

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)	Date of Meeting:	4 June 2024
Subject:	Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement		
Report of:	Assistant Director of Children's Services (Quality Assurance and Safeguarding)	Wards Affected:	All
Cabinet Portfolio:	Children, Schools and Families		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt Confidential Report:	No		

Report – Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement

This report will provide an overview of Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement activity between February and April 2024 in Sefton Children's Social Care. In addition to this, it will set out audit performance over the last 12 months offering a view of direction of travel and areas of focus. Alongside the 'deep dive' audit activity which takes place each month, an increasing amount of focused dip sampling and quality assurance is now taking place. This work is undertaken as a result of lines of enquiry opened by performance data, or the need to evaluate or understand a discreet area of practice. Make A Difference interviews are also arranged to drill down on what contributed to achieving good outcomes for children and their families.

Audit judgements - last 12 Months

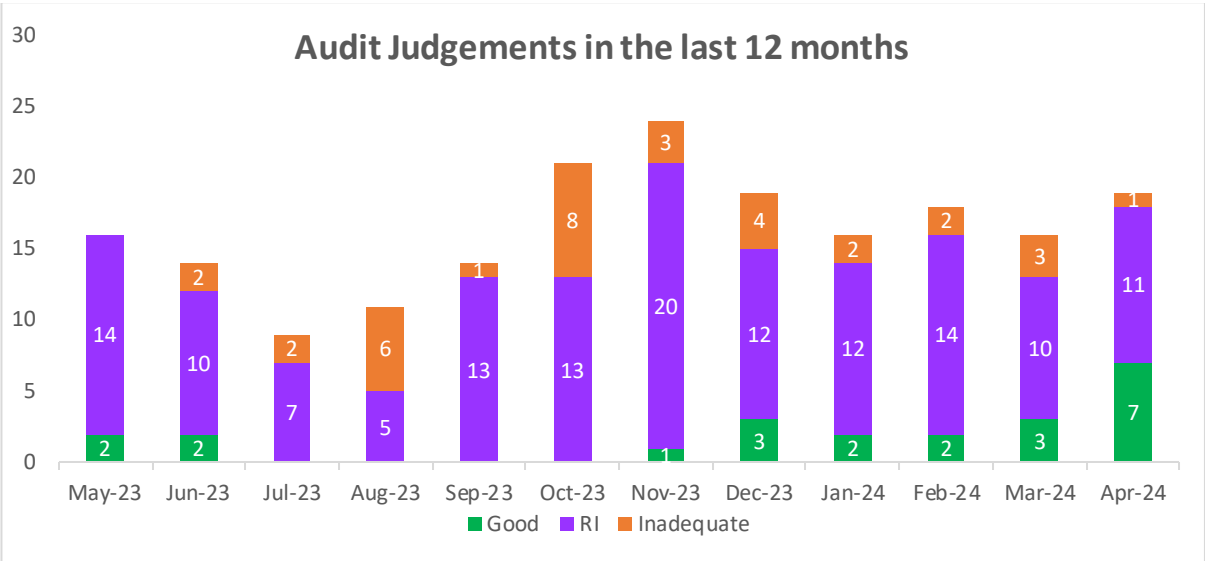
The chart below summarises activity over the last 12 months; it provides a wider context and shows gradual improvement over time. There is clear evidence that the amount of work graded Inadequate has reduced significantly over the last 6 months. Most work audited across the service continues to be considered Requires Improvement to Be Good overall, but work identified as 'Good' is increasingly becoming a feature with 'Good' judgements noted every month in the last 6 months with some domains graded outstanding. Positively, 37% of work audited in April 2024 was judged 'Good' which is the highest figure recorded since the Quality Assurance & Impact Framework was launched in October 2022.

In April 2024, we launched a refreshed audit tool which removed some audit domains linked specifically to recording and other aspects of compliance. These areas were important to consider at earlier points in our improvement journey as we needed to embed basic practice standards. The refreshed tool now focuses on the 5 practice principles, and specifically, the outcomes for the child and family. This shift coincides with more audits being scored 'Good' overall in the month. The tool may have

influenced this shift but also this may reflect improved practice and outcomes which we have begun to see over time. 50% of the audits judged 'good' were moderated to ensure consistency of grades and, encouragingly, all were upheld. There will be increased moderation over the coming months while the new tool is embedded so we are confident that our good grades are such and we are not becoming overly optimistic.

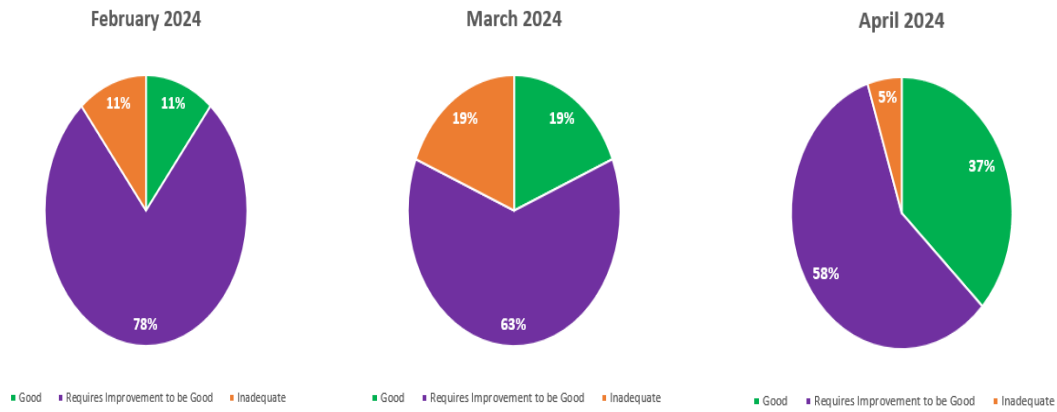
Sefton’s improvement plan identifies 5 ‘practice principles’ which are:

- Assessment
- Plans and Planning
- Child Centred Relational Practice
- Management Oversight and Supervision
- Creating Permanence.

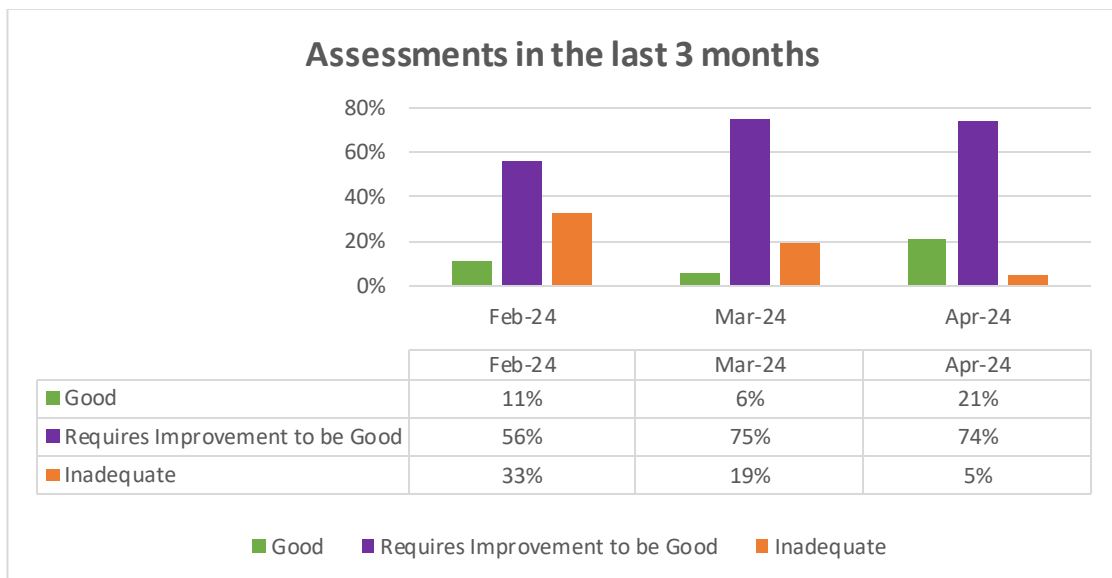


Recent Audit Activity – February 2024 to April 2024

Since the last report, **53** deep dive audits have been completed across Children’s Social Care (Feb24-April 24). **19** of these audits were moderated (**36%**) which resulted in **4** audits being downgraded to ‘Requires Improvement to be Good’ or ‘Inadequate’ and 1 audit upgraded to ‘Good’ following moderation. The green sections of the pie charts indicate % of good grades.



Assessments



What do we know?

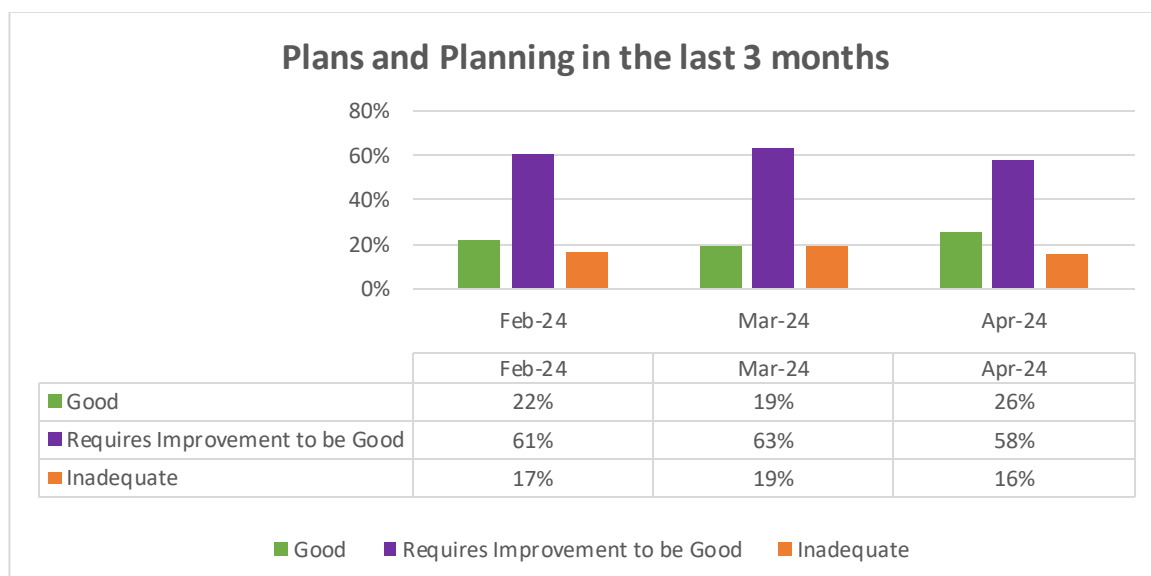
- Positively, most assessments are completed in timescales and the quality of assessments is improving (see direction of travel chart above.)
- Better quality assessments show evidence of effective collaboration with family members and relevant multi-agency partners to understand the child’s lived experience and support a clear plan for the child.
- Increased evidence of recent assessment training being used to inform assessment work.

- In many assessments, a more in-depth analysis is needed to pull together all known information about the child and family including from previous assessments to consider ability to make meaningful change and form the bridge to a SMART plan.
- Weaker assessments lack depth; they do not consider fully, the complexities of family and peer relationships, the family history and the parent’s own childhood experiences and how these impact on parenting and the child.
- Following significant events or changes in circumstances, assessments are not consistently being updated; meaning information is lacking in terms of the child’s current needs. This continues to be a feature in audits.
- Significant learning from this audit period shows that fathers are not being consulted equally with little, or no attempts made to contact the child’s father to inform the assessment and gather their views.

Impact of any improvement or learning activity

- Good assessment training has been created and rolled out to relevant teams between August – December 2023. Comparing grades for domain area linked to assessment; improvement is evident and confidence in assessment work appears to be growing. There is also improvement noted in terms of management oversight and quality assurance to improve quality of assessment.
- As more assessments are completed, the impact of this training combined with plans and planning training should evidence continued improvement. This will be monitored through ongoing quality assurance and feedback from children and families.

Plans and Planning



What do we know?

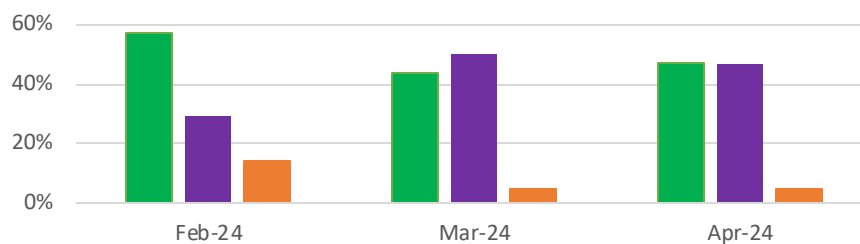
- Positively, parents and carers told auditors that they feel supported by their Social Worker and involved in planning for their child. There was one example of a parent receiving reports on coloured paper specific to their needs which enabled her to fully participate in meetings.
- Examples of strong multi-agency planning and partnership working which kept the young person safe and improved their outcomes.
- A number of examples of clear, SMART CIN plans co-produced with support from the CIN IRO's.
- In weaker plans, they are not specific enough and do not include timebound actions to support the child and family and remove barriers to permanence.
- Like in assessments, fathers are not always involved in meetings and planning for their child. The responsibility for change can be disproportionately assigned to mothers with little intervention with the child's father who often poses the risk. This has been a reoccurring theme over time with targeted learning to address this back in Social Work Week 2023.
- Irregular multi agency meetings contribute to plans drifting and delays in the child and family receiving the right support. Drift is not always challenged by partners.
- It is not always clear how partner agencies are contributing towards the child's plan as information is not always shared or there is a lack of analysis of work completed so it is hard to measure impact.

Impact of any improvement or learning activity

- Good assessment training links assessment to planning. Additional training on planning has been rolled out between February – May 2024 with positive feedback received. Further plans are in place to support critical thinking and analysis as we know that many practitioners struggle with this aspect of practice.
- There was a focus on plans and planning during Social Work Week 2024; with good practice examples being shared in respect of Missing Trigger Plans, Pathway Plans, Easy Read Plans, Early Help Whole Family Action plan and a learning session on safety planning with input from a Sefton mum to bring her experience alive.

Child Centred Practice/Relationship Based Practice

Child Centred/Relationship based practice over last 3 months



	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24
Good	57%	44%	47%
Requires Improvement to be Good	29%	50%	47%
Inadequate	14%	5%	5%

■ Good ■ Requires Improvement to be Good ■ Inadequate

What do we know?

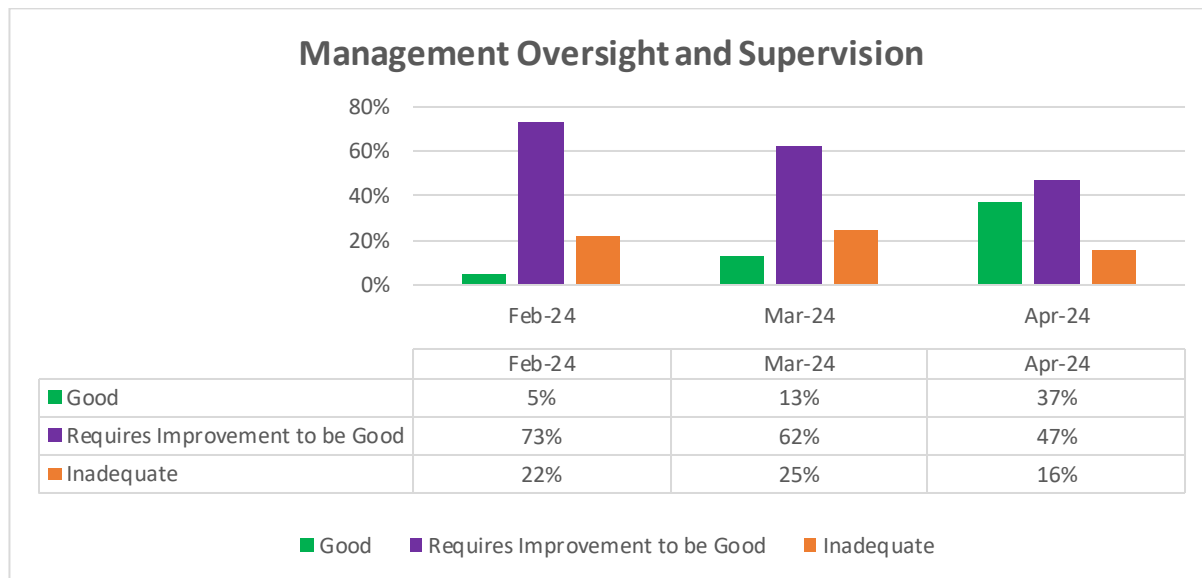
- Direction of travel information above identifies consistent good work in this domain.
- Positively, visits to children and young people are regular with more examples of recordings that show purposeful visits linked to the child's plan. Those children and young people who had consistent relationships with professionals were able to build good relationships and complete regular meaningful work with increased evidence of direct work tools being used to support communication.
- There were some examples of good transitions when workers changed with joint visits to enable the new worker to develop a positive relationship with the family.
- During feedback conversations, parents and carers spoke highly of their child's Social Worker and the support they had received which has supported progression of plans.
- Again, there is little evidence of efforts to consult or build relationships with the child's father and other significant males to aid them to understand the expectations on them as a parent and complete meaningful intervention work/ utilise strengths or increase support.
- There is not always a full understanding of the wider family network to aid contingency planning.
- More direct work with the child/young person would ensure their daily lived experience is understood. Sometimes when direct work is undertaken; this is not analysed to consider impact and review how information gathered can support the plan.

Impact of any improvement or learning activity

- Leeds colleagues have over the course of the last 2 years supported Sefton to embed a family valued approach to practice. Child Centred/relational practice continues to be a strength. Recent training in good assessment and plans and planning plans has reinforced messaging around relational practice. More work needs to be undertaken to emphasise the importance of involving fathers in all that we do; in particular understanding their rights, responsibilities and their potential.

- During Social Work Week in March 2024; we brought people together for further learning; with family feedback being shared and a Sefton mum joining one session to share her own lived experience. Our Virtual School also delivered a session on child centred inclusive practice and outstanding practice examples noted within our Care Experienced team were celebrated to further raise the bar. Good is what we expect as standard and so we wanted to show what people have done to go above and beyond and the impact of this on connection and relationships.

Management Oversight and Supervision



What do we know?

- Positively, supervision is taking place regularly across the service and largely within expected timescales. Also, there is evidence from recording that managers have a good knowledge of the families practitioners are supporting.
- Stronger supervisions evidence the manager reviewing actions set at previous supervisions to progress the plan and also using reflection and testing out hypothesis.
- There is also regular oversight of the child's plan by the IRO/CIN IROs to move actions forward.
- There is not always challenge evident from the Team Manager when actions in the child's plan are not progressing or curiosity by Senior Managers when there are significant gaps such as the father not being contacted/consulted.
- Although management oversight is present at key points, this would benefit from adding timebound actions and analysis to show impact on the child.

Impact of any improvement or learning activity

- Leeds colleagues have worked with Team Managers and others to improve practice leaderships skills by facilitating Team Manager training and action learning sets on management oversight and supervision. Sessions have involved managers sharing examples of management oversight and supervision records with others for review and feedback (show and share

approach) and these sessions continue in Sefton today; facilitated by the Principal Social Worker (22 managers in March 2024). In April 2023, no audits were graded good for this domain; compared to 37% in April 2024 showing gradual improved progress. We expect this aspect of practice leadership to continue to improve and will focus more energy on understanding supervision graded inadequate.

- All managers are now engaged in audit; managers tell us that by doing audits themselves and reviewing the work of colleagues; this allows them to reflect upon and improve their own oversight. Feedback from the annual staff survey echoed this point also.

Impact and Outcomes (Creating stability and achieving Permanence)

What do we know?

- Consistency in professionals and good partnership working has reduced risks for the child/young person and has allowed for effective scrutiny and review of the child/young person's plan.
- Evidence of children and young people happy and thriving with those who are caring for them and understanding their plan for permanence.
- Examples of parents being fully involved in assessments and planning from the outset which has resulted in a family led plan.
- The main barrier to achieving permanence is that plans are not SMART and do not show clearly the progress being made to improve the child/young person's outcomes.
- Delays in assessments means that permanence is not achieved in the right timeframe for the child/Young Person.
- A greater understanding of the family network is required for contingency planning and decision making around permanence. Increased use of Family Group Conferencing would aid this.

Impact of any improvement or learning activity

- Practice & Performance Meetings bring practitioners and managers together on a quarterly basis. The focus of the meetings in March 2024 was on Plans and Planning where we showcased good plans from across the service.
- In addition, a refreshed audit tool with greater focus on permanence and learning to improve outcomes for the child/young person was launched on 01.04.24.
- An audit tool is also being piloted to consider practice within the Fostering Service and Family Group Conferencing Service to see how this work can contribute to achieving permanence for children and young people.

What children and their families are telling us

Auditors spoke to **2** care experienced young adults and **3** children/ young people between February 2024 and April 2024. Any negative/constructive feedback is highlighted in orange boxes. They told us:

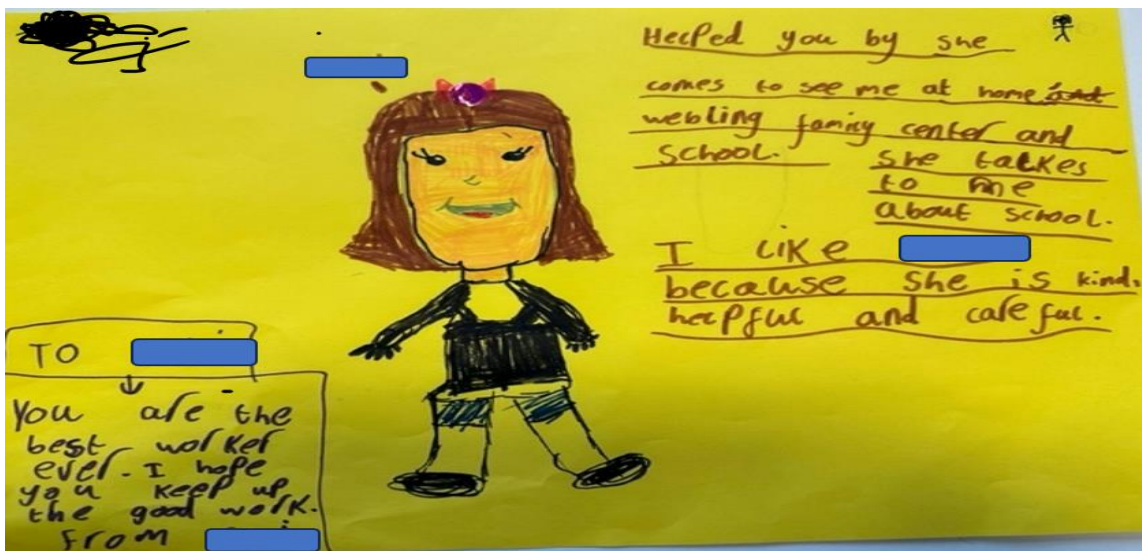
I have been allocated about 10 different social workers and passed around like a parcel.

<The young person> shared with me that she feels that the support being implemented is the right support for her and her family so

I meet with my PA every two months and we speak all the time. If I contact him over a particular issue then he would make arrangements to see me more frequently at times. I am happy with how my plan is progressing.

CIN meetings - I attend them and I have chaired my own meetings. It is important because the meetings are about me.

I will ring <PA> and have a rant and he will listen. I can talk to him and if I ask him to do something he will do it like chasing up Social Workers. I don't attend meetings but the next one will include plans to get back into work so I might get more involved then.



The drawing above was created by a 7-year-old girl during a planned visit by the auditor to gain her views. This shows that she values the Social Worker because she is "kind, helpful and caring."

We are using audit activity as another means of gaining feedback from children and families and ensuring that there is appropriate follow up when issues are raised.

Auditors also spoke to **34** parents and carers during the audit period to gain their views on their experience with Children's Social Care and also triangulate with audit findings. It is significant that we have specific feedback from a father who feels that he was not considered as this was a recurring theme; not isolated to him. Parent's/carers told us:

I feel left out the loop, it is very rare I find out what goes on with the meetings, I have only been invited to 1 meeting. They <the SW> are really good with my kids but they have done nothing for me. They can't be "XXXXX". It's like I don't matter.

(feedback from a dad)

<Parent> doesn't feel happy in general with social care as there have been so many different Social Workers. She doesn't feel she has been able to build relationships so she can rely on them to provide her with support. <Parent> has not met the new social worker properly yet as she was unwell on the last visit.

I have been fully involved in the assessments that have taken place and have been prepared for meetings and had reports in advance. This has built my trust and made the assessments more open. My neurodiversity is acknowledged and adjustments put in place to support.

The support we have had has been so positive. The SW is amazing, a credit to Sefton and should be cloned. It would be a mistake to ever let her go as she has had such a positive impact on our family.

I agree with assessment as we have regular meetings. I am kept up to date. I had been given a copy of the assessment and felt it was very detailed. I feel really supported and so does <the young person>, they put us at the centre of everything.

<The carer> described purposeful visits to the home by the SW and also understood the reasons visits were taking place and how they connected to the plan.

I don't blame CSC for the drawn out court hearings. But it has been a long time. We have felt supported by the SW and IRO and are celebrating 2 years of being together as a family. When we have our final hearing on X we hope that this is the celebration of the adoption being granted.

The plan worked great for me, made me realise what I had to do and this makes me happy. I wasn't ready to leave <previous partner>, it changed my life completing the Mirror Project. I am very happy it happened. If I didn't have the plan I don't know what would have happened.

Thematic dip sample audits completed:

- Child participation and planning for cared for review meetings - 20 children/young people sampled.
- Children on repeat Child Protection Plans - 5 families sampled.
- S47s decision making- 17 families sampled.
- Early Years PEPs - 6 children sampled.
- Assessments which identify specific needs and disabilities - 12 families sampled.
- Quality of assessments in CWCN and Cared for Children- 9 families sampled.

All thematic dip samples have individual actions set by the auditors for follow up and feed into practice improvement activity.