

# CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

<b>DATE</b>	14/11/2024
<b>REPORT OF</b>	Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Children's Services Improvement Journey
<b>STATUS</b>	Open

## CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

Improving services for children is one of the core priorities within the Council Plan.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Led by the North East Lincolnshire Council (NELC) Children's Services Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and supported by Sector Led Improvement Partners (SLIP), progress continues to be made as part of the Children's Services improvement journey.

We have undertaken a mid-way review of the 2024/25 improvement plan, and taking account of our journey to date, the reset on our vision and ambition, consideration regarding progress on our inaugural Improvement Plan and findings from recent monitoring visits, we have refined our Improvement Plan for 2024/25 and reset our strategic objectives and priority areas of focus. A summary of the plan is available via Appendix 1.

Led by the DfE Commissioner, the Continuous Improvement Board continues to oversee the improvement plan progress, impact and outcomes in the context of high support and high challenge

## MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

This report seeks to update scrutiny panel members on NELC's Children's Services improvement journey and ensure that scrutiny members are briefed on the performance and implementation of the ongoing Improvement Plan.

### 1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1. New SLIP arrangements were enacted from the end March 2024, which demonstrated confidence in the NELC leadership and management team's capacity to co-ordinate and facilitate the improvement arrangements. A robust SLIP delivery programme is in place involving four Local Authority SLIP partners (North Tyneside, Camden, Leeds and North Yorkshire), along with individual SLIP delivery partners, all of whom are contributing to the implementation of our priority areas of focus.
- 1.2. The most recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit was undertaken in September 2024, with a focus on children in need (CIN) and children in need of protection (CP). Ofsted found that since January 2023, children subject to CIN/CP planning are

better safeguarded. The full report is available here: [NELC Ofsted Monitoring Visit September 2024](#).

## 2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

2.1. In the context of the Improvement Plan, a risk register has been developed and is routinely updated and shared via the Continuous Improvement Board. Any identified risks have mitigating actions in place which provide assurance to board members.

2.2. As we move forwards in our improvement journey, opportunities to drive forward transformational change, include:

- **WORKFORCE:** Permanent, experienced leadership and management team now in place to drive forward practice improvements and transformational change. Ongoing focus on workforce development including recruitment and retention
- **QUALITY OF PRACTICE:** Creating the conditions to enhance the consistency and quality of practice i.e. as a result of an amplified focus on supervision
- **SECTOR LED IMPROVEMENT:** Utilising the added value of sector led support to enhance our improvement journey leading to practice improvements
- **FINANCIAL ENVELOPE:** Using the money that's in the system to best effect (including through core and grant funding)
- **MANAGING POPULATIONS AND DEMAND:** Refreshed practice approach and threshold document, with partners integrated into the front door.
- **PARTNERSHIPS:** Amplified focus on how partners/partnerships contribute to the children's system and ensuring opportunities for high challenge and high support; building on refresh of governance arrangements e.g. via the development and implementation of associated strategies
- **SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES:** Performance and data are key enablers and pending rationalisation of education systems and changes to Liquid Logic, will be key to managing populations and demand and ensuring effective assurance and oversight
- **CORPORATE PARENTING:** Raising awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities that contribute to the development and implementation of the corporate parenting offer and care leaver offer
- **SUFFICIENCY:** Amplified focus on the foster friendly initiative and the development of the fostering offer to value and increase the number of foster carers; and the development of our children's home provision, and supported accommodation / housing options

- **LISTEN, LEARN, REVIEW, ADAPT:** Through our assurance framework (taking account of voice, performance/data and practice wisdom), we are able to listen, learn, review and adapt to continue to make progress and improve outcomes

### **3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1. There is dedicated communications officer capacity linked to Children's Services which is contributing to enhanced, proactive and responsive communications across the workforce and from an external perspective, including in the context of our amplified focus on recruitment marketing activity.
- 3.2. Promoting NELC as a place to work; and on building relationships with key partners across the place of North East Lincolnshire. This is having a demonstrable positive impact on recruitment.

### **4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 4.1. The DfE have directly awarded improvement funding to NELC which demonstrates their confidence in our capacity to manage our improvement priorities.
- 4.2. The continuing approach to our priority areas of focus is showing a positive impact on the budget trajectories, in the context of investing to save. We are also providing high challenge and high support across partnerships to ensure all are consistently and comparatively contributing to the local children's agenda.
- 4.3. A continued focus on key improvement priorities will result in continued improvements in the quality of practice, reducing demand and meeting need at the lowest level which will contribute to good financial management and planning.

### **5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS**

#### **5.1. Improvement journey: recent areas of focus and key highlights against our strategic objectives**

##### **5.1.1. Embed our empowering leadership and management approach**

- Work is progressing to develop an 'umbrella strategy' which will bring together the overarching ambition and priority areas of focus, which are delivered through key partnerships and boards, and associated strategies. The strategy will articulate how we are 'stronger together' and how, through the power of partnership, we can improve outcomes for children, young people and families across the borough

- Following on from the leadership sessions with a national leader, we have scheduled a programme of leadership development sessions from November 2024 to February 2025, which will include over 100 front line practitioners from across Children's Services
- We have renewed our audit approach, including clarity of roles, and revised the audit toolkit to take account of the new arrangements, and the move away from graded audits. The outcomes of audits are providing the basis on which to continue to develop our practice and to share and showcase examples of good practice across the workforce
- Building on the CIN/CP summer event, work is progressing to co-ordinate a Christmas event, which will provide further opportunities for children and families who have experience of the system to share their views, have their say and engage in an informal environment
- We continue our focus on enabling opportunities for young people and parents/carers to have meaningful engagement on key boards and partnerships, which ensures that the views and lived experiences are able to shape and influence at a strategic level
- The Corporate Parenting Board continues to be co-chaired by a care experienced young person, the Parent Carer Forum are engaging directly and a foster carer representative have now taken up membership too
- Corporate Parenting Fortnight, featuring Care Leavers week, took place from 28 October to 8 November 2024, and included a range of events and activities for children in our care and care leavers, along with key stakeholder events including the Fostering Friendly Brunch, the Corporate and Community Parenting Partnership Event and YOUUnique awards. The events provided opportunities to develop relationships with and better understand the lived experiences of children in our care, care leavers and foster carers, and enabled key stakeholders across the partnership to have meaningful conversations about the power we have to change lives, and how we can continue our journey to be the best corporate and community parents we can be
- Working collaboratively across the partnership, there has been further progress in developing and implementing the delivery plans to respond to the priority areas of focus (in relation to child exploitation, child sexual abuse, neglect and early help. Examples of early impact include the publication of the neglect tool / screening tool, development of neglect champions, ongoing programme of neglect training; child sexual abuse toolkit in

development, and focus on commissioning child sexual abuse training as a priority in order to upskill the partnership in relation to identified, intervention and recovery work; a sharpened focus on the identification of children at risk of and experiencing child exploitation to ensure proactive and timely sharing of information regarding locations, offenders and hotspots for disruption.

- We have commissioned the Local Government Association to facilitate a corporate parenting peer review / diagnostic, which will be focussed around the contributions across the council and wider partnership to our corporate and community parenting agenda. The key lines of enquiry will be in relation to the board arrangements, partnerships, employability, emotional wellbeing and mental health, accommodation / housing, which will all be underpinned by the voice of the child. The peer review will take place between 13 and 16 January 2025, and planning and arrangements are underway

#### 5.1.2. **Help, support and protect our children, young people and families**

- The purposefulness of intervention to effect change, including the use of direct tools and the quality and evolution of CIN/CP planning continues to be a focus. Additional training and reflection has been co-designed and co-facilitated with a young person to strengthen planning and intervention. The training, which was attended by over 100 front line practitioners, managers and leaders was extremely powerful and reinforced the importance of relational, child centred practice
- Work is progressing to roll out the risk analysis framework across leaders, managers and front line practitioners, to transition from the use of safety plans to strengthen the response to risk analysis within established planning frameworks. This will ensure that risk analysis considers the child's development needs, parenting capacity and family and environmental factors
- Following the March 2024 visit, the Front Door Health Check revisit was held in October 2024, with five senior leaders from across the Yorkshire and Humberside region. They observed an open, honest, reflective culture led by stable and visible managers. They described the partnership arrangements as completely transformed and unrecognisable to previously with strong partner connectivity and decision made for children, which has led to significant progress since the last visit, and a clear set of expectations for children
- Through the embedding of the CIN/CP and Assessment Assurance Meetings, and the Quality Assurance and Joint Audit

Meeting, there are strengthened assurance mechanisms in place and a focus on live reflection on practice and outcomes for children

#### **5.1.3. Deliver a high quality offer for children in our care**

- We are working collaboratively with SLIP delivery partners to develop children in care planning and quality of practice. There are ongoing improvements, and an ongoing focus, on the timeliness of children in our care reviews, and along with the permanence tracker, there is a continued focus on ensuring the effectiveness of planning to meet children's needs
- There has been a significant focus on foster carer recruitment, which includes the development of foster friendly businesses and schools, as well as the role of fostering ambassador(s). Since its inception in April 2024, there are more than 70 foster friendly businesses, more than 20 foster friendly schools, and 3 fostering ambassadors. They all contribute to raising awareness the importance of foster carers, and how they can change the life of a child. Foster carers experiences are also helping to raise awareness of the importance of their roles. This has contributed to as many fostering enquiries in 6 months, as in the previous year (45), 8 of whom are currently progressing through to assessment
- The new fostering allowance model has been implemented from October 2024, and is being supported by a comprehensive training, development and support offer
- Work is underway to explore the Care Friends App where foster carers can identify and put forward their friends and associates who they think would make good foster carers to help us to target people who may not otherwise consider fostering. It can also be used to circulate information and messages to carers

#### **5.1.4. Deliver a high quality offer for care leavers**

- We are working collaboratively with SLIP delivery partners to develop care leaver planning and quality of practice. We are focussing on further strengthening the timeliness and quality of pathway plans to best meet and support our care leavers needs and aspirations. Through dip sampling and auditing of pathway plans, young people's voice is usually well established in plans as a practice principle
- A bespoke learning and development programme has been developed for the Leaving Care Team.
- We have co-produced the new Care Leaver Local Offer and as such, care leavers have directly influenced the design and development of the offer, and a number of young people have

specifically written part of the offer themselves. This includes a new financial policy, care experience as a protected characteristic, improved partnership support, the start of an 'all age' offer and awareness raising and training

- Protected characteristics for care experienced people has now been endorsed through the relevant Council governance and democratic processes including Full Council. Work is underway to ensure this is best utilised to strengthen our offer across the Council
- Additional housing capacity has been created, and further collaborative discussions are ongoing to create more accommodation for 16 and 17 year old accommodation

## **5.2. Children's Social Care performance update**

- 5.2.1. There is continued oversight of performance across Children's Services on a day-to-day basis, week-to-week and month-to-month basis, and there is routine reporting, oversight and tracking across relevant governance and partnership arrangements, including in the context of the Continuous Improvement Board.
- 5.2.2. Key performance exceptions and highlights are included in appendix 2.

## **6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. No impact

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. No impact

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. No impact

## **9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. No impact

## **10. MONITORING COMMENTS**

- 10.1. This report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

## **11. WARD IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1. All wards impacted

**12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12.1. None

**13. CONTACT OFFICER(S)**

13.1. Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services

**ANN-MARIE MATSON**

**DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**



## APPENDIX 1: Children's Services Improvement Plan 2024/25 mid way refresh – summary

Council ambition	Stronger Economy and Stronger Communities				
Vision for children	Our Children, Our Future				
Strategic objectives	Embed our empowering leadership and management approach	Help, support and protect our children, young people and families	Deliver a high quality offer for children in our care	Deliver a high quality offer for care leavers	Develop the quality of our learning and education landscape for all children
Priority area(s) of focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vision, strategy and partnerships</li> <li>2. Workforce development</li> <li>3. Assurance framework (including governance)</li> <li>4. Children, young people and families views and lived experiences / voice and engagement</li> <li>5. Safeguarding Children Partnership</li> <li>6. Corporate Parenting arrangements</li> <li>7. SENDAP governance</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Child Sexual Abuse</li> <li>9. Integrated Front Door / Emergency Duty Team</li> <li>10. Strategy discussions</li> <li>11. Assessments (CASS / CDS)</li> <li>12. CIN/ CP / Courts</li> <li>13. Private fostering</li> <li>14. Children's Disability Service</li> <li>15. Family Help</li> <li>16. Family Hubs</li> <li>17. Youth Justice</li> <li>18. Young and Safe offer</li> <li>19. Child protection conference systems and processes</li> <li>20. Family networks approach</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. Assessments, planning and review (CIOC)</li> <li>22. Fostering recruitment, retention and regulatory compliance</li> <li>23. Children's Homes provision / sufficiency</li> <li>24. Commissioning of external placements</li> <li>25. CIOC review (IRS) systems and processes</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. Leaving Care Team</li> <li>27. Care leaver offer</li> <li>28. Housing and supported accommodation provision / regulation and regulation</li> <li>29. Quality and impact of pathway planning</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>30. Early Years</li> <li>31. Elected Home Education</li> <li>32. Exclusions and suspensions</li> <li>33. Attainment of CIOC, children with a social worker, and children with SEND</li> <li>34. Development of the extension duties of the virtual school</li> <li>35. NEETS</li> <li>36. School attendance</li> </ol>
Creating the conditions for success	Practice Approach	Assurance Framework	Performance Framework	Voice and Engagement Framework	Workforce Development Strategy
Success measures	Quantity indicators (performance data)	Quality indicators (audit / assurance)	Outcomes data	Feedback from children, young people and families	Feedback from the children's services workforce

## APPENDIX 2: Performance exceptions and highlights

In North East Lincolnshire, children and young people are more likely to:

- be supported by permanent staff
- receive support early and be less likely to need a statutory service
- remaining living within their own family and community

(than in 2021/22 and January 2024)

	Where we were (2021/22)	Where we were (January 2024)	Where we are now (September 2024)
% front line practitioners who are permanent	25%	69%	74%
Unallocated cases	166	0	0
Average caseloads (and highest)	26 (49)	20 (30)	20 (30)
Numbers of contacts to the IFD per month	1852	1448	825
Numbers of referrals per month	291	220	123
Re-referrals %	29%	27%	21%
Assessment timeliness %	68%	89%	93%
Numbers of children in need	2415	1857	1794
Numbers of children on a child protection plan	353	269	151
Numbers of children in care	629	505	439
Care leavers in suitable accommodation	88%	90%	96%
Foster carer enquiries	45 (full year)	46 (full year)	45 (6 months)
Number of assessments approved at Fostering Panel	3	4	8 (in progress to date)

### **Further key headlines (as at September 2024) include:**

- Average caseloads has slightly reduced from 21 in August to 20 in September for frontline social workers. This continues to have daily oversight, and the ongoing recruitment of more permanent social workers will continue to have a positive impact on this
- The large majority of supervision is held in timescales and there is robust management oversight to ensure consistency, to maintain and build on compliance, and to improve quality
- 541 cases were open to targeted Family Help with a further 566 cases open to partners, which demonstrates that children are receiving help and support at the earliest point. Steps up to social care remain relatively low demonstrating that Family Help are able to manage the risk and only escalate cases where appropriate
- The number of cases open to social care services has decreased but remains fairly static overall. Children in need numbers have remained higher than our improvement plan target levels, mainly due to cases stepping down to children in need from child protection and children in our care. There is a focus on throughput following successful intervention within the teams
- The number of contacts received in September 2024 is in line with previous months, though there has been a drop in the number of safeguarding contacts and an increase in early help contacts. The timeliness of contacts to referrals has increased slightly but remains below target levels and as such, remains an ongoing area of focus to ensure timely decision making and intervention
- The rolling rate of initial child protection conferences held in timescales has remained stable, and is in line with statutory neighbours, though it remains below our target levels, and as such, remains an ongoing area of focus to ensure there are no delays to children progressing to child protection where appropriate
- There were two re-registrations in September 2024, for children who had previously been on a plan, compared to 0 in August 2024, but not in the last two years, though this remains below our comparators
- 12 children entered our care in month whilst 6 children exited our care in September 2024 with a total of 75 children leaving care in 2024/25 to date. There has been a review of processes regarding entry to care and the legal tracking and support panel which will ensure robust oversight of entry to care and initiation of legal proceedings. To further unpin this there are developments underway in respect of children on the edge of care, with a focus of preventing this through intensive wrap around support
- Visits to children in our care in timescales remain consistently high, and there have been further improvements in the timeliness of visits to children in need of protection. There is daily oversight on this to maintain and further improve timeliness of visits