

**Report Title: Here**

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| Date of meeting:            | <b>28<sup>th</sup> January 2025</b>  |                           |           |
| Report to:                  | <b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services and Safeguarding)</b>  |                           |           |
| Report of:                  | <b>Risthardh Hare</b>  |                           |           |
| Portfolio:                  | <b>Children, Families and Schools</b>  |                           |           |
| Wards affected:             | <b>All</b>   |                           |           |
| Is this a key decision:     | <b>No</b>  | Included in Forward Plan: | <b>No</b> |
| Exempt/confidential report: | <p><b>Yes</b></p> <p>The report is NOT FOR PUBLICATION by virtue of Paragraph..... of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. The Public Interest Test has been applied and favours the information being treated as exempt</p> |                           |           |

**Summary:**

This report highlights the approach to improvement that we are taking in Children’s Social Care and services for children run by the local authority, and the progress we have made. It also highlights further action that needs to be taken to ensure we continue to improve outcomes for children and young people in Sefton

**Recommendation(s):**

- (1)
- For the committee to have a good understanding of the improvement programme in children’s social care and children’s services in Sefton.

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

Our Improvement plan contains actions under five priority areas: Practice; People; Partnerships; Right Support at the Right Time; and Knowing Ourselves Knowing Our Children. We are making progress but are aware that we need to be rigorous in our understanding of what still needs to be done.

We know that Ofsted will be undertaking another full Inspection of Children’s Services (ILACS) within the next six months and have started a programme of inspection readiness in preparation for this.

Our transformation programme will focus on wider systems improvement to provide a framework of support to practice. The programme focuses on workforce development, a new practice model, partnerships, sufficiency, and commissioning. The children's services transformation plan sits within and is supported by the corporate transformation plan, which sets a clear ambition to build on successes and remain focused on improving the lives of our residents

### **What are we doing to improve practice?**

Using our quality assurance framework to identify inadequate practice we have instigated focused reviews with practitioners using reflective conversations, leading to action planning to make improvements. We have developed a 'Rapid Improvement' project for children in Help and Protect and Children with Complex Needs.

We are also doing focused work with managers and child protection chairs, using action learning sets, and workshops. As a management team we have instigated robust monitoring of performance on a weekly and monthly basis, and further investigation of what the data means in terms of practice, partnership working and core safeguarding.

The Transformation Programme is focused on improving recruitment and retention of social workers, sufficiency of placements and support for our cared for and care experienced young people, voice and influence of children and families, a redesign of Early Help; Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision; and improvement to our infrastructure.

We are developing our new practice model in children's social care, and the framework for this will be trauma informed systemic practice.

We are working in partnership through the Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership and the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure children are receiving help and support to live safely in our communities.

We are analysing how the work we are already doing, and plan to do in the near future fits in with new government policy framework 'Keeping children safe, helping families thrive' and legislation, the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024-2025.

### **Rapid Improvement Project Help and Protect**

In October 2024, there were 18 families who had been subject to child protection planning for over 12 months comprising a total of 45 children. This indicated that we needed to focus on better planning to reduce risk and drift and delay for these children. The 45 children were reviewed by Assistant Directors during November and December 2024. Since the reviews five children (across three families) stepped down from child protection planning. Twenty-two children (across ten families) remain subject to child protection planning from this cohort and Practice Improvement Managers are tracking the actions agreed at for these children and actively working with the relevant practitioners to progress plans and improve outcome. The work includes:

- o Creating/updating safety plans
- o Improving plans to make them SMART, child centred and family focused.
- o Chairing multi agency meetings to support worker and role model effective practice
- o Updating Children and Family assessments

## **Improvement activity when audits are graded inadequate**

In the six-month period (May-October 2024), there were fourteen audits graded inadequate with thirteen of these sitting in the Help and Protect service area. From this cohort, it was identified that six practitioners remain working in Sefton. The Practice Improvement Managers are actively supporting four of these practitioners in a coaching capacity to improve the quality of assessment and plans they produce. It was agreed by Service Managers that the work of the remaining two practitioners would undergo a re-audit in December 2024/January 2025 as the overall standard of their work is not deemed inadequate. The Practice Improvement Managers will be reviewing all the children who these practitioners are working with at present, doing 1-1 work with the relevant practitioners to progress plans and improve outcomes.

As well as audits graded overall as inadequate, the Practice Improvement Managers are reviewing children's files alongside practitioners where individual audit domains such as assessment or planning have been identified as inadequate. They are working with them to improve aspects of practice, using restorative methods and co-production to increase confidence and skills.

To date 100 children's files have been reviewed by practice improvement managers which has included supporting the SW to improve the quality of work. Dates are planned with the relevant workers to review the remaining 138 children identified in this cohort and improve practice if necessary, and it is anticipated that all children will be reviewed by the end of February 2025, a total of 238 children.

There will have been 25 social workers supported altogether through all the three strands above. They are being upskilled through doing with rather than to – co-producing a safety plan, or an assessment, working through good practice examples and what good looks like, and supporting practitioners to chair meetings. The aim of this work is not a quick fix, but to embed practice improvement work with practitioners and managers.

## **Further improvement work**

At the Senior Leadership' Team's monthly performance meeting, senior managers including the DCS will be reviewing any inadequate audits from the previous month with the relevant team manager and service manager/head of service to ascertain why inadequate practice was allowed to happen, and what interventions have been put in since to improve the practice and outcomes for the child.

Our service managers have been analysing the expected Ofsted key lines of enquiry, and we have produced briefings and action plans as a result, to improve practice and outcomes for children and families. We have also involved partners in the findings from key lines of enquiry, making sure there is a 'golden thread' of improvement actions.

From 13.01.25 for two weeks the Assistant Directors and Director of Children Services will be reviewing all Sefton children on a plan with each social work team, focusing on practice improvement in terms of immediate risk and drift and delay. As a result of this we will have a greater understanding of where we need to improve practice.

From January, the service manager for Safeguarding will be holding a panel where children on a child protection plan for longer than 15 months will be brought, by the Practitioner, manager and CP chair, supported by a practice improvement officer who will look at the child's trajectory and provide support and coaching for improving the child's outcomes.

A further improvement project will commence in March 2025 focusing on restorative child protection conferences. This project is being implemented in partnership with the Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP).

We are also focusing on four areas of improvement where we know our data and performance is not where it should be. These are:

Children with complex needs and disabilities; private fostering; homeless 16 and 17 year olds, and children affected by harm outside the home.

### **Improvements in Partnership Working – Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership**

A consolidation of work over the last 18 months has led to a more structured and focused partnership. The sub-groups are now up and running, some are more developed than others. Work between Leeds and the subgroup chairs has now been completed. The SSCP annual report has been completed, and updated Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements are finished and signed off. We have requested nominations from Headteachers to address the need for an education representative to join the Key Strategic Leads group and the creation of a separate Education sub-group, which is beginning this month (January), and is part of the new policy update and legislation which is being implemented by the Labour government. Recommendations from the multi-agency audits done in first three quarters of 24/25 will be developed in the last quarter.

### **Improvements in Partnership Working - Corporate Parenting Board (CPB)**

Over the last 12 months there has been a real improvement in the effectiveness of the CPB in engaging partners and encouraging them to proactively make changes that have benefited our care experienced and cared for young people. The board has also been effective in challenging partners to provide better services for our children and young people. This can be seen in the improvement in timeliness of initial health assessments for children coming into care, and the increase in the number of our children who have had their yearly dental checks.

### **Other achievements facilitated by the board have included:**

Free travel for CEYP - Sefton CPB collaborated with Liverpool City Region to gain free travel for our young people over a four-year period. In October 2024 the new 'Metro Card' was launched providing free access to all public transport (bus, rail and ferry) for all care experienced young people across the region.

The launch of Sefton Caring Business Charter. The charter invites local companies and organisations to commit to offering education, training and employment opportunities to our cared for and care experienced young people in the borough. To date over 60 companies have signed the charter.

The Strategic Housing Partnership - following consultation and discussion with our care experienced young people at the CPB the Strategic Housing Partnership was developed during 2024 led by colleagues in Housing. The partnership brings together social landlords, housing providers and the council housing department to improve housing opportunities and offers for our cared for young people across the borough. Benefits for young people include:

- Direct matching of properties rather than bidding – more choice for CEYP
- 'House to Home' piloted by One Vision Housing. Properties are decorated, carpeted and fitted with essential white goods prior to the young person moving in
- The DWP have guaranteed to pay rent while the accommodation is being prepared, even though the YP's tenancy has not started

The setting up of The Hub for Sefton care experienced young people is also an example of partnership working, we have had input from private sector and voluntary sector organisations, as well as other council departments, and have created a warm and welcoming space for young people with a good choice of services available, as well as activities and skills-based training for our young people.

## **Preparation for the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children Services (ILACS)**

We know we are approaching the 'window of inspection' as it is nearly three years since the last ILACS. We started preparing for this in October, with a weekly CSC Ofsted readiness meetings attended by managers and data colleagues to:

- Quality assure Annex A data and documentation.
- Investigate and action plan around Key Lines of Enquiry identified through the data. Findings from these have been taken into the Sefton Safeguarding Children Partnership so we have a golden thread of findings and actions across our multi-agency partnership.
- Involve our education partners in terms of EHE, CME and school attendance.
- Look at specific areas of practice such as Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse to ensure we are focusing on areas we know Ofsted will be especially interested in and prepare briefings.
- Plan logistics and communications for the ILACS.
- Ensure the improvement plan and Ofsted diagnostic reflect progress and areas of concern.

## **We are also holding monthly Ofsted readiness meetings with partners which allows us to:**

- Share information, good practice and identify areas of concern as a partnership.
- Inform partners of the methodology of ILACS and how they will be involved.
- Share the evaluation criteria used by Ofsted to decide on their judgement.
- Undertake briefings and key lines of enquiry for specific subjects i.e. use of the Child Exploitation screening tool.
- Look at specific areas of practice such as Domestic Abuse and Harm Outside the Home to ensure we are focusing on areas we know Ofsted will be especially interested in and prepare briefings to ensure we know what is improving and what are the areas for concern.
- Ensure each agency has a single point of contact and communications plan for when ILACS is announced.

## **2. Financial Implications**

None

## **3. Legal Implications**

None

## **4. Corporate Risk Implications**

Reputational risk if there is a negative Ofsted judgement for children's social care

**5 Staffing HR Implications**

None

**6 Conclusion**

None

**Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

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| <b>Equality Implications:</b><br><br>There are benefits for care experienced young people in the improvement work being undertaken in corporate parenting. These are detailed in the report. |
| <b>Impact on Children and Young People:</b><br><br>Improvements in children’s social care will have a positive impact on the children and young people we are working with.                  |
| <b>Climate Emergency Implications:</b><br><br>The recommendations within this report will have a Neutral impact.   |

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

**(A) Internal Consultations**

With the senior management team children’s services

The Executive Director of Corporate Services & Commercial (FD7927/25.) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD6027/25. have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

**(B) External Consultations**

None

**Implementation Date for the Decision :**

Immediately following the committee

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|-------------------|-----------------------------|
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**Appendices:**

There are no appendices to this report

**Background Papers:**

None

