



CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

WEDNESDAY, 24 APRIL 2024

10.00 AM COMMITTEE ROOM, COUNTY HALL, LEWES

MEMBERSHIP - Councillors Bob Bowdler, Johnny Denis, Penny di Cara, Kathryn Field (Chair), Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Mathew Milligan and Colin Swansborough

A G E N D A

1. Minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2024 (*Pages 3 - 6*)
2. Apologies for absence
3. Disclosure of Interests
Disclosure by all members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the member regards the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
4. Urgent items
Notification of items which the Chair considers to be urgent and proposes to take at the end of the appropriate part of the agenda. Any members who wish to raise urgent items are asked, wherever possible, to notify the Chair before the start of the meeting. In so doing, they must state the special circumstances which they consider justify the matter being considered urgently.
5. Exclusion of Press and Public
To consider excluding the public and press from the meeting for the next two agenda items on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in Category 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual.
6. Regulation 44 Quarterly Summary Report - Quarter 4 (January - March 2024) (*Pages 7 - 60*)
Report by Director of Children's Services.
7. Any other exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.
8. Accommodation pathways for care experienced young people (*Pages 61 - 72*)
Report by Director of Children's Services.
9. Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics (*Pages 73 - 78*)
Report by Director of Children's Services.
10. Inspection of East Sussex Local Authority Children's Services (*Pages 79 - 98*)
Report by Director of Children's Services.
11. Any other non-exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.

PHILIP BAKER

Assistant Chief Executive
County Hall, St Anne's Crescent
LEWES BN7 1UE

16 April 2024

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CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Committee Room, County Hall, Lewes on 16 January 2024.

PRESENT Councillors Bob Bowdler, Anne Cross, Kathryn Field (Chair), Johanna Howell, Sorrell Marlow-Eastwood, Matthew Milligan and Colin Swansborough

ALSO PRESENT Alison Jeffery - Director of Children's Services
Fiona Lewis - Head of Looked After Children Services
Sally Carnie - Head of Looked After Children Service
Deborah Ennis - Senior Manager, IMPOWER
Belinda Trunfull - Governance and Democracy Officer

25. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 OCTOBER 2023

25.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2023.

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

26.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Penny di Cara (It was noted that Councillor Johanna Howell was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor di Cara).

26.2 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Johnny Denis (It was noted that Councillor Anne Cross was in attendance as a substitute for Councillor Denis).

27. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

27.1 Councillor Matthew Milligan declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest that a close family member is an East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Foster parent.

27.2 Councillor Johanna Howell declared a personal non-prejudicial interest that she is the Chair of People Scrutiny.

28. URGENT ITEMS

28.1 There were no urgent items.

29. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

29.1 RESOLVED to exclude the public and press from the meeting for items 6 and 7 on the agenda (see minutes 30 and 31) on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual. It was considered that the public interest in maintaining the exception outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

30. EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL (ESCC) CHILDREN'S HOMES QUARTERLY REGULATION 44 SUMMARY REPORT

30.1 The Panel considered the Quarterly Registered Children's Home reports for the following Children's Homes:

- Brodrick House
- Homefield Cottage
- Hazel Lodge
- Silver Birches
- Lansdowne Secure Children's Home
- Acorns
- The Bungalow

30.2 The Panel considered an Ofsted Inspection report for The Bungalow Children's Home.

30.3 The Panel welcomed the report and received a verbal update from Fiona Lewis, Head of Looked After Children Services who informed that the move to producing the reports and supporting statements on a quarterly basis is going well.

30.4 32 recommendations were made by the Regulation 44 Independent Person across the 7 homes this quarter. These related to leadership, management and protection of children standard.

30.5 An Ofsted visit to the Lansdowne Secure Children's Home has been completed in anticipation of the home reopening in January 2024.

30.6 Areas of focus for the next quarter include ensuring that children have the same access to digital resources as their peers, improving the rate of social workers' feedback to the Independent Person to inform the Regulation 44 report and developing staff understanding of language in children's records.

30.7 Recruitment continues to pose a challenge, however, there is ongoing broader recruitment strategies in place.

30.8 Following an Assurance inspection for The Bungalow in November, the inspection identified positive progress. The temporary move of children to Acorns went well following substantive storm damage to The Bungalow Children's Home.

30.9 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

31. ANY OTHER EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR.

31.1 There were none.

32. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

32.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on LAC statistics.

32.2 Sally Carnie, Head of Looked After Children Service updated the Panel on the latest position for LAC in East Sussex, informing the Panel that data is drawn as a snapshot on the last day of the month and some changes occur as data is cleansed within the system.

32.3 Since the previous quarter, the overall number of LAC has decreased from 686 to 671. A combination of factors has contributed to this decrease in number including strenuous focus on reunification work with children and their birth families. Despite the overall reduction in the number of LAC during this quarter, children who have remained in care continue to have

complex needs requiring high levels of skilled care. As a result, the LAC service continues to remain under pressure with a national and local shortage of care placements.

32.4 The Panel discussed the LAC data trend and issues affecting data production. The Panel heard that a few anomalies were resolved following a significant data cleansing exercise. Staff training has also improved the effective recording of data ensuring that there are no gaps within the key stages of the process hence ensuring that the child's journey and decision-making stages are clear. Working closely with Social Workers and the Business Support Team has also played a key role in certifying that the children's needs are kept at the forefront.

32.5 The Panel further discussed recruitment of foster carers. Adverts have been going out to Parish Councils and new pay rates will soon come into effect. A review will take place to consider the current advertising on roundabouts due to rising costs. Further work is also being undertaken by IMPOWER around recruitment.

32.6 Councillor Bowdler informed the Panel that following the recent Ofsted inspection, one of the topics highlighted was around listening to the voices of young people and ensuring that there is a clear two-way conversation between the young people and members of the Panel. Events such as Children in Care Council (CiCC) are good forums, however, other channels need to be explored to ensure young people feel heard and their views understood. As it can be a challenge for young people to attend the Corporate Parenting Panel Meeting, it was suggested that children in care could engage with the Panel through video recordings where they would have the opportunity to voice their views and concerns. The department informed the Panel that they are working on plans involving the selection of appointed care leaver acting as a conduit between members of the Panel and various groups of young people.

32.7 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

33. LANSDOWNE SECURE UNIT UPDATE ON RELAUNCH

33.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided a progress update on Lansdowne Secure Children's Home. The Panel heard that the home is now open with staff training currently ongoing. The home will be open to children from February 2024.

33.2 The Panel recently visited the home and commented on how impressed and pleased they were having had the opportunity to meet the staff and tour the home.

33.3 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

34. IMPOWER - SUFFICIENCY AND VALUING CARE

34.1 The Panel received a presentation from Deborah Ennis, Senior Manager, IMPOWER who updated on the work of IMPOWER with Children's Social Care since May 2023.

34.2 IMPOWER is a consultancy that works exclusively with the public sector with a focus on improving outcomes for people by transforming public services. IMPOWER works with frontline staff across the service to identify opportunities to enhance outcomes.

34.3 An analysis has been presented by IMPOWER detailing children and young people's needs in East Sussex and associated placement cost pressures in July 2023, as well as the identification of opportunities within a first cohort of children and young people with complex needs using the Valuing Care approach.

34.4 Work is currently focused on developing clear plans to embed the Valuing Care approach across process, practice and commissioning in East Sussex.

34.5 The Panel discussed the working relationship between IMPOWER and other Local Authorities including those that had received an outstanding Ofsted rating following IMPOWER's involvement.

34.6 The Panel RESOLVED to note the report.

The meeting ended at 11.26 am.

Councillor Kathryn Field
Chair

Agenda Item 6

By virtue of paragraph(s) 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: 24 April 2024

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Accommodation pathways for care experienced young people.

Purpose: To update the panel on the accommodation options for Care Leavers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the update.

1. Background

1.1. Part of the service's corporate parenting responsibilities is to ensure appropriate accommodation pathways for our care experienced young people and those at risk of homelessness.

1.2 In East Sussex this responsibility is met through effective joint working between Children's Services, East Sussex Housing Partnership Board and Public Health.

1.3 A joint protocol for care experienced young people and 16 and 17 year olds who are at risk of homelessness or maybe homeless is in place between Children and Housing services.

1.4 Public Health and Children's Services jointly fund posts to support our young people to access accommodation pathways, they work in partnership with local housing authorities, housing providers, adult social care, health and criminal justices services and the voluntary sector.

2. Supporting information

2.1 The young person's housing and accommodation pathway consists of several steps. Early intervention includes working with schools, Public Health and Children's Services to minimize demand and reduce the risks of homelessness and housing crisis through multi-agency support with families and young people.

2.2 Integrated Service gateways have been developed, supporting young people in temporary and emergency accommodation delivering a range of services including housing, employment, mental health and benefits. Placement support plans and pathway plans provide a structure for integrated support towards independent living.

2.3 Options for young people on the housing and accommodation pathway include staying put (with foster carers) supported lodgings and accommodation, shared student style accommodation and social housing. Young people are supported in time with 'moving on' to private and social rentals. There is a council tax relief scheme in place across East Sussex for care experienced young people and our young people receive a setting up allowance.

2.4 There are a number of key challenges across the housing sector including a high number of households living in temporary accommodation, an increasingly unaffordable private rented sector and a shortage of supported move on options for people with additional needs. A significant proportion of the activity supporting individuals who have additional or multiple needs is grant funding, with indications that funding will end in March 2025.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 Through refreshed partnership arrangements with multi-agency partners, it is intended that the East Sussex Housing Strategy will work to address the key challenges existing across the system, enhancing cross sector working and aims to deliver a reduced reliance on temporary accommodation and support sustainable housing and accommodation options.

3.2 Addressing the needs of care experienced young people and those at risk of homelessness are part of the joined-up approach being taken through the East Sussex Housing Board, the joint Housing and Children's Services Action Plan, the Joint Protocol and young people's housing and accommodation pathway.

3.3 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the update.

ALISON JEFFERY
Director of Children's Services

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

Accommodation Pathways for our care experienced young people

Michael Courts – East Sussex Housing Partnership Lead
**Laura Knight – Young Persons Housing and Accommodation
Manager**

Joint working to meet our corporate parenting responsibilities

- East Sussex Housing Partnership Board
- Joint Housing and Childrens Services Action Plan
- Jointly funded posts in Childrens Services and Public Health
- Joint Protocol's for care leavers and 16 and 17 year old young people are risk of homelessness or who may be homeless and require accommodation
- Strategic and operational partnership meetings

East Sussex Housing Partnership Lead

- Joint role between Public Health and Housing, working to strengthen links between the sector.
- Refreshed partnership arrangements, including a strategic board of the local housing authorities, housing providers, children's services, adult social care, health, criminal justice, voluntary sector and government departments. A series of specialist groups have also been formed.
- The aim of the partnership is to be the voice of housing in East Sussex, support cross sector working and provide a medium- and long-term vision for the sector.

Young Persons Housing and Accommodation Manager

- Joint role across East Sussex Childrens Services and District and Borough housing authorities, working in partnership to ensure we meet our collective responsibilities to young people and families in housing need or at risk of homelessness
- Develop and manage delivery of a countywide East Sussex Youth Housing and Accommodation Pathway
- Co ordinate delivery of countywide Care Leavers Housing Protocol and Joint Protocol for Youth Homelessness Prevention, assist in operationalising processes required for implementation

Accommodation Options

- Staying Put
- Supported Lodgings
- Low to high levels of Supported Accommodation/Semi Independent living
- Shared Accommodation including student style accommodation for those in employment, education and training
- Social Housing
- Private Rented Sector (PRS) accommodation

Support to move on

- Pathway planning, preparation for independent living
- Local Offer
- Joint Housing Options interview - holistic assessment of young persons circumstances and aspirations, realistic options, personalised housing plan and support to access PRS
- Placement support workers to help in managing a private or social sector tenancy
- Setting up home grant and practical support; initial tv licence, first shop and energy top up paid
- Rent top up where agreed for specific schemes, guarantor offer

Challenges to move on

- Over 1,200 households living in temporary accommodation across the county. Around half are placements for single people. The housing authorities spent over £14,000,000 on temporary accommodation in 2023/24.
- Increasingly unaffordable private rented sector, even after the uplift in Local Housing Allowance.
- A shortage of supported move on options for people with additional needs.
- Current activity supporting individuals with multiple and compound needs is mostly grant funded, much of which is due to end in March 2025.

Challenges to move on for Care Experienced young people

Lack of social housing;
competing priority
needs

Inconsistent approach
to priority banding
across District and
Borough Housing
Authorities

Access to and
affordability of PRS

High service charges for
those who are working
in supported
accommodation

Intentionally Homeless
decisions

Suitability of
accommodation -
suitable by definition
but not in opinion of
care leavers

East Sussex Housing Strategy

- Emerging Themes:
 - Facilitating collaboration
 - Ensuring a data-lead approach
 - Building capacity in the local workforce
- Emerging Priorities:
 - Supporting sustainable delivery of housing and accommodation
 - Reducing reliance on temporary accommodation
 - De-carbonisation of the housing stock
 - Healthy homes and communities

Committee: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **24 April 2024**

Title of Report: **Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics**

By: **Director of Children's Service**

Purpose of Report: **To update the Panel on changes in the last quarter**

Recommendations: **The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the report.**

1. Background

Financial Appraisal

1.1 Services for Looked After Children are predominantly funded from the Children's Services base budget with some additional smaller funding streams supporting specific activity e.g. Virtual School activity from the Pupil Premium Grant and the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children's grant from the Home Office.

2. Supporting information

2.1 Data found at Appendix 1 is drawn as a snapshot on the last day of the month and some changes occur as data is cleansed within the system. Any changes made to the system will update the data as at the correct date of the activity not the date of entry, therefore the end of year figures produced for the Department of Education 903 collection will show the finalised East Sussex County Council (ESCC) figures. This quarter has seen a decrease in the overall number of Looked after Children from 671 on the last day of December 2023, to 655 on the last day of March 2024. This equates to an overall decrease of 16. The decrease has resulted from a strenuous focus on reunification work with children and their birth families, and discharges from care into Special Guardianship, Adoption and Child Arrangement Orders. The sufficiency of any placements either in-house, or in the independent sector though, continued to be extremely challenging. The national shortage of fostering placements in particular, have shown no sign of improvement. However, the improved financial offer that ESCC has made to support the recruitment of local foster carers is showing early signs of success with 16 new applicants currently being processed. Nonetheless the over reliance on residential placements continues to place significant pressure of the Childrens Services budget. This is a national picture and was recognised in an Education Parliamentary Committee which took evidence from the Local Government Association and representatives from a number of Local Authorities on the 26 March 2024.

2.2 A total of 338 children were living in foster care at the end of March 2024, which is an increase of 9 since the last quarter. This represents 52% of our overall LAC population (excluding those under kinship carers). Of that number, 235 were living with approved ESCC carers (36% of our overall LAC). This is a slight increase of 2 from the previous quarter. 5 children were placed with foster carers who were also approved adopters as part of the Fostering for Adoption pathway, this is an increase of 2 since the last quarter. 94 children were living with agency carers, this has increased by 3 since the previous quarter. In addition, there was 1 child placed with another Local Authority foster carer, this has reduced by one since the last quarter. There was also 1 child placed in a Foster to Adopt placement with an agency adopter that is not part of the Regional Adoption Agency. There were 16 children placed for adoption at the end of March 2024 which is a decrease of 3 since the previous quarter.

2.3 There were 95 young people living in supported housing options, homes or hostels, which is a decrease of 5 since the previous quarter. The introduction of a new Ofsted regime for the regulation of this type of provision in October 2023 appears to have bedded down locally with very little loss of

provision. The figure of 95 also includes 6 children who were either under the age of 16, or who were placed in unregistered provision. These placements are only used in exceptional circumstances where no suitable alternative regulated provision is available. In these circumstances robust risk assessments and monitoring plans are made to ensure children are cared for safely.

2.4 At the end of the quarter, the number of children who were living with kinship foster carers, decreased significantly from 77 to 67 a total of 10 children.

2.5 The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC, also decreased from 30 to 27. Planning for placements of this sort is always monitored rigorously to mitigate any risk factors. Agreement and authorisation for this type of placement is given at a senior level, unless it is court mandated.

2.6 At the end of March 2024, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes has decreased slightly to 108, a total decrease of 3 in the quarter. This represents 16% of all looked after children. 17 children were living in ESCC run children's homes, which is the decrease of 3, and 91 were still placed in external residential homes. Exhaustive attempts are made to place children in our in-house provision prior to referring out to an agency placement. There are rigorous negotiations on both quality and price when placement searches are made with external providers. Wherever possible ESCC attempts to find family-based placements for our children either within their own networks or with foster carers. Where this is not possible and external residential homes are commissioned, there remains a commitment to step the children down into a family arrangement at the right time.

2.7 At the end of March 2024 there were 3 ESCC children placed in external Secure Units. An increase of 2 since the last quarter.

2.8 At the end of December there were 0 children remanded into youth detention accommodation.

2.9 At the end of December there was 1 child placed in a Family Centre or Mother and baby units.

2.10 ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). The number of UASC was 78 at the end of March, which is a decrease of 4 from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 133 Asylum Seeking young people who were Care Leavers during this period, which is an increase of 20 (121 aged 18-21 and 12 aged 21-25).

2.11 The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders increased from 348 to 350, an increase of 2, and those children subject to a Special Guardianship Order increased from 470 to 472, an increase of 2.

2.12 There were no complaints from any Looked After Child during this period.

3. Conclusion and recommendations

3.1 It is very pleasing that there has continued to be an overall reduction in the number of Looked after Children during this period. In addition, there have been more children living in fostering family placements this quarter and a small reduction in those living in residential or supported housing options. However, the children who have remained in care continue to have some complex needs and require high levels of skilled care. The Looked After Children's system has continued to be very pressurised during this period with the national and local shortage of care placements, although there are grounds for optimism in the upturn in fostering enquiries and recruitment locally. It is to the credit of the ESCC duty placement service that they have continued to find Ofsted or Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered placements for the majority of our Looked After Children.

3.2 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the report.

ALISON JEFFERY
Director of Children's Services

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

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Appendix 1

Placement Type	Placement Provider Description	Total
A5 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) with current foster carer	PR1 - Own provision by LA	2
	PR2 - Other LA provision	1
A6 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) not with current foster carer	PR1 - Own provision by LA	9
	PR2 - Other LA provision	4
H5 - Unregistered Provider Supported Accommodation	PR1 - Own provision by LA	1
	PR4 - Private Provision	2
H5 - Registered Provider of Supported Accommodation	x	1
	PR4 - Private Provision	82
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	4
K1 - Secure unit	PR2 - Other LA provision	2
	PR4 - Private Provision	1
K2 - Homes and Hostels	x	1
	PR1 - Own provision by LA	17
	PR4 - Private Provision	90
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	1
P1 - Placed with own parents	PR0 - Parents or other person with parental responsibility	27
R3 - Family centre or mother and baby unit	PR3 - Other public provision	1
U1 - Foster placement with relative or friend- long term fostering	x	2
	PR1 - Own provision by LA	23
U3 - Foster placement with relative or friend- not long term or FFA	x	2
	PR1 - Own provision by LA	44
U4 - Placement with other foster carer- long term fostering	x	3
	PR1 - Own provision by LA	84
	PR4 - Private Provision	37
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	3
U5 - Placement with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter- FFA	PR1 - Own provision by LA	5
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	1
U6 - Placement with other foster carer - not long term or FFA	PR1 - Own provision by LA	151
	PR2 - Other LA provision	1
	PR4 - Private Provision	53
	PR5 - Voluntary/Third Sector Provision	3
Z1 - Other placements	x	6
	Total	655

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Report to: Corporate Parenting Panel

Date of meeting: 24 April 2024

By: Director of Children’s Services

Title: Inspection of East Sussex Local Authority Children’s Services

Purpose: This report sets out the outcome of the Council’s Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services in December 2023

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the findings of the inspection and the draft action plan.

1 Background

1.1 East Sussex County Council was inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) under the framework and evaluation schedule for Inspections of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) from 11 – 15 December 2023.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The outcome of the inspection was published 6 February and is attached at Appendix 1. The Council’s Children’s Services has been judged to be good overall and outstanding for the experiences and progress of children in care. This is a good outcome for the service and for the Council which has made keeping vulnerable people safe, a priority outcome. It is a very welcome recognition of all the hard, determined, and high-quality work the service has done since the last inspection, through a time of pandemic, its continuing effects, and cost of living pressures. The judgement for each area of the inspection is set out below.

Judgement	Grade 2018 inspection	Grade 2023 inspection
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care (and care leavers 2018)	Outstanding	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers (introduced in January 2023)	N/A	Good
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	Good

2.2 The inspectors spend most of their time with frontline staff and the inspection outcome is a reflection of the difference staff make to the lives of children and young people in East Sussex.

2.3 The report notes:

‘Children in East Sussex continue to receive consistently strong and effective support that helps them to improve their lives. Since the last ILACS inspection in 2018, the authority has responded well to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing numbers of

families experiencing financial hardship and the growing number children with complex needs who require help.’

2.4 The report picks up the leadership of the Corporate Parenting Panel:

‘Support for vulnerable children is a priority for leaders and cross-party leadership of the Corporate Parenting Board demonstrates the collective will to do the right things for children and their families.’

2.5 Key strengths highlighted in the report include:

- Most children and families move quickly into the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) when necessary. For the majority of children, proportionate decision making reflects children’s needs and is responsive to the level of risks that they face.
- Social workers are confident and experienced at identifying the range of risk factors impacting on children.
- Children’s identity and heritage are considered well in terms of planning for the right support, including their gender, sexuality and faith.
- Strategy meetings are well attended and are held in line with the level of perceived risk to children.
- Child-in-need and child protection plans focus on what matters most to children. They are reviewed in a timely way at multi-agency review meetings that are well attended.
- Disabled children with complex needs, supported by practitioners from the disabled children’s service, receive strong support. Well-managed caseloads allow workers to respond to children’s needs and to work with multi-agency partners effectively.
- The multidisciplinary specialist family service (SWIFT) works alongside social care services to provide highly valued expertise in assessment and intervention across a wide range of need, including parental substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental health, and assessment work for families before or during court proceedings.
- Well-established systems, underpinned by strong relationships with partner agencies, enable an effective response to out-of-hours concerns.
- The oversight of elective home education is an area of strength. There is an effective system for the tracking of high numbers of pupils who are educated at home and staff seek to identify and support children who may be at increased risk of harm.
- Children in care, including disabled children, are well cared for and live in homes that meet their needs. Social workers consider children’s diversity needs very carefully so that they can support them to settle well with their careers and make progress in their education.
- Social workers know the children (*in care*) they support exceptionally well. They are insightful and attuned to children’s needs, helping them to express their views using individualised and bespoke communication methods.
- The health needs of children in care are considered well. Health assessments, dental and optician checks are arranged for children, and strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs) are completed as part of the health assessments.
- Governance of the virtual school is effective, and the virtual school makes a positive difference to children’s academic and personal development.
- (Care leavers) benefit from enduring and trusted relationships with workers who support them well. The support provided to care leavers makes a positive difference as they move into adulthood.
- Care leavers are supported to maintain links with family members and other adults to ensure that they have access to a network of people who can offer them long-lasting support into adulthood.

- The local offer, co-created with care leavers, contains helpful information about the wide range of financial and practical support, specialist advice and services that are available to them. A small number of aspects of the offer are not sufficiently explicit, including access to the dedicated mental health practitioner and prescriptions.
- Leaders are taking appropriate action to expand the range of opportunities for care leavers, for example through access to council-led mentoring schemes, apprenticeships or work experience, or links to local businesses and the culture sector.
- Investment in early help services, and current work to establish a new multidisciplinary model for locality teams, as well as plans to enable the specialist SWIFT services to deliver support at an earlier point, demonstrate the corporate commitment to delivering sustainable and impactful support for children.
- The long-standing stability of the workforce enables well-rooted relationships to develop with children and care leavers in East Sussex. Leaders make no secret of the fact that the workforce is their most valuable asset.
- Workers stay in East Sussex because they feel valued and supported to do well.
- Inspectors had the pleasure of meeting a group of articulate, caring and kind young people, all of whom said that they felt safe and had someone to turn to as a trusted adult.

2.6 Ofsted provided a child friendly summary to inform children and young people about the inspection outcomes. This is attached at Appendix 2.

2.7 The report identifies three areas for improvement:

- The quality of plans for children and care leavers so that they are all specific, measurable and timebound.
- The recording of management oversight, supervision and direction.
- The oversight, timeliness and rigour of the response to children:
 - experiencing neglect, including children in Public Law Outline pre-proceedings, and
 - in private fostering arrangement

2.8 The draft post-inspection action plan in response to the report is attached at Appendix 3. The final action plan will be shared with Ofsted by 17 May 2024.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 East Sussex has maintained a focus on the key priority outcome of keeping vulnerable people safe and responded well to the impact of the pandemic, increased demand and the challenging financial context for both families and the Council. The Corporate Parenting Panel is asked to note the contents of the inspection report and the draft action plan.

ALISON JEFFERY

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Amanda Watson

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MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

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Inspection of East Sussex local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 11 to 15 December 2023

Lead inspector: Tom Anthony, His Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Children in East Sussex continue to receive consistently strong and effective support that helps to improve their lives. Since the last ILACS inspection in 2018, the authority has responded well to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing numbers of families experiencing financial hardship and the growing numbers of children with complex needs who require help. Support for vulnerable children is a priority for leaders, including the chief executive, lead member and director of children's services. Cross-party leadership of the corporate parenting board demonstrates the collective will to do the right things for children and their families.

In most areas, the quality and impact of practice have remained strong, and the stability of the workforce is impressive. However, records of management oversight and challenge, as well as the quality of practice in discrete areas, including the two areas for improvement that were identified at the last inspection, are not consistently robust.

What needs to improve?

- The quality of plans for children and care leavers so that they are all specific, measurable and timebound.
- The recording of management oversight, supervision and direction.
- The oversight, timeliness and rigour of the response to children:
 - experiencing neglect, including children in Public Law Outline pre-proceedings, and
 - in private fostering arrangements.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: good

1. Staff at the single point of advice (SPoA) provide a timely response to initial contacts in East Sussex. Essential information is gathered to help inform appropriate threshold decisions at this stage. This helps workers to identify the right service in line with children's needs. Consent is understood, sought and dispensed with appropriately. Parents' views are taken into account in decision-making.
2. Although an increase in demand has led to delays in allocation for a small number of families, the majority of families receive effective early help at the right time for them. Once allocated to an early help key worker, children and their families benefit from a high level of support. This enables children and families to build relationships rapidly with workers who understand their needs and work effectively with them to reduce risk and make enduring change.
3. Most children and families move quickly into the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) when necessary. For the majority of children, proportionate decision-making reflects children's needs and is responsive to the level of risks that they face. For most children, social workers' analysis and recommendations are thorough and based on timely and comprehensive information-gathering.
4. Social workers are confident and experienced at identifying the range of risk factors impacting on children. They plan intervention to reduce risk and progress safety plans. They work closely with parents, sharing reports and safety plans so that children are safer.
5. Management oversight is captured well within MASH information-gathering records, and the rationale for decision-making is mainly clear in terms of next steps or prioritisation leading up to and following strategy discussions. Re-referral rates are low. Managers in the MASH provide clear advice on next steps for children moving into statutory assessment. However, indicative timescales for completing the assessment in accordance with the child's needs are not defined at the outset. Some assessments are taking many weeks, with the

rationale not being clear. This was an area for improvement at the last inspection.

6. Most assessments are analytical and thorough, and they are often informed by research and practice learning reviews. They take into account parents' own experiences, concerns and vulnerabilities. Direct work is undertaken with children during the assessment process. This captures their experiences well, and they are helped to share sensitive and difficult feelings. However, evidence of this work is not always uploaded onto children's records.
7. Children's identity and heritage are considered well in terms of planning for the right support, including their gender, sexuality and faith.
8. Decision-making is robust and leads appropriately to escalation when needed to safeguard children. Strategy meetings are well attended and are held in line with the level of perceived risk to children. During child protection enquiries, experienced social workers visit children quickly at a time and place where the child feels comfortable.
9. Domestic abuse specialist workers support practitioners and families, helping to create immediate safety plans for children who have been exposed to domestic abuse. Culturally matched community groups are identified to provide ongoing and sensitive support to victims.
10. Child-in-need and child protection plans focus on what matters most to children. They are reviewed in a timely way at multi-agency review meetings that are well attended. While practice itself is strong, plans are not consistently sharply focused on what tangible change is needed and by when, and many do not contain well-articulated contingency plans.
11. Children who have a child-in-need or child protection plan receive regular visits from practitioners who build relationships with them and their families to support change and improvements. Practitioners are skilled and knowledgeable, using a wide range of direct work tools in their one-to-one meetings with children.
12. Disabled children with complex needs, supported by practitioners from the disabled children's service, receive strong support. Well-managed caseloads allow workers to respond to children's needs and to work with multi-agency partners effectively. Creative use is made of visual tools to capture children's views and wishes and these feed into children's plans. Plans are dynamic and they are flexed as children and families make progress and their circumstances change.
13. The multidisciplinary specialist family service (SWIFT) works alongside social care services to provide highly valued expertise in assessment and intervention across a wide range of need, including parental substance misuse, domestic abuse, mental health, and assessment work for families before or during court proceedings. A waiting list to access some services creates short-term delays

for some children. Senior leaders are aware of this and plans are in place to frontload the use of SWIFT in the Public Law Outline (PLO) process.

14. Some children experience neglect for too long. Episodes of marginal improvement are followed by a return to significant and impactful neglect, and there is insufficient evidence of reflection on what has and has not worked in the past. A new neglect toolkit has recently been launched and is yet to have an impact.
15. Oversight and challenge to drive progress during PLO pre-proceedings are not sufficiently effective. Some children are subject to pre-proceedings for too long. Letters to parents, as was the case at the last inspection, are not written in a way that makes clear the concerns regarding children's experiences and what needs to change.
16. The dangers of harm by exploitation are understood well, and risks are reduced through effective support provided to children at risk of extra-familial harm. Mapping identifies links between children and the adults who are exploiting them. Police plan disruptive actions, including specialist operations, and 'connected coaches' offer a multidisciplinary approach, providing intensive and effective support to children aged 11 to 17 and their families.
17. Staff in East Sussex are creative and effective in the way in which they engage children and families to continually improve the impact of their work. A well-established collaboration against child exploitation (CACE) group for parents of children who are exploited supports parents well and is a vital resource for them. Parent mentors also provide key support to families who are going through family drug and alcohol court (FDAC) proceedings.
18. Well-established systems, underpinned by strong relationships with partner agencies, enable an effective response to out-of-hours concerns.
19. Concerns about adults working with children are dealt with thoroughly by a well-managed local authority designated officer service that has good systems in place for the management of allegations, concerns and complaints.
20. Once notified about children living in private fostering arrangements, not all children are visited swiftly in their homes as part of the assessment of their safety. This means that potential risks are not rigorously assessed.
21. Children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless receive an appropriate and effective response. They are provided with advice and information to help them to make appropriate decisions about the support that they need.
22. The oversight of elective home education is an area of strength. There is an effective system for the tracking of high numbers of pupils who are educated at home and staff seek to identify and support children who may be at increased risk of harm. The local authority has clear procedures to identify and monitor

children who are missing education. They work positively with families and schools to determine and address the main barriers to accessing education.

The experiences and progress of children in care: outstanding

23. Most children come into care in East Sussex at the right time and after other family options have been explored. Providing children in care with consistent support and minimising changes of social worker are priorities from the outset. The strong relationships that children have with their workers have a positive impact on the progress that they make.
24. Children in care, including disabled children, are well cared for and live in homes that meet their needs. Social workers consider children's diversity needs very carefully so that they can support them to settle well with their carers and make progress in their education. Children have many opportunities to learn and to have fun, including through dancing, horse riding and cookery. Workers advocate effectively for resources, including holidays and activities.
25. Social workers know the children they support exceptionally well. They are insightful and attuned to children's needs, helping them to express their views using individualised and bespoke communication methods. They visit children regularly and keep in frequent contact, including in the evenings and at weekends, so that children have positive, long-term relationships with a trusted adult. The frequency of visits and contacts is increased when children need additional support.
26. Continuity of allocated social worker is prioritised and these long-standing relationships have a positive impact on children's progress and experiences. Social workers are able to understand children's experiences, the impact of trauma and significant life events. Provision is in place for therapy and bespoke emotional support when it cannot be accessed from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), and this supports children's evolving identity and independence.
27. Children's plans set out how their needs will be met, including for their health and education, and they identify what they need to thrive and to maintain important relationships. Care plans are updated in line with statutory timescales, but not routinely as situations change. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) are involved in placement decisions, assessments and care planning. Review records do not always provide the clarity to understand the journey of the children, but they are written sensitively to children who are encouraged to chair their own 'My Voice Matters' reviews. IROs escalate concerns promptly and appropriately.
28. Arrangements for early discussion of care and permanence plans for children, including, for example, with fostering and adoption colleagues, are unclear. There is no overall tracking to ensure that permanence plans and contingencies are in place, although this is not causing identifiable delay. Leaders are taking

appropriate action to establish a consistent method to record and track children's permanence plans.

29. The health needs of children in care are considered well. Health assessments, dental and optician checks are arranged for children, and strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs) are completed as part of the health assessments. The findings are used to identify and plan for children's health and therapeutic care needs.
30. The importance of children maintaining connections with family and friends is fully recognised and prominent in the plans made for them. Consideration is given to brother and sister relationships and careful planning helps the children to live together whenever possible. Parents and wider family are enabled to spend positive time with their children.
31. Reunification is explored when this is realistic and in children's best interests. Placement with parents assessments are thorough; they analyse risk and represent the child's voice and health needs. They are appropriately reviewed and authorised by a senior manager.
32. A very small number of children with highly complex needs live in unregistered children's homes. The arrangements are closely monitored and the search to identify registered and suitable provision to meet children's needs is an ongoing process.
33. Supervising social workers provide regular supervision to foster carers, although this varies in quality. Training for foster carers has been enhanced, including a renewed focus on understanding diversity. Detailed and timely reports are provided for panel, which is overseen by a strong and knowledgeable panel chair. Decision-making and recommendations are timely and in line with the aim to promote the welfare of children in foster care.
34. Adoption for children, achieved through membership of the regional adoption agency (Adoption South East), is a strength. Governance arrangements are clear and effective. Early permanence for children is provided by fostering to adopt carers who are informed and well supported. The model of conducting virtual panels delivers a flexible and cost-efficient service that minimises delay for children's future planning.
35. Governance of the virtual school is effective, and the virtual school makes a positive difference to children's academic and personal development. Staff at the school provide helpful guides for designated teachers about personal education plans, as well as training and additional funding to support children accessing extra-curricular clubs. Schools are overwhelmingly positive about the support provided by the virtual school.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: good

36. Most care leavers are helped to make good progress in their lives. They benefit from enduring and trusted relationships with workers who support them well. Social workers and personal advisers keep in frequent contact with care leavers. These relationships continue in accordance with care leavers' needs, regardless of age. Personal advisers are committed and persistent in helping to improve care leavers' lives and experiences, and they encourage them to make changes, even when this is challenging and support is not welcomed. The support provided to care leavers makes a positive difference as they move into adulthood.
37. Care leavers are introduced to social workers and personal advisers at a time that is right for them and following their 14th birthday. Children are allocated a personal adviser by the time they are 17 and a half years old, and, when needed, social workers continue to support care leavers past their 18th birthday. This fluid approach provides an opportunity for joint working and the development of new relationships and reduces the impact of changes of worker and feelings of loss that could leave care leavers feeling unsupported.
38. The majority of pathway plans are created with care leavers but they are not consistently specific and timebound so that impact and progress can be tracked and measured. Stronger plans identify needs well and lead to relevant actions to help care leavers. Independence skills are mostly well considered via the passport to independence work as care leavers move towards adulthood. However, for a small number of care leavers, their voices are not sufficiently captured. Some pathway plans are not sufficiently ambitious or aspirational. Plans do not always reflect the depth of the support that is actually being provided and how this is helping care leavers to make positive progress and changes in their lives.
39. Care leavers are supported to maintain links with family members and other adults to ensure that they have access to a network of people who can offer them long-lasting support into adulthood.
40. Care leavers have good access to a range of health services that support their general physical health and emotional well-being. These include a dedicated mental health practitioner who works directly with them. Workers offer both practical and emotional support. However, not all pathway plans capture opportunities and activities that will help care leavers to stay healthy.
41. Many care leavers are helped to stay in education, employment and training and to achieve their career and further education goals. When things are difficult or they need help with future options, care leavers are appropriately signposted to youth employability services and weekly drop-in sessions that provide practical help, advice and guidance. Care leavers who are not in employment, training or education are supported to return at a time that is

right for them. Leaders are taking appropriate action to expand the range of opportunities for care leavers, for example through access to council-led mentoring schemes, apprenticeships or work experience, or links to local businesses and the culture sector.

42. The local offer, co-created with care leavers, contains helpful information about the wide range of financial and practical support, specialist advice and services that are available to them. A small number of aspects of the offer are not sufficiently explicit, including access to the dedicated mental health practitioner and prescriptions. Care leavers living in East Sussex receive council tax exemptions, but those living elsewhere do not.
43. Care leavers in custody are visited regularly and receive encouragement to access opportunities that will positively support them on their return to their community. Personal advisers work well with families and other professionals to plan in advance for their return.
44. Former unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers are well supported by a specialist team of practitioners who are experienced and skilled in understanding the impact of earlier life experiences and trauma and supporting them with their asylum applications.
45. Care leavers who are young parents receive good levels of support, practical help and guidance on becoming a new parent. There is also appropriate support for care leavers who live separately from their child.
46. The needs and vulnerabilities of care leavers aged over 21 are identified and addressed within visits and other contact, but the records of these activities are not sufficiently clear. Their progress and development are not captured well at regular intervals. This makes it difficult for care leavers to look back and see their progress when reading their records.
47. Most care leavers live in accommodation that meets their needs and where they feel safe. This includes staying with former carers, returning to family, or living in supported accommodation or in private or council-rented homes. A small number of care leavers live in unsuitable accommodation; they are being provided with support to help them move into something more suitable.
48. Good use is made of the annual children in care and care leavers survey to understand the experiences of care leavers and identify areas for development, especially around emotional well-being and loneliness. Managers acknowledge the need to improve engagement and to strengthen direct opportunities for the voices and experiences of care leavers to influence service development.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: good

49. Services that support vulnerable children are a shared and unifying priority in East Sussex. The chief executive, lead member and director of children's services are well informed by the frequent and varied occasions when they meet with children and care leavers to hear them talk about their experiences. This feedback helps to shape services and plans. Leaders are exploring how they can better enable children to contribute routinely to corporate parenting board meetings.
50. Investment in early help services, and current work to establish a new multidisciplinary model for locality teams, as well as plans to enable the specialist SWIFT services to deliver support at an earlier point, demonstrate the corporate commitment to delivering sustainable and impactful support for children.
51. Regular reporting to the chief executive when children are placed in unregistered children's homes, and the monthly review of the children who are assessed as being at the highest risk or highly vulnerable, mean that the challenges that children and families experience are understood at a senior level.
52. Leaders are realistic in their self-evaluation and are clear about the areas where improvements are needed. For example, they are aware that children's and care leavers' plans are not consistently SMART and they are taking appropriate action to improve quality.
53. Positive reports from the judiciary and the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), along with feedback from designated safeguarding leads in schools, confirm senior managers' commitment to delivering effective partnership working. The highly valued and effective FDAC service is an example of their determination to work collaboratively to provide the right support to children and families.
54. Leaders have created a range of effective specialist services, including connected coaches, who provide intensive support to children on the edge of care or who are returning to live with their families, in response to the escalating volume and complexity of children's needs.
55. A wide range of performance information is reported and analysed to help to identify trends in demand and assess the impact of the support provided. However, in a small number of areas, incomplete data inhibits an up-to-date understanding of the needs of children and care leavers. Leaders know this and have plans to improve the data available to them.

56. For some of the most vulnerable children, including those subject to PLO pre-proceedings, there is insufficiently rigorous tracking and oversight of progress to ensure that plans are implemented at the right pace for children.
57. An extensive quality assurance framework helps leaders to maintain clear oversight of activity. Audits provide leaders with a line of sight to frontline practice and are well received by the workforce as an opportunity to pause and reflect on their practice.
58. The quality and impact of supervision are very variable and mean that practitioners, and thereby children, do not always benefit from effective management direction and challenge. Records of supervision are not consistently detailed.
59. The long-standing stability of the workforce enables well-rooted relationships to develop with children and care leavers in East Sussex. Leaders make no secret of the fact that the workforce is their most valuable asset. Staff retention rates are impressive, and time after time inspectors saw children and care leavers who have developed trust and confidence in workers, many of whom have supported them for long periods of time.
60. Workers stay in East Sussex because they feel valued and supported to do well. They hold manageable caseloads and are able to visit children regularly to build effective relationships. They speak highly of the support that they receive from practice managers and they value the range and frequency of learning and development opportunities. These opportunities help workers to develop their professional skills, as well as those who want to progress their careers into more senior roles.
61. Inspectors had the pleasure of meeting a group of articulate, caring and kind young people, all of whom said that they felt safe and had someone to turn to as a trusted adult.

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6 February 2024

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To the children and young people in East Sussex

Inspection of children's services

In December 2023, Ofsted inspectors visited your area. They looked at children and young people's experiences of the help, protection and care given to them by workers at the local authority. They also looked at what leaders at the local authority do to make these services better.

We have asked the workers at the local authority to share this letter with you. It tells you the main things that inspectors found. There is a more detailed report on our website that you can read if you would like to.

What grades did inspectors give the local authority?

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

What did the inspectors find?

- Children in East Sussex continue to receive consistently strong and effective support that helps to improve their lives. When children or families need help, this is provided as soon as possible. If children are at risk, social workers and other professionals take action to make them safer.
- Children are helped by experienced social workers who visit them regularly and know them well. Sometimes specialist workers also become involved, so that the right additional support is provided. Specialist services, such as connected coaches and the collaboration against child exploitation (CACE) group for parents, make a big difference to children's lives.
- For a small number of children, the plans created to support them and their families are not clear enough.
- When children are unable to live with their parents or other family members, they live with local foster families or in other homes, where they feel safe and supported.
- Children who cannot live with their families are often supported by the same social worker for a long time. Children get to know and trust their workers, who help them to keep in touch with their friends and family, because they know this is important.
- Older children leaving care are supported to get to know and trust their personal advisers, who provide them with ongoing help as they become adults. Most care leavers receive good support, although sometimes it is not ambitious enough.
- Children in care and care leavers participate in forums and have a voice. Managers look carefully at the feedback completed by children in care and care leavers, and they are looking for more opportunities to increase involvement in discussions about how they can provide the best support.
- Leaders in the council want to do the right things for children and their families. Social workers and personal advisers love working in East Sussex because they feel valued and supported.
- Inspectors had the pleasure of meeting a group of articulate, caring and kind children and young people, all of whom said that they feel safe and have someone to turn to as a trusted adult.

Yours faithfully

Tom Anthony
Lead inspector
His Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted ILACS Action Plan 2024

Improvement Area	Actions	Lead(s)	Timescale
The quality of plans for children and care leavers so that they are all specific, measurable and timebound	<p>Child's Plan and Care Leavers Pathway plan steering group to develop enhanced guidance and implement workforce development plan to strengthen consistency of SMART plans.</p> <p>Case audits to include greater focus on plans being specific, measurable and timebound.</p>	<p>Nicola McGeown (Principal Social Worker)</p> <p>Chris Jackson (HoS Locality)</p> <p>Sally Carnie (HoS Looked After Children)</p>	May 2024
The recording of management oversight, supervision and direction.	<p>Relaunch of Supervision policy across all Practice Managers and Operational Managers.</p> <p>Further development of guidance on recording with mandatory attendance at training.</p> <p>Supervision audit redesigned to include sharper focus on recording of management oversight and challenge</p>	Nicola McGeown, (Principal Social Worker)	June 2024
The oversight, timeliness and rigour of the response to children:	<p>Roll out of Neglect Toolkit across teams</p> <p>Implementation of multi-agency neglect forum.</p>	Nicola McGeown, (Principal Social Worker)	In progress
(i) experiencing neglect, including children in the Public Law Outline pre proceedings and	<p>Implement improvements to Public Outline Tracker and include in performance reporting dashboard.</p> <p>Deliver targeted training on parental assessments to improve timeliness.</p>	<p>Chris Jackson, (HoS Locality)</p> <p>Chris Jackson, (HoS Locality)</p>	<p>March 2024</p> <p>June 2024</p>
(ii) in private fostering arrangements.	Revise and implement procedures regarding visits in private fostering cases (language schools).	Jo Nash, Strategic Lead MASH & DAT	April 2024

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