



Northumberland
County Council

Children's Social Care Continuous Improvement Plan 2019

Progress Ratings

1 - Achieved	2 - Largely Achieved, Some Tasks Outstanding	3 - In Progress	4 - Not Achieved, not started
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Priority 1	Ensure all children and families receive the right help at the right time from the right service			
Key areas	Demand Management / Continue to remodel services and front of house arrangements to further embed the early help offer and increase the proportion of referrals which result in an Early Help Assessment and Plan. (This is linked to the Early Help strategy).			
Overall lead	Dorothy Chambers/Mary Connor/Emma Richardson			
Aims	Key actions	Lead(s)	Timescales	Progress 1 - 4
1.1 Further embed the partnership understanding of and engagement with Early Help services at both county and locality level to ensure that the needs of and services for children are identified and offered at the lowest appropriate level of intervention	Review the implementation of the new Early Help strategy	MC	Quarterly	1
	Embed multi agency locality networking events	MC	July 2019, Quarterly	2
1.2 Ensure 0-2 year olds from the 30% most deprived areas receive appropriate targeted children's centre services.	Measure referral figures as part of the monitoring of children's centre targets	JM	March 2019	1
	Identify key groups for Performance Impact Evaluation (PIE) to be used as a measurement and embed the measurement of impact through use of these	JM / MC	July 2019	2

	Implement GroupWorks as the new children's centre recording system and as part of this identify milestones and impact measures.	JM	April 2019	2
1.3 Support the development of and maximise the links and co-ordination with community-based and voluntary sector services	Deliver whole staff poverty / disadvantage awareness raising training so they are aware of the Poverty Strategy.	ER	April 2019	3
	Develop locality support for and links with community assets / universal provision so that staff are aware of and appropriately access the work of VCS groups.	ER	June 2019	3
1.4 Continue to develop the effectiveness of co-location of early help within First Contact to embed early intervention and improve use of early help offer for families who do not meet the criteria for children's social work intervention	Early Help Team Manager has recently been appointed and will offer ongoing supervision to co-located staff and work with Locality Teams to further embed the early help offer	DC/MC	Commence Jan 2019	3
	Introduction of new system whereby all new contacts are considered via the Early Help Module where decisions will be made regarding next steps.	DC/JM	Feb 2019	2
	Ensure through routine dip samples that cases stepping down following a child and family assessment are appropriate.	DC/MC	April 2019	3
1.5 Ensure that social work interventions at the front door are timely and proportionate and that thresholds are consistently and appropriately applied	Continued investigation, audit and quality assurance at the Front Door to test out application (with partners) of multi agency thresholds and analyse findings regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contacts over the previous 6 months. - cases transferred to the MASH over the previous 12 months - the increase in: section 47 enquiries; those cases from the Front door progressing to Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC); children made subject to CP plans; child protection plans ending after three months - assessments not leading to social care intervention. 	DC/FB/LS	April 2019	2

	Report at performance clinics and review impact at Quality Performance and Audit Group (QPAG)		May 2019	3
1.6 Further develop the range and flexibility of services for families with children at risk of entering care to ensure that they are supported to remain at home where safe and that all alternatives to care are effectively explored	Undertake further work to develop Northumberland Families First (NFF) model of intensive working to support family breakdown	MC/JM	May 2019	3
	Develop a performance dashboard for NFF	JM / LL	March 2019	2
	Maximise the use of Family Group Conferencing by further extending its use and undertake quarterly impact monitoring with Barnardos.	MC / AW	Quarterly	2
	Continue to promote the Safe Families service including supporting its expansion into North and West Northumberland.	MC / AW	Quarterly	2
1.7. Target resources better in order to meet need across the whole county	Complete and implement service reviews (Youth Offending Service, Accommodation service, Family Support Team, Disabled Children's Team and SEND).	CMc AW MC	May 2019	2

What measurable impact is expected?

- More children will receive an early help service-increase in numbers to the Early Help (EH) locality hubs
- Increased number of Early Help Assessments undertaken
- Timeliness of services offered, ie children and young people seen within 5 days of referral
- Less re-referrals into social care
- Reduction in number of referrals to Children's Social Care and C & F assessments being undertaken which are not required
- Reduction in number of children subject to a CP plan
- Less children becoming Looked After
- Evidence of service user/ agency/ child or young person experiences influencing service delivery

Priority 2	Embedding family-focused practice			
Key areas	Embedding the use of Signs of Safety (SoS) as practice model; Continue the development of Northumberland Families First (NFF) (see priority 1)			
Overall Leads	Adele Wright/ Dorothy Chambers / Angela Glenn / Patrick Boyle / Neil O'Toole			
Aims	Key actions	Lead(s)	Timescales	Progress 1 - 4
2.1 Embed signs of safety as the practice model to improve collaborative working with families and ensure that the voice of the child is reflected in assessments and plans	Establish a SOS steering group to provide direction for and oversight of the implementation of model.	AW/MC	May 2019	2
	Monitor and report back on progress (including use of QA tool)	AW/MC	Quarterly	4
	Embedded SoS language and models into practice to promote child centred practice to be quality assured using the collaborative case file audit tool.	AW/MC	August 2019	3
	Review the ICS module in other LAs and consider application in NCC.	AW/MC	Feb 2019 and ongoing	3
2.2 To identify and engage with a wider family and friends network at the earliest opportunity (see also priority 1)	Continue to develop the flexibility of our preventative services where children may become looked after, including engaging wider family members at the earliest possible stage.	AW/MC	July 2019	3
	Implement learning from the regional court review of care proceedings and to ensure our pre-proceedings	AW	May 2019	2

	work is timely and effective.			
	Develop and further promote the use of Family Group Conferences as an additional tool, especially within pre proceedings work.	AW/MC	July 2019	2
	Further develop the use of genograms and other similar tools at early points in intervention.	AW / MC	June 2019	4
	Gather and analyse feedback from children, parents and wider families (eg fathers and other male carers).	AW / MC	June 2019	4

WHAT MEASURABLE IMPACT IS EXPECTED

- SoS Quality Assurance system reporting to be implemented in line with SoS model requirements (frequency to be determined)
- Evidence from indicators from audits and all QA processes regarding voice of the child
- Evidence of effectiveness from feedback from families
- Reduction in numbers subject to child protection plans
- Improved effectiveness and timeliness of pre proceedings work
- Improved timeliness of court proceedings

Priority 3	Continue to raise the standards of frontline social work practice			
Key areas	Quality of Assessments, strategy meetings, s47 enquiries, parenting and risk assessments.			
Overall Leads	Dorothy Chambers / Angela Glenn / Patrick Boyle / Neil O'Toole / Fiona Brown / Liz Spratt / Adele Wright			
Aims	Key actions	Lead(s)	Timescales	Progress 1 - 4
3.1 Maintain and continue to improve the quality of C & F assessments	Ensure work is being undertaken alongside assessments where appropriate so that services are being provided. In a timely way.	DC	June 2019	3
3.2 Specific risks (contextual safeguarding) are identified and addressed promptly and effectively	Implement agreed assessment tool for use in specific circumstances in line with regional MSET (Missing, Sexually Exploited and Trafficked) plans. Including the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pilot use of screening and assessment tool and then roll out to all areas. ● Implement MSET screening and assessment tool and Police to take lead and chair MSET. ● Prepare MSET Briefing paper for March NSCB. ● Evaluate the usage and effectiveness, Action Based Research agreed with Northumbria University. ● Ensure that the tool is used to identify need and inform plans in all cases (and not just as a referral mechanism for MSET) 	DC / PB	March 2019	1
	With the police and schools, jointly evaluate impact of Operation Endeavour pilot.		PB/CL/DR	April 2019

3.3 Improve the effectiveness and timeliness of our CIN work	Audit and report on Children in Need (CiN) looking at the effectiveness of processes and themes and escalation to Child Protection (CP)	AW	June 2019	2
	Use learning from audits to shape new mandatory e learning module for private fostering to continually reinforce staff awareness	AW	July 2019	3
	Continually reinforce compliance with mandatory private fostering e learning	AW	Quarterly from July 2019	4
	Undertake further annual analysis of private fostering cases to ensure that all such situations have been responded to effectively and appropriately	AW	Annual	4
3.4 Ensure that those families who require support and work around domestic abuse are identified and supported in a timely way, and that the work is effective.	Domestic abuse screening tool which supports the identification of risk and need to be developed and implemented.	DC	April 2019	3
	Explore and implement future Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) arrangements within the MASH: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with partner agencies • Explore other Local Authority arrangements 	DC	April 2019	3
	Recommission perpetrator programme following analysis of need.	MC / LP	March 2019	3
	Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of therapeutic work pilot for children.	MC / LP	March 2019	2
	Commission further Domestic Abuse services as appropriate depending on successful joint bidding arrangements across the region	MC / LP	March 2019	2

What measurable impact is expected?

- Quality of assessments improved as judged in case file audits
- Evidence of work taking place during assessments
- Reduced numbers of assessments leading to no further social work intervention
- Evidence of reduced risk in specific areas (contextual safeguarding and domestic abuse)
- Evidence of the use of the tools to inform plans and interventions
- Audits of practice will demonstrate a cohesive and comprehensive approach to managing risk

Priority 4	Continue to raise the standards of frontline social work practice				
Key areas	Raising standards of social work practice (SMARTness of plans produced following assessment, legal work, permanency) SMART = Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Bound				
Overall leads	Graham Reiter/Adele Wright				
Aims	Key actions	Lead(s)	Timescales	Progress 1 - 4	
4.1 Ensure written plans clearly identify outcomes, timescales and how progress will be measured and that they are used with and accessible for families.	Further targeted training to be delivered on SMART plans in line with Signs of Safety.	AW	July 2019	2	
	Ensure Children's Social Care (CSC) contributions to Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) are timely and SMART	FB/MC	April 2019	3	
4.2 To ensure consistent focus on plans and progress	Management case supervision to include focus on and reference to the case plan.	AW	February 2019	1	
	Refresh guidance on visiting children.	AW	Jan 2019	1	

	Ensure more consistent focus on plan outcomes and actions and evaluate progress against outcomes.	AW	July 2019	2
	Ensure all meetings and reviews consistently focus on the plan outcomes and actions and evaluate progress against those outcomes.	KM	February 2019	3
	Improve the alignment of CIN, CP, LAC and EHCP reviews.	KM / AW	March 2019	3
	Review the pathway plan audit tool and performance measures to identify ways in which they can be more outcome-focused. This was tested and it has now been decided that we use the "Care leavers" audit tool. This is more suitable to those cases and is more outcome focussed.	SP	March 2019	3
4.3 Use the peer audit of our care planning in December 2018 to gauge our improvement.	Benchmark our findings against those of the peer audit.	AW	February 2019	2
4.4 To ensure that ICS effectively supports SMART planning	Demonstration planned from Liquid Logic in April, but need for business case not yet established	GR	June 2019	2
	Interim/contingency work to amend current templates on ICS	AW	June 2019	2
4.5 Ensure the timely achievement of permanence for all children	Family and friends networks for children are identified early in the intervention and this is specifically checked at key points such as Legal Gateway Panel (LGP)/CP conferences (see priorities 1 and 2)	AW/KM	February 2019	1
	Audit the quality of pre-proceedings Public Law Outline (PLO) work to ensure it is thorough, timely and robust. completed	QPAG/A W	February 2019	1
	Improve the timeliness of care proceedings by front loading assessment in	AW	June	2

	the PLO stage and implement the relevant recommendations of the review by regional judiciary in relation to family assessments and identifying fathers (see also priority 2)		2019	
	Evaluate the impact of the Legal Gateway Panel	GR/AW	February 2019	1
	Implement areas for additional development	GR/AW	June 2019	3
	Improve the practice and processes for consistently achieving and celebrating the permanent placement of children in foster care by clarifying the matching process and training staff to ensure it is implemented and embedded.	AW/LS	June 2019	2
	Ensure that where there is a plan for children to return home, this is thoroughly assessed in a timely way and appropriate support is in place.	AW	March 2019	2
	Monitor the effectiveness of Adopt North East in supporting the timely achievement of permanence for children being adopted	CM-C/GR/LS	June 2019	4

What measurable impact is expected?

- Improved timeliness of social care interventions achieving desired outcomes (from audit and QA processes)
- Increased percentage of cases audited where the indicator regarding Improved outcomes and life chances is positive (from audit)
- Increased timeliness of children achieving permanence in adoption, long term fostering and SGO
- Reduced readmissions to care
- Evidence of focus on plans and progress in case supervision, multi agency meetings and CIN/CP and LACreviews.
- Feedback from CAFCASS and Courts.

Priority 5	Management oversight and Quality Assurance: Ensure effective leadership and management is available to support and promote good practice across all areas			
Key areas	Coordination of performance management and quality assurance processes; further development and use of user feedback; evaluating impact, maximise all learning opportunities; through developing the culture of a learning organisation, good practice is recognised and shared and practice improvements are identified and implemented effectively; Overall the provision and delivery of high quality cost effective services which benefit all children, young people and their families evaluated and recognised through a range of qualitative and quantitative methods.			
Overall lead	Graham Reiter			
Aims	Key actions	Lead(s)	Timescales	Progress 1 - 4
5.1 To effectively support the development of quality practice, moving on from compliance and to ensure that impact is clearly evaluated	Embed the practice and processes of the Quality, Practice and Audit Group (QPAG) to identify, support, improve and evaluate the quality of practice	GR	October 2019 to review first year	2
	Maximise the use and coordination of all methods of quality assurance to support practice improvements, to be detailed in a revised performance and QA outcomes framework	GR / AH	April 2019	2
	Paper pulling together all current elements of participation/feedback work with young people completed	SP	March 2019	1
	To specifically maximise and develop the use and evaluation of service user feedback	GR/AH/BS	Quarterly	3
	Annual Practice week to focus on the quality and effectiveness of social care practice	AW	February 2019	1

	Continue monthly practice days	GR	Monthly	1
5.2 Develop a system to capture customer experience Gain user feedback to support our continuous improvement	Recruit to performance/participation post to support gathering of service user feedback.	SP /Ben Sd	Jan 2019	1
	Through the strategic participation group coordinate the gathering of evidence from children, young people and families.	SP Ben Sd	Ongoing, quarterly	3
	Gather feedback from the experiences of children and young people in the front door processes.	DC	May 2019	3
5.3 Improve the effectiveness of case management oversight	Ensure supervision actions are completed from previous supervision and if they are not, record why not.	CSMs / TMs	March 2019	3
	Use Signs of Safety to reflect, analyse and identify future actions and time scales.			3
5.4 Embed the leadership pledge	Evaluate the effectiveness of the leadership pledge in underpinning our management and approach to practice and in developing us as a learning organisation.	GR	July 2019	1
5.5 Ensure policies and procedures are up to date and effectively support practice	Embed the Tri.x procedures and ensure that they support front-line practice effectively	AW	March 2019	1

What measurable impact is expected?

- Evidence from professional judgement through: qualitative evaluation of work through Practice Days, Practice Week and audits; and Management oversight and supervision to reflect on impact and experience of the service user.
- Improved performance and quality of practice in all areas of Children's Social Care (evidenced by the above processes)

Priority 6	Further strengthen the Corporate Parenting agenda			
Key areas	Quality and sufficiency of fostering and residential provision; supported accommodation for care leavers; employment, education and training; high quality corporate parenting.			
Overall Leads	Liz Spaven / Karen MacDonald / Jane Walker / Sharron Pearson			
Aims	Key actions	Lead(s)	Timescales	Progress 1 - 4
6.1 Strengthen the leadership and governance of the Corporate Parenting advisory group	Review and strengthen the effectiveness of the corporate parenting group and multi agency looked after children partnership (MALAP) to ensure its effectiveness is maximised and operating in line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017.	CM-C / GR	March 2019	2
6.2 Review the Corporate Parenting Strategy	Review and develop the strategy and associated delivery plan, including consideration of Children and Social Work act 2017.	AW / LS	April 2019	2
6.3 Continue to improve the range of placements to support LAC	Development of in house residential provision from agreed Council funding.	KM	2020	3
	Complete actions from the sufficiency review and analyse findings to identify needs to inform placement planning.	LSpa	September 2019	3
	Develop the principle of placing all children within a family setting where possible, using residential care more flexibly and improving links with, and step down arrangements, between residential and foster care and family placements.	LSpa / KM	Review quarterly	3
	Consider a policy or guidance across foster and residential with	LSpa /	April 2019	3

	regards to placement plans and exit routes from residential to matched foster placements	KM		
	Further develop the joint commissioning of external placements with health colleagues and to improve the timely accessibility of mental health provision for our looked after children.	GR / LB	April 2020	2
6.4 Continue to improve the effectiveness of our services to care leavers	Deliver the action plan in response to the peer challenge of services for care leavers. Action plan complete and regular NAS management meetings to progress this.	MC/ SP	June 2019	2
	Employ a health professional to work in NAS to provide advice and support for workers working with young people	MC/SP	June 2019	2
	Identify more apprenticeships and mentors for care leavers and ring fence a proportion for care leavers, including development and implementation of NCC care leavers covenant	MC/CT	September 2019	2
	Further improve and embed the voice of care leavers in service development and delivery and in individual work planning	MC/SP	Quarterly review	2
6.5 Maintain and improve the quality of services for children who are to be adopted	Collaborate, monitor and ensure the development of the Regional Adoption Agency (ANE) meets the needs of children to be adopted from Northumberland in a timely way	CM-C / GR / LS	Monthly	3
6.6 Continue to improve education, employment and training opportunities for LAC and care leavers	The Virtual School Improvement Plan 2018-2020 identifies priorities for the next two years to further improve the effectiveness and impact of our Virtual School and to implement the increased requirements of the children and social work act 2017.	JW / SP	September 2019	2

	Develop and embed the care leavers covenant to include a range of employment opportunities	CT	September 2019	3
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What measurable impact is expected?

Continued improvement on the range of performance measures relating to LAC and Care Leavers in the revised Corporate Parenting Strategy delivery plan

Priority 7	Workforce stability, development and succession planning: Recruit, retain and develop a professional, committed and stable workforce				
Key areas	Targeted recruitment to attract newly-qualified and experienced staff; embedding a co-ordinated and holistic training programme; developing a model to support and manage Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) staff; developing a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) pathway for aspiring senior practitioners and managers.				
Overall Leads	Adele Wright /Su Kaur / Tracey Horseman & Adults link person				
Aims	Key actions	Lead(s)	Timescales	Progress 1 - 4	
7.1 To recruit the best possible candidates into social work positions to create a skilled, competent and stable workforce	Advertise and recruit on rolling basis for experienced social workers.	AW	Ongoing	1	
	Plan the recruitment of advanced practitioners and deputy team managers to retain development opportunities for current staff and enhance career pathways.	AW	Ongoing	1	
	Embed and further develop the ASYE academy and programme, evaluating its impact for children and families. First ASYE academy cohort to make transition into safeguarding teams.	AW/SK	April 2019	2	
			Feb 2019	1	
	Engage in regional workforce development recruitment and training initiatives	SK/AW/TH	Ongoing	1	
Develop and pilot the apprenticeship programme and build on step up to social work model	SK/TH	Sept 2019	2		
7.2 To retain our social care workforce, offering them development opportunities and	Embed the new structure to offer opportunities for social work staff to move into advanced practitioner positions and remain in front line practice.	AW/SK	April 2019	1	

creating stability.	Retain competent step up candidates and other students that have been invested in once qualified.	TH/SK	Ongoing	2
7.3 To ensure a comprehensive workforce plan is implemented to ensure succession planning for managers is addressed.	Update and circulate the workforce strategy to reflect current need.	TH	April 2019	2
	Engage with the DfE practice supervisors development programme 3 candidates commencing Feb 2019. Further cohorts to be planned.	SK	Feb 2019	1
	Evaluate the impact of the first line programme (10 managers have completed the programme)	SK	June 2019	3
	Develop internal leadership and management development sessions to build on the work already undertaken.	AW	Oct 2019	2
	Analyse findings of the succession and talent management tool to predict workforce needs	AW	May 2019	3
7.4 Ensure staff are trained and developed, supporting and promoting their wellbeing.	Develop a comprehensive learning offer based on training needs analysis and corporate priorities	TH/AW	May 2019	2
	Implement the actions from the staff survey and undertake social work health check	SK	April 2019	3
	Implement corporate wellbeing policy making timely referrals to Occupational Health to manage absence robustly, supporting attendance at work.	AW	Ongoing	2

What measurable impact is expected?

- Staff are attracted to NCC, successfully recruited and retained
- Staff satisfaction increased using SW health check
- Experienced staff retained in the organisation

- Newly qualified staff are well inducted and trained into NCC practice and retained and promoted into more senior positions
- Varied source of new entrants to increase diversity of ASYE
- Experienced managers successfully complete the practice supervisors programme and are retained in the service to benefit from succession planning
- Reduced staff turnover rate
- Reduced staff sickness levels
- Improved performance and quality of practice in all areas of Children's Social Care (evidenced by the above processes)

Priority 8	Continually improve leadership and partnership working to deliver better outcomes			
Key areas	Focus on vulnerable children and young people, capturing the lived experience			
Overall Lead	Cath Mcevoy-Carr / Alan Hartwell			
Aims	Key actions	Lead(s)	Timescales	Progress 1 - 4
8.1 Launch the children and young people's partnership (CYPSP) with the revised and strengthened Children and Young People's Plan.	Work with partners to develop new plan based on shared outcomes	CM-C / AH	April 2019	2
	Consult with children and young people and relevant bodies in the democratic process		May 2019	3
8.2 As a regional early adopter, shape the local safeguarding partnership arrangements across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.	Align with the multi agency partners to identify appropriate local arrangements	CM-C	April 2019	3
	Use regional arrangements to agree with strategic priorities	CM-C	Sept 2019	3
8.3 Ensure that the voice of children and young people shapes and influences service development and delivery (plus voice of other service users) See also priority 5				
8.4 Improve the effectiveness of partnership working between social care and schools	Improve the information provided to schools about social work involvement and interventions so that this work can be supported and built upon within these settings.	GR	July 2019	3
	Improve the schools' understanding of the range of social care services to children and young people and how to access them	DC / MC / JW	July 2019	3
8.5 Improve the transitions process between children's and adults'	Finalise the transitions policy developments	GR / S Murray	June 2019	4

social care using structural opportunities to support the ethos.	Ensure reference to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) action plan	GR / SB	June 2019	3
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What measurable impact is expected?

- CYPP published and implemented
- Development of a new outcomes framework to measure impact (see also Priority 5)
- Evidence from the evaluation of practice days and practice week
- Evidence from LSCB audits and quality assurance measured through the Quality Improvement and Performance sub group