



Children's Services Improvement Plan

April 2024 – March 2025



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Introduction

This is our action plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of children's services in Cheshire East which took place in February and March 2024. The findings from the inspection are available in a report on the [Ofsted website](#). The inspection gave Cheshire East's children's services an overall grading of inadequate and found that although some improvements had been made since our last inspection in 2019, the quality of practice and the experience and progress of children and young people was too variable, and for care leavers this was inadequate. We need to make significant improvements and this plan sets out how we will do this.

We are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people. We will use the inspection findings to continue to improve the support we offer. This plan responds to all the areas identified in the inspection report. Immediate action was taken to improve services, starting during the inspection, and this is reflected in the plan alongside longer-term actions and ambitions.

Through the delivery of our plan and our programme of improvement, we will continue to embed a culture of high support and high challenge and be a **child-focused** organisation that works **together with** people, through effective relationships that support positive change. We know our workforce is our most important asset and we will continue to support and regularly communicate with frontline practitioners and managers so everyone understands their role in improvement and we co-produce, deliver, evaluate and celebrate changes together.



Context

This inspection, and previous inspections, have shown that Cheshire East's children's services have not provided consistently good quality support to our children and young people. We were judged inadequate in 2013 and 2024. In developing this plan, we have critically considered what barriers have prevented us from achieving good quality services to date. We have recognised that in the past we have moved from fixing problem to problem, which has led to a 'stop/start' approach. We now need to embed a systemic approach to improvement; changing our culture, developing the right systems and processes to ensure we routinely evaluate impact, and holding our shape around the changes we expect to see – holding the right people accountable consistently at every level.

We will be reviewing and changing our services in line with the [children's social care national framework](#) to ensure that we deliver consistently good quality practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.

Cheshire East Council, like councils across the country, has been experiencing unprecedented financial pressures. In February 2024, the council approved a balanced budget for 2024/25, which included spending money from reserves to cover the impact of additional financial pressures. The level of reserves is now insufficient to adequately protect the council against future risks. Forecasts indicate there is four-year funding gap of £100m to balance the budget and hold an appropriate level of reserves.

Alongside the improvement programme in children's services, Cheshire East Council has embarked on a significant transformation programme. The council-wide transformation plan will aim to address the funding gap and will be submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as part of the criteria for exceptional financial support from the government.

We calculate that £1.986m of additional investment will be required to support children's services to deliver our improvement plan at pace. A costed proposal for additional capacity and expertise to support

improvement was received and agreed by the Children and Families Committee and Full Council in July 2024.

Challenges for children's services are challenges for the whole council, and there is whole-council commitment and support for delivering this plan. This improvement plan is part of the council's transformation and has been informed by the findings from the LGA corporate peer review in March 2024.

The council's transformation plan will also support us to achieve our improvement plan. Cheshire East Council's transformation will include changes to the organisation's culture - embedding high standards, and effective challenge and performance management where these are not met, focusing on outcomes, not process. These messages will be echoed through our children's leadership and management programme.

The council's transformational plan will also support improved working between council services and improve the support to services from enablers.

This plan also feeds into our wider strategy for developing the council's children's services, the Together Strategy, which has the following building blocks:

- **Together supporting and enabling our workforce:** we have the right people, with the right skills and support to improve the outcomes of our children and young people
- **Together connecting as one team:** we work as one team across children's and adult services with shared skills, processes and communication to focus on the needs and experiences of children, young people and their families
- **Together improving and innovating our services:** our children, young people and their families have consistently good/ outstanding experiences of our services
- **Together collaborating with our families, colleagues and partners:** we adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering our services help to shape them.

Coproduction

In Cheshire East, we aim to work [TOGETHER](#) and adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering services help to shape them.

We will engage children and young people throughout our improvement journey in developing and delivering improvements. Children and young people's views will influence our delivery on a child, service, and strategic level. We are developing a new Corporate Parenting Board that will include care experienced young people as key members. Young people will be involved in shaping and evaluating services through the Corporate Parenting Board, our young people's participation groups, through our audits, young people's surveys, and the local offer app.

We will also continue to engage with practitioners and managers within our frontline teams to ensure we are all delivering improvements together, and we will ensure their feedback, and feedback from our partners, informs our evaluation of impact.

Support and Challenge

We are committed to delivering this plan and achieving consistently good and better services that achieve strong outcomes for children and young people. We know that we cannot deliver this plan alone, and that we need to work together with our children, young people and families, with our teams, across the partnership and throughout the council.

Throughout the development of the plan, we have engaged with frontline practitioners and managers on the inspection findings and what support they need moving forwards, and we will continue to engage with our workforce throughout the delivery of the plan to ensure we are all on this journey together.

This plan has been developed together with and provided with scrutiny and challenge by:

- service managers and service leads, including partners
- the children’s social care leadership team
- the children’s services leadership team
- the council’s leadership team
- the Safeguarding Children’s Partnership
- the Improvement and Impact Board
- elected members on the Children and Families Committee and Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee.

The final plan was endorsed by full Council.

We will continue to invest in our workforce through training, development, and management and leadership support and challenge. Training has been tailored to the areas for improvement raised during the inspection and will continue to be responsive to development needs throughout the year as identified in quality assurance and monitoring activity. This includes a bespoke leadership programme for all leaders within children’s services to embed a culture of high support and high challenge, and embedding restorative practice as our practice model so we build strong relationships that support effective change. The impact of training and support on practice will continue to be evaluated through the delivery of this plan so we can adapt and respond to areas for improvement.

We will also seek to ‘infect our system’ with good practice by collecting and sharing examples of good practice with teams.

We also recognise the enormous value from learning from other areas. We are currently working with Stockport through the sector led improvement programme (SLIP) to embed our practice model, restorative practice. We have tailored this support to help to address the inspection findings. We have reviewed successful improvement plans in other areas and sought advice from other authorities and external bodies with specialist expertise, including the LGA and DfE, to support the development of this plan and will continue to use these sources throughout our improvement journey. We will

continue to learn from innovative and best practice in other areas to improve our offer for children and young people in Cheshire East.

Monitoring Impact

The first chapter of the plan is structured under the seven areas for improvement highlighted in the 2024 Ofsted inspection report. It starts with senior manager oversight, to ensure this drives continuous improvement, followed by care leavers, as this is the area requiring the greatest improvement. The second chapter considers the additional areas for development from the inspection report. The third chapter covers additional actions identified through internal assurance activities.

The plan sets out the actions we will take to improve services. What is most important is that what we do makes a difference, so each month we will report on impact against the inspection findings. Progress against actions and impact against the inspection findings will be rated using the following:

Colour	Action Definition	Impact Definition
Grey	Action not started yet, no risk to implementation anticipated	Too early to measure impact
Red	Action not on track	No impact or very limited impact/ improving outcomes for a few children and young people
Amber	Action not yet completed, but on track to be completed within timescales	Some positive impact but this is variable and does not consistently improve outcomes for children and young people
Amber E	Action completed but we need to embed and evidence impact	
Green	Action completed and embedded with evidence of impact	Positive and consistent impact which delivers improved outcomes for children and young people

Each section of the plan has a dedicated senior leader who is responsible for achieving and reporting on impact. The sources we will use to assess our impact for each area of the plan are outlined in each section. These include:

- Seeking and listening to children and young people’s experiences
- Single agency and multi-agency audits
- Performance indicators
- Listening to practitioners and managers, including within partner agencies
- Recruitment and retention information.

Our impact on work with children and young people will also be evaluated through Ofsted and DfE monitoring visits.

The plan will be a live and responsive plan, so will adapt to incorporate new actions as needed. The plan covers the activity we will carry out over a 12-month period from April 2024 to March 2025. A new plan will be developed after this plan is completed for the period from April 2025 onwards.

Governance and Accountability

Progress against the plan will be driven by senior leaders and will be assessed and monitored through usual management arrangements including senior management meetings and supervision.

An independently chaired Improvement and Impact Board will formally scrutinise progress and impact monthly. Key members of the Safeguarding Children’s Partnership and the council’s senior leadership team are members of the Improvement and Impact Board.

The Corporate Parenting Board will drive developments for cared for children and care leavers, and so will contribute to delivering improvements in relation to the inspection findings.

The Safeguarding Children’s Partnership will receive six monthly updates on progress enabling all members to scrutinise and challenge progress.

The Children and Families Committee will scrutinise impact against the plan at every committee meeting.

The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee will scrutinise progress pertinent to care experienced young people and will receive reports on the work of the Corporate Parenting Board and its impact on improving outcomes for these young people.

The Children’s Services Strategic Quartet, chaired by the council’s chief executive, will scrutinise progress against the plan at every meeting.

Progress will also be reported into the corporate assurance panel, an external panel monitoring the council’s transformation.

Key stakeholders, including our workforce, will be kept informed of progress through quarterly communications. Feedback from our workforce will continue to be sought through existing forums/ mechanisms such as team meetings, senior leaders walking the floor, councillor frontline visits, and #talktogether staff sessions.

Glossary

The legal definition of a care leaver comes from The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which states that a care leaver is someone who has been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday.

Care leavers can also be referred to as care experienced young people or young adults, as they have had experience of being in care. This term tends to be preferred by young people/ young adults. Both terms are used interchangeably within this plan.

Abbreviation	Expansion
CINCP	Child in Need and Child Protection
CYPMHS	Children and young people’s mental health services
DfE	Department for Education

DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
EET	Education, employment or training
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
LGA	Local Government Association
MASH	Multi-agency safeguarding hub
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NHS	National Health Service
PAs	Personal Advisors
PEPs	Personal education plans
RONI	Risk of NEET indicators
SLIP	Sector led improvement programme
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based
UASC	Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Children's Services Improvement Plan on a Page

Our improvement plan sets out how we will address the findings from the [Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services \(ILACS\)](#) in February and March 2024. It covers the 7 areas inspectors highlighted:

Senior leaders' oversight	Care leavers	Quality of plans	Quality and frequency of visits	Management oversight and supervision	Effectiveness of IROs	Sufficiency of placements
<p>What the inspection found:</p> <p>We need to improve how we monitor if children are getting the right support, as some children were not getting support that was good enough</p>	<p>What the inspection found:</p> <p>We need to improve the quality and consistency of support to care leavers, including those who are homeless and those who are over 21</p>	<p>What the inspection found:</p> <p>We need to improve the quality of plans for children so they are child-focused and drive timely change</p>	<p>What the inspection found:</p> <p>We need to improve the quality and frequency of visits to children to ensure they are purposeful and in line with children's assessed needs.</p>	<p>What the inspection found:</p> <p>We need to improve the quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure this supports consistently good practice</p>	<p>What the inspection found:</p> <p>We need to improve the effectiveness of child protection chairs and IROs to escalate, challenge, and scrutinize plans for children</p>	<p>What the inspection found:</p> <p>We don't have sufficient placements to meet children and young people's needs</p>
<p>What we will do:</p> <p>Review reporting and governance arrangements</p> <p>Senior leaders will regularly speak to children and young people and involve them in shaping services</p> <p>Monitor progress against the improvement plan monthly through an independently chaired Improvement Board</p> <p>Embed 'Being Brilliant at the Basics'</p> <p>Revise the quality assurance framework</p> <p>Step up a new Corporate Parenting Board to ensure there is a whole council and partnership approach to improving outcomes for care experienced young people</p> <p>Commission corporate parenting training for senior leaders and elected members</p> <p>Develop care leaver champions across the council</p> <p>Review councillor visits to frontline services</p>	<p>What we will do:</p> <p>Develop practice standards</p> <p>Roll out a mandatory training plan specific to the care leavers service</p> <p>Change the management structure</p> <p>Revise the format of the pathway plan with young people</p> <p>Formalise arrangements around young adults where there are safeguarding concerns</p> <p>Develop care leavers hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield</p> <p>Launch an app for the local offer</p> <p>Develop EET plans for all young adults who are NEET and able to work</p> <p>Increase apprenticeships and other route to work opportunities</p> <p>Refresh the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation</p> <p>Mobilise additional accommodation options for 16-18 year olds</p> <p>Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer</p> <p>Review the 21+ offer and approach</p>	<p>What we will do:</p> <p>Embed restorative practice</p> <p>Continue to run masterclasses on plans</p> <p>Hold a management and leadership session on plans</p> <p>Establish reflective case discussion meetings to progress outcomes for children on longer child protection and repeat plans</p> <p>Develop a permanence strategy</p> <p>Refresh the practice standards on care planning</p> <p>Review permanence decision panels</p> <p>Explore what partnership training is needed to support effective challenge</p> <p>Develop a new child protection plan in partnership with children, young people and families</p> <p>Review the cared for plan in partnership with children, young people and families</p>	<p>What we will do:</p> <p>Strengthen the performance framework to ensure there is robust performance management of visits to children</p> <p>Deliver masterclasses on purposeful visits</p> <p>Reissue the visiting template to support consistent recording</p> <p>Develop and roll-out e-learning on visiting</p> <p>Team managers to review visiting schedules in supervision, and IROs and CP chairs to have oversight of frequency visits to children</p>	<p>What we will do:</p> <p>Commission a bespoke leadership development programme for all leaders in children's services</p> <p>Deliver an in-house leadership and management programme for children's social care tailored to our areas for improvement</p> <p>Update the supervision policy and develop practice guidance on reflective supervision</p> <p>All managers to complete supervision training</p> <p>Embed the permanence tracker</p> <p>Review the care plans for all cared for children who are not currently in foster care or planning to return home</p>	<p>What we will do:</p> <p>Review the performance management framework for IROs</p> <p>Include IROs in the in-house and commissioned leadership and management programmes</p> <p>Review and refresh the IRO practice standards</p> <p>Hold an IRO service development day every 3 months</p> <p>Revise the guidance on IRO quality assurance alerts to support outcome-focused practice</p> <p>Explore and challenge performance around permanence in performance clinics</p>	<p>What we will do:</p> <p>Embed a culture of considering support from the family network at the earliest opportunity</p> <p>Join Foster4</p> <p>Work in partnership with the other Foster4 LAs to build our offer – ensuring there is an effective front door to support those who make an enquiry about becoming a foster carer</p> <p>Explore opportunities within the council to increase fostering marketing and raise awareness of fostering</p> <p>Develop specialist foster carers to support children to step down from residential care</p> <p>Develop our third Mockingbird constellation</p> <p>Open three council residential children's homes</p> <p>Carry out a deep dive on reunification and step down for children from care</p> <p>Investigate the potential for joint commissioning of high needs placements</p>

Children's Services Improvement Plan Timeline

Our improvement plan set out how we will address the findings from the [Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services \(ILACS\)](#) in February and March 2024. This is the timeline for what we will achieve by delivering our plan.

What we achieved by the end of June 2024

1. All 209 21+ care leavers contacted and offered support. Tracker in place to monitor engagement with 21+ care leavers
2. New management structure in the care leavers service
3. Developed and started delivering a bespoke training programme for the care leavers service
4. New practice standards for the cared for and care leavers service.
5. Coproduced new pathway plan
6. Foster4 – we joined and launched new service
7. Opened a new residential home – Flude House
8. Revised quality assurance framework
9. New Improvement and Impact Board to drive and evaluate progress against the improvement plan
10. New Children's Services Strategic Quartet to provide improved leadership and accountability for children's services
11. Director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers

What we achieved by the end of September 2024

12. Care leaver hubs (safe spaces) in Crewe and Macclesfield
 13. Local offer app launched
 14. Proposals in place to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages
 15. Revised protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation
 16. All young adults who are NEET and able to work will have an EET plan
 17. Reflective case discussions established for longer child protection and repeat plans
 18. Third Mockingbird constellation
 19. Senior leaders and first tranche of managers trained in our bespoke management and leadership programme
 20. Revised supervision policy
 21. Vital signs performance report in place to support evaluation of the improvement plan
 22. Strengthened performance framework
- Not yet achieved:**
23. Additional capacity in place to deliver the improvement plan

What you will see by the end of December 2024

24. Two more residential homes opened
25. First meeting of the multi-agency corporate parenting strategic board, chaired by the council's chief executive
26. LGA corporate parenting training rolled out for senior leaders and elected members
27. Care leaver champions across the council
28. Cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26 and action plan refreshed and relaunched
29. New programme for councillor frontline visits and expansion to cared for and care leaver services
30. Revised transition policy
31. Local offer reviewed together with young people and partners
32. Additional accommodation options in place for young people aged 16-18 using flexibilities/ modifications in current contracts
33. Specialist foster carers in place
34. Deep dive completed on reunification
35. Refreshed recruitment and retention strategy

What you will see by the end of March 2025

36. New permanence strategy
37. All managers completed supervision training
38. Increased apprenticeship opportunities and other route to employment opportunities in place for care leavers
39. Approaches in place to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are prioritised for mental health support
40. 'Waiting well' initiatives developed with key health providers and third sector provision
41. Reviewed emotional support offer for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people
42. Refreshed recruitment campaign to attract high quality practitioners and managers to Cheshire East

Improvement Plan

All ratings are accurate as at 9 October 2024.

Chapter 1

1. Senior Leaders' Oversight

What needs to improve				
Senior leaders' oversight of performance to ensure that there is a coherent approach to continuous improvement.				
Section Lead	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior leaders had not recognised, until this inspection, the extent of improvement required in services for care leavers. Systems to monitor and track groups of individual children have not been effective in identifying vulnerable care leavers who are not receiving the services they need. As a result, too many vulnerable care leavers are not getting the right level of help, support or protection. Despite improvements, the quality of practice is still too variable. Improved timeliness has not been achieved for all children. Implementation of improvement plans needs to accelerate across teams but in particular within the care leavers service. Leaders have recognised in their self-evaluation that more needs to be done to ensure that quality assurance activity is identifying all areas of poor practice and that it is consistently having an impact on outcomes for children. Not all young people are informed of, or understand, the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
SL1	Ensure there is effective line of sight from frontline practice through to the Executive Director of Children's Services through a review of reporting and governance arrangements, including a review of the performance framework.	Executive Director of Children's Services	September 2024 Review effectiveness each quarter	Complete but need to evidence impact

SL2	Develop a forward plan of participation activities where senior leaders will hear the experiences of children and young people directly, work with them in shaping services, and give feedback on improvement progress.	Participation Lead	September 2024	Delayed
SL3	Refresh the terms of reference for the Improvement and Impact Board, and expand the board to incorporate partners, to ensure there are robust arrangements in place to drive and scrutinise impact for children and young people in response to the inspection findings.	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL4	Establish a Children's Services Strategic Quartet to provide improved leadership and accountability for children's services in line with best practice in the LGA guide for Chief Executives , and for council leaders , and DfE statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services .	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL5	Step-up a multi-agency corporate parenting board to drive and scrutinise progress for cared for children and care experienced children and young people and ensure there is a whole council and partnership approach to supporting our young people.	Executive Director of Children's Services	November 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL6	Commission LGA corporate parenting training for senior leaders across the partnership and all elected members.	Executive Director of Children's Services	November 2024	On track
SL7	Develop care leaver champions across the council to increase awareness and support for care experienced young people and young adults.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	December 2024	On track
SL8	Refresh the cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26 and action plan together with our care leaver ambassadors.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	November 2024	Delayed
SL9	Revise the quality assurance framework to include thematic audits in line with the improvement plan and to strengthen the impact of audits on practice.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	May 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL10	Establish service manager thematic audits to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas and drive improvements.	Service Managers CINCP	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

SL11	Develop mechanisms to ensure audit findings and feedback from children and young people are routinely shared with teams to strengthen the impact of audits on practice.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL12	Develop a vital signs performance report in line with the improvement plan areas to support effective evaluation of improvement activity and drive improvements.	Business Intelligence Manager	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL13	Review the programme for councillor visits to frontline services, expanding these to cared for and care leaver services, to ensure there is member oversight of quality of practice and outcomes for children and young people.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	November 2024	On track
SL14	Review the children's social care national framework and its implications for practice and processes, to embed consistently good practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	November 2024	On track
SL15	Embed 'Being Brilliant at the Basics' through our culture, leadership, and developing and sharing key communications on practice. Continually evaluate impact and reinforce messages through monthly performance meetings and quality assurance activity.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Principal Social Worker	Key communications in place by September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL16	Collate and share examples of good practice to embed understanding of good practice across teams and to celebrate good work.	Principal Social Worker	Start sharing practice by August 2024 and continue throughout the year	Complete but need to evidence impact
SL17	Strengthen how we capture children and young people's feedback through audits by embedding this within the role of the audit and quality assurance officer.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	January 2025	On track
SL18	Introduce contact to families, to capture the impact of services/interventions on outcomes for children and young people, to inform service improvement.	Participation Lead	January 2025	On track

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<p>The pace and impact of changes will be evaluated through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monthly reports against the improvement plan • monthly performance indicators in the vital signs performance report • monthly practice review audits which assess the quality of practice across services • monthly thematic audits to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas • feedback from children and young people from our participation groups and through audits. • Ofsted monitoring visits will demonstrate whether our understanding of improvements are accurate. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements result in consistently good quality practice - over 80% of audits will be good or better quality. • Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of children's outcomes and areas for development. • Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the practice and development needs of staff on both an individual and workforce level. • Quality assurance activity drives improvements to the quality of practice, resulting in improved outcomes for children. • 90% young people tell us they understand the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy. • The council will have at least 20 care leaver champions across all the directorates.
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month			Grey
<p>There is effective line of sight to frontline practice through the monthly Director's Performance and Quality Clinic, where heads of service are held accountable for their service's performance and outcomes for children and young people. These are underpinned by weekly performance clinics are held between service managers and team managers which agree the focus for each week. Power BI reports are in place for all key performance areas providing all managers with performance information at any time. Monthly Improvement and Performance meetings for all children's services will take place from October, chaired by the Executive Director of Children's Services.</p> <p>The vital signs performance report has been revised for the current board including targets and RAG rating to show impact against our key measures.</p> <p>We have increased capacity to drive improvements through the appointment of a Director for Improvement, who has specialist expertise and a proven track record of delivering improved children's services.</p> <p>We have strengthened line of sight to frontline practice through the introduction of internal moderation. This demonstrated that auditors are over optimistic in their judgements. Learning from this will be shared with auditors, and new processes will be put in place to ensure there is routine internal moderation. A workshop to improve auditing and internal moderation is planned for November.</p>			

Service managers are completing dip samples within their service areas to evaluate impact against the improvement plan. The findings from these are shared with the audit and quality assurance team to ensure that cross service themes are identified and there is oversight of the quality of practice across all service areas.

Mechanisms for routinely sharing audit findings and feedback from children and young people with teams have been agreed. The learning from these will be shared at the celebrating practice workshops for children's social care staff in October and November. A monthly newsletter will also be introduced in October to share the learning from audit and what areas of practice we need to focus on to improve our support to children and young people. The expectation is that this newsletter is discussed with teams in service meetings. Audit and feedback from complaints and compliments will be a theme at each celebrating practice workshop which will take place quarterly, starting in October.

A communications strategy on 'being brilliant at the basics' has been developed and communications were shared with practitioners and managers in September. The September Director's Performance and Quality Clinic also had a focus on the basics of assessments, plans, supervision and visits. These will be reinforced through the in person celebrating practice workshops for managers and practitioners in October and November.

An example of good practice will be shared at the celebrating practice workshops, presented by a practitioner. The local resources section of our policies and procedures website is being developed and will be launched at the workshops. This will include practice guidance and examples of good practice.

Work on a forward plan of participation activities took place, however with the appointment of a new DCS and Improvement Director, we are going to review whether this is the best way to involve children and young people in our improvement work.

Three care leaver ambassadors have been appointed to support corporate parenting work and ensure that the views of care experienced children and young people shape service development. The first partnership Corporate Parenting Board took place on 2 October, chaired by the council's chief executive. This was attended by two of the care leaver ambassadors who presented the results of the care leavers survey, and recommendations on actions to be taken from focus groups of care leavers. The board also included a workshop on what arrangements are needed to develop and drive corporate parenting in Cheshire East. New governance arrangements will be established based on the workshop. These will support the refresh of the cared for and care leavers strategy, and the corporate parenting strategic board will oversee its delivery.

The refresh of the cared for and care leavers strategy is likely to not be achieved within timescale to enable effective coproduction with our care leaver ambassadors.

LGA corporate parenting training took place on 30 September for all members of the Corporate Parenting Board and elected members on the children's committees.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

Internal moderation of audits has demonstrated that auditors have been overoptimistic in their judgements on the quality of practice; 8 of the 12 judgements were downgraded, 4 remained the same.

Following moderation, 1 case was judged good, 5 requires improvement, and 6 inadequate. The audits reflect our areas for improvement from the inspection – particularly in the quality of plans and management oversight and supervision, including impact of challenge from IROs.

Positive feedback has been received from practitioners on the 'being brilliant at the basics' communication. One practitioner said **“Have just been going through this and think it’s really good. It actually succinctly sums up what we are trying to do. I am going to use it as a guideline when I write my stat visits up.”**

What our performance indicators show

The vital signs performance report has been revised for the current board including targets and RAG rating to show impact against our key measures.

2. Care Leavers

What needs to improve

The quality, consistency and responsiveness of support, advice and guidance for care leavers, including those who are homeless, with additional vulnerabilities, and those who are over 21 years of age.

A. Quality of practice

Section Lead

Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers

What inspectors found

The quality of practice for care leavers is inadequate.

Relationships and transition to the care leavers' service

- Not all children in care have the opportunity to get to know their personal advisers (PAs) to build a relationship with them before they are 18 years old. Planning for young people who transition to the leaving care service is not always robust. For some, their voice is not evident and plans lack detail which means their individual needs are not always sufficiently understood. This means that there are some young people who leave care with too much uncertainty about how they will be supported.
- Not all PAs know their young people well enough to have trusted and meaningful relationships with them. For some young people, PAs do not know their stories of why, or when, they came into care.
- Case records do not reflect the work undertaken with young people.

Pathway plans

- Pathway plans do not consistently cover all the important elements of young people's lives. Wishes and feelings are not always clearly expressed. They do not consistently include other professionals, they are not sufficiently ambitious for young people and they do not always capture young people's voices.
- Plans for unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers do not consistently acknowledge their unique cultural heritage, or identify how young people can access support for the trauma they have experienced.
- Plans are not always effective in helping young people to make meaningful change in their lives.
- Support for care leavers is not effective enough, which means that many do not access employment, further education or training.

Recognising and responding to risk

- Risk of harm is not always recognised or responded to effectively.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For some young people, there is a lack of professional curiosity about their day-to-day lives and living arrangements. This has resulted in a lack of understanding of risk, or a clear recognition of how best to support young people when they are at their most vulnerable. When potential risk of harm for care leavers is identified, it is difficult to see how this risk is managed or mitigated effectively. This means that some care leavers may be exposed to risky situations and people. This was not fully understood by senior leaders until this inspection. <p>Management oversight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PAs receive supervision, however the quality of supervision was variable. Most supervision is brief and task focused. Significant gaps in supervision exist on some young people's care files meaning there is a lack of consistent management grip on driving young people's plans forward and ensuring they are safe. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLA1	Develop and launch practice standards for the cared for and care leavers service to support consistently good practice. This will include clear standards on recording, visiting, transitions, and responsibilities when cases are jointly held.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLA2	Develop and roll out a mandatory training plan that is specific for the care leavers service to support practitioners to deliver consistently good practice. This will include planning, professional curiosity, adult/ transitional safeguarding and culture/diversity.	Principal Social Worker Service Manager Care Leavers	Launch in June 2024 and deliver over the year	On track
CLA3	Change the management structure of the care leavers service, removing the role of senior PAs, ensuring that all PAs receive direct oversight and supervision from a team manager (who are qualified social workers) to support good quality supervision and drive improved outcomes for care leavers.	Service Manager Care Leavers	April 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLA4	Revise the format of the pathway plan with young people to ensure it supports good practice. The new plan will include sections for multi-agency professionals' views, and contingency plans.	Service Manager Cared for Children	May 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLA5	Deliver restorative practice training to the whole care leavers service together to support a change in culture and consistency in practice.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers together with Stockport SLIP support	November 2024	Delayed

CLA6	Formalise arrangements around young adults where there are safeguarding concerns to ensure senior leaders have oversight of these young adults and that multi-agency team around the adult meetings are held to develop safety plans with them.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLA7	Recruit three Care Leaver Ambassadors to work together with us to improve services, and to represent the experiences of cared for children and care leavers to the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board and corporate parenting workstreams.	Participation Lead	October 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

Please also see the section on management oversight and supervision

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans and will assess if PAs can tell young people's stories. • Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, for example UASC young people. • Some of the thematic audits will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, the impact of their plan, and their relationships with their PAs. • The percentage of young people with PAs and pathway plans at 16. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice to support care leavers will be of consistently good quality and will support young people to achieve good outcomes. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. • Management oversight is good quality and drives improved outcomes. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality. • 100% of young people will get to know their PAs from age 16. 90% young people will tell us they have good relationships with their PAs and know how they will be supported once they leave care. • 100% PAs will be able to tell young people's stories. • 100% case records will accurately reflect work with young people. • Pathway plans will cover all the important elements of young people's lives, and will reflect their voices and their individual needs, including their cultural heritage. Plans will consistently include other professionals and will be ambitious for young people. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. • There is appropriate professional curiosity, which means risk of harm is recognised and responded to swiftly and effectively. When potential risk of harm is identified, it is managed or mitigated effectively. 100% audits will show appropriate professional curiosity and that risk of harm is responded to.
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Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>	Impact Rating
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Key improvement activities delivered this month	Grey
<p>The training plan for the care leaver service responded to the findings from the inspection and was tailored to the training needs identified by staff within the service. The impact of the training for the care leavers service is being reviewed to identify what further training is needed.</p> <p>We are requesting a review of the SLIP support, so will be reviewing the action about restorative training for the service in line with that.</p> <p>The pathway plan will be periodically reviewed and updated to ensure it is user friendly and accessible to young people.</p> <p>Three care leaver ambassadors have been appointed to support corporate parenting work and ensure that the views of care experienced children and young people shape service development. They will be presenting at the celebrating practice workshops about the importance of relationships and child-centred work.</p>	
What impact we are achieving for children and young people	
<p><i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i></p>	
<p>The latest audits demonstrate our practice to support care leavers is not yet good quality.</p> <p>Good feedback on practice has been received through IRO good practice alerts. 4 good practice alerts were received by the care leavers service in quarter 2. Two examples of these are included below (which are written to the young person):</p> <p>“A, I am making this good practice alert for your PA B. You have been in a really unsafe place and I have seen B advocate for your safety and stability in professional meetings to effect safeguarding for you. When we held your review I could see the positive relationship you have with B and she really cares and wants the best for you. B has gone above and beyond to try and get to a place of safety – amazing work B.”</p> <p>“C I am making this good practice for your PA D. We held your review yesterday and I could see the positive relationship you have with D, how she is straight with you and wants to keep you safe. D has also supported you to have much documents and paperwork in place even though you are in foster care and still 16 years old. D is starting to prepare you well for moving to semi/ full independence when the time is right for you. This was very good practice from D who I could see wants the best outcomes for you. Well done D.”</p> <p>Feedback has been received from the YMCA around support to care leavers to formally recognise that PAs are going above and beyond to support young people.</p>	
What our performance indicators show	
<p>As at 7 October, we had 120 16 and 17 eligible cared for young people across all services. 101 of these have a pathway plan in place (84%), which is the same as last month’s performance. Performance is being monitored through routine performance meetings.</p>	

B. Planning for Adulthood

Section Lead	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition planning into adulthood for most care leavers is variable. There is some proactive planning for disabled care leavers with complex physical needs, and young people with neurodiverse needs. However, for other care leavers such as those with complex mental health and emotional needs, proactive transition planning does not always take place. This means that these care leavers do not access the help and support that they need. • Not all care leavers have access to their full health history. This means important information that could be used to provide ongoing support to them as they transition to adulthood is not available or used to inform care planning for them. • Not all PAs spoken to by inspectors could describe the local offer to care leavers or explain how care leavers could benefit from it. Not all young people are accessing the full range of entitlements or services available to them. The local offer is not communicated effectively to all care leavers, which means that they are not all aware of, nor do they access, their full range of entitlements. • Care leavers can access community-based resources but do not have a dedicated place they can go to which provides a safe space for them to receive support. The plan is for the newly opened family hubs to provide this in the coming months but at present this is not available. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLB1	Embed within our culture and approach that we start planning for adulthood as soon as a child or young person enters care.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers Head of Service Inclusion	Review impact in October 2024	Delayed
CLB2	Review terms of reference and membership for Ignition Panel to ensure young people's post 18 plans are effectively tracked and reviewed from age 16 to ensure proactive transition plans are in place.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLB3	The practice standards will specify which preparing for adulthood roles should be undertaken by social workers and which by PAs and will set clear expectations on what care leavers should receive/ have in place.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLB4	Develop care leavers hubs, with our care leavers, as a safe space for care leavers to access support and advice.	Service Manager Care Leavers Area Delivery Manager Targeted Youth Work	Interim hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield by July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

	Advice sessions will be offered from the hub to support preparation for adulthood, including housing, finances, drug and alcohol support, parenting support, careers advice, CV workshops, and interview preparation. Emotional health and wellbeing support will be available at the hub through Pure Insight and health support through the cared for nurse.	Head of Service for Education Participation and Pupil Support	Permanent hub from the Crewe Youth Zone by the end of 2025	On track
CLB5	Review the transition policy.	Service Manager Cared for Children Service Manager for Children with Disabilities	December 2024	On track
CLB6	Engage and consult with care experienced young people on how they want to understand their health histories and adapt the current process in line with their feedback.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	October 2024	On track
CLB7	Deliver training to PAs on arrangements to support young people to understand their health histories.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	June 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLB8	Launch an app for the local offer. This will ensure all care leavers have immediate access to the local offer and their entitlements through their mobile. It will also support us to keep in touch with young people and gain their feedback and allow young people to develop peer support groups.	Service Manager Care Leavers	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLB9	Review the local offer together with young people and partners.	Service Manager Care Leavers	December 2024	On track
CLB10	Deliver training on the local offer to all PAs.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLB11	Develop regular participation opportunities for care leavers through the care leaver hubs, to ensure their views shape services.	Participation Lead	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLB12	Launch a free bus pass for care leavers aged up to 21.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	October 2024	On track

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be planning for adulthood. • The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, what they know about the local offer, and how their plan is preparing them for adulthood. • The percentage of young people who have access to their health histories. • PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it. • Feedback from young people accessing the care leaver hubs. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive planning takes place for all care leavers ensuring they are prepared for adulthood. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. • 90% young people tell us they feel well supported and have the information they need to be prepared for adulthood. 90% tell us they know about the local offer, the care leavers hub, and their entitlements. • 100% care leavers have access to their health histories. • 100% PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it.
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month			Grey
<p>The care leaver app is available for care leavers and we are promoting this through the care leaver hubs.</p> <p>The free bus travel pass will be launched in October which will support care leavers to access the hubs and EET opportunities.</p> <p>The local offer will be reviewed with young people during November as part of November Children's Rights Month.</p> <p>Consultation with care leavers has commenced as to how they would like to understand their health histories. The consultation has been informed by good practice in other local authorities regarding care leaver health summaries.</p> <p>Participation opportunities are offered regularly to care leavers at the care leaver hubs.</p> <p>The terms of reference and membership for Ignition Panel have been reviewed. The purpose of the meeting is to ensure the post-18 plan for 16 and 17 year olds is being considered and progressed, to ensure the young person is being supported into independence. The panel has oversight of all the post-18 plans. Young people are encouraged to attend to hear their post-18 options and be involved in creating their plan. Young people are considered at the panel in the month of their 16th birthday and plans are reviewed 6 monthly.</p>			
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			

There is increased senior leader oversight of outcomes for young adults through the post-18 resource and accommodation panel (RAP). This panel ensures there are meaningful plans in place for young adults and supports them to take up tenancies at the right time for them.

We know from the focus audits that planning for adulthood from an early point is not yet embedded and is still an area for development.

What our performance indicators show

In July and August 100% of cared for young people turning 18 in the quarter received a care leaver health summary.

As at 8 October, there were 13 17 year olds and 36 16 year olds without PAs. A new PA is starting in 2 weeks, which will ensure that all 17 year olds are allocated. A further PA has been recruited to start in November, which will support with allocating more 16 year olds. Recruitment is open for a further post, once this is in place we will be able to allocate all our young people.

C. Education, Employment and Training

Section Lead		Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration		
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET). They are not being encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances in order to achieve their aspirations for a better future. 		
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLC1	Work together with young adults who are NEET and able to work to develop an EET plan to support them towards gaining EET. Plans will be reviewed every 12 weeks.	Service Manager Care Leavers	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLC2	Develop an offer of EET opportunities, including apprenticeships, that support young people to gain employment or training in their chosen field.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	On track
CLC3	Work with local businesses and organisations, including the chamber of commerce, to secure additional corporate parenting support for cared for children and care leavers and to prepare employers for supporting young people in employment.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	On track
CLC4	Provide bespoke support to enable young people to be prepared for entering employment through job readiness training, CV and interview support.	Service Manager Care Leavers	October 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentage of young people who are in EET. • Thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, including EET. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentage of care leavers who are in EET will increase – we want to increase to above 75% in EET. • By April 2025, we would have at least 10 new apprenticeship opportunities for young adults. • 90% young people will tell us they are encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances and access EET. 	
Impact to date				Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				
Key improvement activities delivered this month				

There are currently 42 young people who are NEET. Of these, 16 have just transferred over from the Virtual School where they would have had PEPs in place to support them around EET or gaining EET. They will now need EET plans to be put in place, and this will be looked at over the next month. 100% of young people who are NEET and able to work from the previous cohort, year 15 and up, have an EET plan in place. The 16 new Year 14's who transferred over in September all previously had PEPs and these are now being moved over to EET plans. Of these young people 7 have EET plans in place and are being offered support from the EET Team. The remaining 9 are all discussed monthly at NEET Challenge Panel and have EET plans discussed in statutory visits. 3 of these young people have had interviews and job offers and are waiting to start work.

We continue to offer monthly EET sessions at both care leaver hubs.

We currently work with Cygnet and Safe Opportunities to offer work placements to young people. This is currently funded by the Virtual School and is primarily for 16–19 year olds.

The Apprenticeship Co-ordinator and EET adviser are also always looking for links to employers and opportunities for work opportunities for young people. We also have just started a new Venture with Confidence programme which will run up to Christmas. We have offered places to 12 young people on this.

A meeting has taken place on developing a model of work experience and apprenticeships with a plan to move this to the next stage.

We have a young person due to start work experience with the Family Hubs. A meeting with ICT is due to take place next week to explore opportunities, and Care4CE are also keen to see what work experience opportunities they could offer. Outside the council we also have a meeting booked with Sportscape Education to see what opportunities they may be able to offer to our care leavers.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

10 young people have started at university this year – we now have 20 young people at university.

We now have 9 care leavers in apprenticeships.

All young people who attended the last Venture with Confidence programme have positive plans in place for their next steps and all but one have started on these. 12 young people have started the new Venture with Confidence programme.

What our performance indicators show

Grey

In September:

- 75% care leavers aged 17-18 were in EET, which is a reduction from 81% in August but is closer to performance across other months.
- 55% care leavers aged 19-21 were in EET, which again is a reduction on previous months.

These indicators can fluctuate significantly in September as individuals decide that initially agreed education pathways may no longer be the most appropriate route.

D. Accommodation

Section Lead	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For care leavers who live out of the area, accessing suitable housing is challenging and some wait for extended periods in supported accommodation until suitable permanent accommodation becomes available. • A small number of care leavers are homeless. This group includes some care leavers with the greatest needs, including those who struggle with their mental health, those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or those who are in unsuitable accommodation, or have no fixed abode. • Information about where young people are living is not routinely updated. This means that the local authority cannot be assured that these vulnerable young people are safe and well cared for. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLD1	Refresh and relaunch the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation, with clear escalation requirements, to ensure all practitioners are working to expected practice standards and there is senior leadership oversight of any young adults in emergency and unsuitable accommodation.	Service Manager Care Leavers	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLD2	All young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in emergency accommodation will be reviewed in weekly performance clinics and by the monthly risk management forum to ensure effective plans are in place to support and protect them.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLD3	The weekly temporary and emergency accommodation meeting will consider any care leavers who need accommodation.	Housing Options Manager	June 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

CLD4	Deliver training for PAs on supporting young adults with housing concerns, including how to support young people to meet the criteria for housing allocation in other areas, so they can provide bespoke support tailored to young adults' needs.	Housing Options Manager	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLD5	Establish a director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers to drive increased sufficiency.	Interim Director of Commissioning	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLD6	Explore and review the suitability of temporary and emergency accommodation options across Cheshire East to increase options for care leavers. Identify gaps in provision to inform commissioning to ensure we can meet young people's needs.	Service Manager Care Leavers Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLD7	Develop proposals to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages.	Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLD8	Mobilise additional accommodation options for cared for young people aged 16-18 using flexibilities/ modifications in current contracts.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	October 2024	On track
CLD9	Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer, ensuring this is shaped by our care experienced young adults.	Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	March 2026	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, including care leavers in unsuitable accommodation. The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experiences. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 80% care leavers who live out of area access suitable housing in a timely way. 90% care leavers tell us they are well supported. Effective plans and contingency plans prevent care leavers from needing to access emergency or unsuitable 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of young people who are homeless. • The number of young people in unsuitable accommodation. 		<p>accommodation. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records on where young people are living are accurate and there is effective oversight of young people's accommodation.
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<p>Impact to date</p> <p><i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i></p>	<p>Impact Rating</p>
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<p>Key improvement activities delivered this month</p> <p>A director level project group for accommodation for young people aged 16+, chaired by the Interim Director of Commissioning, has been in place since July 2024 and has met three times. Mapping of existing capacity shortfalls and pressures within accommodation has been completed. A project plan has been developed to increase our accommodation and was this agreed by the council's Corporate Leadership Team in July. The project plan will be delivered in 3 phases between July 2024 to March 2026 for full implementation of the offer.</p> <p>Governance arrangements have been agreed to support the project and System Stabilisation and New Model Development sub-groups have been established under the Accommodation with Support Steering Group.</p> <p>We are exploring a range of options to develop our accommodation offer. A positive site visit was conducted on 3 September to the former MMU site at Apollo Buckingham, Crewe. This established the suitability of accommodation and wider support offer/ campus facilities. The site has committed to working with young people to redecorate rooms to make them more homely and individual. It is intended that this site will be used for accommodation with support for 18+ UASC and for emergency beds. We are aiming to move some young people from their current placements with 'Homes for Support' (an independent residential placement provider) to this new more appropriate option to release places at Homes for Support which is aimed at a younger cohort. This will also realise savings for the council.</p> <p>Discussions are being progressed with our current commissioned providers of 16-17 year old supported and independent living placements, YMCA and P3, on mobilisation of additional emergency bed provision. YMCA expect to have 11 one bedroom 'ignition' flats available by January 2025; 2 flats will be available in October 2024 and the other 9 by January. Revised proposals for 3 emergency beds (with additional security measures and a separate entrance to the main building in a partitioned wing) will be considered by the children's directorate leadership team in early October and progressed if plans are deemed sufficiently robust.</p> <p>An additional emergency bed has been secured from August 2024 at Watermill House with P3; this has been occupied since the 16 September.</p> <p>Pure Insights (our commissioned care leavers mentoring service) have also expressed an interest in developing supported accommodation for young adults aged 18+ which we will explore with them.</p> <p>Formal plans for the full commissioned 18-25 offer will be tabled for the Children and Families Committee in January 2025 prior to procurement activity. This work will now be overseen by the new model development group under the parent 16-25 accommodation with support workstream.</p>	<p>Grey</p>
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From October we will involve the council's revenue and benefits representatives in this work as concerns have been raised about timeliness and contact frequency when trying to claim housing benefit back for eligible over 18's for those placed with registered housing providers.
<p>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</p> <p><i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i></p>
<p>As of 7 October there were 4 young person in unsuitable accommodation (excluding those in custody), 1 in a hotel and 3 who are homeless and staying with friends.</p> <p>Collaborative working across children's social care and housing is improving awareness and oversight of those in unsuitable accommodation and concerted effort is being made to support young adults into suitable accommodation. However, given the high level of complexity and vulnerability of these young people, we must continue to prioritise strengthening our collective response to them from a council and partnership perspective.</p> <p>In year development work with existing providers and Apollo group should result in additional accommodation options for young adults before Christmas 2024.</p>
<p>What our performance indicators show</p>
As above.

E. Care leavers aged over 21	
Section Lead	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For care leavers over the age of 21, persistent efforts to engage them are not routinely made. • When young people become 21, unless they are in education or highly vulnerable, they are no longer provided with a PA or leaving care services unless they contact a duty worker and explicitly request help. At the time of this inspection, there were over 200 young people in this category, and this included very vulnerable disabled young people. Some of these care leavers have not been receiving the services they need, or are entitled to, and the local authority cannot be assured that they are safe. • It was not evident on young people's records that discussions had taken place to inform a decision as to young people's informed choice to move from having a personal advisor to the 21+ offer. • Disabled care leavers who are open to the 21+ offer are not prioritised as a vulnerable group and as such the local authority cannot be assured that their needs are being met. In cases seen there was not enough evidence of persistence or curiosity in where they may be now, despite histories of having extensive engagement with services as children. • The quality assurance of the care leaver cohort aged 21+ needs strengthening.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
CLE1	Contact all 209 care leavers aged over 21 to ensure they are aware of the support available to them and offer them an allocated worker.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLE2	Review the 21+ offer and approach, formalising this in a protocol and ensuring it is clear on the local offer. The protocol will include continued proactive communication post 21 so young people know what support is available.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLE3	Review cases for care leavers with a disability who are open to the 21+ offer to ensure their needs are being met.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLE4	Develop a tracker for care leavers aged over 21 and monitor through weekly performance clinics to ensure there is regular oversight of engagement and support with these young people.	Service Manager Care Leavers	May 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLE5	Establish regular quality assurance around care leavers aged over 21 to ensure there is effective oversight of their outcomes and that this drives improvement.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers Head of Service for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
CLE6	Review the impact of the revised 21+ offer with young adults, involving them in shaping any changes to services.	Service Manager Care Leavers	January 2025	On track

Please also see CLB5 – Review the Transition Policy.

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be support to those 21 and over, including those with a disability. The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young adults to understand their experience of services. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persistent efforts to engage young adults over 21 are routinely made. We are in touch with over 90% of care leavers over 21 in the last 3 months. Over 90% young adults will tell us they know that support is available if they need it.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of care leavers over 21 who we were in touch with within the last 3 months. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is effective oversight of young adults aged 21+ and their outcomes, including young adults with a disability.
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month			Grey
We are currently reviewing our over 21 cohort to ensure we have the right young people open.			
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
<p>Young adults know the 21+ offer is there if they want to access it. Our 21+ process is now much clearer so we have greater confidence that the right young people are open to the offer, and the offer is responsive to changing need.</p> <p>However we have more to do to improve the quality of our support. Eight dip samples were undertaken by the Care Leaver Service who reviewed children’s files to understand if the 21+ offer was consistently effective. The findings indicated that there is still work to do to improve practice in this area. Not all young people open to the 21+ offer had a Pathway Plan to consider their needs and risks. This will be addressed with the team and the service aim for all young people open to the 21+ offer to have a Pathway Plan by the end of October 2024. Where Pathway Plans were completed, it was much clearer to auditors the reasons why young people were open to the service and what support was being offered. There were recording issues on case files that means it was sometimes difficult to evidence how PAs were maintaining contact with young people.</p>			
What our performance indicators show			
As of 7 October, there were 233 young adults aged 21+, 160 were open to the 21+ offer and 73 were allocated a PA.			

3. Quality of plans

What needs to improve				
The quality of plans for children to ensure that they are more child-focused and drive forward positive change in a timely way.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<p>Child in need and child protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of child protection plans is inconsistent. Some are outcome focused although some lack purpose and urgency. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning. • The quality of safety plans is inconsistent, mostly relying on vulnerable parents and are overly optimistic. The use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required. • Multi-agency core groups meet regularly to review progress however social workers do not routinely update children’s experiences against the child protection plan. • For some children who have been known to services for several years and have been the subject of repeat child protection and child in need plans, the quality of practice is too variable. Contingency thinking and planning are not strong enough for these children. This means that, for some children, plans are not effective in improving their outcomes. • When child in need and child protection plans do not progress, there was drift and delay for children, and ineffective challenge from the chair and multi-agency group in child in need meetings, core groups and review conferences. <p>Cared for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of care plans for children is inconsistent. • Consideration is not routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage. • Some children are subject to statutory intervention for longer than they need to be. This is due to delays in the discharge of care orders. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
P1	Embed the agreed restorative practice model approach to support requirement for consistently good practice.	Principal Social Worker	August 2024	Delayed

P2	Continue to provide masterclasses – short in-house training sessions for practitioners and managers on specific topics. This will include planning. The masterclass programme will continue to be responsive to audit findings to support improved practice.	Principal Social Worker	Starting in April 2024 and running throughout the year	On track
P3	Hold a management and leadership session on planning to ensure there is a shared understanding on what constitutes a good quality plan, and that the role of team managers and IROs is clear in scrutinising plans to ensure all plans are good quality.	All Service Managers	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
P4	Establish reflective case discussion meetings to progress outcomes for children on longer child protection plans and repeat plans.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Child Protection	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
P5	Develop a permanence strategy to ensure permanence planning is considered and progressed from an early stage, with permanence plans being in place at the second cared for review. The permanence strategy should consider all routes to permanence, including reunification.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	January 2025	On track
P6	Refresh the practice standards on care planning to ensure expectations to support permanence are clear.	Service Managers for Cared for Children	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
P7	Review permanence decision panels to ensure effectiveness of permanence planning.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	October 2024	On track
P8	Explore within the multiagency safeguarding group what training is needed to support effective partnership challenge.	Children's Safeguarding Partnership Training Manager	December 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
P9	Develop a new child protection plan in partnership with children, young people and families to ensure it is concise, focused on the key priorities to keep children safe, and easy for families to understand.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Child Protection	November 2024	On track

P10	Review the cared for plan in partnership with children, young people and families to ensure it is supports best practice and is easy for families to understand.	Service Managers for Cared for Children	December 2024	On track
<i>Please also see action MO5 - Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence planning within statutory and children's timescales.</i>				
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of plans across all service areas. • Multi-agency audits will tell us about the quality of multi-agency challenge in supporting plan progression. • Permanence planning will be a focus of thematic audits. • The percentage of plans judged good or better. • The percentage of plans within timescales. • The percentage of children on repeat child protection plans. • Number of children on CP plans over 15 months. • The percentage of permanence plans in place by the second review. • The number of children on care orders and number of care orders discharged. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans will be consistently good quality, with effective contingency plans, child-focused and result in good outcomes for children and young people. It will be easy for everyone to see what needs to happen from the plan. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. • Drift and delay is prevented through effective management oversight and partnership challenge. • Consideration is routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage and children achieve permanence in a timely way. • Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%. • 100% permanence plans will be in place by the second review. 	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month The service is trialling a new child protection plan with families. The new plan aims to be more child focussed, impact focussed and easier for families to read and engage with. Feedback from families is currently being collated. IROs are attending 6 core groups to consider how the new child protection plan is being used to progress planning. Over 200 people have been trained in restorative practice and we have established in-house trainers to ensure the model is sustainable. Restorative practice is included within our practice standards. Training is continuing to be rolled out to the workforce. Our first annual celebration of restorative practice will take place at the celebrating practice workshops in October and November, which will include a session on reflective circles and reflecting on practice in group supervision. However, this work has been delivered by our SLIP partner, Stockport and we have not yet seen any reports to evidence this is embedded or the outcomes of the work and this has been requested.				Grey

The children's social care management and leadership session on 13 August covered supervision and quality of planning. A further session on 12 September covered the quality of plans and what makes a good plan.

Masterclasses (short training sessions) are continuing to be offered on creating strong plans. Masterclasses are now being provided to multi-agency practitioners to strengthen our partnership work.

Trainers across the safeguarding partnership have reviewed what training is needed to support effective partnership challenge. Since July 2024, the safeguarding partnership is running Working Together 2023 webinars with focus on responsibility and roles, including challenge. The partnership also offers a professional curiosity, critical thinking and professional challenge course twice a year.

We are developing a new Permanence Strategy in collaboration with colleagues from across the Children's Directorate and multi-agency partners, to ensure that we are all engaged in achieving permanence for children and young people. To support this process, we have reviewed permanence strategies from good and outstanding local authorities. The Permanence Strategy is being developed in collaboration with children and young people and we are working closely with the Participation Team and our Care Leaver Ambassadors to achieve this. We anticipate launching the new Permanence Strategy in December 2024.

The practice standards have been refreshed and promoted through communications on 'being brilliant at the basics'. They include expectations on permanence.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

The latest audits show that most plans are not yet good quality; 2 of 12 plans were good (16.6%), 8 of 12 (66.6%) required improvement and 2 (16.6%) were inadequate. Plans are not always SMART with clear timescales. The biggest issue continuing to bring judgement gradings down is management oversight and supervision. Expectations on the quality of plans have been confirmed with team managers, and service managers are expected to hold team managers to account for their performance in terms of signing off plans within individual supervision. The lead practitioner team will put on a bespoke session looking at what makes a good quality care plan to support the workforce in November. We will review the quality of care plans following this training as part of the monthly dip samples undertaken by service managers to understand the impact of this training.

The quality of cared for plans is detailed within the focus report. Of 6 cases, 1 was judged to be good, 1 required improvement and 4 were inadequate. In 5 of 6 cases information was missing from files which made it difficult for auditors to evidence why decisions had been made for children and young people. Permanence for young people is not being sufficiently considered within care planning which leads to drift with plans of permanence. Contingency planning is sometimes not considered or is limited which means we are then overly reliant on placements remaining stable for young people.

For the two cases judged to be good overall following moderation, there was an assessment that the auditors and moderators judged to be outstanding. This provided a solid foundation on which planning for the young person could take place. The plan utilised multi agency colleagues and had clear, SMART actions which were tracked between meetings. There was a keen eye to permanence that was also reflected within

supervision records, and this helped drive case progression. Visiting was also strong with a good understanding of the young person's lived experience. We will use these good case examples and share them widely with teams to support good practice.	
What our performance indicators show	
The percentage of children subject to repeat child protection plans within 2 years has reduced to 11.3% in September (from a range between 13.4-14.6%) which is positive.	

4. Quality and frequency of visits

What needs to improve				
The quality and frequency of visits to children so that they are purposeful and in line with assessed needs.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<p>Child in need and child protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to children in need and those subject to child protection plans are not always carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need. Not all visits are carried out within local authority prescribed or statutory timescales. There is a lack of clarity on the expected visiting times for children in need. • Some children are not visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. Changes in social workers impacts this. • Visits to children do not always have purpose and do not link to their plans clearly enough. Records of visits vary in depth and quality of detail. Some visits are very brief, and their contribution towards the assessment or progress of the plan is limited. <p>Cared for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to children in care are not always carried out in line with statutory visiting schedules or their assessed need. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
V1	Strengthen the performance framework to ensure robust performance management of visits to children.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
V2	Support improved visiting practice through the masterclass training programme and briefings to team meetings.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
V3	Reissue the visiting template to practitioners to ensure consistency in recording.	Principal Social Worker	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

V4	Develop and roll out e-learning on visiting to support purposeful visits that are carried out with a frequency that reflects children's needs.	Principal Social Worker	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
V5	Deliver training to the children's social care workforce on the impact of recording, including views from a care leaver on what reading their case files felt like for them.	Principal Social Worker	Launch within the Celebrating Practice Workshops in October	On track
V6	Develop more ways of writing documents e.g. visits to the child, and that children's views are highlighted in a specific colour within the child's record. Principal Social Worker to share new expectations in Celebrating Practice events.	Principal Social Worker	March 2025	On track
V7	Team managers to review visiting schedules in supervision, and IROs and CP chairs to have oversight of frequency visits to children.	All Team Managers and IROs	Evaluate in January 2025	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and visits, and the quality of relationships with children and young people. Timeliness of visits. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visits to children are carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need and this is clearly recorded on their files. Over 80% visits will be in line with need as shown through audit. Children are visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. 90% of young people will tell us they trust their social workers. Visits to children are purposeful and clearly link to their assessments or plans. 	
Impact to date				Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Grey
<p>There is effective line of sight to frontline practice through the monthly Director's Performance and Quality Clinic, where heads of service are held accountable for their service's performance and outcomes for children and young people. These are underpinned by weekly performance clinics are held between service managers and team managers which agree the focus for each week. Power BI reports are in place for all key performance areas providing all managers with performance information at any time. Monthly Improvement and Performance meetings for all children's services will take place from October, chaired by the Executive Director of Children's Services.</p> <p>Masterclasses on visiting and briefings at team meetings on visiting by the lead practitioners have been delivered to teams.</p>				

The e-learning on visiting went live on 28 August. This emphasises that visits should be taken at a frequency that reflects children's needs. This is also made clear within our practice standards.

The care leaver ambassadors will be attending the celebrating practice workshops in October and November to deliver a session on the importance of building strong relationships with children and young people, and what difference this can have on their lives, to support improved practice. Expectations on recording the child's voice will be included in the 'being brilliant at the basics' communications.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

A very small number of dip samples were undertaken in relation to visits to cared for children and note it is difficult to draw overall conclusions of the quality of practice. In the 4 children's files that were considered, visits that were written to the child were judged to be of better quality; the voice of the child was clearer, and the case record was more purposeful. Visiting frequency was variable and auditors found there was no rationale to evidence the visiting rate. There were some gaps in case recording which needed to be addressed. Actions identified following a visit were not consistently SMART as timescales were not clear. The auditors felt that where the visiting template was used, the quality of recording was improved.

Good examples of tailored and purposeful visits have been shared during one to one meetings between the head of service and PAs.

What our performance indicators show

The timeliness of visits is monitored through the weekly and monthly performance clinics.

5. Management Oversight and Supervision

What needs to improve				
The quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure that consistent, good social work practice is in place.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management oversight and challenge are not fully embedded across all service areas. Management oversight across all service areas does not provide sufficient challenge or reflection to improve social work practice. For some children, this has led to their needs not being recognised or acted upon in a timely way. • The quality of supervision is too variable. Supervision is not always sufficiently analytical or reflective. Supervision is not consistently driving children's plans forward, actions although timebound roll over for many months without completion. This means not all children's circumstances are sufficiently understood. • For a small number of young children who live in children's homes there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children's care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay. • Recent arrangements to track permanence for children have been introduced, but it is too soon to see the impact of this, and some children continue to experience drift and delay. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
MO1	Commission a bespoke leadership development programme to support all leaders in children's services (from team leaders and above) to develop their leadership, reflective skills, and confidence in effective challenge to improve practice and outcomes for children.	Principal Social Worker	Running between March 2024 - June 2025	On track
MO2	Deliver an in-house leadership and management development programme for children's social care, tailored to our areas for improvement, to support a culture of high support and high challenge and embed consistently good quality practice.	Principal Social Worker	To commence in April 2024 and run throughout the year	On track
MO3	Update the supervision policy and develop practice guidance on reflective supervision based on best practice.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

MO4	All managers to complete supervision training to support them to deliver reflective supervision that considers children's lived experiences, supports learning and improves practice.	Principal Social Worker	Training to be delivered between November and March 2025	On track
MO5	Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence within statutory and children's timescales.	Service Manager Cared for Children	Evaluate impact in October 2024	On track
MO6	Review the care plans for all cared for children who are not currently in foster care or planning to return home to ensure they are on the right plan.	Head of Service Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
MO7	Revise the supervision form to ensure that children and young people's views are included and considered as part of reflective supervision.	Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection	October 2024	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and management oversight. These audits include a review of case supervision which informs the judgement on management oversight. The percentage of supervision within timescales. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management oversight and challenge are embedded across all service areas. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality. Supervision is consistently good quality, analytical and reflective. Management oversight improves social work practice, leading to children and young people receiving timely support and experiencing good outcomes. Children achieve permanence in a timely way. 100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review. Over 90% supervision will be within timescales. 	
Impact to date				Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Grey
<p>The supervision training will take place over three dates between November and January. The training is mandatory for all managers and those managers who have never undertaken any reflective supervision training before will be prioritised for cohort one.</p> <p>A workshop is being held on 9 October with all team managers to share the audit findings on supervision, along with good practice examples, and agree what a good supervision looks like. Further dip sampling of supervision will take place in November to evaluate impact.</p>				

The supervision form will be revised to ensure children and young people's views are included and considered as part of reflective supervision.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

The highest challenge impacting audit judgements was the lack management oversight and supervision. Where management oversight and supervision were inadequate, the expected frequency of case supervision was not evidenced, and where auditors judged management oversight and supervision to be requiring improvement, they noted examples where activity was not focused on the plan, progressing actions, or addressing gaps.

24 dip samples of supervision were also undertaken to review the quality of case supervision within the CINCP teams. Findings evidenced that team manager sickness and increased caseloads impacted on supervisions taking place. There were some good examples of reflective supervision identified within this dip sample; however, this remains inconsistent, and the quality of supervision can vary even when completed by the same manager largely due to workload demand. There are still improvements to be made on the setting of SMART actions within supervision and then reviewing these through future supervision sessions. The dip sample found there was a lack of evidence around the supervision actions driving the plan or triangulating with other plans such as actions from Legal Advice Meetings or children who were missing from home.

What our performance indicators show

Case supervision is a focus area of 'being brilliant at the basics', and there is continued scrutiny of performance through performance clinics and the Director's Performance and Quality Clinic. Performance on supervision timeliness has increased for CINCP and the care leavers service.

6. Effectiveness of IROs

What needs to improve				
The effectiveness of child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers (IROs) to escalate, challenge and scrutinize plans for children.				
Section Lead		Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance		
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child protection chairs are not consistently effective in driving forward plans for children. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning, some plans lack purpose and urgency. They do not consistently advocate for children. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to act when risks increase, or changes have not happened within the child's timeframe. For example, for children who experience long-term neglect. Child protection chairs recognise they need to be more specific about what needs to change within the timeframe for children. Some plans are lengthy and opaque, the use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required. Permanence plans are not routinely identified by the time of children's second reviews, leading to drift and delay of children's plans. For some children, IROs were not seen to actively raise this within the cared for children's review. IROs do not always robustly challenge the appropriateness of plans, which are not always-outcome focused, or challenge drift. The quality and impact of care planning for cared for children was variable. For some children, the impact of multiple social workers and IROs has resulted in drift and delay of their plans and permanence. For a small number of young children who live in children's homes there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children's care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay. 		
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
IR1	Review the performance management framework for IROs to ensure that we can evidence their impact in children's plans and children's lives.	Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
IR2	IROs will be included in the in-house and commissioned leadership and management development programme. This will ensure we have a consistent understanding of quality and expectations on practice and joint approach to improvement.	Principal Social Worker	IROs to be included by April 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

IR3	Review and refresh the IRO practice standards to embed consistently good quality practice.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	Review quarterly at service development days	Complete but need to evidence impact
IR4	Hold an IRO service development day every 3 months to embed consistently good practice.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	Every 3 months from June 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
IR5	Revise the guidance on IRO quality assurance alerts to support improved outcome-focused practice in line with our key improvement areas, e.g. planning, tailored visiting, and preventing drift and delay.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
IR6	Explore and challenge performance around permanence in performance clinics with IROs to ensure this is achieved within children's timescales.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Cared for Children	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
IR7	Carry out consultation and engagement sessions with cared for young people to evaluate the impact of the cared for IRO service and redesign the consultation forms for older young people.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Cared for Children	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

Please also see action P9 - Develop a new child protection plan in partnership with children, young people and families to ensure it is concise, focused on the key priorities to keep children safe, and easy for families to understand.

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans. • Themes and impact of IRO quality assurance alerts. • Percentage of plans that are good or better quality. • Number of children on CP plans over 15 months. • Percentage of repeat child protection plans. • Percentage of permanence plans at the second review. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IROs consistently drive forward plans and advocate for children. Plans are good quality, outcome-focused, and result in good outcomes for children. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. • Children achieve long-term permanence in a timely way. • 100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review. • Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%.
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Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>	Impact Rating
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<p>Key improvement activities delivered this month</p>	<p>Grey</p>
<p>The revised quality assurance alert guidance has been completed and has been renamed the resolution protocol. This protocol emphasises the importance of restorative practices and restorative relationships in seeking resolution and better outcomes for children.</p> <p>We have reviewed our performance management framework. Performance information is shared at the Director’s Performance and Quality Meetings for discussion and challenge. Performance meetings are held fortnightly with the IROs and these involve a thematic audit of specific issues for care planning. The last thematic audit looked at permanence at the second review and the barriers to achieving this. Actions are developed following these audits to support improved practice.</p>	
<p>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</p> <p><i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i></p>	
<p>The service has trialled a new child protection plan that aims to be more child focussed, impact focussed and easier for families to read and engage with. A review of this plan is underway and feedback from families will be sought to identify next steps.</p> <p>The latest audits show that there is evidence of IRO footprint on case files; however, we recognise the quality and consistency of this can still be variable. We remain keen to improve the evidence of IRO impact. The quality and consistency of the IROs footprint has been impacted by unforeseen sickness in the service as well as the increased numbers of children into care and additional responsibility for reviewing care leavers.</p> <p>There are risks currently that we are not able to fulfil our statutory functions within the safeguarding service due to sickness absence within the IRO team and the increased demand in terms of numbers of children into care and into child protection. Caseloads are significantly higher than the recommended average in the IRO handbook. We have adverts out for the two IRO posts agreed by committee and have put together an internal request for agency cover in the interim. Since the last board meeting, we have successfully recruited two agency IROs to cover the current workforce sickness. This will support with reducing demand and enable statutory functions to be fulfilled.</p> <p>A focus group was undertaken with some young people to consider their experiences of the cared for IRO service. There was a rich range of feedback provided which identified positives in that the young people liked their IRO and felt supported by them; the IRO advocated for their needs and held other people to account for actions that they needed to complete. They liked being involved and consulted about their review and the option to have bespoke themed reviews aligned to their interests. The young people identified there had been a lot of change in the IRO service and they would like more opportunities to meet with their IRO outside of reviews.</p> <p>The young people provided feedback that there was work to do on the way we capture their feedback in consultation and requested a method that allowed them to access forms on their phones and send them directly to the IRO. We are using this feedback to shape our engagement strategy in the service. We aim to have digitalised feedback opportunities available to children, young people and families by November 2024.</p>	
<p>What our performance indicators show</p>	

Positively, we have seen the numbers of children open on a child protection plan for 15 months or longer remain static at 19. This equates to 6.5% of the total, down from 8% in August. This suggests we are making some improvements with managers and IROs tracking progress of planning at earlier points to ensure plans can be safely ended within the children's timescales.

The percentage of children subject to repeat child protection plans is also reducing. Repeat plans are currently accounting for 25% of the overall numbers (year to date). This is a positive picture showing a reduction from a high of 39% in July. Month by month, in September performance has reduced to 11.3% compared to a range of 13.4-14.6% over previous months.

Since the last improvement board, looking at the data from 1 September to date, there were 114 cared for reviews that took place. There was a plan of permanence identified at the second review for 75% of children for whom this applied. However, we have also identified children across the broader system whose plan of permanence is not where we need it to be. There may be a number of factors which contribute to this. This needs exploring within a deep dive to provide a more accurate picture as to the barriers in achieving permanence for these young people. The service will undertake this quality assurance activity in November 2024. This will inform the permanence strategy that is being developed and will enable practice improvements to be understood in this area.

7. Sufficiency of placements

What needs to improve				
The sufficiency of suitable placements that can meet children and young people's assessed needs.				
Section Lead		Head of Service Children's Provision		
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, there is variability in how quickly potential carers from within the extended family are identified. Challenges to sufficiency impact on the choice of placements and the quality of children's experiences. Some children still live in homes that do not match their needs, due to a lack of choice. Sufficiency of in-house foster carers is a challenge. Some children experience multiple placement moves, which are unsettling for them. There are inconsistencies in management oversight and recording as to the rationale for this. A small number of young children who now live in children's homes have experienced frequent moves in foster care placements and too many changes in social worker. Some young children live in residential children's homes for long periods of time. 		
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
S1	Embed a culture of considering support from the family network at the earliest opportunity, including identifying potential carers from within the extended family where children can't remain in the care of their birth parents.	Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	Delayed
S2	Join Foster4, which will provide additional resources for fostering recruitment and training.	Head of Service Children's Provision	May 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
S3	Work in partnership with the other local authorities to build our Foster4 offer, ensuring there is an effective front door to the fostering service so we can effectively support those who make an enquiry and increase the number of foster carers within Cheshire East.	Head of Service Children's Provision	October 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

S4	Explore opportunities within the council to increase fostering marketing and raise awareness of fostering to increase the number of people considering fostering.	Head of Service Children's Provision	October 2024	On track
S5	Develop specialist foster carers to support children and young people to step down from residential care.	Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	On track
S6	Develop our third Mockingbird constellation to increase support for foster carers and children and young people in foster care.	Service Manager for Fostering	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
S7	Open three Cheshire East Council residential children's homes, which will include one emergency bed, to increase the placement options for Cheshire East's young people.	Head of Service Children's Provision	Flude House to open in April 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
			Claremont House to open in November 2024	On track
			Victoria Lodge to open in December 2024	Delayed
S8	Carry out a deep dive on reunification and step down for children from care as part of the council's transformation programme.	Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection	December 2024	On track
S9	Investigate the potential for joint commissioning of high needs placements for children with relevant system partners, developing costed business cases where required, to support increased placement options for young people.	Strong Start Programme Lead Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	On track
S10	Young people to develop recruitment questions to ask foster carers, and deliver training to the fostering panel, to ensure children and young people's voices and experiences are included in the recruitment and selection of foster carers.	Participation Lead	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
S11	Develop a 'Homes for Cared for Children' workstream and action plan to improve outcomes for cared for children. This workstream will include a care leaver	Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	On track

	ambassador to ensure the views of care experienced children and young people shape our priorities and service development.	Participation Team		
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in in-house fosters and increase in range of foster carers to support different groups, for example older young people. • Percentage of children and young people in foster care with Cheshire East carers. • Reduction in the timeframe to bring in new foster carers. • Number of children and young people with 3 or more placement moves. • Children and young people will report that their placements meet their needs and they feel safe and supported. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, their networks are explored at an early stage to support them to remain with their wider family where possible. • There is sufficient choice of placements to meet children and young people's needs, which means children are placed in a home that is right for them. • Children and young people experience stable homes and placement moves are prevented/ limited wherever possible. 	
Impact to date				Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Grey
<p>Family Networking:</p> <p>The Family Group Conference team is now well established and supporting a clear focus on early identification of support within the child's family network. The focus of this team is within CIN. However, we have more to do to embed a family networking approach across all services. Family networking is considered at CP and for cases in pre-proceedings, but not always at CIN when the Family Group Conference team is not involved. Work will be undertaken to tighten planning at CIN to ensure that the help families are getting is impactful.</p> <p>Placements:</p> <p>Placements continue to be challenging but we are looking to be creative to ensure our children and young people have homes that meet their needs.</p> <p>Fostering:</p> <p>The Foster4 offer is now embedded into our service, which includes a recruitment hub. An allocated professional from Foster4 is based with Cheshire East for 2 days a week supporting recruitment and marketing activity. Monthly meetings take place with Foster4 which are working well. We are currently assessing 7 fostering households to be mainstream carers, which is positive. Some of these have come through our involvement with Foster 4 and some have come through our own internal recruitment.</p> <p>We have appointed a team manager for recruitment and assessment. We have also met with a company around targeting our digital foster care campaign to specific audiences/ demographics, which may support us in our ambition to recruit more diverse carers.</p>				

We have 145 fostering households (83 mainstream carers and 62 connected carers), in addition we have one carer who is fostering to adopt and one on a reg 24 in progress. Whilst we continue to grow our fostering service, we have also had some carers naturally retire which can affect our net gain overall.

We have recruited our third Mockingbird Home Hub Carers and they have completed their training. We have identified 6 satellite families and are in the process of identifying another 1 to meet fidelity.

Young people have developed recruitment questions to ask foster carers, and delivered training to the fostering panel, to ensure children and young people's voices and experiences are included in the recruitment and selection of foster carers.

In House Residential:

Flude House has had a difficult month due to staffing sickness. We have seen an increase in incidents, which has been challenging to navigate for the new team but we are starting to now see a reduction again, which is positive.

Claremont has now been renamed 'Cherry Tree House' and all Ofsted documents have now been submitted. Some new staff have joined and have been completing their induction with training, shadow visits in Flude house, and have also been providing stability work and support to 2 siblings in their foster placement.

Recruitment for Victoria Lodge's registered manager is proving difficult. We have not been able to recruit and therefore we cannot complete the registration process. The home's layout and decor is complete. In collaboration with HR we are reviewing the job description for the post and have received support from Cheshire West. A job evaluation is underway. As a result, opening is likely to be pushed back until the end of the financial year. We will then review our plans to ensure opening of any further homes is considered in line with our improvements to prevent additional pressure in the system.

Joint Commissioning of high needs placements

A triangulation group has been established between the ICB MH and Neurodiverse Commissioning Team, ICB Transforming Care Team, and Cheshire East Council Strong Start Commissioning Team to look at options for children with complex needs.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

We continue to run Triple S (Step up, Step Down and Stability) on a weekly basis, and this is working well to stabilise placements and plan moves in advance. The team have seen some successful step downs this month with one child returning to her dad, a young man stepping down to supported accommodation and siblings kept together in fostering placements.

Satellite carers have voiced their positivity about being part of Mockingbird and the support and companionship it has provided. Carers and young people have spoken about it feeling like a 'real extended family'.

We have received an email from a foster carer, sharing how much she enjoys working with the fostering service and sent some photos of a recent holiday with her foster children.

What our performance indicators show	
We are currently assessing 7 fostering households to be mainstream carers and 1 IFA transfer. There has been an increase in the last 3 months in the percentage of children with 3 or more placements within the last 12 months.	

Chapter 2

1. The Front Door

Section Lead	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For some children and families, there is a delay in the step-up from early help services to statutory services. The step-up process is not as streamlined as it should be. For a small number of children, obtaining information from partner agencies and the voice of the child can lead to a delay in decision-making when the threshold is clearly met. Issues relating to parental consent are not always well recorded. The multi-agency partnership is not routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children, or, when managers make decisions to close referrals. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
FD1	Update the contact guidance to include that where the threshold for a referral is clearly met, cases must be actioned immediately. This guidance will also include ensuring consent is clearly recorded. Embed the guidance to support consistently good practice.	Service Manager Integrated Front Door	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
FD2	Review multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) arrangements in other local authorities to learn from good practice and inform the development of multi-agency decision making in the front door.	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse Service Manager Integrated Front Door	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
FD3	Hold a collaborative workshop to review the current front door provision and agree actions to establish multi-agency decision-making, informed by the inspection findings and observation of good practice in other areas.	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse	September 2024	Delayed
FD4	Consider chapter 3 of Working Together 2023 in the safeguarding partnership to establish agreed multi-agency working arrangements.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	December 2024	On track

		Chair of the Safeguarding Partnership and statutory partners within the partnership		
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly multi-agency front door thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be step up to social care. These audits also consider consent and timeliness of decisions. The percentage of contacts that are referred to children's social care completed within 24 hours. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families stepping-up from early help services to statutory services will swiftly receive support. Over 90% of referrals to children's social care will be within 24 hours. 90% parental consent will be well recorded. All decisions for referrals to children's social care will be made swiftly. Over 80% referrals audited will be good quality. The multi-agency partnership is routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children and when managers make decisions to close referrals. 	
Impact to date				Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Grey
A key milestone that has been achieved in September was to recruit to a new service manager for the integrated front door. We are considering some external support to review the Front Door and so the timescale around developing MASH arrangements will be amended (FD3).				
What impact we are achieving for children and young people				
<i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>				
Team Managers within the front door review timescales every day and audit any cases that go over the timescale. Decisions are being made in a timely manner and there is consistency regarding conversion rates.				
What our performance indicators show				
There were 865 contacts to the ChECS front door in September. Despite an increase in contacts, timeliness has improved with 95.3% of referrals to children's social care were progressed within 24 hours. Performance indicators are being used to develop audit activity within ChECS to review quality of triage and decision making/ application of thresholds.				

2. Strategy Meetings

Section Lead	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy meetings do not consistently capture the discussion about risk, which means that the rationale for decisions made, and next steps, is not always clear. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
SM1	Deliver a workshop on strategy meetings for team managers to support consistently good practice.	Service Managers CINCP	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SM2	Deliver training for unit coordinators on minute taking to support consistently good practice across the team in capturing discussions on risk.	Children and Family Service Business Support Lead	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
SM3	A management analysis box to be added to the strategy discussion form to ensure a clear rationale for decisions is included.	Service Managers CINCP	June 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy discussion audits within the 8-weekly multi-agency liaison meetings will tell us about the quality of strategy discussions and whether the rationale for decisions is clearly recorded. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy meetings consistently capture the discussion about risk which means that the rational for decisions and next steps is clear. 90% strategy discussions will have a clear rationale for decisions. 	
Impact to date				Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Grey
The Safeguarding Children's Partnership multi-agency liaison meeting is considering the quality of strategy meetings through a relaunch of their routine quality assurance on a bi-monthly basis. This meeting is attended by key strategic leads in health, police, education, children's social care and the partnership business manager. The expectation is that learning from this meeting is taken back into agencies for dissemination. Learning is				

<p>also fed into the leadership network training. The quality assurance activity will consider the learning from the inspection and identify any partnership themes that will inform our improvement work in Children’s Social Care.</p>	
<p>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</p> <p><i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i></p>	
<p>Training was delivered to unit coordinators in August. Dip sampling of minutes took place in September to assess the impact of this. 18 minutes were sampled by business support officers, and all were found to contain discussion on risk and with management analysis completed by the team manager.</p> <p>The workforce have provided feedback that the amended strategy meeting form allows them to capture the discussion more easily and the management analysis box has provided clarity as to the rationale for decision making.</p>	
<p>What our performance indicators show</p>	
<p>Our conversion to section 47 from strategy discussion is currently 80%. The quality assurance work around this improvement action needs to consider whether we conduct too many single agency s47 investigations and whether we are utilising strategy discussions in the right way.</p>	

3. Life-story work and later-life letters

Section Lead		Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life-story work and later-life letters are not usually started in a timely way. This means that children have limited opportunities to understand their journey into care at a time that is right for them. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating	
LS1	Commission external training on life-story work to ensure practitioners understand the expectation, importance, and how to complete it.	Principal Social Worker	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact	
LS2	Include in the practice standards for care planning that the expectation for every child is that life story work and later life letters are started early.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact	
LS3	Establish a process for monitoring and reviewing life-story work and later-life letters.	Service Managers Cared for Children	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact	
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from children and young people, and their carers – children will tell us they have a better understanding of their life stories. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life-story work and later-life letters are started early so children understand why they are in care. 		
Impact to date					Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					
Key improvement activities delivered this month					Grey

Life story work and later in life letters are included within the permanence tracker and monthly review meetings take place. Life story work and later in life letters are also considered within performance clinics.

Research in Practice have been commissioned to provide training on life story work. The dates of the training are being advertised and it will take place in November and January.

The practice standards include the importance of ensuring that every child knows and understands their story in a way that makes sense to them, and that we will support families to be as involved as possible in the sharing and explaining of these stories to children.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

Informal feedback from ASYEs is that the training and guidance provided has supported them to realise the significance of this work, and that they have enjoyed doing these pieces of work. One social worker received exceptional feedback on the quality of her work and we are exploring making her an adoption champion to share her good practice.

What our performance indicators show

4. Health of Cared for Children

Section Lead	Associate Director Quality and Safety Cheshire East, Cheshire and Merseyside NHS			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiting lists result in some delay in children accessing emotional support services. • A small number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and young people wait too long to access emotional support and counselling due to waiting lists. • Initial and review health assessments are not always completed within appropriate timescales. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
H1	Develop prioritisation matrices/ approaches to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are prioritised for mental health support based on an understanding of the additional and differing needs and risks for children with experience of the care system.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB	March 2025	On track
H2	Develop ‘waiting well’ initiatives with key health providers and third sector provision to support children and young people while they wait based on an understanding of protective factors and how they can be increased and developed in response to needs.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB	March 2025	On track
H3	Review the current emotional support offer for UASC young people in Cheshire East, taking into account any recommendations/ good practice from the Cheshire and Merseyside scoping exercise on support to UASC young people.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	March 2025	On track
H4	Health and children’s social care to jointly review the timeliness of health assessments on a six-weekly basis to support improved timeliness.	Service Manager Cared for Children Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	May 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
H5	Develop a single point of contact for health assessments within the local authority to support increased timeliness.	Service Manager Cared for Children	May 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

H6	Report quarterly to NHS England on out of area initial and review health assessments that are out of timescale to drive improved timeliness.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	May 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
H7	Develop a health and wellbeing workstream and action plan to improve health outcomes for cared for children and care leavers. This workstream will include a care leaver ambassador to ensure the views of care experienced children and young people shape our priorities and service development.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	December 2024	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiting lists for children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS). • Timeliness of annual health assessments, initial and review health assessments. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people access children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) without delay. 90% of non-urgent referrals receive an assessment within 6 weeks. 90% wait no more than 6 weeks between assessment and treatment. • 90% annual health assessments will be completed within timescales. 	
Impact to date				Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Grey
Emotional Health of Cared for Children				
<p>The Complex Needs Escalation and Support Tool (CNEST) was introduced within Children and Young People Mental Health Services (CYPMHS) this year. The use of the Complex Needs Escalation and Support Tool (CNEST) helps identify unmet needs in children and young people, enabling individualised care. This approach is now embedded within CYPMHS and efficiently facilitates the mobilisation of appropriate support to address diverse needs. Its multifaceted approach plays a vital role in mitigating hospital admissions, placement breakdown and averting custody situations. Each Wednesday a clinical meeting is attended by representative leads from all the areas of CYPMHS where children and young people who are rated red on the CNEST are discussed. A Red Case Oversight Group chaired by strategic clinical director and head of operations provides senior oversight of escalating needs, where there is increased risk of hospital admission, placement breakdown and other complex systemic challenges. There is senior operational and clinical leadership representation at the Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East Gateway.</p> <p>Current data shows for cared for children there is an average 3 week wait for first contact from point of referral, and this will be tracked monthly from this point as an additional marker has been added to the Patient Electronic Record to note cared for status.</p> <p>Cheshire and Wirral Partnership's (CWP's) Waiting Safely, Waiting Well policy details key principles that govern safe and supportive waiting for people waiting for services provided by Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (CWP) and whilst waiting to transition to other services, this includes transitions external and internal to CWP. Contained within the policy is the Wait List Validation and Harm Review Standard Operating</p>				

Procedure which has been devised to ensure that there is a clear process in place for children and young people referred to community CYPMHS that are waiting for assessment and/or intervention for all teams within Children Young People and Families care group. It highlights the importance of providing assurance on safe and well-led aspects related to waiting lists.

Greater Manchester ICB have now completed their scoping exercise regarding the health of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and are now in the process of producing a number of recommendations on behalf of the North West region. This will include support for emotional health.

Health Assessments for Cared for Children

Weekly multi-agency meetings are continuing to take place to try to resolve barriers to attendance for health assessments. Where children have not attended within timescales, there is still effective multi-agency work to ensure these children are seen as quickly as possible, often in complex situations.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

This quarter there appears to have been an increase in the number of children who are experiencing significant delays in their health assessments due to issues in obtaining the required legal paperwork such as parental consent. Additionally, some IHAs have not been able to go ahead because booked interpreters did not attend the appointment. This likely to impact on performance for Q2. Health and social care teams are working together to identify solutions to these issues, actions include developing a new information gathering process and developing the decliner pathway to ensure young people who decline a health assessment still receive a health action plan.

What our performance indicators show

Children and Young People’s Mental Health Services (CYPMHS)

The average waiting times in July 2024 for a Choice Assessment were 10 weeks for South Cheshire and 6 weeks for East Cheshire (similar to the time of inspection).

Average Choice Assessment Waiting Times (in weeks)											
	2023			2024							
Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
0-18 South Cheshire	5	15	7	9	11	8	7	10	6	6	10

0-18 East Cheshire	5	7	3	7	6	9	6	4	5	3	6
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The waiting times in July 2024 for a Partnership Appointment were 9 weeks for South Cheshire (reduced from 18 weeks at the time of the inspection) and 10 weeks for East Cheshire (similar to the time of the inspection).

Average Partnership Appointment Waiting Times (in weeks)											
	2023			2024							
Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
0-18 South Cheshire	2	4	6	10	18	15	7	10	15	7	9
0-18 East Cheshire	11	5	4	9	12	23	7	8	10	13	10

The data is available at [Waiting times - Children and Young People's Mental Health Services :: Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust \(mymind.org.uk\)](https://www.mymind.org.uk)

Health Assessments for Cared for Children

2023/24 turnout data confirmed that 91% of cared for children had their annual health assessment. This an increase of 2% from 89% in 2022/23.

Additionally, 87% had their teeth checked by a dentist in 2023/24 which is an increase of 12% from 75% in 2022/23.

5. Education for Cared for Children

Section Lead	Head of Service for Inclusion			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many primary-aged children in care experience attendance issues as they move into secondary school. • Personal education plans (PEPs) contain the required information, but outcomes for children in care overall are low. • Many children in care are ill-prepared for adulthood and struggle to cope with the challenges that they face when they leave care. • The identification of children and young people who are at risk of not being in employment, education or training (NEET) does not begin early enough. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
ED1	Review attendance through education advisors' fortnightly attendance meetings and determine clear actions for young people to improve their attendance.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
ED2	Review the plans for those with lower than 50% attendance, in alternative provision, or not in full time education, in a forum chaired by a head of service, to ensure there are clear actions on what needs to happen and there is senior leader oversight of these young people.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
ED3	Hold multi-disciplinary team meetings for individual children and young people when required to improve attendance. These meetings develop a plan to improve attendance and continue to meet until attendance has improved.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
ED4	Improve the quality of PEPs through delivering training, ensuring we are ambitious for young people, targets are SMART, and there is a clear early planning for preparing young people for adulthood and securing EET. Involve young people in the development and delivery of the training to ensure the impact of a good quality PEP is clear.	Head of Service for Inclusion	Delivery from September - December 2024	On track
ED5	Review the PEP form to ensure that this supports improvement in areas where care experienced young people attain less well than their peers, for example reading.	Head of Service for Inclusion	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact

ED6	Report cared for children's attainment against their peers within scorecards and performance reports to drive improved performance.	Head of Service for Inclusion	September 2024	Delayed
ED7	Audit young adults who are NEET at 20 and look what learning can be taken from their preparation for adulthood to improve our support.	Head of Service for Inclusion Service Manager for Care Leavers	August 2024	Delayed
ED8	Use the risk of NEET indicators (RONI) to identify which cared for young people in Year 11 are at risk of NEET and ensure that the right support is in place to support them into EET.	Area Delivery Manager Youth Support Service – NEET and Preparing for Adulthood	November 2024	On track
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage attendance for cared for children. Educational outcomes for cared for children. PEP audits will tell us about the quality of PEPs and impact, and how well they support preparation for adulthood and prevent young people becoming NEET. Percentage of PEPs that are good or better quality. Percentage of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 that are NEET. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% attendance for all cared for children Educational outcomes for cared for children are good and in line with their peers. Cared for young people are well prepared for adulthood. Identifying children and young people who are at risk of NEET begins early and helps to prevent them becoming NEET. 95% of PEPs are graded as good or better 90% of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 are EET. 	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Grey
<p>Each day a report is sent to the heads of service for social care outlining all cared for young people with unauthorised absence to ensure there is oversight and support in place for these young people.</p> <p>Our quality assurance document for personal education plans (PEPs) has been finalised. Quality assurance of 10% of all cases from the summer term has been completed. This found that our areas for improvement are including the child's voice and setting SMART targets. These findings have been fed back to our advisors and has informed training for designated teachers, which took place on 20 September and 1 October. This training will support improved quality PEPs with a specific focus on SMART targets and pupil premium+. Our next steps will be to quality assure</p>				

the Autumn term PEPs of the training attendees to monitor the impact of this training. We have scheduled audit activity which will incorporate different themes across all ages from early years to post 16.

The PEP form has been reviewed and updated. It asks for all data available on the young person to be added so that we can keep an accurate log of their performance against national expected levels of attainment and progress. The new PEP form has now been developed within our case management system (LiquidLogic) as of 16 September. The new form was presented to designated teachers at the PEP training sessions. A working group of designated teachers, social workers, and IROs will pilot our new PEP form during the Autumn term. Once we have feedback from this pilot we will make any final amendments and then roll this out to all designated teachers for statutory school age children as of Spring 2025.

Meetings have taken place with our internal data team and the North West data lead to review current data collection and develop an action plan for further developing data reporting based on good practice. We are working to develop our current data reporting following this year's summer examinations. This is currently in progress and will be in place following national validation of data in November.

A working group is established around NEET. Members undertook audits during August, however further work was required to refine the audit process. A further audit using a refined tool which has been agreed by the group will take place in October.

RONI (risk of NEET indicator) and RODI (risk of disengagement indicator) Workstream 2 is in place with an established core group of members acting as part of a multidisciplinary team. A new BI report has been completed identifying all young people and allocating a RONI weighting score. Information is currently being shared with schools on those at risk of NEET or disengagement. Meetings with virtual school advisers have been scheduled in to review the progress of each young person who is identified as RONI. Termly meetings have been arranged between the virtual school and youth support as a coordinated approach to collaboratively look at this cohort of young people to ensure the appropriate intervention and support is in place.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

During our training sessions with our schools and settings, two of our children and young people attended to present and share information on their current education, their journey and experiences. This also included information on their PEP and the importance of being involved in this plan, and the impact this had on them.

What our performance indicators show

Cared for attendance for pupils in reception to year 6 was 96% from 2 September – 4 October. Attendance for cared for is lower for those in years 7 to 11 at 83.8%.

6. Workforce

Section Lead	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent changes in social workers impact on the quality of relationships and the progress of plans for some children, leading to delay. • Too many children have experienced changes in social worker, which means they must retell their story, and this prevents them from being able to build trusting relationships. • The impact of multiple social workers and IROs on care planning has resulted in drift and delay for some children in achieving permanence. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
W1	Review capacity across children's social care and supporting services to deliver the improvement plan and develop a costed proposal to the Children and Families Committee.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
W2	Assess demand to the care leavers service and determine what capacity is needed to support allocation at 15 years 9 months and to increase support to care leavers aged 21+.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
W3	Review capacity across the two IRO teams to look at how we can create dedicated time for supporting and driving improved outcomes for care leavers.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
W4	Reestablish a workforce, recruitment and retention group for children's social care.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	September 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
W5	Refresh the recruitment and retention strategy.	Head of HR Principal Social Worker	December 2024	On Track
W6	Develop and launch a refreshed recruitment campaign to attract high quality practitioners and managers to Cheshire East.	Head of HR Principal Social Worker	January 2025	On Track

W7	Develop reporting on caseloads specific to each service on what we would expect to see to support effective oversight.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care Business Intelligence Manager	August 2024	Complete but need to evidence impact
W8	Launch a level 7 apprentice scheme (a masters equivalent programme, so a shorter programme than our current BA equivalent level 6 apprenticeships) to supplement our current scheme supporting people to train as social workers with Cheshire East.	Principal Social Worker	To start in March 2025	On track
W9	Seek practitioners' views on the support they receive to deliver good practice, workloads, and progress to date, through the practice review audits, elected member frontline visits, and walking the floor.	Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly review	On track
W10	Keep the children's workforce updated on developments around the inspection findings through the monthly children's newsletter and monthly talk together sessions with the DCS to ensure there is a joined up approach to improvement.	Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly review	On track
W11	Seek children, young people and families' views of the support they have received through our audit process.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	Monthly	Complete but need to evidence impact
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice across all service areas and include feedback from children and families on their relationships with their workers. • Caseload data. • The percentage of social worker vacancies and the percentage turnover rate for social workers. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social workers build effective and trusting relationships with children and families, which supports improved outcomes for children and young people. 90% young people tell us that they trust their social workers. • Teams are stable, meaning children and young people don't experience frequent changes in social worker or IROs. • Average caseloads are 15 for AYSEs, 20 for cared for, and 22 for CINCP. • 80% practitioners tell us that their caseloads are manageable and they feel well supported by managers. 	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month				Grey

Eight of the 13 additional posts to support improvement activity have been filled (4 social workers, 3 PAs, and a project manager for 18-25 accommodation work). Recruitment is underway for the 5 other posts, 2 of which had the recruitment extended due to a lack of suitable candidates.

The Children's Workforce Strategy Group started on 9 September 2024 to improve recruitment and retention in social care. The workforce task and finish group is refreshing the current recruitment and retention strategy which will be aligned to the corporate workforce strategy. Work is underway on a new recruitment campaign, including videos and social media, with a targeted approach to experienced social workers. These resources have been finalised for consideration at the Task and Finish Group meeting on 16 October 2024. They will be launched for subsequent recruitment campaigns from this date.

The Chief Executive announced the launch of our improved employee offer which includes an employee benefits platform as of 4 October 2024.

A new cohort of social work degree apprenticeships is in place for September 2024.

Reporting on caseloads is now in place within Power BI enabling senior manager oversight of workload pressures, and the headlines are reported to the board within the workforce report.

An expression of interest has gone out to internal candidates week commencing 30 September for the level 7 apprentice scheme. Interviews are planned to take place week commencing 11 November.

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.

Our good practice alerts recognise some of the strong relationships that are in place between children, young people, families and practitioners. However we know some children and young people experience too many changes in worker which impacts on their ability to build relationships and feel supported.

What our performance indicators show

Information on caseloads and further detail on workforce is included within the workforce report.

Chapter 3

1. Actions from internal assessment activities from September 2024

Section Lead				
Areas for improvement		•		
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Action Rating
	<i>Source:</i>			
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	•	What we will see when we've addressed this area	•	
Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to the areas for improvement</i>				Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month				

What impact we are achieving for children and young people	
<i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>	
What our performance indicators show	