

Westmorland and Furness Children's Social Care Improvement and Development Plan

2023 – 2024

Introduction

Our aspiration in Westmorland and Furness new unitary council is to be at least Good, with a skilled and supported workforce focused on strength-based effective practice making a difference to the lived experience of children and young people.

A lot has been achieved, and staff should be proud of their commitment and dedication but there remains much more to do. We have taken the approach that our future ambition can only be delivered by working together across all of Children Services. As a new Children Services, we need to ensure that we build an inclusive, progressive strength-based culture focused on pride in the work that we do, passionate about making a difference, supportive and respectful of colleagues, children, young people and their families alike.

This plan sets out the actions we are taking to improve our services for children in need of help and protection, children in care and care leavers, building on the work undertaken between January and March 2023 to respond to the outcomes from the Ofsted ILACS inspection of Cumbria children's services in 2022. Whilst many of the actions have been completed, those which remain outstanding are referenced in this plan to ensure there is continuity of purpose during a period of significant system change.

The intention is to work with staff and partners to ensure that we are clear about our longer term ambitions to improve practice, support our people, have effective partnerships and that children, young people and their families are active participants in the decisions that affect their lives.

Governance and oversight

This Plan includes actions to address key priorities identified through our early self-evaluation processes and the 2022 inspection.

The work to continue to improve children's social care will be overseen by the Director of Children's Services; internal and external quality assurance processes such as surveys, audits, and reviews, alongside the views and feedback from children and young people and staff.

Progress on the actions in the plan will be monitored regularly by an Improvement Board chaired by the Director of Children's Services reporting to the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet and subject to scrutiny.

Overall performance of children's social care services incorporates statutory and local measures to assess the impact of our improvement work (see Appendix 1).

Monitoring and reporting on progress

The Plan will be managed by the identified lead in Quality, Resources and Transformation with progress reported regularly to the Improvement Board and the Lead Member for Children's Services. Implementation will take place within services and where required focused task groups.

An assessment of progress on implementing the Plan will take place monthly, using the descriptions below:

Status	Progress against timescale
Grey	Action not started
Blue	Action completed and signed off
Green	Action on target
Amber	Action delayed and likely to miss completion deadline
Red	Action significantly delayed and has missed completion deadline (new completion deadline date required)

Priorities for improvement

Our overall priorities are to:

1. Provide inspirational leadership and effective management for our workforce
2. Ensure the quality of our practice is consistently good, enabling us to meet children’s needs
3. Develop a learning culture supported by robust quality assurance and performance management
4. Include the voice of the child through our practice and as part of our processes.

We aim to achieve this by undertaking the detailed actions set out below:

Action Plan

A. Impact of leaders on social work practice			
Strategic Lead – Assistant Director Children & Families, Jonathan Taylor			
Our aim is to ensure there is effective, impactful oversight and challenge by leaders, managers and IROs resulting in improved practice and outcomes for children with a sufficient and flexible workforce with the right skills and expertise to meet the needs of children and families			
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
1. Providing strategic leadership	1.1 Develop a Children and Families Quality Assurance Framework	August 2023	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor
	1.2 Review and relaunch IRO outcome resolution process with IRO service and wider social care management team to ensure a focus on impact and outcomes	September 2023	Assistant Director Quality, Resources & Transformation – Amy Holliman
	1.3 Review delegated authority procedure and ensure expectations are understood at every level	September 2023	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor

	1.4 Revise and agree the Terms of Reference and forms for Legal Placement Panel, Permanence Panel	September 2023	Senior Manager – Jean Mawdsley, Stefan Chapleo
	1.5 Deliver a programme of coaching workshops for leaders at all levels focused on vision, expectations and impactful leadership	October 2023	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor
	1.6 Oversee the service testing and implementation of the separation of the children’s case system (LCS)	March 2024	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor
2. Creating a learning culture	2.1 Implement quarterly collaborative practice week providing line of sight for leaders at all levels to frontline practice	September 2023	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor
	2.2 Establish clear approach to learning from practice including embedding key themes from local and national research, feedback, complaints, local and national safeguarding practice reviews	September 2023	Assistant Director Quality & Resources & Transformation, Amy Holliman
3. Developing the workforce	3.1 Launch practice masterclass programme and establish monthly development planner	September 2023	Senior Manager – Jean Mawdsley
	3.2 Develop and publish IRO practice standards	September 2023	Assistant Director Quality & Resources & Transformation, Amy Holliman
	3.3 Review and develop options for strengthening the voice of the child in all the work we do, and securing meaningful engagement and participation of children, young people and families	September 2023	Senior Manager – Jean Mawdsley Principal Social Worker – Tracey Thompson
	3.4 Create unique W&F recruitment offer for ASYEs including a development programme, define approach to social work academy	March 2024	Principal Social Worker – Tracey Thompson Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor

	3.5 Develop a social work workforce strategy and action plan to meet retention and recruitment needs including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recruitment and retention incentives • learning and development needs of staff • learning from best practice and new initiatives • Emotional wellbeing support for staff • Digital offer 	March 2024	Principal Social Worker – Tracey Thompson People Management Business Partner – Amy Thompson
4. Managing Performance	4.1 Review and relaunch management oversight and supervision policy	September 2023	Senior Manager - Stefan Chapleo
	4.2 Establish rigorous contract monitoring process for hosted services i.e., fostering, adoption, residential and edge of care	September 2023	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor
	4.3 Implement regular monitoring for all children placed in unregulated/unregistered provision with management oversight and documented actions	October 2023	Senior Manager – Jean Mawdsley
	4.4 Undertake thematic review of management oversight and supervision to assess impact	December 2023	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor

Impact Measures	
Key performance indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision frequency • Workforce retention • EPW rates
Feedback and quality indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision audits • Observations of practice • Collaborative practice audits

Interdependencies with other plans	Workforce strategy; Council Delivery Framework, QA framework; Signs of Safety Implementation plan
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B. Experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Our aim is to ensure that our response to children and young people in need of help and protection is of consistently good quality and results in sustained improvements to their lives.

Strategic Lead – Senior Manager Stefan Chapleo

Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
5. Identifying and responding to need	5.1 Review and implement consistent approach and assessment and planning supported by revised guidance for staff	October 2023	Senior Manager Stefan Chapleo
	5.2 Introduce mandatory face to face training to secure consistency of practice in assessment and planning	October 2023	
	5.3 Review impact of 5.1 and 5.2 at December 2023 Practice week through thematic audits etc.	December 2023	
Theme	What are we going to do	By When	Lead
6. Delivering an Early Help offer	6.1 Undertake mapping of existing services	October 2023	Senior Manager Early Help - Lorraine Hopkins

	6.2 Develop a strategic plan for the transformation of the Early Help offer	December 2023	
	6.3 Review and agree the Early Help partnership offer	December 2023	
	6.4 Review commissioning process for 0-19 child and family support services in partnership with commissioning service	December 2023	
	6.5 Implement revised Early Help offer for the local area	March 2024	
	6.6 Implement Family Hub delivery plan	March 2024	
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
7. Making good decisions and providing effective help	7.1 Review and evaluate our current practice model and present options for strengthening the approach	December 2024	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor
	7.2 Develop and embed the use of the LCS practice performance dashboard	December 2024	Senior Manager Stefan Chapleo
	7.3 Evaluate the consistency of our practice methodology being embedded as part of December 2024 practice week.	December 2024	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
8. Identifying and responding to all types of abuse	8.1 Develop and deliver domestic abuse training programme	December 2023	Senior Manager – Jean Mawdsley
	8.2 Develop proposals regarding a domestic abuse workflow within our case recording system	December 2023	

	8.3 Review the domestic abuse practice model six months post implementation	February 2024	
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
9. Preventing harm to children who experience neglect	9.1 Develop a refreshed partnership neglect strategy and multi-agency implementation plan	September 2023	Senior Manager Stefan Chapleo
	9.2 Review and evaluate impact of work undertaken including neglect thematic audits	March 2024	
	9.3 Develop tools for children's services staff to ensure focus on lived experience for children	December 2023	
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
10. Responding to Homeless young people aged 16 and 17	10.1 Review options leaflet for young people and deliver training with clear expectations of practice standards	January 2024	Senior Manager - Stefan Chapleo
	10.2 Audit of cases to ensure practice expectations are being delivered (children are being given leaflets and workers ensure that they are clear on their rights and that this is evidenced on the child's file.)	January 2024	

	10.3 Review findings of HAST review of 16/17 homelessness and determine any outstanding actions	January 2024	
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
11. Responding to children who go missing and children at risk of exploitation	11.1 Evaluate CERAR process following implementation of complex safeguarding teams, including effectiveness of safety planning and risk reduction (CE and missing)	October 2023	Senior Manager – Jean Mawdsley
	11.2 Evaluate of impact of complex safeguarding team	November 2023	
	11.3 Evaluate process of return interviews for children who go missing who are not open to social care	November 2023	
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
12. Responding to unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	12.1 Develop a cohesive and future ready service response to UASC including appropriate assurance reporting	January 2024	Senior Manager – Jean Mawdsley
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead

13. Provide support for children with disabilities	13.1 Include a specific focus on CWD practice, with joint auditing, within Practice Week	September 2023	Senior Manager Stefan Chapleo
	13.2 Undertake a full review of CWD practice in to establish baseline	September 2023	
	13.3 Undertake a review of the effectiveness of the short break homes	December 2023	
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
14. Edge of care practice	14.1 Review edge of care approach and identify recommendations	December 2023	Senior Manager – Jean Mawdsley
	14.2 Review and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the work undertaken by the resilience team	December 2023	

Impact Measures	
Key performance indicators	Re-referral rates Assessment timescales CP plan rate

	CP repeat plan CP over 2 years Statutory visit timescales CE assessment timescales Early Help indicators Return home interview timescales Number of repeat missing episodes
Quality and feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative audits • Family feedback • Practice observation
Interdependencies with other plans	CYP DA Group action plan; Community Safety Partnership Plan, Early Help Strategy and implementation plan; Family Hubs delivery plan; commissioning strategy, Signs of Safety implementation plan, CWD Improvement Plan; SEND Improvement Plan

C. Focus: Experiences and progress of Children in Care

Our aim is to ensure that children are looked after in a timely manner and in their best interest, and only for as long as necessary. Permanence is achieved at the earliest opportunity. Children are safe and settled where they live, and supported to have strong and meaningful relationships and networks within their family and community, understand their life story and identity, and have their health and wellbeing needs met and are supported to achieve good educational outcomes.

Strategic lead – Senior manager, Jean Mawdsley

Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
15. Improving experiences and outcomes for children in care	15.1 Hold workshop to identify actions to strengthen joint working between social care and health	October 2023	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor
	15.2 Evaluate the effectiveness of the joint working between the virtual school and district teams, including development of an Ambitions Panel	December 2023	Virtual Head - Jane Fallon

			Senior Manager – Jean Mawdsley
	15.3 Develop a new cared for children and care leavers strategy and action plan	January 2024	Senior Manager – Jean Mawdsley
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
16. Sufficiency of provision	16.1 Develop services, policies, procedures and oversight in line with unregulated provision regulations	July 2023	Senior Manager - Jean Mawdsley
	16.2 Undertake independent review of sufficiency and consider proposals for future service delivery and permanence offer, alongside implications for the current strategy	October 2023	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor
	16.3 Develop approach to timely decision making and joint between commissioning and social care	December 2023	Assistant Director Children & Families - Jonathan Taylor, Assistant Director Commissioning and Procurement – Sharon Simpson

Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
17. Private Fostering	17.1 Review and relaunch of the Private fostering checklist to ensure that DBS checks are routinely completed and consistently recorded on ICS	July 2023	Senior Manager - Jean Mawdsley
	17.2 Audit cases to ensure DBS checks consistently completed and recorded on child's file and is embedded into practice	November 2023	
Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead

18. Legal pathways and planning	18.1 Implement Legal workspace including training of all frontline staff	July 2023	Assistant Director Children & Families – Jonathan Taylor
	18.2 Evaluate impact of new legal workspace	October 2023	
	18.3 Engage with regional working group to develop consistent framework and practices across the Northwest including: Working group with NW around Supervision Order policy for NW	July 2023	Senior Manager - Stefan Chapleo
	Notification and Transfer across Local Authority Boundaries Procedure	July 2023	
	Northwest Pre- Care and Care Proceeding	August 2023	
	CAFCASS pilot to be considered	October 2023	
	Review pre proceedings guidance and process	October 2023	

Impact Measures	
Key performance indicators	Permanence plans for all CLA CLA rates Number of children entering care Number of children leaving care Proportion of CLA in in house foster placements CLA review timescales CLA statutory visits Participation in CLA review CLA with 3+ placements in last year CLA living in same placement for 2+ years CLA placed outside LA boundary

Quality and Feedback	Collaborative and thematic audits Practice observation Feedback from cared for children
Interdependencies with other plans	CLA and Care leavers strategy; Be healthy action Plan; Sufficiency Strategy and action plan; CLA and care leavers education delivery, Sufficiency Statement and action plan; Foster carers for Cumbria plan; RAA delivery plan, FJB; Cafcass liaison meeting; NW Help and protection meeting

D. Focus: Experiences and progress of Care Leavers

Our aim is to improve transitions to adulthood, consistency of practice and pathway planning, support young care leavers to build supportive networks and stay in touch, to secure positive engagement with education, employment and training and have a clear and accessible offer for care leavers.

Strategic Lead – Jean Mawdsley, Senior Manager

Theme	What we are going to do	By when	Lead
Health and emotional wellbeing	Work with NHS health partners to ensure health offer for care leavers is clear and accessible	December 2023	Work with NHS health partners to ensure health offer for care leavers is clear and accessible
Employment, education and training	Work with partners including virtual school to develop a care leavers Ambitions group to support care leavers to engage with EET pathways	December 2023	Work with partners including virtual school to develop a care leavers Ambitions group to support care leavers to engage with EET pathways

Support into adulthood	Develop a delivery plan for Westmorland and Furness Care experienced young people which is aligned with our cared for and leaving care strategy, and the new ILACS care leavers judgement.	January 2024	Senior Manager - Jean Mawdsley
Local Offer for Care Leavers	Review and refresh local offer for care leavers incorporating vulnerable groups (including young parents, LGBTQ+, custody, UASC, mental health and wellbeing) including launch with staff to ensure understanding and promotion	January 2024	
Health and emotional wellbeing	Work with public health to develop a clear offer for care leavers re. emotional health and wellbeing including access to leisure.	March 2024	
Relationships and participation	Ensure all our care experienced young people are clear about their entitlements and the support on offer through targeted campaign and awareness raising – in partnership with care leavers forum	March 2024	

Impact Measures	
Key performance indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased numbers of young people who remain in EET through to 25 Care leavers in suitable accommodation Care leavers in education, employment and training Care leavers in higher education Care leaver visits

	Care leavers with up to date pathway review Care leavers in apprenticeships Eligible CLA with up to date pathway plan
Quality and feedback	Collaborative audits Feedback from care leavers
Interdependencies with other plans	CLA and Care leavers strategy; Care Leavers action plan; CLA and care leavers education delivery plan