

Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee

13 September 2023

Scrutiny of the initial response and areas of focus following the ILACS inspection of March 2023

Report by Director of Children, Young People and Learning

Electoral division(s): All

Summary

This report details the service response to the local authority children's services ILACS inspection of March 2023 and specifies the actions being taken to continuously improve practice and promote even better outcomes for West Sussex children and families.

Prior to the ILACS inspection, Children's Services' priorities for practice improvement were outlined in the Practice Improvement Plan (PIP). These priorities were subject to bi-monthly scrutiny by the Departmental Leadership Team; also, monthly scrutiny by the then Improvement Board, chaired by John Coughlan, independent advisor for the Department of Education (DfE).

Since the ILACS inspection, the Practice Improvement Plan has been reviewed and replaced with a Continual Practice Improvement Plan (CPIP). The CPIP summarises our current key priorities for children in line with the seven practice areas for improvement identified in the ILACS report published 11 May 2023. It also contains actions from the previous Practice Improvement Plan where we aspire to do even better.

Alongside this, a reconstituted Continual Practice Improvement Board has been formed, independently chaired by Steve Crocker, previous DCS for Hampshire and newly appointed DfE advisor, to oversee continual improvements for a further six-12 months in West Sussex.

Focus for Scrutiny:

The Committee is asked to assess the areas of focus and actions planned in response to the recent ILACS inspection (March 2023).

Key areas of scrutiny include:

1. The seven areas identified in the ILACS report for improvement and how the specific, time-measured actions being taken by the service will achieve these, promoting best outcomes for West Sussex children and families.
2. To identify any areas for consideration for future scrutiny (where there are outcomes scrutiny may influence or add value to) and any specific areas for action or response by the Cabinet Member.

The Chairman will summarise the output of the debate for consideration by the Committee.

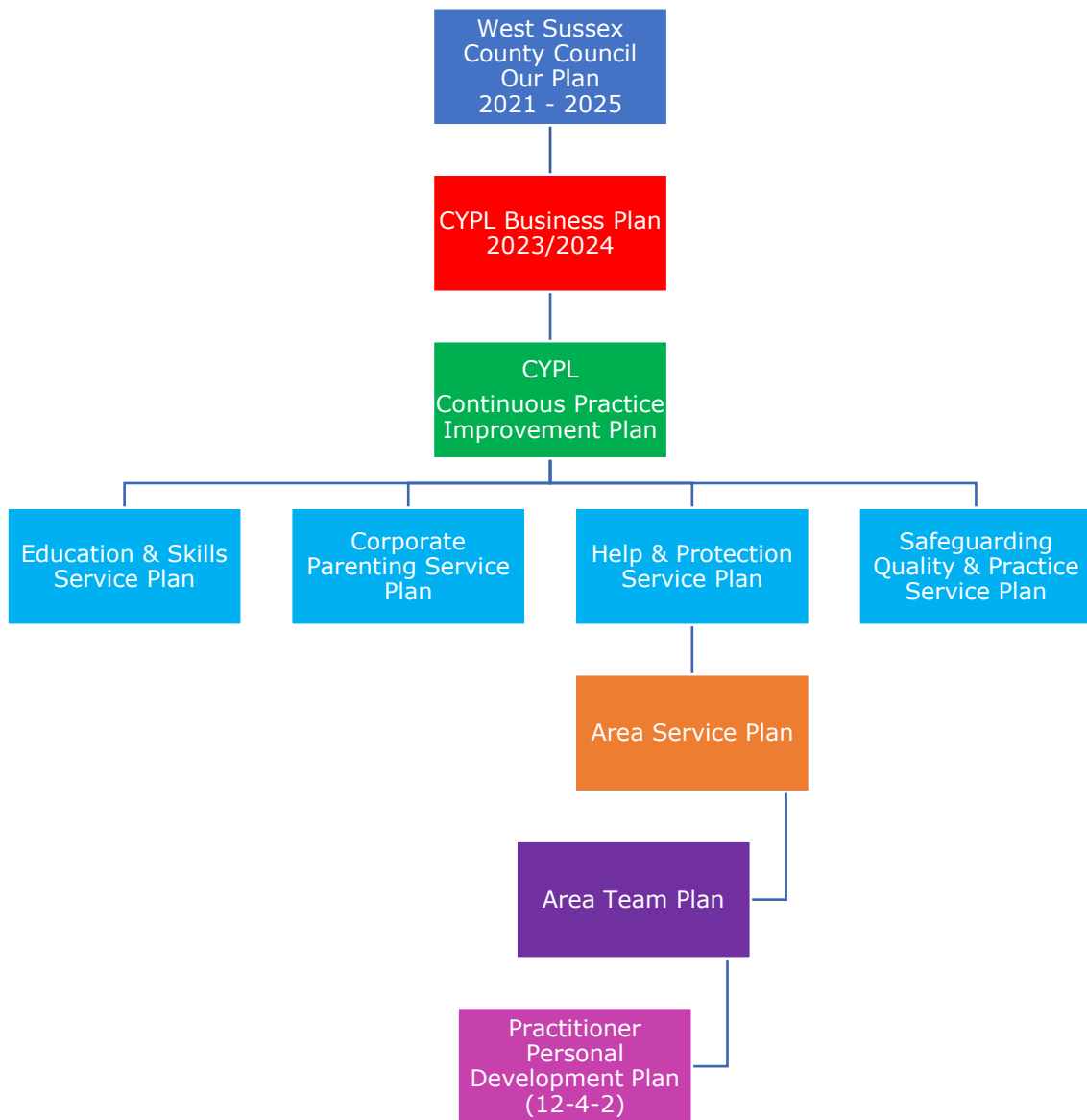
1. Regulatory Background; Ofsted Inspection 2023

- 1.1. A full [inspection](#) of Children's Services took place between 13-24 March 2023. Senior leaders, managers and staff judged the Ofsted findings to be fair and reasonable, and reflected a balanced understanding of the standard and quality of practice for children and their families in West Sussex. The Ofsted report aligned well with the understanding of the senior leadership team and operational managers, reflected in the recent self-evaluation report (Q1 2023/24).
- 1.2. Following the ILACS inspection, Ofsted held an annual engagement meeting on 5 June 2023 with the senior leadership team. The current performance and service priorities were noted and discussed, as well as any subsequent improvements made since the inspection.
- 1.3. As the service is no longer judged to be 'inadequate' the inspection requirements are now less intensive. The next intervention is likely to be a two day 'focused visit' within a year of the ILACS inspection, to be expected before March 2024. This focused visit will look at one specific area of practice. Whilst this will be Ofsted's choice, the senior leadership team have requested a focus on care leavers, although this may not be the case. It is also possible that the service could be subject to a Joint Area Targeted Inspection (JTAI) and preparations are now starting so the service is inspection-ready for any of these inspections if they were to occur.

2. Continued Practice Development and Improvement

The Departmental Leadership team and staff are committed to maintaining the pace and trajectory of service improvement as we journey towards a good and outstanding Ofsted judgement. Therefore, the previous 'Ofsted preparation meetings' have been reviewed, evaluated, and amended to focus more fully on 'getting to good' practice.

- 2.2. In recognition of the crucial role all Children, Young People and Learning practitioners play in improving lives for children, these six-weekly meetings will review progress in line with the CPIP and have been designed to encourage department-wide accountability and collaboration in our continuous improvement journey.
- 2.3. The CPIP vision statement – Putting Children First – communicates our organisational purpose. This is in line with both the County Council's Our Council Plan 2021-2025 and the CYPL Business Plan 2023/2024. This one, consistent message ensures that there is clarity about our departmental vision and aspiration. It highlights the interdependencies between these plans and the 'golden thread' linking the planning documents together. This key message has been communicated department-wide, with these meetings and processes now being fully aligned with the County Council's business plan for Children's Services. The governance arrangements for the continual practice improvement plan (CPIP) is now designed to impact through to individual personal development plans as illustrated below:



It is expected that this approach will increase understanding of how an individual practitioner's work with children and families directly contributes to the organisation achieving its goals, thereby motivating practitioners, and encouraging greater accountability.

- 2.4. Regular and detailed scrutiny of performance data is central to tracking progress in line with the CPIP. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been linked to each practice improvement area to measure what difference is being made for children. The Children, Young People and Learning Quality Assurance and Performance Management Frameworks provide a clear structure of activity to measure the journey of continuous improvement and progress in line with the Ofsted recommendations including:

Activity	Frequency	Responsible Scrutineer
Help & Protection and Children We Care For 'Getting to Good'	Six-weekly	Quality and Assurance Service

Activity	Frequency	Responsible Scrutineer
service meetings – Heads of Service and Service Managers		
Impact of Leaders 'Getting to Good' meetings	Quarterly	Quality and Assurance Service
Service plan reporting	Quarterly	Departmental Leadership Team
Service team plan scrutiny	Bi-monthly activity	Back to the Floor event team
Continuous Practice Improvement Plan	Monthly	External Continuous Improvement Board
Scrutiny of Service plan/CPIP related key performance indicators and 'business as usual' practice expectations.	Monthly	Performance Assurance and Action Board
Continuous Practice Improvement Plan and CPIP related key performance indicators.	Monthly	Departmental Leadership Team (DLT) Finance and Performance Board
Individual performance development plan reviews	Quarterly	All Children, Young People and Learning managers

- 2.5. Monthly Performance Assurance and Action Board meetings attended by members of the Departmental Leadership Team and Heads of Service provide an opportunity to measure practice improvement in each service area down to individual child level. The CPIP Scorecard is produced monthly using data from the performance Dashboard and RAG rated to highlight areas of concern as well as good practice.
- 2.6. Finally, the new Children, Young People and Learning 'Back to the Floor Framework' provides a further important insight into front line practice countywide and the quality of work being carried out with children and families. This peer review process plays a key role in supporting the department's continuous improvement journey and West Sussex County Council's commitment to putting Children First, facilitating opportunities to learn and share best practice.
- 2.7. Three-day, bi-monthly Back to the Floor events will be embedded into the culture of West Sussex practice and quality assurance work on a 12-month cycle. Information will be gathered from a variety of sources during Back to

the Floor events to understand the journey of the child and the extent of practice improvement including:

- Observations of frontline practice – visits, case management meetings, child protection conferences, team meetings etc.
- Meeting with Head of Service/Service Managers
- Feedback from partners – for example, from partners attending multi-agency meetings.
- Feedback from children and families – for example, from attendance at meetings, end of visits etc.
- Meetings with individual specialist practitioners as appropriate
- Children’s record sampling alongside practitioners

3. Key priorities and actions to address.

- 3.1. The Ofsted ILACS report identified seven practice areas for improvement. These areas sit at the heart of the CPIP, along with other key priorities and cross cutting themes identified by the Department as continued areas of focus.
- 3.2 The CPIP is service led and designed to highlight the Ofsted recommendations and practice improvement areas pertinent to each service area as follows:
- 3.3 Children who need help and protection; led by Assistant Director Jenny Boyd:
 - The timeliness and quality of strategy discussions and child protection investigations.
 - The consistent quality and effectiveness of assessments and plans for children in need and children in need of protection.
 - The response to children aged 16-17 who are homeless.
 - The completion of return home interview and their impact on planning for children when they go missing.
 - Improvements to the work with children with disabilities, early help and for children to remain safely at home and to be diverted away from care proceedings.
- 3.4 Children we Care for and Care leavers; led by Assistant Director Dan Ruaux:
 - The timeliness of initial health assessments and access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for specialist assessments and therapeutic support when children are in care.
 - Sufficiency of placement choice when children come into care.
 - The quality, advice, and support provided to care leavers 21 and over and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people as they transition their leave to remain.
- 3.5 Impact of leaders and partnerships; led by Assistant Director Linda Steele:
 - The effectiveness and scrutiny of the safeguarding partnership

- Improvements in the standards and consistency of practice
- 3.6 Children with Special Educational Needs and the implementation of the Education and Learning Strategy; led by Assistant Director Steve Nyakatawa:
- The timeliness of EHCPs.
 - The effectiveness of safeguarding in schools.
 - Implementation of the Education & Skills strategy.
- 3.7 Each of these areas is further broken down into areas of specific practice and incorporates some cross-cutting themes, such as:
- The effectiveness of partnership working
 - The embedding of the voice of the child and their families in all the work we do
 - High quality supervision for all staff
 - Timely response to complaints
 - Transitions for children between services
 - Staff attendance at training and to have personal development plans.
 - An effective local safeguarding partnership
- 3.8 Each of the seven Ofsted recommendation areas is subject to a separate Practice Action Plan (PAP) outlining specific performance measures and targets to evidence significant improvements. These practice action plans are subject to scrutiny at the Continual Practice Improvement Board; at the Departmental Leadership Team and within other relevant strategic boards or workstream meetings.
- 3.9 Each Practice Action Plan has a Departmental Leadership Team owner and responsible senior management leads to support accountability and delivery. They are designed to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound as evidenced in the following Strategy Discussion Practice Action Plan example:
- **Ofsted Area for development** - To enhance the timeliness and quality of strategy discussions and child protection investigations.
 - **What does this mean for us?** We must enhance the speed at which we convene strategy discussions with our partners to determine the level of assessment required. Our minutes of strategy discussion need to be concise, and actions need to be SMART. We need to enhance the quality of section 47 enquires and improve the timelessness of our initial child protection conferences.
 - **What actions do we need to take?**
- Review West Sussex practice guidance and process for convening strategy discussion by August 2023 Sponsor Linda Steele – **Responsible Lead**

Melanie Spencer. Conducting a review of practice guidance and process for convening strategy discussions will lead to a more efficient, effective and child centred decision making.

Deliver internal bite size training on strategy discussions and S47 enquires. This will include partners agencies in the MASH- Training to be delivered by Team Managers at Team Meetings, September 2023 - **Sponsor** Linda Steele – **Responsible Lead** Melanie Spencer. Carrying out this action will ensure that our practitioners and managers are clear about their roles and responsibilities to hold timely strategy discussion and empower them to challenge any delay they experience from partners availability to attend.

Conduct a review of strategy discussions and S47 enquires through Quality Assurance activities including collaborative and thematic audits, Back to the Floor activity - **Sponsor** Linda Steele – **Responsible Lead** Laura Mallinson and Vicky Richardson. Conducting this review will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency and consistency of these processes. Leading to improved outcomes for children and families, identified training needs and ensuring compliance with statutory requirements and best practice.

Safeguarding Partnership Improvement and Assurance subgroup to include strategy discussion and S47 as part of the programme of partnership audits January 2024 **Sponsor** Linda Steele – **Responsible Lead** Sharon Ward Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children and Laura Mallinson Head of Safeguarding. This will improve practice by creating opportunities for improved communication and coordination among agencies. Evaluating compliance with policies and procedures and ensure all agencies have a consistent focus on quality and safeguarding.

Target child protection conferences for audit – July 2023 **Sponsor** Linda Steele – **Responsible Lead** Laura Mallinson. Conducting this review will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency and consistency of these processes. Leading to improved outcomes for children and families, identified training needs and ensuring compliance with statutory requirements and best practice.

Principle Social Worker and Heads of Service observe strategy meetings to ensure compliance and identify good practice and areas for development - October 2023 **Sponsor** Linda Steele – **Responsible Lead** Vicky Richardson. Carrying out this action will ensure that we are improving practice and reflecting with practitioners and managers to make further improvement.

- 3.8 Scrutiny of each Practice Action Plan and its associated Key Performance Indicators is taking place in the following forums: Performance Assurance and Action Board; Getting to Good meetings; DLT; Continuous Improvement Board, and Safeguarding Partnership Improvement and Assurance Subgroup. Performance Measures have been identified for each of the Ofsted recommendations to provide targets for practitioners to aim for and milestones to benchmark progress as detailed below.

- 3.9 Our improvement plans have been submitted to Ofsted and the DfE for their scrutiny and comment.

Practice Action Plans

- 3.10 Area for Improvement: **The consistent quality and effectiveness of assessments and plans for children in need and children in need of protection:**

Actions we are taking include:

- Review West Sussex practice guidance regarding Child and Family Assessments to ensure there is clear direction and guidance on what should be included in a good assessment. August 2023.
- Deliver internal bite size training on Child and Family Assessment practice guidance regarding what makes a good assessment to include genograms, chronologies, engaging non-resident parents and wider family and initial visit expectations. September 2023.
- Review 2023/24 training offer for staff to ensure that training for assessment skills meets service need and is communicated to staff to promote attendance. September 2023.
- Neglect Toolkit to be used within Child and Family Assessments to support our assessment. October 2023.

How we are measuring progress and current performance as of July 2023:

- % of management oversight audits graded as good and above (41%)
- % of assessments graded as good and above (63.6%)
- Number of children with up-to-date management oversight in A&I and FS teams (91.7%)
- % of re-referrals within 12 months (22.2%)
- % of assessments in 20 days - 45 days (88.2%)
- % of visits to children within 5 days (67%)

- 3.11 Area for Improvement: **The response to children aged 16-17 who are homeless.**

Actions we are taking include:

- Providing training on the unique needs of 16/17 year old homeless children to social workers involved in conducting child and family assessments. Training to be delivered to service managers by end of September 2023.
- All 16/17-year-olds assessed as being homeless are having a compliance conversation recorded on their case file by the assessing, allocated social worker evidencing they have informed children of their rights to be cared for by the Local Authority and the benefits of being a care leaver. January 2024.
- All 16/17-year-old homeless children's plans will be clearly linked to the assessment of their needs and highlight opportunities for children to return safely to the care of their parents or wider family in a timely way. Team managers to quality assure children's plans to ensure this detail is captured.

How we are measuring progress:

- Number of 16/17 year old children presenting as homeless (19)

3.12 Area for Improvement: **The completion of return home interview and their impact on planning for children when they go missing.**

Actions we are taking include:

- Increasing the timeliness of return home interviews for children and young people - identify any bottlenecks and streamline the processes; set clear timescales and targets for conducting return home interviews; Ensure targets are realistic and achievable and are part of individual workers 12-4-2.
- Providing training and support to improve the quality of Return Home Interviews will be comprehensive and will explore the reason for missing episode and what the pull and push factors are for children and young person.
- Allocated worker and team manager to analyse and reflect on children's missing incidents within supervision and management oversight.

How we are measuring progress:

- % of return home interviews completed within 72 hours (77%)
- Reduction in the number of missing episodes (283)

3.13 Area for Improvement: **The timeliness of initial health assessments and access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for specialist assessments and therapeutic support when children are in care.**

Actions we are taking include:

- Develop and update guidance materials and communication channels for practitioners to ensure they have access to the latest information and resource. September 2023.
- Change of legal status to be recorded on Mosaic within 24 hours – social worker to email placement finding team to confirm. Embedded coordinators to use the change report and escalate to the Team and Service Managers any legal status not updated within 24 hours for further action. March 2024.
- Process of reporting young people who decline their health assessment to be followed. Embedded Coordinator to ensure this is captured on the relevant form and uploaded on to the referral episode to enable the work step to be completed. August 2023.

How we are measuring progress:

- % of IHAs completed within timescales (20 working days) (64.3%)
- % of CwCF with Strengths Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (41%)
- % of CwCF with a dental check up to date (77.1%)

3.14 Area for Improvement: **Sufficiency of placement choice when children come into care.**

Actions we are taking include:

- Sufficiency strategy and market position statement to be revised considering the full spectrum of placement needs and emerging trends, particularly in relation to mental health and contextual safeguarding placement requirements. January 2024.
- New Care Placement Referral - Launch a new referral form for care placements (in consultation with providers and other stakeholders) that clearly articulates the needs of our children, the outcomes we seek and the support we will provide while they are placed. October 2023.
- Crisis Foster Carers - Commission one or a group of fostering providers (potentially including in-house provision) to form an emergency rota of placements which are always available to provide short term emergency placements when needed. December 2023.

How we are measuring progress:

- % of CwCF with 3 or more placements in the last 12 months (12.8%)
- % of CwCF placed outside LA boundary and more than 20 miles from where they used to live (22.5%)

3.15 Area for Improvement: **The quality, advice, and support provided to care leavers 21 and over and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people as they transition their leave to remain.**

Actions we are taking include:

- Conduct training with all staff involved in creating and implementing pathway plans to enhance the quality of pathway plans and ensure care leavers understand their entitlements until the age of 25. December 2023.
- Team managers to oversee and guarantee that all pathway plans encompass a through representation of the discussion held between personal advisor and care leavers. March 2024.
- Involve care leavers in creating a version of the current triple planning process that is accessible and easy to understand for care leavers awaiting immigration decisions. March 2024.

How we are measuring progress:

- % of care leavers with an up-to-date pathway plan (86%)
- % of leaving care service planning audits graded as good and above (100%)

4. Demonstrating Impact

4.1 The purpose of all work with managers and staff is to improve the service to children and families and that children's needs must remain at the heart of all endeavours. Impact has been demonstrated or is expected through the following means:

- Improvements in a range of performance indicators – for instance timeliness of visits, the routine presence of case supervision and other compliance with specified professional practice standards.
- Measures of quality, as identified through the monthly internal auditing process.
- Evidence of improved service-user outcomes and increased customer satisfaction, reductions in complaints etc.
- Evidence of improved working with partners – especially Health and Schools.
- Positive feedback from managers, staff, and Unison.
- Successful recruitment and retention of staff, and associated wellbeing indicators.
- Evidence of improvements in front line practice and better outcomes for children because of multi-agency, strategic leads being held to account by the Continuous Improvement Board.

5. Quality Assurance and the role of auditing

5.1. Maintaining a strong and effective grip on practice and performance has been central to the Improvement journey to date. The Children First programme has developed and implemented a strong Performance Management Framework which is used to provide managers at all levels of the service with up-to-date reports and a cascade of performance meetings that culminate with the Director of Children’s Services (DCS) and her leadership team. The quality of practice is a key theme running through all activities associated with the Children First Improvement agenda. It is essential to be able to measure the quality-of-service delivery as well as compliance with the statutory requirements, such as visiting timescales. Casework auditing continues to fulfil a key function both in maintaining and raising quality and to provide examples of good practice and is currently being broadened to include the views of children and young people. Improvements in practice because of casework auditing is evidenced below (Q1 2023 Summary Report):

Q1 2023: Overall Audit Grades

	Total Audits	Total Moderations	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
April 23	27	26	4%	24%	64%	8%
May 23	27	25		38%	58%	4%
June 23	24	20		40%	60%	0%
Q1 Total	78	71	1%	34%	61%	4%
Q4 Total	54	51		27%	57%	16%
Q3 Total	86	74		27%	57%	16%

	Total Audits	Total Moderations	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
Q2 Total	87	75		30%	57%	13%

- 78 children audited and 71 moderated in Q1.
- Overall Q1 2023 returns had the highest good child gradings and lowest inadequate children since the current audit tool was introduced in September 2021.
- Good child gradings have continued to increase and inadequate children decrease during Q1.
- June 23 saw the highest good grades of the year (40%) with no child inadequate.
- April 23 saw the first overall outstanding child grade (CWD team). More social workers are asking how to achieve outstanding audits, guidance has been updated and distributed with the monthly cycle child allocations.
- The quality of audits continued to improve during Q1 with a collaborative audit culture becoming more embedded across services.
- QA is receiving more positive feedback from social workers and team managers about the usefulness & impact of collaborative audits on their practice. This could be further strengthened by ensuring that the participation in monthly audit cycles are fully supported and encouraged by senior management.

6. Specific service area improvements

6.1. Engaging practitioners is at the heart of bi-monthly Back to the Floor activity. Events have been held across the following service areas since the ILACS inspection to date:

- Children With Disabilities
- Central Assessment & Intervention/Family Safeguarding Teams
- Western Assessment & Intervention/Family Safeguarding Teams and Early Help

6.2. Activity undertaken during the event included observations of legal gateway meetings; visits to children; interviews with frontline staff, children and families, and scrutiny of children's case files. To support delivery in line with the CPIP, practice areas for future development were identified and shared with senior management including:

- Mind Of My Own app refresher training for staff to ensure children's voices are heard.
- Greater use of reflective discussions in care planning for children.
- Awareness of the staff Wellbeing Hub to be promoted.
- Sharing of initial meetings before proceedings with families to be captured on children's case files.

7. Current and ongoing issues

7.1. The West Sussex transformation programme closely aligns with national level proposals to reform social care – especially through rebalancing the social care system towards early family support, the removal of unnecessary bureaucracy and focusing on the right outcomes for children. The aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, understanding children and young people's mental health needs and working effectively with the NHS to address them, as well as challenges posed to families by the rising cost of living, will all continue to impact on the demand for the service.

Addressing areas of continuing under-performance

- 7.2. Through our regular performance management reporting it is evident that the service is still unable to provide a consistently high-quality service across all areas. The quality and impact of social work practice for children in need and children in need of protection continues to remain variable. There is an acknowledgement that due to levels of high demand, the pace of service changes and staff turnover, some children do not receive a high-quality level of service. Managers are focusing on the specific teams where consistent practice is not yet evident and this will remain a focus for performance management review.
- 7.3. In April 2023, the month immediately following the inspection, we saw a drop in performance across the areas highlighted by Ofsted as needing improvement, specifically in assessment timeliness, visiting and in the timeliness of section 47 child protection investigations. This reflects the impact of the inspection preparation and intense activity around the Ofsted visit as well as a high level of staff taking leave, having postponed this in the build up to the inspection.
- 7.4. Since that time, performance has been either restored or improved in the Assessment and Intervention service. Performance continues to be lower than it should and needs to be in the Family Safeguarding Service in respect of timeliness of visits and S47 investigations. This is scrutinised at Service, Team, and individual level so that the reasons can be fully understood and addressed in a targeted way by the senior managers for the teams and services concerned.
- 7.5. Practice Action plans are in place to address these areas and the service has additionally held problem-solving events for managers and staff to gain all perspectives on specific presenting issues and their potential solutions.
- 7.6. The Departmental Leadership Team continues to maintain a strong focus on performance across the service and ensures that it is ready for an inspection at any time. The performance reporting is aggregated into a quarterly self-evaluation document which describes the current improvement trajectory and how areas of underperformance will be tackled. Additionally, monthly Performance Assurance and Action Board meetings attended by members of the Departmental Leadership Team and Heads of Service provide an opportunity to measure practice improvement in each service area down to individual child level.

Staff recruitment and retention

- 7.7. Ongoing staffing recruitment and retention continue to be a challenge both locally and nationally. Recruitment and retention of social workers presents a particular challenge to all local authorities, both now and into the future and the service therefore continues to prioritise recruitment to manage this. Vacancy rates are being managed well but they are higher in some areas of the service than others, particularly within the Family Safeguarding teams. However, our workforce recruitment programme and specifically the overseas recruitment activity is having a positive impact and vacancies continue to be covered by agency staff where appropriate which has resulted in low rates of uncovered vacancies within the service.

7.8. We have instigated the following to stabilise the situation as follows:

- Recruitment of 35 experienced overseas social workers (August 2023); they are now completing their induction programmes and starting to have full caseloads. A further 18 overseas social workers are in the process of being onboarded.
- Making the professional staff group more efficient – for instance, where appropriate by divesting them from purely administrative tasks, or providing improved IT solutions that help to maximise their time spent with children and families.
- An ongoing focus on staff retention is also in place to improve the wellbeing of our staff and for the County Council to become an employer of choice.
- 32 Newly Qualified Social Workers commence their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment September 2023 (a mix of apprentices, step-ups and those who have been on placement with us). A further 11 new apprenticeships will join us September 2023, including a care experienced young person.

8. Conclusion

8.1. This report has summarised the overall position since the Ofsted inspection in March 2023. It confirms that the service remains fully focused on our continued improvement programme and that there is considerable ongoing activity to meet our intention of being a good and outstanding service. The independent chair of the Continuous Improvement Board ensure a degree of external scrutiny of our plans and progress as the service continues to improve the quality of services for children and their families, with realistic plans and leadership oversight in place to achieve this.

9. Other options considered.

9.1. Not applicable - this is a report for information.

10. Resource

10.1 Costs for the activities described in this report have been costed within the current Children's Services budget.

11. Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
To maintain the level of continual improvement and sustain the progress made to date.	The service has demonstrated improvement in all areas, and this has now been validated by Ofsted and formally acknowledged. Service management, human resources, professional practice, infrastructure, and culture are being transformed in a manner that is expected to be fully sustainable. An appetite for change has been manifested, and the determination to deliver good services to children and families in West Sussex continues.

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and experienced staff and the impact of this on the Council's ability to sustain improvements and maintain high levels of service provision.	<p>The service has put in place measures to address these challenges through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strategy for addressing the market scarcity of social workers. • implemented measures to tackle specific recruitment pressures in other parts of the service. <p>Staff morale is improving, as confirmed by the staff surveys and Ofsted inspectors. The enthusiasm for joining the service manifested through the Social Work Academy scheme demonstrates the ability of the service to inspire careers that support the wellbeing of vulnerable children and families in West Sussex.</p>

12. Policy alignment and compliance

- 12.1 **Equality Duty and human rights assessment** - The service recognises the primary importance of child safeguarding, sound family relationships, good parenting, and the nurture of children to fulfil their potential. The provision of the service is based on need, as determined through formal assessment protocols. This need is not explicitly related to formally protected characteristics, but any such characteristic is and will continue (as now) to be respected in compliance with equality principles and considered in the way in which the service is delivered.
- 12.2 In terms of those with a protected characteristic, the service will ensure enablement and support across all relevant categories, and this will both continue and be enhanced through the Children First agenda.
- 12.3 The County Council has an overriding duty to safeguard the Human Rights of children and young persons in its area, and this has been recognised in the Children First agenda. The Council is mindful of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights – The Right to Respect for Family and Private Life - and has taken relevant factors into consideration in preparing this report. The processing of personal and special category data is subject to the Council's Data Protection Act policies and procedures in relation to discharging the County Council's and its partners' legal responsibilities.
- 12.4 The County Council is also mindful of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - which states that all children have the right to be consulted and to have their opinions heard on any decision that affects them. Hearing, understanding, and acting upon the voice and experiences of the child is a key design principle of the Children First service improvements. The Council will continue to ensure it fulfils all its statutory duties regarding meeting the needs of children and young persons in its area during the Children First service transformation programme.

- 12.5 **Social Value** - The Children's Services improvement programme and associated measures discussed in this report will directly support improved delivery of the West Sussex Plan priority to give every child the Best Start in Life. Enhancing the protection of young lives and support for family life will continue to build resilience and social capital and contribute towards stronger and more effective communities. The implementation of the service improvements will also respect sustainability principles in accordance with the County Council's strategic policies.
- 12.6 **Crime and Disorder Implications** - There are positive implications for Sections 17, 37 and 39 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 in the prevention and reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour, and in reducing offending and re-offending by young people, all of which are affected by the progress activity discussed in this report.

Lucy Butler

Director of Children, Young People and Learning

Contact Officers:

Louise Warren, Senior Improvement Lead

Vicky Richardson, Head of Practice Improvement and Inspection

Background Papers: None