

ILACS Action Plan – St Helens Council

January 2020

“History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children.”

Nelson Mandela

Since July 2018 following an Ofsted focussed inspection in St Helens which found significant shortfalls in practice, the Authority has been on an improvement journey across Children’s Services. Much progress has been made to move forwards in social work practice, systems and processes, and the culture within the Department.

In September 2019 Ofsted undertook a full ILACS inspection and, unfortunately, whilst the Inspectors acknowledged the improvements that had been made over the preceding 12 months and the progress within the Department, the overall judgement was that it was ‘inadequate’.

Consequently, Senior Officers and Members recognised the need to continue to move at pace and address the shortfalls within Children’s Services. Senior Leaders in St Helens are determined and ambitious, and continue to strive for Children’s Services to move to ‘good’ and then ‘outstanding’.

The priority focus following the ILACS inspection will be on social work practice, management oversight, reducing drift and delay particularly in permanence planning, and ensuring the Department establishes and maintains high standards and drives better outcomes for children.

A culture of high support and high challenge will continue to be established and underpinned by effective leadership, ongoing learning and reflection, and robust governance and decision making. This ILACS action plan will be overseen by the Improvement Board, and staff will be empowered to drive improvements with Senior Leaders, children and young people.

The impact of this plan will be measured by 4 key factors:

1. The Improvement Board performance dashboard and the KPIs within this action plan
2. Children and young people feedback
3. Staff and partnership feedback
4. Ofsted rating

Sarah O’Brien

Executive Director People’s Services / Accountable Officer, St Helens CCG

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SECTION 1:

What Needs to Improve: The quality of social work assessments and plans, to ensure that intervention is purposeful, and progress with children and families can be measured.

Improvement Aim: The quality of social work assessments and plans will be consistently of a 'Good' standard across all areas of practice and as a result intervention will be timely and appropriate and will drive measurable improvements for children and their families without drift & delay.

	Ofsted Finding	Action to be taken	Outcome / Impact for Children	Lead Officer	Timescale Black - work starts Blue - outcomes improving by	Comment on Progress	R A G
343	1.1 Early help assessments and plans vary in quality	Early Help Service Manager will undertake a piece of work to improve the consistent quality of assessments and plans in early help. Examples of "good assessment's" will be provided for all staff to support staff. Regular audits will continue to be undertaken to track improvements and the aspiration is to improve the % of good assessments to 100%.	Early help and Social work practice will improve and be consistently good. This will ensure children and families get help and support at the earliest opportunity and are safe from actual harm. Early Help work will prevent escalation of concerns and the need for statutory intervention in family life.	Assistant Director Education & Children's Health	March 2020 Feb 2021		
	Decisions are sometimes made to reduce the level of support prematurely, resulting in the need for repeat statutory interventions in a short period of time.	The Heads of Service for Front Door and Duty, Social Work Assessment, and the Assistant Director Community and Schools Support Services will work together and agree steps to be taken to ensure more effective joint working between Early Help and Social Work teams, so that the level of support is not reduced prematurely and children are not moving in short periods of time between Early Help and statutory Social Work. A clear protocol will be agreed by Heads of Service on step up/step down cases. Such cases will be regularly reviewed by Heads of Service and ADs.	Children will flourish, feel secure, listened to and have a say in the plans professionals put in place for them. The voice of children will be clearly evident across case files. The thread between what children have said and actions / outcomes in their plans will be highlighted.	Assistant Director Children's Social Care	April 2020 Feb 2021		

		<p>There will be routine audits of step up/step down arrangements. System development will be undertaken to ensure Early Help work more visible.</p>	<p>KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 0% audits judged to be inadequate 				
<p>1.2</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">344</p>	<p>The quality of assessments is not consistently good enough and they are not always updated after significant events. Analysis is weak and the voice of the child is not always clear.</p>	<p>Training Sessions regarding Social Work Assessments will be undertaken across all teams to improve the quality and consistency of assessments. In addition, specific development sessions will be undertaken with first line managers to drive more effective management oversight. Training sessions will also include the need for better engagement with children (and the recording of this in assessments) and consideration of historical information, networks and previous work. Thematic audits will be undertaken on a rolling basis to continuously assess the quality of assessments and to also drive their improvement. Examples of what “good” assessments look like will also be produced and shared with staff. The assessment pro-forma will be reviewed as part of Signs of Safety roll out. Co-production and staff engagement is key.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The rate of improvement in the % of early help audits judged to be good - % of cases re-referred to CSC from Early Help - The rate of improvement in the % of assessments that are judged to be good (target 100%) - Number of children offered an advocate (target 100%) and number of children engaged with an advocate - A decline in rate of statutory intervention - Number of training sessions offered and number taken up 	<p>Principal Social Worker (Training Actions)</p> <p>Senior Assistant Director Children’s Safeguarding (Audit Actions)</p>	<p>Feb 2020</p> <p>Feb 2021</p>		
		<p>Ongoing action from improvement plan (IP5.9) - The ‘Day in The Life’ tool will be routinely used which helps us to recognise and understand the lived experience of children and this will underpin all decision making and practice. This message will also be driven through the practice standards and through the Signs of Safety model. This will be made a mandatory field in core documents.</p>		<p>Assistant Director Children’s Social Care</p>	<p>Work started</p> <p>Feb 2021</p>		

1.3	The quality of plans is inconsistent. Plans are generic and lack clarity regarding what actions need to be completed, by whom and by when. Plans need to be realistic, timebound and purposeful. Updated Plans do not always reflect progress made.	Training Sessions regarding Social Work Plans will be undertaken across all teams to improve the quality and consistency of plans and to ensure they are SMART. These training sessions will also include the need for better engagement with children and the recording of this in plans. Thematic Audits will be undertaken on a rolling basis to continuously assess the quality of plans and along with driving their improvement. Examples of what "good" plans look like will also be produced and shared with staff.		Principal Social Worker (Training Actions) Senior Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding (Audit Actions)	March 2020 Feb 2021		
1.4	Need to improve access to advocacy, especially for younger children.	A review of current offer available to children in terms of advocacy and independent visits will be undertaken and any gaps identified. Following this review, the gaps will be addressed and an exercise will be undertaken to raise awareness across all social work teams of the availability of advocacy and the importance of promoting this to children. In addition, an awareness raising campaign will be undertaken with all children under social care services to raise their awareness of the availability of advocacy. The number of children accessing advocacy will be monitored.		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	June 2020 Feb 2021		
1.5	Quality of plans in respect of permanency planning is inconsistent and unclear.	Dedicated training sessions will be undertaken in terms of improving the quality of permanency planning. This section will be led by the Principal Social Worker and examples of good practice will be produced.		Principal Social Worker	Feb 2020 Feb 2021		
		Senior leaders and managers across		Director of	January 2020		

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		<p>children's services will continue to promote and track timely permanence planning and move the culture to a new way of thinking. Permanence Panel will robustly track permanence planning and provide regular reports to the Improvement Board. IRO's will offer consistent scrutiny and oversight of care plans for children.</p> <p>PIP support will focus on Permanency Planning.</p>		<p>Children's Services</p>	<p>Feb 2021</p>		
<p>1.6</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">346</p>	<p>Where plans identify the need for special guardianship, timescales for the plan to be completed are absent and this leads to drift and delay.</p>	<p>Dedicated training sessions on special guardianship and the importance of having defined timescales included within a plan. Thematic audits will be undertaken regarding the use of special guardianship to monitor improvement on this area over time.</p> <p>IRO's will offer consistent scrutiny and oversight of care plans for children. Permanence Panel will confirm and review planning for SGO and provide regular feedback for the Improvement Board, legal services and the wider team to ensure service planning is in place.</p> <p>SGO plans will be tracked.</p>		<p>Senior Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding</p>	<p>Feb 2020 Feb 2021</p>		

SECTION 2:

What Needs To Improve: Management Oversight and monitoring of services, including in pre-proceedings, to ensure that there is sufficient grip on the quality of practice and to avoid drift & delay for children.

Improvement Aim: Management oversight of cases by team managers, HOS and senior directors will improve to be consistently effective across all areas of children's services. It will drive continual improvements in the quality and impact of social work practice on children and families and will ensure drift and delay are a rare occurrence in St Helens.

	Ofsted Finding	Action to be taken	Outcome / Impact for Children	Lead Officer	Timescale Black - work starts Blue - outcomes improving by	Comment on Progress	R A G
2.1 347	There is drift and delay in progressing plans within the duty and assessment teams, which impacts on the quality of work provided to vulnerable families in need of support.	An urgent review will be undertaken of the current case transfer system between Duty, Assessment, Permanence and Early Help teams. The opinions of staff of what is currently going well with this system and what is not working will be taken into account, and any required amendments to the process will be put in place to ensure there is smooth and timely transfer of cases, particularly between Duty to Assessment Teams. Assistant Director and relevant Heads of Service will ensure Team Managers understand their role in terms of management oversight and the importance of understanding which cases are not progressing as they should. The case transfer tracker will be subject to a monthly review by the Assistant Director and thematic audits will be undertaken regularly to monitor any drift and delay between teams. Furthermore, the Assistant Director	Children at risk of harm will be identified quickly and appropriately and they will be safe. Children's needs, wishes and feelings will be central to any action taken. They will experience the right action at the right time and will feel respected by professionals. Children and young people will experience a service that responds quickly to their needs with little drift and delay. KPIs: - Number / % of cases where transfer has been delayed – per	Assistant Director Children's Social Care	May 2020 Feb 2021		

		and Heads of Service will monitor staffing and caseloads.				
2.2	Some agreed actions in Child protection work are subject to delay due to a lack of management oversight regarding the completion of timely risk assessments. This leaves a small number of children in situations of unassessed risk.	Head of Service for the Safeguarding Unit will work with Head of Service for Assessment to put in place a system for capturing actions and child protection work and ensuring these are not subject to delay. The work to ensure team managers understand their responsibilities in terms of oversight when it comes to tracking actions on children's cases, and effective scrutiny by the child protection conference chair, should further ensure that delays in child protection work are minimised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - month (target 95%) Number / % of audited cases with an outcome of Inadequate or RI for MO / Supervision (target 0% inadequate) - Staff turnover in Duty and Assessment Teams per month (aim for turnover of less than 3%) - No. of cases where a child has three or more allocated SW per month (target of zero) - The rate of improvement in the % of audits finding VoC and direct work with children to be rated as good (target 0% inadequate) 	Senior Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding	March 2020 Feb 2021	
2.3 348	Management oversight work is not consistently good across the service once work is progressed to duty and assessment teams. Supervision records are not clear enough about what actions social workers need to take. This is compounded by changes in social workers, resulting in significant drift and delay for some children.	<p>Some specific training sessions regarding management oversight, what this is and what needs to happen for it to be effective, will be put in place and offered to all Team Managers and Heads of Service. (This action is a continuum of action IP5.3 on previous improvement plan.)</p> <p>Examples of good supervision records will be produced, and training will be undertaken so staff understand what needs recording in supervision.</p> <p>Actions will be taken to minimise the change in social workers, but also the Assistant Director for Social Work will put in place effective systems so that changes of social worker and the impact this has on</p>		Principal Social Worker	March 2020 Feb 2021	
				Assistant Director Children's Social Care	March 2020 Feb 2021	

		individual teams will be monitored and escalated.				
2.4	Delayed transfer between teams following an assessment results in some families remaining in duty teams for too long without a coherent, continuous programme of intervention. So, some children do not receive support they need in a timely way.	Action 2.1 will cover this		Principal Social Worker	Feb 2021	
2.5	<p>Monthly performance clinics provide a forum for scrutiny and challenge, but all new developments have not yet had desired impact on the quality of management oversight in teams.</p> <p>More is needed to ensure frontline managers monitor performance more effectively and are robustly held to account to drive up the quality of practice.</p> <p>Senior managers must ensure they have effective mechanisms to have an accurate overview of practice.</p>	<p>Monthly performance clinics will continue, and a service Performance Management Framework will be put in place. Team Managers will be actively engaged in Performance Clinics to support understanding, effective monitoring of performance and the transfer of learning into practice.</p> <p>Systems will be put in place to ensure front line managers understand how to monitor performance and are doing this more effectively. Progress on this will be reported to the Children's Improvement Board.</p> <p>Partners in Practice will support us in establishing better mechanisms to ensure senior managers understand practice gaps.</p>		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	<p>June 2020</p> <p>Feb 2021</p>	
2.6	The quality assurance	Work that has started in the last 12		Senior	Ongoing	

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350	<p>framework is not fully implemented. Work must continue to embed Quality Assurance framework to ensure audit enables effective management oversight and drives practice improvement.</p>	<p>months on implementing the Quality Assurance Framework will continue, aspects will be implemented. (This action is similar to the ongoing action in the previous Improvement Plan IP2.3.)</p> <p>Audits will continue to occur as planned but new forums for reporting the outcomes of audit to team managers and Advanced Practitioners will be put in place to ensure that the learning from audit is driving practice improvement.</p> <p>We will ensure from now that all activity undertaken in Children's Services (early years through to permanence) is co-ordinated through Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Framework.</p>		<p>Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding</p>	<p>Feb 2021</p>	
2.7	<p>Considerable cultural barriers to practice improvement remain, particularly in relation to embedding effective management oversight at all levels to challenge the too variable standards of social work practice.</p>	<p>Action 2.3 addresses how we will improve management oversight.</p> <p>Performance clinics, high risk case meetings, DCS assurance clinics, Improvement Board and Scrutiny will all be mechanisms to challenge and drive improvements in practice.</p> <p>The DCS and Executive Director will challenge existing custom, beliefs, values and practice to establish a new approach (culture) that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on children's outcomes • Open 	<p>Children and young people will be cared for and supported by staff who are well developed and high performing. Practice will be better and therefore children and young people will experience high standards of care, timely intervention and outcomes will improve.</p> <p>A workforce who are listened to and engaged with will perform better and this will impact positively on the</p>	<p>DCS</p>	<p>Work started and ongoing</p> <p>Feb 2021</p>	

351		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective • Challenging • Dynamic • Supportive of staff • Underpinned by high standards and expectations <p>Communication and engagement with staff will improve through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly news round-ups • Monthly 'Meet Director' sessions – staff selected from across teams • AD meet service managers • Monthly summary ELT key messages • Visible Executive Director – on site 2x weekly • Assistant Director visible • Chief Exec on site regularly 	<p>experience of children and longer-term outcomes. Children and young people's views, learning from them and resulting improvements in practice will be incorporated into communications to staff.</p>			
2.8	<p>Frequent changes of social worker due to organisational restructure, staff changes and sickness mean that children sometimes have to repeat their stories too often.</p>	<p>The Department will continue to recruit to vacant social work posts. HR and wider Corporate support will be provided to ensure the Council has robust strategies to recruit and retain staff and minimise the turnover. Staff vacancies and sickness will be tracked and monitored at the Workforce Planning Board and will be reviewed at the Improvement Board.</p> <p>In addition, a Workforce Planning Board with HR will be established to ensure that, through the work on management oversight, mechanisms are put in place within</p>		<p>Assistant Director Children's Social Care</p>	<p>Feb 2020 Feb 2021</p>	

		Children's Social Care to ensure that the Assistant Director is aware of pockets where change in social worker is particularly high.					
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SECTION 3:

What Needs To Improve: Permanence planning from the front door through to adoption, to ensure that the full range of permanence options are achieved in a timely way for all children in care.

Improvement Aim: There will be a shift in ‘culture’ and approach in St Helens to ensure a ‘think permanence’ ethos is embedded right across the service. More children will achieve early permanence and the rates of Looked After Children will reduce and be comparable to similar regional and national neighbours.

	Ofsted Finding	Action to be taken	Outcome / Impact for Children	Lead Officer	Timescale Black - work starts Blue - outcomes improving by	Comment on Progress	R A G
3.1	Pre-proceedings work is underdeveloped. There has been delay in securing the correct legal status for some children. New arrangements for legal gateway need to continue and embed.	A further review of pre-proceedings and legal gateway arrangements will be undertaken and any areas that still require improvement will be identified and action taken. The good work already underway will continue and start to embed.	Permanency planning for children in St Helens, from the minute they are referred into the service, will improve and be consistently good. Social Workers from the Front Door all the way through to the Permanency Service will understand the need for permanency planning, and will understand how to recognise those children and young people who are at high risk of coming into care to ensure that action is taken in a timely, consistent and responsive manner. Impact on children will be that children are not left in situations for too long that are not the most appropriate arrangement for their needs. Ultimately, this improvement in permanency planning will reduce the number of children in our care in St Helens.	Assistant Director Children's Social Care	June 2020		
3.2	Private fostering services are underdeveloped. More needs to be done to ensure all professionals are effectively identifying children living in these arrangements so that their needs can be assessed, and they can be effectively safeguarded.	Dedicated Social Workers identified by the Head of Service will hold private fostering cases. Audits will be scheduled to review the impact of this work. An awareness campaign will be undertaken across the multi-agency partnership to ensure all agencies understand private fostering so that those children living in private fostering arrangements will be identified and managed appropriately and effectively. Progress to be reported in to CSP.		Senior Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding	May 2020 Feb 2021		

<p>3.3</p>	<p>The lack of recognition of the need for permanence and the very poor quality of permanence planning by managers is widespread. Significant drift and delay is experienced by children who are left too long in situations where their legal security is unclear or unmet.</p>	<p>A whole department wide training programme regarding permanency planning will be put in place and implemented. The work on management oversight will introduce better skills but also mechanisms to identify those children where drift and delay is becoming a problem. Audits will be undertaken to assess the improvements in permanency planning. The training around permanency planning will also include information to ensure that staff understand the full range of permanency options.</p> <p>Partners in Practice will be asked to help us improve permanency planning.</p>	<p>KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rate of improvement in % of private fostering applications meeting compliance (audit every 6 months) - Average times for PP cases - Number of children discharged from care via each route (SGO, etc) per month (target of greater number discharged than entering care) - No. of children with or without long term permanence approved Placement with Parents compliance rate (tested via audit) 	<p>Assistant Director Children's Social Care</p>	<p>Feb 2020 Feb 2021</p>		
<p>3.4</p>	<p>The full range of permanence options, including special guardianship (SGO) & adoption, is not routinely considered in a timely way, or at all, so children are subject to unnecessary involvement in long-term fostering arrangements for too long.</p> <p>SGO has not been explored proactively with families when it is in the best interests of children to do so.</p>	<p>A whole department wide training programme regarding permanency planning via SGO will be put in place and implemented. The work on management oversight will introduce better skills but also mechanisms to identify those children where drift and delay is becoming a problem. Audits will be undertaken to assess the improvements in SGO work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The number of children exiting care with an adoption plan - A1, A2, A3 adoption score card measures 	<p>Assistant Director Children's Social Care</p>	<p>Feb 2020 Feb 2021</p>		

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3.5	For a small number of children who live with friends or family members, viability assessments are not completed to assess any potential risks, and these connected carers are not always offered appropriate support by the fostering service.	<p>The Fostering Service will undertake a review of children who are currently living with friends or family to review the quality of viability assessments and address any gaps.</p> <p>Policies and systems will be put in place to make sure that these connected carers are, going forward, routinely offered the support they need. Audits will be undertaken to assess the improvements in this area and the impact on children.</p>		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	June 2020 Feb 2021		
3.6	Plans to return home are not supported by a full risk assessment or progressed in a planned way.	A new practice standard guidance will be put in place in relation to plans to return children home, and examples of what a good plan to return home looks like will be provided. The service will work with NSPCC to implement a Reunification Programme. Ongoing audit will assess the impact of this.		Principal Social Worker	April 2020 Feb 2021		
3.7	There is no evidence of specific family support consistently being provided to address the complex family issues which resulted in the child entering care.	A review of the current offer of support from Family Intervention Workers in relation to children on the Edge of Care will be undertaken. Clear advice in relation to the offer will be developed with any gaps identified and actions put in place to ensure there is consistent family support being provided going forwards. Audits will be undertaken to assess the impact of this.		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	March 2020 Feb 2021		

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3.8	Placement with parent regulations are poorly understood.	Specific training in relation to placement with parent regulations will be offered as part of training on permanency planning. Improved tracking of this work and oversight along with ongoing audits will assess improvements in this area.		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	Feb 2021		
3.9	When children do return home and make progress there is further delay progressing revocation of care orders, or securing legal permanence through Special guardianship arrangements.	There will be increased oversight of the current status of revocation of care orders via the joint meeting with Legal. A report on this area will be taken to Children's Improvement Board and they will monitor progress.		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	April 2020 Feb 2021		
3.10 356	Children who need to be adopted are not always identified early enough, and there is not yet a robust system in place to ensure that family finding starts at the earliest opportunity.	The training on permanency planning will cover this area and ongoing audits will assess the impact. Ongoing audits will assess the impact raising the profile of the adoption advice meetings.		Principal Social Worker	Audit ongoing Feb 2021		
3.11	There has been insufficient rigour in progressing permanence once children are placed with carers. There needs to be clear mechanisms and tools in place for senior managers to understand extent of drift or delay and poor practice in permanence planning. A tracker and permanence panels need embedding to monitor progress of plans for	A permanency tracker will be implemented and monitored via the Permanency Panel which will be put in place and embedded. A report will be taken to the Children's Improvement Board to explain these mechanisms and any other mechanisms that are put in place to ensure senior managers have good oversight of children currently subject to permanency planning.		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	Dec 2019 Feb 2021 Feb 2020		

	children who are yet to secure legal permanence and ensure formal matches take place.	<p>IRO's will ensure there is a Permanence Plan agreed at the 2nd LAC review and, if not, use the escalation protocol to secure a permanence plan. Permanence planning to be considered at every review.</p> <p>Audits will be undertaken in this area monthly for at least 12 months to ensure that this crucial area of development is addressed. Chair of the Panel will submit a 6 monthly report to Improvement Board.</p>			Feb 2020		
3.12 357	The fostering service needs to improve through more training and the fostering panel needs a review to ensure compliance with regulations.	<p>A review of the Fostering Panel has already been undertaken to address this particular Ofsted finding. A report on findings and action taken will be taken to the Children's Improvement Board. Legal advisor to the Foster Panel will ensure the panel meets its regulatory requirements and a planned internal audit will be undertaken to assess this.</p> <p>In addition, a review of the fostering service will be undertaken by an external reviewer – a proposal for this will be developed by Heads of Service and brought to the Improvement Board.</p>		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	Feb 2021	August 2020	
3.13	<p>Corporate parenting is more of a priority than it was 12 months ago.</p> <p>Need to further embed 'corporate parenting' and ensure forum is effective.</p>	A review of the current Corporate Parenting Forum will be undertaken and, in consultation with the current members and some young people, changes made to ensure the good work started continues, but to make sure it is more effective in terms of		Portfolio Lead Protecting Young People	June 2020 Feb 2021		

scrutiny and oversight than it has been previously.

Work undertaken over the last 12 months to make sure that children are a top priority and central to the Council will continue, with the support of the Chief Exec and Leader. Children's Services will remain a priority and key initiatives, such as the Children in Care Celebration Event, Care Leaver's hampers etc, will continue.

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SECTION 4:

What Needs To Improve: Support for children and families on the edge of care which is timely, responsive and effective.

Improvement Aim: We will establish an 'outstanding' Edge of Care service which facilitates better outcomes for children and young people at high risk of coming into care and facilitates a reduction in the number of Children in Care in St Helens.

	Ofsted Finding	Action to be taken	Outcome / Impact for Children	Lead Officer	Timescale Black - work starts Blue - outcomes improving by	Comment on Progress	R A G
359	<p>4.1 Services for children on the edge of care are not yet offered to families in a consistent way.</p> <p>With no edge of care service in place, the local authority is constrained in its efforts to prevent children coming into care and to adequately support them to safely return home without delay.</p>	<p>During 2019 Cabinet approved additional funding to establish a robust edge of care service. The aim is to identify appropriate property and open up elements of this service from January 2020. The strategy approved by Cabinet will be implemented urgently and implementation and progress monitored through the Children's Improvement Board every 3 months with the first update in February 2020.</p>	<p>Children at risk of going into care will be identified promptly and appropriate steps taken to provide them urgent support. Where possible they will be prevented from becoming children in care for.</p> <p>KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No. of cases supported by Edge of Care Service – initially 40% of children who are on the edge of care would be prevented from coming into care in the first year but that this target would increase in the years after. In terms of numbers this will phase up as the service comes on line. - No. of FGCs held per month (numbers should increase as the service becomes 	<p>Assistant Director Children's Social Care</p>	<p>Feb 2020</p> <p>Feb 2021</p>		
	<p>4.2 A sufficiency strategy and action plan are in place, but this lacks analysis to inform future capacity needs.</p>	<p>The current sufficiency strategy and action plan will be reviewed to ensure it is more robust and more analytical, and that it helps the service to plan for future capacity needs.</p>		<p>Assistant Director Education & Children's Health</p>	<p>June 2020</p>		

			becoming looked after (aim for a decline in rate so come in-line with statistical neighbours)				
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SECTION 5:

What Needs To Improve: The quality and usefulness of pathway plans, to ensure that they help care leavers address a range of issues, depending on individual needs.

Improvement Aim: Pathway plans for care leavers will be of a consistently good standard and will ensure care leavers receive the right level of support to meet their needs.

	Ofsted Finding	Action to be taken	Outcome / Impact for Children	Lead Officer	Timescale Black - work starts Blue - outcomes improving by	Comment on Progress	R A G
361	5.1 Care leavers are not always provided with their health histories to enable them to understand their health needs.	Work ongoing with Health partners to ensure that the health histories for children we look after are robust, and we will implement a system to ensure that care leavers are provided with their health histories as a matter of routine. Dip sample audits will be undertaken to ensure that this is occurring consistently.	Care leavers will receive information about their health history and will be supported to access health services to ensure their health needs are met. We will ensure that pathway planning is improved and provides a clear plan for young people.	Senior Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding	June 2020 Feb 2021		
	5.2 Some young people do not receive a PA as soon as they need it, the aim to extend allocation of PAs to 16 year olds needs to be achieved.	Review the current level of PAs in the service with a plan to make sure that, within 6 months of this action plan, the allocation of PAs has been extended to those young people who are 16 years old.	KPIs: - % of young people with health passport (target 100%) - % of 16 year olds with allocated PA (target 100%) - % of audited Pathway Plans that are judged to be good (target	Assistant Director Children's Social Care	June 2020		
	5.3 The quality of pathway plans is inconsistent and not all are up to date or provide enough detail to reflect the young person's current needs.	Continue the work already started in the last 12 months to produce overarching leaving care assessments and pathway planning guidance. Ensure that staff within the leaving care service understand what a good quality pathway		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	Ongoing Feb 2021		

		plan looks like. Undertake dip sample audits to ensure that this area is improving.	<p>- greater than 80%) No. of out of borough care leavers in receipt of our accommodation standard (target 100%)</p>				
5.4	There is limited evidence that pathway plans are being utilised as a way of effectively promoting young people for independence.	<p>Work will be undertaken with PA's to ensure Pathway Plans are being used as the key driver for work with our young people.</p> <p>Feedback will be sought from care leavers twice yearly to understand their experiences of pathway plans.</p>		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	March 2020 Feb 2021		
5.5	The accommodation options and offer for care leavers placed out of borough are not clear.	The Head of Service, overseen by the Care Leavers Board, will appraise the current accommodation options and offers for those care leavers placed out of borough, and produce a report for the Children's Improvement Board. Following this review, the Children's Improvement Board will determine whether any further actions or areas of improvement need to be taken.		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	April 2020 Feb 2021		
5.6	There is more work to do to engage care leavers, 19-21 year olds, where the numbers not in education, employment or training is high.	A new drop-in service for care leavers will be established and a newly appointed NEET worker will start to target this group of care leavers with the aim of improving the numbers in education, employment or training.		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	July 2020		
5.7	Care leavers are not always clear about the details of the	Write to all care leavers and explain the local offer and where		Assistant Director	March 2020		

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	local offer.	they can find details of the local offer and promote drop in services.		Children's Social Care	Feb 2021		
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NOTE: In addition to the actions in Section 5 there is a stand-alone care leavers action plan (this was Section 7 of the previous Improvement Plan). Delivery of this action plan is monitored by the Care Leaver's Board and reports into the Corporate Parenting Forum. Twice a year progress on this will be reported to the Improvement Board.

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SECTION 6:

What Needs To Improve: Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs’) challenge in relation to the quality of permanence planning, to ensure that more robust oversight drives practice effectiveness

Improvement Aim: We will establish a SCU (Safeguarding Unit) with IROs and Conference Chairs that are highly trained and skilled and bring an effective level of challenge and independent scrutiny to the quality of social work practice and permanency planning. The IRO’s will drive better outcomes and improved experiences for the children in our care.

	Ofsted Finding	Action to be taken	Outcome / Impact for Children	Lead Officer	Timescale Black - work starts Blue - outcomes improving by	Comment on Progress	R A G
6.1 364	There is limited evidence of IROs systematically raising concerns in relation to drift and delay in permanence planning.	<p>A new training programme to update IROs will be undertaken, with the aim being that all IROs in the Safeguarding Unit will understand their roles and responsibilities, and the standard expected within the IRO handbook.</p> <p>A formal system of escalation will be put in place for both conference chairs and the IROs. The primary purpose of this will be for IROs and Conference Chairs to raise issues in relation to the quality and timeliness of planning, and any aspects of practice to avoid drift and delay and improve social work practice. There will be regular audits to check this and the DCS will review the escalation process and tracker on a monthly basis.</p>	<p>We will embed systems to ensure the quality of support provided is good, and that scrutiny and oversight from the Safeguarding Unit (IROs and Conference Chairs) is robust.</p> <p>KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Volume and Timescales for escalation resolution - % of escalations relating to drift and delay on cases (target: reducing number quarterly) - No. of cases escalated to DCS per annum (target of reducing numbers) - Number of 	Senior Assistant Director Children’s Safeguarding	<p>March 2020</p> <p>Feb 2021</p> <p>March 2020</p>		

			children with a permanence plan at the second LAC review (target of greater than 80%)			
6.2	Allegations against professionals have not always been responded to robustly in recent months. New LADO arrangements need embedding.	A new LADO arrangement is being embedded. A report on the new arrangements and what it entails will be taken to the Children's Improvement Board. Agreed actions and timescales will be approved here and monitored by the Children's Improvement Board.	<p>Children in all settings will be protected from risk of harm posed by any staff caring for them.</p> <p>KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Times to resolve LADO referrals (Target of reduction in delays) - Number of agencies referring (target – widespread agencies) 	Senior Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding	May 2020 Feb 2021	

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SECTION 7:

What Needs To Improve: The quality of support to new social workers and close monitoring of caseloads for all staff, to ensure that more robust oversight drives practice effectiveness.

Improvement Aim: We will establish an effective system of support for new (and all social workers) and review current systems for caseload monitoring that don't over rely on average caseload reporting to ensure senior staff understand how demand is affecting individual social workers.

	Ofsted Finding	Action to be taken	Outcome / Impact for Children	Lead Officer	Timescale Black - work starts Blue - outcomes improving by	Comment on Progress	R A G
7.1 366	High caseloads in some teams and workflow issues that have contributed to further drift and delay	<p>Over the last 12 months new systems have been put in place to monitor caseloads, and standards have been established in terms of the reasonable number of cases for both ASYEs and experienced social workers. However, whilst a lot of the time average caseloads have been reasonable, there have been pockets, as found by Ofsted, where some social workers and teams are holding too many cases, and this is impacting on work. An urgent review of current staffing levels will be undertaken following the Ofsted inspection, and where there are staffing challenges resulting in highest caseloads, this will be addressed from within existing resources where possible. Where there are gaps a case of need will be produced and taken through the appropriate decision making forums within the Council.</p> <p>A review of the current system for monitoring caseloads will be undertaken and extra steps introduced so that average numbers are not relied on. The DCS will receive a monthly update on caseloads</p>	<p>A well developed and supported workforce, with manageable caseloads, will deliver a high standard of social work practice which will impact positively on children as it will ensure children receive the right level of care, at the right time, for the correct duration.</p> <p>The voice of the children will be incorporated within policies, procedures, performance management, supervision etc</p> <p>KPIs:</p>	Assistant Director Children's Social Care	Feb 2021		

		across all teams.				
7.2	Social workers in their first post qualifying year of practice, however, do not yet have an established, protected learning environment in which they can develop in their role fully supported. Their caseloads are too high, the support they receive is fragmented and the LA needs to do more to ensure that less experienced staff receive an effective package of support.	<p>Compliance with the agreed Teaching Partnership Assessed and Supported Year in Employment will be monitored to ensure there is protected learning time for newly qualified social workers - this will become standard practice within the Department. The Assistant Director will review this on a monthly basis and make sure that all newly qualified social workers are receiving their protected time and their mentoring.</p> <p>The Assistant Director will develop a proposal for addressing current gaps in mentoring and support for new social workers and present this to the DCS by 01.02.2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Caseloads per team including RANGE and average. (Target for experienced social worker is 20 or less) - ASYE caseload including % of CP cases held. (Target - caseload of 18 or less) - % or number of Social Workers with caseload above 22 (experienced social work) or 18 (ASYE) - % of agency workers in each service area (Target of zero agency workers) - % of assessments completed in 15 days (Target of 100%) 	Assistant Director Children's Social Care	Feb 2020 Feb 2021	
7.3 367	There is considerable reliance on agency staff, this has led to instability and hampered the pace of change and quality of improvement required.	The Assistant Director will continue to work closely with HR in terms of recruitment and retention of staff. Following the Ofsted inspection, a new action plan will be put in place to further reduce the reliance on agency staff.		Assistant Director Children's Social Care	June 2020	
7.4	Senior leaders have acknowledged the need for the workforce to develop new skills, including front line management, particularly in key areas related to planning & permanence, but this work has been too slow to progress.	<p>The department will continue implementing signs of safety across Children's Social Work. This will give teams a clear social work model to underpin their practice and, as part of the training for signs of safety, will help them to develop new skills.</p> <p>A training package will be put in place specifically for Team Managers to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities. This will be led by the Principal Social Worker and, where appropriate, will be done in conjunction with the social work department at Edge Hill</p>		Senior Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding Principal Social Worker	Feb 2021 Ongoing Feb 2021	

		<p>University.</p> <p>The Principal Social Worker will devise a programme of training and updates for all staff and again, following a meeting with Edge Hill, will use the social work department at Edge Hill to support this enhanced training.</p> <p>In consultation with HR and the One Council programme, a programme of organisational development and leadership training will be put in across Children's Services.</p>		<p>Principal Social Worker</p> <p>Executive Director People's Services</p>	<p>Feb 2021</p> <p>April 2020</p>		
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SECTION 8:

What Needs To Improve: Corporate support on implementing improvement plans with pace.

Improvement Aim: Children’s Services will be seen as a top priority for the whole Council. The improvement journey will be supported by staff and leaders across the Council. Council corporate systems and processes will enable improvements, and barriers to change to be broken down.

	Ofsted Finding	Action to be taken	Outcome / Impact for Children	Lead Officer	Timescale Black - work starts Blue - outcomes improving by	Comment on Progress	R A G
369	8.1 The new senior management team appointments are still very new, and has yet to deliver the level of sustained improvement required.	<p>A decision has been taken by St Helens Council that a full time statutory DCS will be appointed under the Executive Director for People’s Services. This post will provide further experienced senior management to the department and will provide a full time Director of Children’s Services to support the new Senior Management Team on the improvement journey.</p> <p>In addition, the senior management team (Assistant Director and Heads of Service posts) will all have a personal development plan agreed and will receive ongoing development and mentoring over the next 12 months.</p> <p>In addition, the DfE</p>	<p>Children in care will be treated with respect and will be a top priority for St Helens Council. They will have the opportunity to progress and reach their full potential similar to children not in care in the borough. Children in care will know they are important and supported by the council.</p> <p>KPIs:</p>	Executive Director People’s Services	DCS July 2020 Development Programme start Feb 2020 and ongoing		

		quality of practice will be recorded on People's Services Risk Register and, when necessary, the Corporate Risk Register.		Children's Social Care		
8.3	Children's views, and the views of care leavers, are beginning to influence service development and raise the profile of children's experiences.	<p>Continue the work on engagement of children and young people, and fully implement the Voice of Children Framework.</p>  <p>Voice of Children and Young People Framev</p>		Senior Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding		

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SECTION 9:

What Needs To Improve: There is still much to be done in St Helens to embed the new 'Descriptions of Need' document, and to tackle the underlying problems of neglect and domestic abuse and the impact of these challenges on the experiences and outcomes for children and their families. Ofsted make reference to all three of these areas in the inspection report.

Improvement Aim: The Description of Need guidance will be embedded across the multi-agency partnership in St Helens and result in consistent application of thresholds for appropriate intervention and support for children and families. The big challenges of Neglect and Domestic Abuse will be tackled by all partners and the negative impact on children understood and addressed to ensure children are safeguarded appropriately and that Adverse Childhood Experiences are minimised. **The Multi Agency Safeguarding Board will lead on this section of the action plan.**

	Ofsted Finding	Action to be taken	Outcome / Impact for Children	Lead Officer	Timescale Black - work starts Blue - outcomes improving by	Comment on Progress	R A G
9.1 372	Some families receive an effective service from early help which leads to positive outcomes. However, decisions are sometimes made to reduce the level of support prematurely, resulting in the need for repeat statutory interventions in a short period of time.	<p>Work that has commenced in the last 12 months to roll out and embed the thresholds of need document will continue across all partners in St Helens. The Safeguarding Partnership Board will maintain oversight of this work and undertake audits and other assessments to determine how effective the thresholds of needs document is, and the impact that it is having on children.</p> <p>CSP will provide bi-monthly newsletters for all partners highlighting progress, barriers and importance of role of all partners to ensure improvement is sustainable.</p> <p>Thresholds will continue to</p>	<p>Children & young people will experience a consistent & timely response to their needs from all key partners (school, health, police, social care etc).</p> <p>KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of cases held at early help that escalate to CSC – including repeat cases - Number of Early Help episodes started - Number of Early Help episodes open - % of all Early Help episodes closed that are stepped 	Chief Nurse	<p>Work ongoing</p> <p>Feb 2021</p>		

		<p>be reinforced in the new one day WTSC 18 New MARF asks partners to cross check and refer to threshold criteria when referring.</p> <p>MASH Board will monitor the Thresholds as cases are referred. .In addition, multi-agency audits will take place to ensure consistency of threshold application. Both reports will be provided for CSP.</p>	<p>down to universal services (short term measure)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of early help episodes closed which result in step down to level 1/universal and are maintained at this level for a 12 month period (longer term measure) 				
9.2 373	<p>The response to domestic abuse and neglect is improving. Both are a significant feature of children's lives in St Helens. There is more to do to respond to chronic neglect in a timely way to ensure that families receive the right help at the right time.</p>	<p>A new Domestic Abuse Strategy is being developed and will be launched in January. The Children's Safeguarding Partnership Board will oversee the implementation of this strategy in terms of children's services. It will identify any gaps in service for children in need as a result of DA and will track the numbers of children receiving a service.</p>	<p>Children subject to domestic abuse or neglect or lived experience of domestic abuse will be identified and protected appropriately.</p> <p>Timely action will be taken to protect them from cumulative harm. Children in St Helens will be safe and flourish.</p> <p>KPIs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of referrals due to DA - % of referrals due to concerns re: neglect - % of assessments due to DA / Neglect - % of children on CP plans or CLA 	Director of Public Health	Ongoing Feb 2021		
		<p>A new Neglect Strategy was launched in September 2019. There is a further workshop planned for December 2019. The Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board will maintain responsibility for implementation of this strategy and ensuring that</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of referrals due to DA - % of referrals due to concerns re: neglect - % of assessments due to DA / Neglect - % of children on CP plans or CLA 	Executive Director People's Services	Ongoing Feb 2021	

		chronic neglect is recognised and responded to in an effective way in St Helens.	<p>due to Neglect or DA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of referrals that convert due to DV - Number of agencies completing graded care profiles 				
9.3	There is an increasing focus on using the graded care profile to understand the impact of neglect on children	The use of the graded care profile will continue to be promoted and embedded in St Helens.		Senior Assistant Director Children's Safeguarding	Ongoing		
9.4	Multi-agency partners in St Helens will continue to work together to improve and maintain the quality of Voice of the Child across the whole partnership.	<p>Each statutory partner and relevant agencies will ensure that the voice and lived experience of children is paramount in all the work that it undertakes in relation to children. Each key agency will be asked to report its work on Voice of the Child, and its evidence, through audits of an improving picture regarding Voice of the Child through the Safeguarding Partnership Board.</p> <p>Safeguarding Partnership Board Independent Scrutineer and members of the Board will continue to undertake front line visits and focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neglect - Domestic abuse - Threshold document - CE & CSE 		<p>DCI Merseyside Police</p> <p>Independent Scrutineer</p>	<p>Jan 2020</p> <p>Feb 2021</p>		

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