

**Report Title:  
Quality Assurance  
and Practice  
Improvement**

Date of meeting:	24 <sup>th</sup> September 2024		
Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee ( Children’s Services and Safeguarding )		
Report of:	Assistant Director, Safeguarding, Review and Quality Assurance		
Portfolio:	Childrens Services		
Wards affected:	All Wards		
Is this a key decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt/confidential report:	No		

**Summary:**

This report will provide an overview of Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement activity during June and July 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 monthly ‘deep dive’ audit activity, focused dip sampling also takes place following lines of enquiry informed by performance data or the need to understand a discreet area of practice.

**Recommendation(s):**

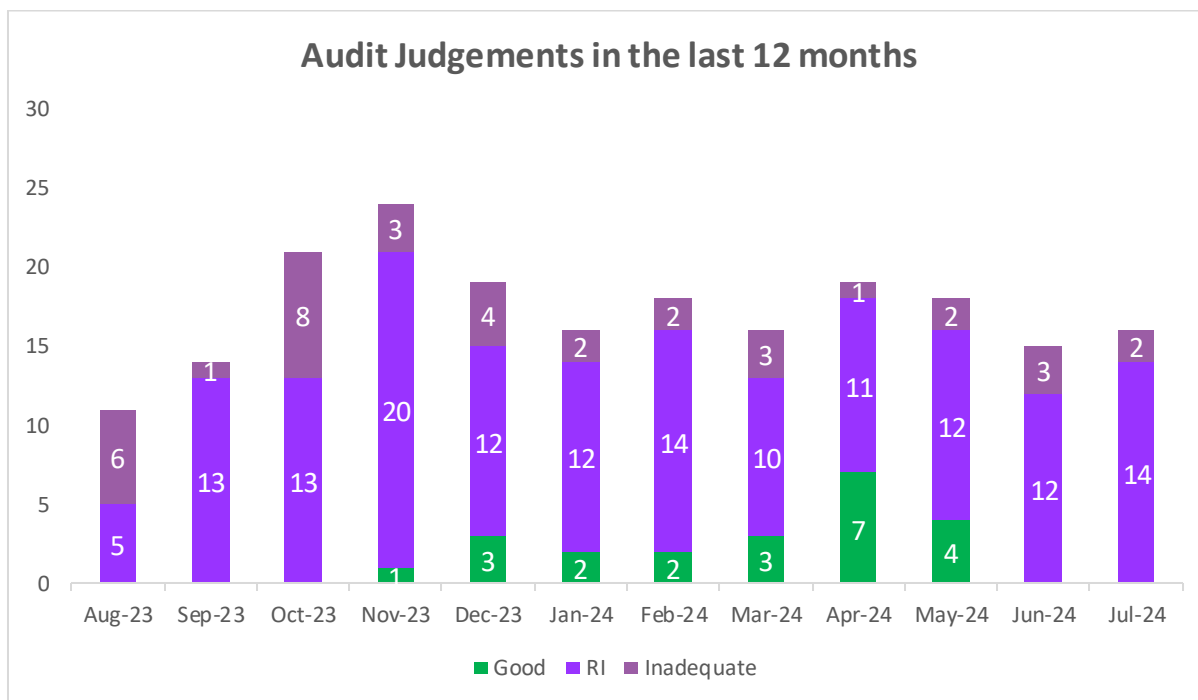
That the report be noted

**1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations**

**Key highlights and direction of travel**

The chart below summarises activity over the last 12 months. **Most work audited across the service continues to be considered ‘Requires Improvement to Be Good.’**

We began to see good work in November 2023 with a peak in April/May 2024; however, there was an absence of good work identified in June and July. 16 audits were undertaken in August 2024; 2 audits have been judged Good, 13 Requires Improvement to be Good and 1 Inadequate pending moderation.



Detailed information was prepared and presented to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Children’s Commissioner in July 2024. This summarized audit performance over time and drilled down on where inadequate and good practice sits across the service. Most inadequate work was concentrated in teams within the Help and Protect Service

### Overview of Key Findings - June and July 2024

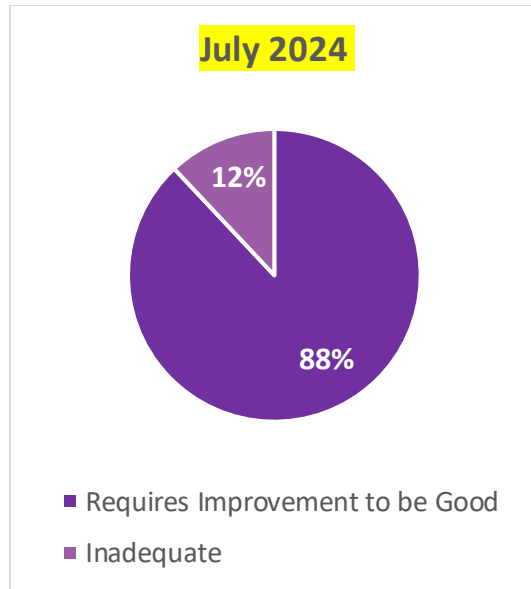
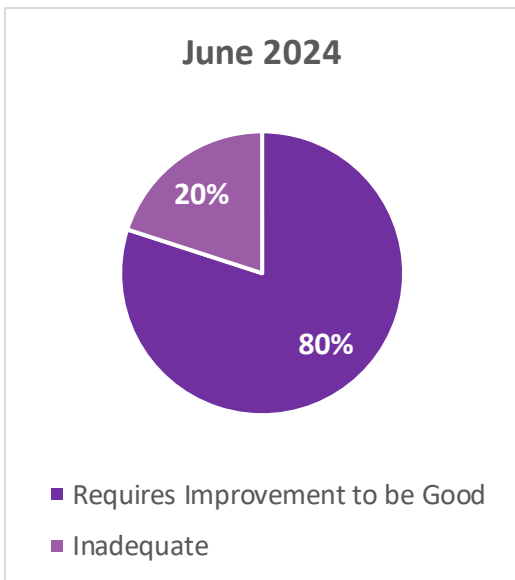
Relationship based practice remains a strength in Sefton and this is echoed in feedback from children and families who report positive and meaningful relationships with professionals and collaborative working to progress plans.

Some children and families wait too long for identified support and permanence. Sefton Children’s Services has a clear vision which promotes high support and high challenge, “tricky conversations” and escalation when drift and delay is observed. A key finding in this audit period is that this is not happening as often as it should be. (CP Chairs/IROS and Managers in supervision.)

Children and families would benefit from plans and visits that have a clear purpose and actions with timescales and ownership so progress can be measured.

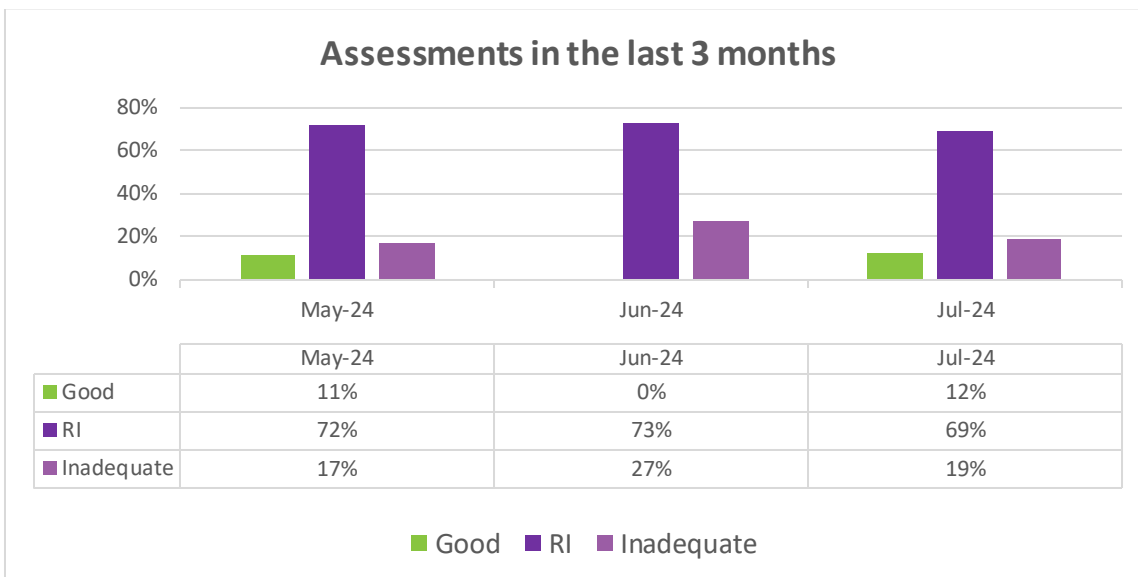
### Audit Activity – June and July 2024

31 deep dive audits have been completed across Children’s Social Care in June and July 2024. 13 of these audits were moderated (42%) which resulted in 4 audits being downgraded - 2 from ‘Requires Improvement to be Good’ to ‘Inadequate’ and 2 from “Good” to “Requires Improvement to be Good”.



## Audit findings linked to the 5 practice priorities

### 1. Assessment



### What do we know?

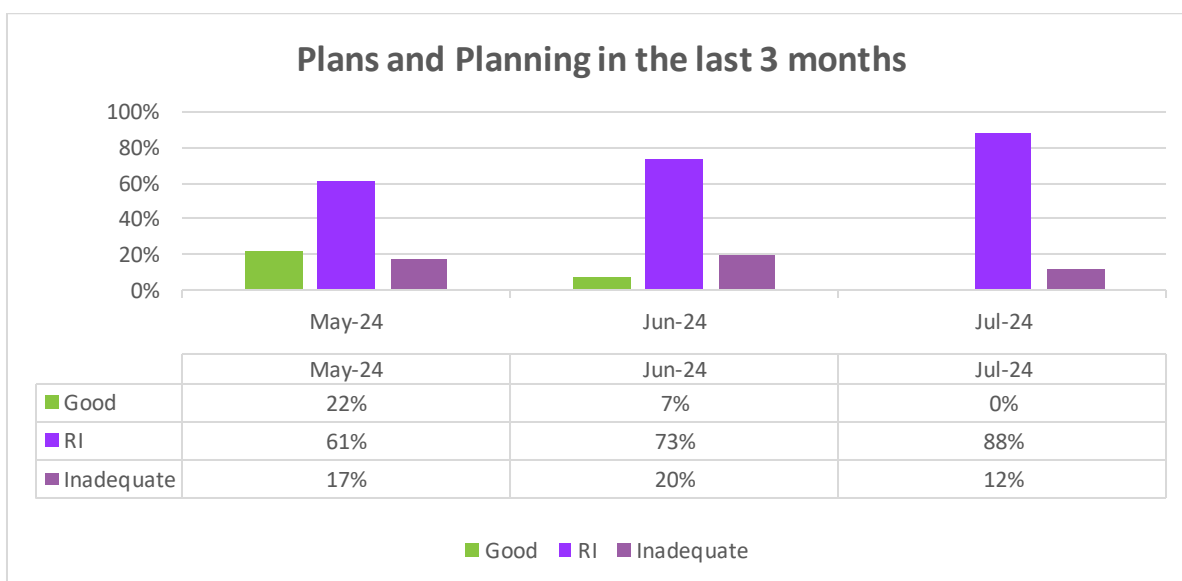
- Most children and families benefit from timely C&F assessments but other assessments such as parenting assessments are often subject to drift and delay.
- In the assessments judged 'Good,' there was no delay in the family receiving intervention and support following the assessment and there was safety planning in place prior to the ICPC.
- For children and families where assessments have been graded inadequate, vulnerabilities and risks for the child were recognised but the timeliness of our response was too slow and safety planning was not clear or evident on the child's record. For other families, there are significant delays in risks being assessed or assessments being updated following significant events to inform safety planning.
- Both Mothers and Fathers who hold PR were not consulted during the assessment period.
- Some assessments lack rich detail from the child/young person and their family to fully understand their wishes, feelings and lived experience.

- More understanding is needed of parents with mental health issues and how this impacts their parenting capacity and child's lived experience.

### Impact of any practice improvement or learning activity

- Good assessment training was rolled out to relevant teams last year with recent refresher sessions provided to all managers to promote consistency. The impact of this training is evident, but application is not consistent. Good assessment training will continue to be included in our core offer and the impact of training will continue to be monitored through ongoing quality assurance and feedback from children and families.
- 2 mandatory sessions on safety planning took place in August 2024 with 140 people in attendance. A further session is planned in September 2024. Following this, safety planning training will become part of our core offer for all new staff. The impact of this can be measured through future quality assurance work.
- Child Protection Conference Chairs have received a separate briefing in respect of ensuring steps are taken during strategy meetings to reduce risk and create safety (while the S47 investigation is ongoing and prior to ICPC) and their role in review of this. Safety planning was also discussed at the Practice and Performance meeting in July 2024 and will be revisited in the October meeting.
- An Analysis Activity Book was created and launched in July 2024 with follow up sessions planned across the service to embed critical thinking and analytical recording to improve assessment, plans, recording and oversight. This work is being supported by a Practice Improvement Manager.
- Practice month (October 2024) will focus on Intra-familial Child Sexual Abuse - core safeguarding which is one of Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership priorities. An extensive programme of learning events has been created with input from the partnership to encourage multi agency learning, working together and shared responsibility.

### Plans and Planning



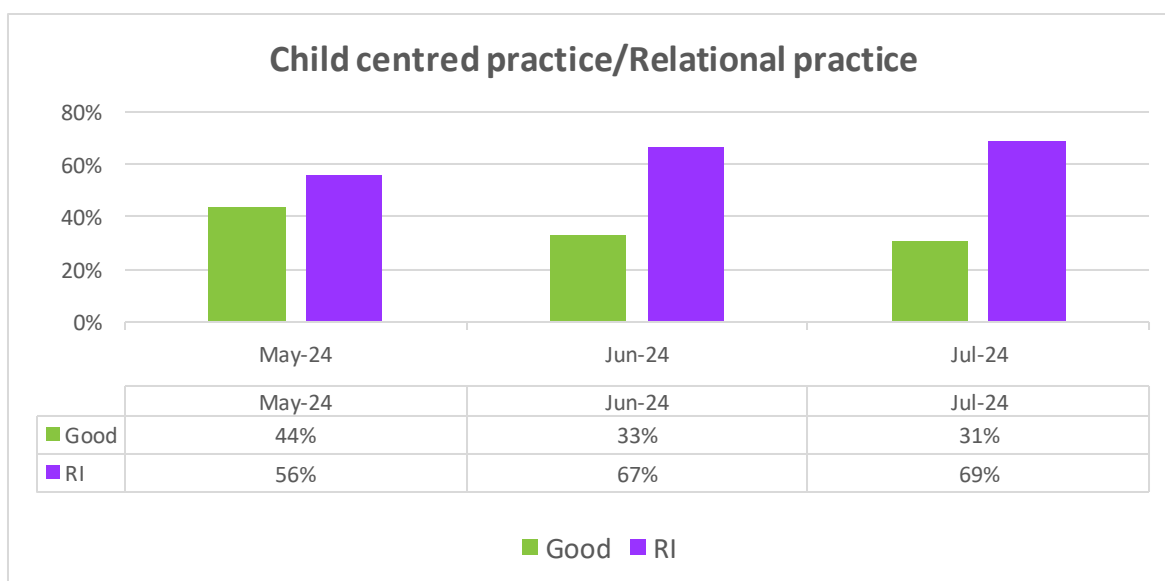
## What do we know?

- Positively, more parents are attending planning meetings and co-producing their child's plan and there was evidence of young people attending their reviews to give their views or their views being sought in advance.
- Most families are benefitting from multi-agency meetings taking place on a regular basis with good multi-agency attendance, but for some families, this doesn't always result in progress being made on the child's plan. In this audit period, delays were identified in EHCP planning and plans agreed at Family Group Conferences not being progressed.
- The main reason for plans being judged 'inadequate' was children and families experiencing significant drift and delay which sometimes contributed to concerns escalating.
- Children and families would benefit from tighter review of actions within plans with clear ownership to enable progress to be measured and minimise delay.
- Stronger review and oversight are required from Team Manager/IRO/CP Chair to identify and address gaps in planning and escalate drift and delay.
- Some young adults experience delays in their Pathway Plan commencing which can delay access to the support they are entitled to, and some Pathway Plans do not address how they will achieve their long-term goals and aspirations.

## Impact of any practice improvement or learning activity

- Improvement activity has continued to focus on plans and planning for children and families and analytical recording and thinking skills. The analysis activity book also references plans and the importance of review.
- Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership training sessions on plans and planning were delivered in in July 2024 to 31 partners with a further session planned for October during Practice month.
- Continued focus over the coming months will be on "steps to reduce risk and create safety" as stated above.

## Child Centred Practice/Relationship Based Practice



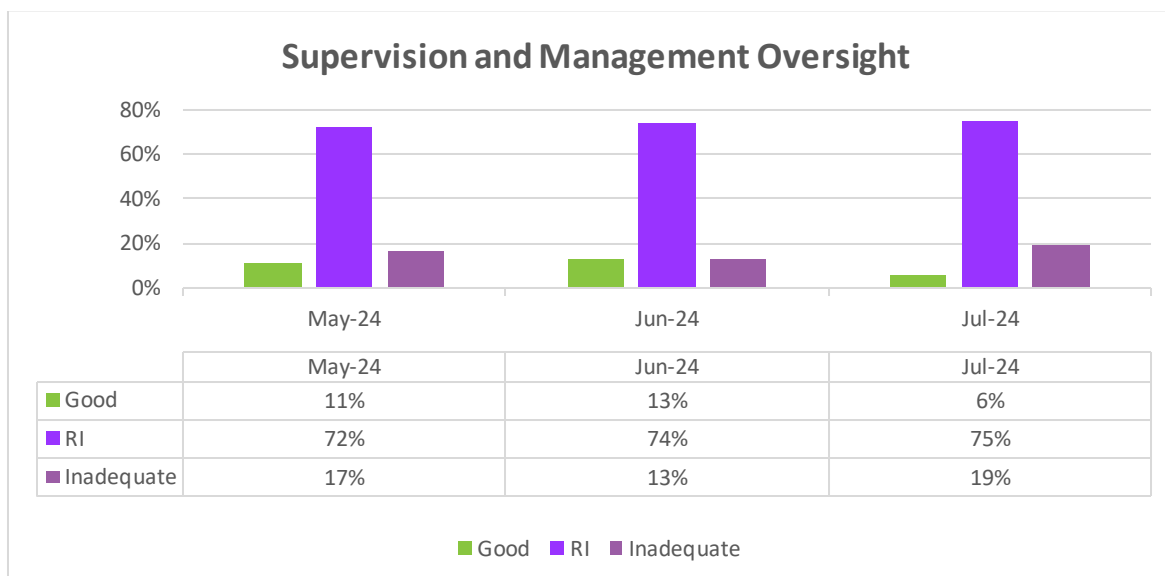
## What do we know?

- Positively, there are no 'inadequate' grades within this domain.
- Children/young people and care experienced young adults have a positive and meaningful relationship with their social worker/PA and some commented that they would contact their worker if they were worried or needed support.
- Children and young people are benefiting from regular visits with more examples of child centred recordings that show purposeful visits linked to their plan.
- There were some examples of young people benefiting from good transitions when workers changed to reduce impact for the family.
- During feedback conversations, young people, parents and carers spoke highly of practitioners and the support they had received which has supported progression of plans. In 1 instance, had the audit focussed on current social work practice (rather than the last 6 months), this domain would have been graded 'outstanding.'
- Some visits to the child/young person still require improvement as although they are timely, the quality of recording is variable, can be repetitive and some lack purpose and analysis of observations/child's voice. This is sometimes impacted upon by duty workers completing visits.
- Children and young people would benefit from increased use of direct work tools to understand their lived experience and planned life story work to help them understand their early life experiences and why decisions were made.

## Impact of any practice improvement or learning activity

- Many Sefton Children's Services staff and partner agencies have attended Trauma Informed Training provided by Merseyside Violence Reduction Programme. There are plans for further sessions for Trauma informed approaches during Practice month 2024.
- Recent training in good assessment and plans and planning plans has reinforced messaging around relational practice and co-production.
- New practice standards have been co-produced with input from the Think ACES Create PACES group who we hope will support the launch of the new standards in October 2024.
- A bespoke session was delivered by Research and Practice to 17 practitioners from across Children's Services - 'Working effectively with Fathers'. This will be rolled out further via a Practice Improvement Manager and a Learning and Development Partner.

## Management Oversight and Supervision



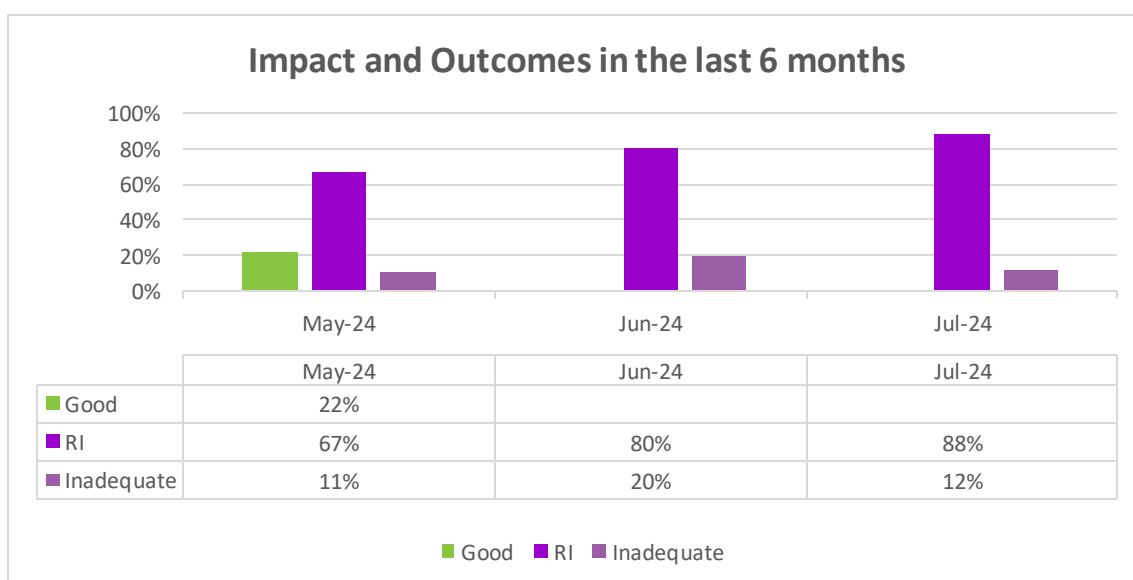
## What do we know?

- Supervision of practitioners is most often taking place regularly and largely within expected timescales. In good examples, regular review of the safety plan was evident in supervision and layered management oversight from the IRO, service manager and assistant director drive planning forward for the family and kept the children safe. When this is not so, the absence of regular supervision is contributing to delays for children and families. It is acknowledged that the audit period covers the holiday period which may result in some supervisions going out of timescales.
- Although, most families benefit from their plan being regularly reviewed in the worker's supervision, there is not always evidence of reflection with the Team Manager regarding the effectiveness of the plan. Records can be too descriptive in nature and don't evidence tracking of actions to drive plan forward and avoid delay.
- The main reason for judgements of 'inadequate' is that children and families are experiencing significant delays in receiving support or achieving permanence and this is not always addressed or challenged by the Team Manager/IRO/CP Chair.

## Impact of any practice improvement or learning activity

- Positively, most managers are engaged in audit and complete audits in a timely way usually to a good standard. 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. Audit training for new managers/new auditors is scheduled to take place in September 2024 as is a further management oversight and supervision action learning set.
- Reflective supervisions are being undertaken when work is considered 'inadequate' allowing all to consider what contributed to the grade and impact on the child and family; addressing any issues raised and required future oversight.

## Impact and Outcomes (Creating stability and achieving Permanence)



## What do we know?

- Families are benefiting from more collaborative working with Children's Social Care which has resulted in a family led plan to reduce risk and improve outcomes for the child.
- Children and young people are afforded stability with those who are caring for them but for some, delays in legal permanence being achieved means there is still uncertainty about their future (including progressing SGO).
- Despite assessment and plans being in place to support the child and family, delay has been a feature, and the child and family has not yet received the identified support.
- Stronger review and oversight are required from Team Manager/IRO/CP Chair to address gaps in planning and address/escalate drift and delay.
- More robust safety planning and assessment is needed to secure long- term safety and stability, including a greater understanding of the family network.
- Care experienced young adults need more forward planning in their Pathway Plans to meet their needs (including mental health needs) and achieve their long-term goal and aspirations.

## Impact of any practice improvement or learning activity

- Practice & Performance quarterly meetings bring practitioners and managers together.
- Ads undertake monthly moderation of audits to ensure good line of sight.
- Response to inadequate audits has been tightened. When work is graded inadequate; audits are moderated swiftly; if the inadequate grade is maintained a reflective conversation is facilitated by the relevant Service Manager to unpick learning and ensure any remedial identified actions are followed up to improve the child and families' lives.

## What children and their families are telling us

Auditors spoke to **1** care experienced young adult and **6** children/ young people in June and July 2024. This is a noticeable increase in communication with young people and shows determination to hear their voice with evidence of 2 auditors responding to a child's request to visit them in their homes. Auditors also spoke to **22** 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. They told us:

I like my social worker; she is kind and helpful. I feel heard and know my plan is to live with my foster carers

(feedback from young person)

Since my new social worker has been involved, I have had good communication and support has been put in place. Prior this this, nothing was happening.

I have been very involved in my child's assessments and plans as I wanted help. I have had copies of everything, and I feel like I have support from a team.

People have taken the time to get to know me, have a laugh and do fun things. I have been very involved in my assessments and plan.

(feedback from young person)



I am happy with the way things have gone and the plan is progressing well. I was consulted during the assessment but in the early stages felt like I was blamed for the domestic abuse and not the victim.

Changes in workers are difficult when you have already told your story. I can sometimes forget things because of my ADHD.

I wasn't contacted by Children's Services when they were doing the assessment, but I have since been involved in CIN meetings.

(feedback from a dad)

I am not sure I have a plan; I have not seen it. I asked for help with work uniform, but it has been weeks and it's still not sorted.

(feedback from Care experienced young adult)

The say they have called me when they haven't, they don't tell me the reason for the visit. The CP plan has been open for 2 years, I don't get invited to meetings and I don't feel we have got anywhere.

(feedback from a dad)

### **Thematic dip sample audits completed:**

- Impact of Safer Families Practice Hub - 23 families reviewed

Actions were identified following this dip sample which will tracked by the Practice Improvement Manager.

Work has also been ongoing with the Fostering Service to create a bespoke audit tool which will be incorporated into our monthly audit schedule from September 2024 and there has been an evaluation of the Family Group Conference Service with dip sampling planned to track progress.

### **2. Financial Implications**

Not applicable

### **3. Legal Implications**

None directly

#### **4. Corporate Risk Implications**

None directly

#### **5 Staffing HR Implications**

None directly

#### **6 Conclusion**

Not Applicable

#### **Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

Not Applicable

<b>Equality Implications:</b> There are no equality implications.
<b>Impact on Children and Young People:</b> Not applicable
<b>Climate Emergency Implications:</b> The recommendations within this report will have a Negative impact.

#### **What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?**

##### **(A) Internal Consultations**

The Executive Director of Corporate Services & Commercial (FD.7781/24) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5881/24) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

##### **(B) External Consultations**

Not Applicable

#### **Implementation Date for the Decision**

Immediately following the Committee

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**Appendices:**

The following appendices are attached to this report:

- Children's Social Care Performance Scorecard

**Background Papers:**

There are no background papers available for inspection