



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

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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 Strategic Board that will include care experienced young people as key members of the board. Young people will be involved in shaping and evaluating services through the Corporate Parenting Strategic 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 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
Green	Action completed	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 Strategic 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 Strategic 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>Visits to children need to be purposeful. Visits should be carried out more often when children need them to be, or to make sure children are safe</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 'Doing the Basics Brilliantly'</p> <p>Revise the quality assurance framework</p> <p>Step up a new Corporate Parenting Strategic 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>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>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>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 you will see by the end of September 2024

12. Care leaver hubs (safe spaces) in Crewe and Macclesfield
13. Local offer app launched
14. Additional capacity in place to deliver the improvement plan
15. Proposals in place to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages
16. Revised protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation
17. All young adults who are NEET and able to work will have an EET plan
18. Reflective case discussions established for longer child protection and repeat plans
19. Third Mockingbird constellation
20. Senior leaders and first tranche of managers trained in our bespoke management and leadership programme
21. Revised supervision policy
22. Vital signs performance report in place to support evaluation of the improvement plan
23. Strengthened performance framework

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 18 July 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	On track

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.	Executive Director of Children's Services	September 2024	On track
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
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
SL5	Step-up a multi-agency corporate parenting strategic board, chaired by the council's chief executive, 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	On track
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.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	November 2024	On track
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
SL10	Establish a service manager thematic audit group to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas and drive improvements.	Service Managers CINCP	August 2024	On track

SL11	Develop mechanisms to ensure audit findings are routinely shared with teams to strengthen the impact of audits on practice.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	On track
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	On track
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 'Doing the Basics Brilliantly' 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	On track
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	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. 	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.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted monitoring visits will demonstrate whether our understanding of improvements are accurate. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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			Red
<p>The Director's Performance and Quality Meeting has been set up, with the first meeting taking place with Heads of Service and Service Managers on 30 July 2024. Outcomes and actions from these monthly meetings will be shared with the DCS.</p> <p>The Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care will lead an initial meeting about voice and influence of children, young people and families, throughout the system on 6 August 2024.</p> <p>LGA corporate parenting training has been commissioned for members of the new multi-agency Corporate Parent Working Group, and elected members on the Children and Families Committee and Cared for and Care Leavers Committee. This training will support senior leaders in their role as corporate parents and will provide a strong foundation for the new Corporate Parent Working Group in October 2024. This training will now take place in September and October.</p> <p>Discussions are taking place to formulate mechanisms to share audit findings. This will include a refresh of the plenary sessions with auditors and practitioners. Consideration is also being given to reintroducing the celebrating practice workshops with dedicated time to sharing messages from audit.</p> <p>The programme for elected member visits to frontline services has been reviewed and proposals on changes will be considered by the Children and Families Committee on 16 September.</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>			
<p>The latest audits show that the majority of practice (70%) requires improvement so is not at the quality we want to achieve.</p>			
What our performance indicators show			
<p>The vital signs performance report will be presented to the Improvement Board in September 2024 to evaluate impact against the improvement plan.</p>			

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	<p>The quality of practice for care leavers is inadequate.</p> <p>Relationships and transition to the care leavers' service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>Pathway plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>Recognising and responding to risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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
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
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	On track

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	On track
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Please also see the section on management oversight and supervision

<p>How we'll assess if we've addressed this area</p>	<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. 	<p>What we will see when we've addressed this area</p>	<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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<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>
<p>Key improvement activities delivered this month</p> <p>The mandatory training plan for care leavers launched on 4 June and is being delivered via a series of away days to support the development of the team and shared understanding.</p>	<p>Red</p>

The revised pathway plan was launched in May. Some further improvements are being made in response to feedback to ensure it is as user friendly as possible.

Restorative practice sessions will be undertaken jointly with care leavers and the cared for service to ensure we support a change in culture across both services and strengthen working relationships.

A new process is in place around young adults where there are safeguarding risks, and multi-agency team around the adult meetings are being held. The new process now needs to be embedded within teams – impact will be reviewed in the autumn. A weekly update is provided to the head of service, director and executive director on young people who are high risk.

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.

In the focus audits of 6 care leavers in July:

- 2 were good
- 3 required improvement (1 of which bordered good)
- 1 was inadequate.

These audits showed that:

- In 5 of 6 of the audits, auditors felt the PA knew young people well. In the one audit where this wasn't felt to be the case there were gaps in recording.
- In 4 of 6 cases there was good evidence of visiting by PAs tailored to need and risk of the young person. There was evidence that where young people were in emergency accommodation visiting rates increased and in one instance there was daily visits to support a young person.
- Recording was generally up to date, with the only exception being the audit graded inadequate.
- 4 young people considered in the audits were in or had periods of time in unsuitable accommodation. For three of the young people there were clear plans in place evidencing strong partnership working, improved identification of risk and efforts to drive forward plans. There was regular liaison with housing. For the one young person where plans were felt to be unclear this was due to gaps in recording.
- There was extensive evidence for 5 young people of the work of the EET team.
- Only one migrant young person was audited in this cohort and the auditor felt that their cultural needs were being recognised and were strong in the recordings.
- The changes to the pathway plan have strengthened the identification of risk and need. We do still need to be more explicitly curious about our young people to ensure we fully understand their experiences.
- Supervision needs to be stronger and more reflective and plans would benefit from being SMARTer to ensure there is no drift.

In the timescales allowing for this audit, only one young person was spoken to as part of their practice review. The young person who supplied their views felt their worker was good and that he had the right support in place to help him with his housing.

What our performance indicators show

We currently have 133 16 and 17 cared for young people across all services. 12 of these young people who are eligible do not have a pathway plan. These are being monitored through routine performance meetings. This has improved since the point of Inspection in March 2024 when there were 20 young people without a pathway plan – but we know this still needs to improve.

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	On track
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	On track

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
CLB4	Develop a care leavers hub as a safe space for care leavers to access support and advice. 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.	Service Manager Care Leavers Area Delivery Manager Targeted Youth Work	Interim hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield by July 2024	Complete
		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	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
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	On track
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	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 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 	

	<p>what they know about the local offer, and how their plan is preparing them for adulthood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 		<p>they know about the local offer, the care leavers hub, and their entitlements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • 90% young people will tell us they know about the care leavers hubs.
<p>Impact to date <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i></p>			<p>Impact Rating</p>
<p>Key improvement activities delivered this month</p>			<p>Red</p>
<p>Care leaver hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield were formally launched on 16 and 17 July. A variety of activities and support will be provided through the hubs, including a monthly evening social event to bring care leavers together for a meal which they will cook and eat together, and there will also be an opportunity for them to share their views and shape services. Young people can also access food and toiletry parcels from the hub if they need them. We will be monitoring which young people access the hub so we can tailor support to their needs.</p> <p>Young people are invited to have their say on the branding and name of the new Youth Zone in Crewe that will be opening in 2025.</p> <p>The care leaver app is available to download on Android and will be available on iPhone shortly. The app will support the information on the local offer to be available in all languages. Participation events and other activities on offer through the care leaver hubs will be able to be shared with young people through the app.</p> <p>A review is taking place of all decision-making panels, including Ignition Panel.</p> <p>A care leaver service development day is being held on 31 July which will cover the local offer, the new emergency accommodation protocol, and protocol for the 21+ offer.</p> <p>The revised 21+ offer will enable more proactive support to young adults, along with support through the app and care leaver hubs.</p> <p>One care leavers team manager will lead on health outcomes for young people and act as a central point of contact with our health partners.</p> <p>A care leaver health group has been established and commenced a piece of engagement work with care experienced young people around the care leaver health summary.</p> <p>The 16+ and Care Leaver Specialist Nurse is delivering drop-in health sessions at a number of 16+ placements and the care leaver hub. Monthly sexual health drop ins at the Care Leaver Hubs have been set-up.</p>			

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.

Due to service capacity, currently we are not able to allocate PAs at 16, and there are some 17 year olds who do not have a PA. This impacts on young people's ability to build relationships with their PAs.

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 are really pleased to report that some of the complex young adults who were considered as part of the inspection have engaged with support through the care leaver hubs – including attending cooking sessions.

What our performance indicators show

In quarter 1 100% of cared for young people turning 18 in the quarter received a care leaver health summary.

C. Education, Employment and Training

Section Lead	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration			
What inspectors found	• 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	All young adults who are NEET and able to work will have a EET plan to support them towards gaining EET. Plans will be reviewed every 12 weeks.	Service Manager Care Leavers	September 2024	On track
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	On track
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				Red
We are on track for all young people to have a personalised EET plan in place by September. All young people who are NEET and able to work are reviewed monthly.				
From September, any of our care leavers living in Cheshire East will be able to access free bus travel, which will support them to access EET opportunities.				
We are in the process of reviewing apprenticeship schemes in other areas and developing a plan that will meet the needs of care leavers in Cheshire East. We are considering a plan that looks at a mix of work placements, internships and apprenticeships to meet the needs of our young people. We have a meeting planned with Stockport to discuss the model they use for apprenticeships.				
We are looking at ways to increase opportunities for young people and offer routes in to work. The apprenticeship co-ordinator and EET adviser are also always looking for links to employers and work opportunities for young people. The post-16 education employment and training adviser attends supported employment forums and Pledge events to link in with local businesses and other workers who support young people into employment.				
We are looking at doing joint sessions with job coaches from the Job Centre at the care leaver hubs to ensure young people are fully supported.				
We have a range of support on offer to young people:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EET plans for those in education to ensure planned transitions and aim to prevent them becoming NEET • One to one support from the EET advisor and apprenticeship co-ordinator for young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET • Venture with Confidence Employability programme for NEET young people • Monthly sessions at each hub to support young people on all aspects of EET 				

- Advice to PAs to offer support to young people around EET.

EET sessions have been held at both hubs.

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 work of the EET Team is starting to have an impact both in terms of our individual young people and future developmental activity. NEET levels are consistently in the low 30% and this has included 4% who are involved in re-engagement activity.

Recently almost 30 young people took part in a Bikeathon and raised over £1,000 for a local homelessness charity.

13 young people attended an open day at Keele University in July.

9 young people are graduating from the venture with confidence programme this month. 4 of these young people have firm plans in place for September. 4 young people are exploring college options and applying for places. 1 young person does not yet have a plan in place and will be supported to look at next steps. One of the young people on the venture with confidence programme won the Young Professional of the Year Award at the Pledge awards.

What our performance indicators show

NEET figures have consistently come down from 40.48% in January to 30.81% in June. There was a slight rise to 32.57% in July. Within this figure there are 20 young people who are NEET and able to work which equates to a figure of 10%. If we look at the same period last year, the figure for June 2023 was 39.61%.

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	On track
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
CLD3	The weekly temporary and emergency accommodation meeting will consider any care leavers who need accommodation.	Housing Options Manager	June 2024	Complete
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
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
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	On track
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

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.	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. The number of young people who are homeless. The number of young people in unsuitable accommodation. 	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 accommodation. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. Records on where young people are living are accurate and there is effective oversight of young people's accommodation. 	
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				Red
<p>All young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in emergency accommodation are reviewed in weekly performance clinics and by the monthly risk management forum to ensure effective plans are in place to support and protect them.</p> <p>Training for PAs on supporting young adults with housing concerns was delivered to 26 officers on 12 June.</p> <p>Discussions are ongoing with YMCA and P3 with regards to securing additional dispersed accommodation with support, particularly for over 18's to 'unblock' commissioned 16-18 beds currently occupied by over 18's and UASC. We are currently on target for mobilisation by October.</p> <p>Accommodation with support for the 16+ group is now established; a project team is in place, chaired by the Interim Director of Commissioning.</p> <p>Proposals to address accommodation shortages were received by Children and Families Directorate Leadership Team on 9 July and will be discussed at CLT on 24 July. A 3 phase project plan is currently being finalised in line with the proposals which will run between July 2024 to March 2026.</p>				

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.

8 young adults are currently in unsuitable accommodation (excluding those in custody). There is senior manager oversight for all these young people - safety plans and risk management plans are in place to support and protect them. Risks to young adults are now understood at all levels and action is being taken to mitigate these risks.

A small number of young adults remain in unsuitable accommodation for too long (see below).

What our performance indicators show

For a small number of young adults, we are exceeding the statutory limit of 48 hours in hotel accommodation. The weekly temporary and emergency accommodation meeting agrees what action is needed to secure these young adults suitable accommodation.

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

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
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
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
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	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. The percentage of care leavers over 21 who we were in touch with within the last 3 months. 	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. There is effective oversight of young adults aged 21+ and their outcomes, including young adults with a disability.
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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		Amber
The care leavers hubs and local offer app will complement the new 21+ offer by increasing the ways young adults can choose to be in touch with us and ways we can engage and communicate with them.		
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.

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.

What our performance indicators show

As of 24 July, of a total of 193 young adults aged 21+:

- 126 young adults were open to the 21+ offer
- 59 were allocated a PA
- 8 were closed.

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	On track
P2	Continue to provide masterclasses – short in-house training sessions for practitioners and managers on specific topics. This will include planning.	Principal Social Worker	Starting in April 2024 and running	On track

	The masterclass programme will continue to be responsive to audit findings to support improved practice.		throughout the year	
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	On track
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
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	On track
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	Not started

Please also see action MO5 - Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence planning within statutory and children's timescales.

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. 	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.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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			Red
<p>Reflective case discussion meetings between the Safeguarding Service and the CIN/CP teams are now set up in the North and South. The purpose of these is to consider cases where there is risk of drift and delay and repeat CP planning.</p> <p>A review is currently taking place of all decision-making panels.</p> <p>The Safeguarding Children Partnership currently offers a 'Professional Curiosity, Critical Thinking and Professional Challenge' course twice per annum (in person). Making positive professional challenge is a thread running throughout partnership training. The training manager will explore what training needs there are across the partnership (including around professional challenge) in the partnership training alignment forum on 29 August 2024.</p> <p>On 13 August there is a session with all team managers to specifically look at planning, agreement around what makes a good plan, and expectations of managers to hold the line regarding what they approve.</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>			
<p>The latest audits show that 50% of plans require improvement, 10% were inadequate, and 40% were good.</p>			
What our performance indicators show <p><i>Please also see the section on effectiveness of IROs for information on repeat child protection plans and permanence plans.</i></p> <p>As at 30 June, the following plans were within timescales:</p> <p>Within CINCP service: 93% cared for plans, 84% child protection plans, 67% child in need plans.</p>			

Within the cared for service: 94% cared for plans, 100% child protection plans, 71% child in need plans.

Within the children with disabilities service: 78% cared for plans, 100% child protection plans, 79% child in need plans.

Timeliness is continuing to be scrutinised and challenged through weekly performance clinics to drive increased timeliness.

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	On track
V2	Support improved visiting practice through the masterclass training programme and briefings to team meetings.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	On track
V3	Reissue the visiting template to practitioners to ensure consistency in recording.	Principal Social Worker	July 2024	Complete
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	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 <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month			Amber
<p>Masterclasses on visiting and briefings at team meetings on visiting by the lead practitioners have been delivered to teams.</p> <p>In the cared for service, a performance management framework was introduced in June for visits that are not taking place in timescales. This has been discussed and shared in service meetings, and we are looking at how we enhance this with use of HR performance management framework.</p> <p>Practice guidance has been updated to include the proforma for practitioners to use when recording visits, this has been briefed out to all staff.</p> <p>We are developing an e-module on visiting frequency and recording expectations, which will be mandatory for all new starters and is planned to go live in August.</p> <p>On 12 August there is a planned dip sample session with team managers in the CIN/CP teams focused on the quality of child protection visiting.</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>			
<p>8 care leaver visits have been sampled – 5 were good, 2 required improvement and 1 was inadequate. Action has been taken on those that were requires improvement or inadequate, and examples of good practice have been shared.</p> <p>Cared for visits that were sampled found quality was variable – some practice was poor, and some was good with detailed recording, written to the young person, demonstrating good understanding of young people's lived experiences. Examples of good practice have been shared across teams.</p> <p>The new visit template with practice prompts is supporting better recording of visits.</p>			

What our performance indicators show

Visits completed within timescale for June were:

Within the CINCP service: 100% cared for, 85% child protection, 86% child in need.

Within the children with disabilities service: 78% cared for, 88% child protection, 79% child in need.

Within the cared for service: 91% cared for, 61% child in need.

New arrangements around the performance framework will support challenge and improved timeliness.

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	On track

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	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				Red
The provision tracker is being reviewed weekly to identify those children who are not on the right care plan and to support timely action to achieve permanence for this cohort.				
The permanence tracker is continuing to be used to monitor achieving permanence within statutory and children’s timescales. The cohort of children in residential care have been added to the tracker.				
Work is underway on the LiquidLogic form for recording case supervision and the accompanying supervision practice guidance. We are looking at briefing the updated changes out to managers on 13 August.				
Dates for the supervision training are being agreed and it will start in November and finish in March.				

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 the majority of management oversight requires improvement (80%), with only 10% graded good or better. Supervision remains an area of focus for us, and we are not using supervision as a tool to support practitioners to reflect on risk and impact.

What our performance indicators show

Current data for case supervision within timescales as at 25 July shows that significant improvement is required – this is being addressed with managers.

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	On track
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

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
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
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	On track
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
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%. 	
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				Red
<p>The safeguarding service continue to embed the new IRO practice standards within the service. We will be utilising the practice standards to support the refresh of the IRO performance framework.</p> <p>We held a service development day on 28 June – the focus was to embed the 'What? So What? What Now?' model of reflective practice that we expect to see in the IRO case records and footprint. We used live case examples to support the IROs understanding of where practice improvements need to be made. Feedback from Ofsted was used to underpin the learning within the service development day. This session was extremely well received, and the impact has been seen immediately within recent escalations from the service.</p>				

The resolution protocol is being revised currently. A draft has been completed with the intention to share with key stakeholders to ensure 'buy in' against this process. The protocol intends to draw on our restorative practice model to enable more joint, collaborative resolution and greater impact for children and families.

IROs attended the leadership and management session held on 10 June.

The last cared for IRO performance meeting looked at children who did not have a plan of permanence at second review within Q4 and Q1. We have made some amendments to the outcomes form around how we record IRO reflections around 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.

It is too soon to evidence clear impact for our children and young people but there have been more escalations raised by the IROs which evidence positive, child focused challenge and a restorative approach to seeking resolution. One escalation has directly impacted a child and family who were struggling to access housing. Escalations to housing have seen this child now move into a new property.

The IRO service is running a series of focus groups with young people through the summer to seek feedback and learn from young people about what works and how we can improve our practice.

What our performance indicators show

Our performance indicators continue to demonstrate our areas for improvement. There are currently 291 children open on a child protection plan – 26 (8% of the total) have been subject to their child protection plan for over 15 months and 17 of these subject to their child protection plan for over 18 months. This suggests that the IRO is not adequately challenging when the child protection plan is not progressing in the child's timescales. A dip sample of these cases has highlighted that 15 of these children should have their plans ended within the next few weeks as we seek to issue proceedings or naturally end the child protection plan due to decreased risk.

We have also seen an increase in repeat child protection planning with 75 (26%) children having had experience of a previous child protection plan and 50% of this cohort are experiencing a second or subsequent child protection plan within 2 years of their previous plan. This is a slight reduction since the last report but continues to indicate we are not addressing risk effectively first time to achieve sustained change. The majority of these plans are for neglect, and it is positive that the Cheshire East Safeguarding Partnership have agreed to hold neglect as a partnership area of focus for 2024/2025 to support improved practice and refresh the neglect strategy.

Permanence planning remains an area for improvement also. A scheduled peer audit on 10 July 2024 completed a dip sample to look at those the children who didn't have a plan of permanence at their four month review this quarter to determine whether there were any delays with holding the review which would impact on achieving permanence and any themes around cared for reviews being stood down due to care planning challenges. This highlighted there was not consensus amongst the IROs of when a plan of permanence would be considered as being agreed. The service have now agreed that a plan of permanence is achieved when options have been narrowed down to two.

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	On track
S2	Join Foster4, which will provide additional resources for fostering recruitment and training.	Head of Service Children's Provision	May 2024	Complete
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	On track
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	On track
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
			Claremont House to open in November 2024	On track
			Victoria Lodge to open in December 2024	On track
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 Children's Provision	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
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 <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>	Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month	Red
<p>In July we have implemented our plan to merge the connected carers team with the mainstream assessment team, to ensure we have one big assessment pod and one larger pod doing support and supervision. This has enabled us to upskill staff in different forms of assessment, to ensure caseloads are more evenly spread and that the demands of the service are prioritised.</p> <p>We have appointed a new Mockingbird team leader, as well as appointing our new home hub carers. We are now looking for our satellite carers to join the constellation.</p> <p>Foster 4 seems to be working well and new carers are arriving steadily.</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>	
<p>A full service audit of the fostering service will be completed in August which will evaluate support to foster carers and recruitment and retention.</p> <p>Our first regulation 44 inspection for Flude House was overwhelmingly positive and this has been sent to Ofsted, as per the regulations.</p>	
What our performance indicators show	

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
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	On track
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	Not started
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					Amber
<p>The contact guidance has been updated, distributed to each team member and team managers are providing oversight daily and weekly audit to ensure timescales are being met.</p> <p>We have contacted Derby MASH and are meeting with them on 30 July. We have reached out to Sunderland to arrange a meeting and have the operating model for Gloucestershire and Essex and are also looking at the joint adult and children's model in Nottinghamshire. Bar Nottinghamshire, these are based on recommendations from our DfE Improvement Advisor.</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>					
<p>Team managers review timescales every day and audit any cases that go over the timescale. There were 3 contacts that didn't meet timescale in the last month's audit and reasons included not being able to contact parents, needing specialist partner responses from adult social care and community mental health to inform threshold. Waiting for partner information will be addressed in the short term through engagement with partners and longer term with the introduction of a MASH model.</p>					
What our performance indicators show					
In June 2024 89.3% contacts to ChECS that were referred to children's social care were completed within 1 day.					

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	On track
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	On track
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
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 rationale 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>				Grey
Key improvement activities delivered this month				
A dip sample of strategy discussions was requested in the last multi-agency liaison meeting.				
What impact we are achieving for children and young people				Grey
<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>				

The learning from the dip samples will be disseminated once all the findings have been collated. The police took an action to collate the learning from this audit and we await the findings.

What our performance indicators show

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.

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	On track
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	On track
LS3	Establish a process for monitoring and reviewing life-story work and later-life letters.	Service Managers Cared for Children		August 2024	On track
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					Red
<p>A tracker is now in place for later life letters and we are making progress against the tracker. Student social workers and apprentice social workers have been supporting work to address cases which needed later life letters and life story books.</p> <p>Moving forwards, the permanence strategy will clearly set expectations about completing this work early.</p>					

We need to ensure that life story work is undertaken for all children who come into care to help them understand their journey. We will be looking at how we can embed this within our development and training moving forwards.

The workforce development team are working with training providers to identify dates for the courses to run. Discussion has taken place with service managers to ensure the content of the course meets the needs of the service.

Life story work and later in life letters will be added as an agenda item within performance clinics.

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.

Significantly more children now have later in life letter and life story books in place, however we still have more work to do to ensure this is in place for all children and that all children understand their journey into care.

What our performance indicators show

As of 16 July, there were 18 children on the adoption tracker following an adoption order being granted because of missing later in life letters or life story books.

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
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

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
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				Red
<p>Emotional Health of Cared for Children</p> <p>The strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) task and finish group are aligning their work to the Cheshire East iTHRIVE transformation work. There has been a significant improvement in the waiting times for therapeutic services delivered by Freedom from Torture who support the emotional health of some of our UASC. At the time of inspection waiting lists for counselling was 9-12 months and is currently now 3-6 months, with a response to referral in 1-2 weeks.</p> <p>Waiting well initiatives are being progressed through the Cheshire and Merseyside Neurodiverse and Mental Health recovery plans, and Place level implementation plans. Impact is already being seen since last summer on wait times for key assessments from provider data.</p> <p>Work is progressing with our mental health provider to enable specific reporting for cared for children who are open or awaiting their services.</p> <p>Health Assessments for Cared for Children</p> <p>A new weekly meeting has been setup to resolve barriers to initial health assessments (IHAs) being completed within timescale. This is led by the ICB team with attendance of administrators from all local health providers and children's social care. This is ensuring that any issues are identified and resolved earlier than they would have done previously. The six-weekly meeting with service managers is continuing and can now focus on escalations and themes.</p> <p>The main reason for timescales not being met is due to children not being brought to appointments. This has been recognised by all agencies and is a current focus for improvement.</p> <p>There has been a significant improvement in the compliance with IHA timescales for children placed out of area due to the decision to bring children placed in Staffordshire back to Cheshire East for their assessment.</p>				

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.

Children are now able to access support for their mental health quicker than they did at the time of inspection. More children are being seen for their initial health assessment within 20 working days.

Feedback from cared for children in quarter 4 tells us that they value their annual health assessment with 100% reporting that they felt their health assessment was useful, that they felt listened to and taken seriously and that their overall experience was excellent or good.

What our performance indicators show

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

The average waiting times in June 2024 for a Choice Assessment were 6 weeks for South Cheshire and 5 weeks for East Cheshire (reduced from 11 weeks and 6 weeks respectively at the time of the inspection).

Average Choice Assessment Waiting Times (in weeks)									
	2023			2024					
Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
0-18 South Cheshire	5	15	7	9	11	8	7	10	6
0-18 East Cheshire	5	7	3	7	6	9	6	4	5

The waiting times in June 2024 for a Partnership Appointment were 15 weeks for South Cheshire and 10 weeks for East Cheshire.

Average Partnership Appointment Waiting Times (in weeks)									
	2023			2024					
Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun

0-18 South Cheshire	2	4	6	10	18	15	7	10	15
0-18 East Cheshire	11	5	4	9	12	23	7	8	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

Q1 data shows that the percentage of initial health assessments (IHAs) completed within 20 days was 84% for children placed in area and 72% for children placed out of area. This is an improvement on 62% and 14% in Q4.

2023/24 annual data shows that the percentage of review health assessments (RHAs) completed within timescale was 91% for children placed in area and 62% for children placed out of area. Q1 data for RHAs will be available in next month's report.

The main reason for delay for both IHAs and RHAs was children not being brought to appointments (children living in area) and capacity issues with out of area providers (children living out of area).

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
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
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
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.	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	On track
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	On track

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	On track
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					Red
<p>The education advisors attendance meeting has changed to monthly now that this is an established group with representatives from across education and social care. This now includes referral processes for all children and young people in care to allow for timely and joint targeted supported for individual children and young people where attendance is becoming a concern.</p> <p>The multi-disciplinary attendance team meetings process and impact will be reviewed in August 2024 to support next steps for the start of the academic year. This will ensure that we have clear and robust meetings in place to support and ensure recording and monitoring of targets/intervention and impact.</p> <p>The PEP form will be reviewed in a virtual school team workshop session during August 2024, including a review of best practice from other local authorities, to coproduce a draft to test and trial as a pilot in the new academic year. This will include a session with our young people. Preparation has been made for audits and moderation to take place during August following all PEPs being completed for this term and received from schools and settings for the end of the academic year. This will inform our 12-month training programme that will be developed and shared at the start of the academic year.</p> <p>We will be working to develop our current data reporting following this years' summer examinations.</p>					

A new business intelligence report has been completed to identify which cared for young people in Year 11 are at risk of NEET and information will be shared with schools in September.

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 number of our young people whose attendance is below 75% and 50% has risen, however, this is largely due to our Year 11 cohort finishing their examinations and therefore attendance dropping each day due to S Codes (study leave). However, if we remove the Year 11 cohort from this dataset our numbers stay static and consistent to June 2024. We have advocated for 10 of our more vulnerable Year 11s to continue attending school and almost all of these now have attendance above 90%.

What our performance indicators show

Please see above.

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
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
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
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
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	August 2024	On track

			Business Intelligence Manager		
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
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 23 for CINCP. 80% practitioners tell us that their caseloads are manageable and they feel well supported by managers. 		
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					Red
<p>A costed proposal for additional capacity and expertise to support improvement was received and agreed by the Children and Families Committee on 16 July 2024 and Full Council on 17 July 2024. This included three additional PA posts, and two additional IROs.</p> <p>Further improvements to the recruitment process have been made with the introduction of additional guidance for hiring managers.</p> <p>The DCS held a #talktogether session on 9 July for all children's services staff on the improvement plan. A process for feedback to staff on any issues raised or suggestions made has been put in place.</p>					

The Workforce Strategy Group has been stood up and will take place 6 weekly from 9 September. This meeting will have a focus on workforce development, recruitment and retention and staff wellbeing. Work within this group will fall in line with the wider corporate workforce strategy.

Work has been completed between Business Intelligence team and the operational service to develop caseload average data for frontline workers.

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.

Relationships are a key feature where practice is deemed to be good. The latest audits found that quality of practice continues to be impacted by the inexperience in the workforce and the turnover of workers across services. Children, young people, and families are more effectively supported where there is longevity and good quality relationships.

What our performance indicators show

At the end of July 2024:

- The average caseload for CIN/CP and CWD was 21.
- The average caseload for cared for was 17.