

ILACS Areas of Improvement

	Improvement Area	Comment	Activity Status	Impact Status
A1.	Partnership Arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All subgroups are reviewing and completing the work plans to ensure they include the key priorities. Governance of the partnership is strengthened Scrutineer will review effectiveness of sub groups in driving our partnership working Work is being undertaken on the partnership training offer considering the pan cheshire approach for core training. Domestic abuse board is being re-established with identified links between the adults and children's partnership to ensure joined up approaches. Regular partnership events have been launched which will focus on themes of partnership working Neglect event scheduled for December 		
A2.	Identification, response to and management of risk	Please see additional report		
A3.	Quality of Social Work Practice – Plans, Assessments and planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training, 1:1 support and targeted work has been undertaken by the SW academy. <p>Assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment training has been delivered to the workforce throughout September 24 – a total of 110 staff members have attended this training. Review of the impact of the assessment training will be included within the thematic audits in December 24 to evidence changes to practice. <p>Plans and planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans and planning training has been delivered from the 22nd October 24, throughout the workforce. A total of 133 Staff members have attended the Plans and Planning training. A further 34 are expected to attend an additional session on November 22nd. Plans and planning will be audited in February 2025 to evidence impact. Audit continues to tell us that Plans sometimes lack detail on the actions and timescales need to be more specific. There is some evidence of plans changing to reflect needs of the families and children but this is not always captured in the documents on the child's record. The re-audit following the SWA support should see progress in quality. The template is being reviewed on the system. All training being delivered to practitioners has the golden thread of, Chronologies, permanence planning and VOC included. The audit framework evidences that auditors are considering practice standards in the auditing process and performance reports indicate improvements against the practice standards but there remains some inconsistencies in teams. SLIP partners are all scheduled with the start of support taking place on the 25/11/2024. Partners have been included in invites to sessions. We have a thematic audit programme that has been developed by the HOS Safeguarding and QA, and the programme includes additional audit activity around our improvement plan. As part of our improvement journey we have an independent auditor who supports practitioners with their audits, who has undertaken moderations and moderation of moderators and a thematic audit. In January we will have a different independent person who is able to deliver direct face to face support. 		

A4.	<p>The quality of help and support for children with vulnerabilities, specifically children aged 16 and 17</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The young carers flag has been developed on the system to support the identification and review of their care needs. Audit of the quality of plans for young carers will be undertaken. • The Commissioned service has undertaken an audit on RHI and the quality of these, CSC has requested the audit report. A thematic audit on the 18/11/2024 this will focus on the use of return home interviews and how these are supporting and informing planning for young people. The audit will provide a baseline re practice. • An audit has been undertaken on Strategy meetings, to map progress against our identified improvements. The multi-agency audit was undertaken via the multi-agency partnership QAF. • The government has recently announced a review of CWD, the consultation is scheduled to conclude in January 2025. Meetings have progressed regarding the development of the 0-25 CWD service. Staff sessions are being coordinated by TDU. The threshold documents are being reviewed by the group to agree criteria and a review of CSC children identified as having a disability will take place once the criteria is agreed. The target date to go live in January 2025. There have been some delays to progress this service, however it is progressing. • Initial meeting and task and finish groups have been arranged to progress the 16/17 years homelessness approach unfortunately both were cancelled. They have been rescheduled and an action plan is being developed. • The homelessness policy is being reviewed. Research has taken place on other LA policies around this and this will help to form part of areas of improvement. We are separating the housing policies so we will have one that focuses on 16/17 homelessness and another which will be our 'positive pathway' strategy for housing for 16+. At the moment, one policy covers all and it is not clear or includes any firm offer from housing as it needs to also address intentionally homeless decisions. 		
A5.	<p>Assessment and support for those children living in private fostering arrangements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A brief dip sample audit was undertaken ahead of schedule to ensure appropriate checks. Two PF households were identified. • Information and leaflets are having a revamp to update the website • Partnership event took place in October where PF was one of the table top discussions • Discussion has taken place in the SCP meeting regarding briefing sessions • Training for reg 24 assessments has been identified and will be delivered to relevant staff within the LA • Police checks are not always happening in a timely manner and depend on the nature of the placement / arrangement being made. 		
A6.	<p>Timeliness of decision making</p>	<p>Service targeted support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Social Work Academy have carried out an intensive practice improvement plan within ICART (Safeguarding and early help) and the Duty and assessment teams over the past 12 weeks. • During this period, SWA has reviewed how services obtain consent, how SW's review and critically analyse/reflect on chronology's/history, visiting standards, analysis, direct work, the use of tools, How the voice of the child is obtained, Strategy meeting standards and S.47 enquires, 1:2:1 support for practitioners. A total of 24 1:2:1's have been completed with the staff within the ICART Safeguarding, Early Help and Duty and Assessment teams have been completed between the periods of 14th October – 18th November 24. • The SWA Principal Manager has been working within the Duty and Assessment team since the 4th November 2024, initially supporting 3 Social Workers who were due to leave the authority, then moving through the Duty and Assessment team to review all case files of the children allocated to 		

		<p>them. The primary objective is to review children’s case files allocated to the three workers who are leaving the Duty and Assessment Team (DAAT) to ensure continuity and reduce disruption to the children and families involved. The aim is to progress support for all children as appropriate. Considering case closure, transfer to CiN / CiC teams, step down to Early Help whilst identifying priorities that need to be completed prior to the current worker leaving. The Social Workers who remain in Halton are provided support and actions to encourage progression of the support provide to each of the children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions identified have been shared with the SW and TM/SM through a designed tracker which is updated and reviewed daily. 2 out of the 3 workers have now withdrawn their notice and plan to remain in Halton (as agency). • There have been a total of 142 cases reviewed across 5 workers since the work began on the 4th November 2024. • 64 were identified to transfer to Teams. • 41 were identified to step down to Early Help or close the Children’s Social Care. • 17 were identified to be Re-allocated to another worker to progress a plan for the child. • A review of the tracker was undertaken on the 15th November 2024 identified that 43 children have closed or transferred from Duty and Assessment. • The impact of the plan was initially measured through dip sampling on the week of the 7th October, while there is evidence in most areas that efforts are being made to implement the training provided. Further dip sampling has been completed on the 18th November 2024. Findings from the dip sample will be reviewed with managers of the team and further support will be provided to close the loop. <p>IRO progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure challenge focuses on improving outcomes for children non negotiables have been agreed has now been circulated and went live on the 01/11/2024. • IROs are escalating concerns through the agreed process in order to reduce impact for children. Escalations primarily focus on drift and delay for the child and delays in assessments being completed. • There has been continued improvements in respect of children being seen prior to their meetings, the quality of those visits will be reviewed. 		
A7.	Sufficiency of suitable placements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The progress on our own children’s home has been delayed due to problems obtaining information for the area risk assessment prior to proceeding. This has recently been obtained and will now progress. • Engagement with Cotton Grass and Juno has resulted in soft blocking of beds. Cotton Grass for separated Migrant children and Juno for a three bed residential provision in Halton which is currently awaiting planning permission. • The review of placements team has been undertaken and strengthened, through the improvement planning. • The quality assurance of contracts and care is taking place with appropriate challenge to providers • Provider forum links are made and the commissioning HOS has developed relationships in this forum. Director for Childrens social care has requested an invite and this has been accepted. 		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of all current placements continues through high cost placement panel and resource panel and has resulted in some positive progress on both the identification and scrutiny over costs and care quality. • Meeting with Foster 4 a number of targeted areas have been agreed and this includes, the recruitment of emergency carers and respite carers to support our edge of care specific carers recruitment for some of our most vulnerable children and carers to offer therapeutic homes stepping down some of our children from residential to foster carers. 		
A8.	Support for children in care family time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement has been made to utilise the family time assessment approach. This will be progressed in the next few months with training and support given to practitioners. • The family time team Service manager to lead the service is identified. Future progress will include scoping of a specific venue for contacts. • The adverts for the Family time team have been delayed, this has been clarified by the PSW. • The children and YP survey is being re-circulated due to limited responses. 		
A9.	The quality of support, advice and guidance for care leavers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLIP are all starting their delivery programme week commencing 25/11/2024 • DFE advisor for Care Leavers has completed the review. Feedback was positive in terms of our aspirations and recognition that our internal plans cover areas for improvements • Care leavers app has been approved and will take three months for launch following design. Care Leavers have requested this in order to be heard and receive real time advice • Re-design of the service has been completed and the structure change approved. Managers posts have been developed and most now recruited to. • IRO post specifically for pathways plans is out to advert • A number of approaches are being taken to improve the EET figures and support our children to achieve their aspirations. 10 young people have been identified to start supporting into jobs and apprenticeships, the exploration of work experience for 6 young people within the council and private industry, Care leavers will be running the café at Brookvale children's centre in conjunction with other services providing on the job experience with a view to returning to college and or seeking employment. • CPB has been strengthened in terms of membership and the sub groups to drive the actions and service develops are being established. Identified areas of improvement by ourselves, OFSTED and the DFE are collated into this improvement plan and the CPB delivery plan. 		
A10.	The quality of visiting and direct work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A set up meeting took place with the life story work provider to review the IT systems that can support workers. A further meeting is taking place with another LA to look at how it works in reality • The creation of the Family time team will allow for CSW to be trained in Life story work to undertake this with our children • Work tools are being shared with staff across the service to support them to obtain and Analyse the views of children in order to develop plans. • We are progressing the reflective space for practitioners that will be filled with resources • Participation officer is engaging with a provider to explore the use of the app and the Care Leavers app development has been approved. 		
A11.	Social Workers & Foster Carers training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWA have set up the training offer for SW which includes, lunch time briefings on practice areas relevant to children and families. 		

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research in Practice engagement is being tracked and managers pushing this as a positive resource for staff • Foster carers event attended and carers advised they can access any training being offered to SW. • Trauma informed approach and Systemic practice approach is being scheduled to promote confidence with our practice approaches. • Parenting assess training is being offered across teams for qualified social workers • AIMS training has been delivered to a number of staff • Jobs families has been approved and social work qualified staff in front line posts have been given an uplift to bring them in line with other areas. • Foster 4 have agreed the foster carer training package and feedback from carers has been positive • All carers are up to date on the TSDS training. • Thrive approach was offered to carers and schools. 		
A12.	<p>The quality of supervision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit is demonstrating improved supervision and management oversight being recorded on records, however work continues around the quality of this • Further audit scheduled week commencing 03/12/2024 		

A2 – Identification, response to and management of risk

What needs to improve: The identification of, and response to, risk by social workers, so that children and young people receive a swift and robust response, including timely, effective strategy meetings and coherent multi-agency work.

Lead Officer: Katherine Appleton – Operational Director, Children & Families Service

Report Period	November 2024	Report By	Katherine Appleton, Director Childrens Social Care	Progress Status		Impact Status	
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Key Progress Updates

1. Strategy meetings are timely, prioritise the safety of children and identify an immediate response to risk.

CSC has undertaken an audit to review and findings are that the strategy requests were appropriate in all but one request, this is mirrored in the audit undertaken by the independent auditor and no challenge to threshold application was made during the Multi-agency audit. The timeliness continues to improve. The multi-agency audit was undertaken via the multi-agency partnership QAF and unfortunately did not receive all returns so it was not possible to triangulate findings. Police have undertaken an internal audit on strategy meetings across Pan cheshire, appropriate challenge has been raised and is being reviewed.

2. Social Worker frequency of visits reflects risks and children are seen and spoken to alone where appropriate.

Whilst there continues to be fluctuations in the frequency of visits and quality we are seeing improvements in respect of the performance data and timescales. Whilst teams report that social workers mostly visit children in response to risk or a particular event, social work records do not always reflect this intervention. SW teams report capacity as a reason for not updating records in a timely manner, however, caseloads in most teams are manageable although do flux. In order to support SW recording the pilot that was enabled to dictate from your mobile direct onto a child's record is being rolled out to all practitioners. SWA next area of focus is Voice of Child, this will involve the base line audit on the quality of visits and response to children, training, 1:1 support and re-audit.

3. Workshop and briefing on consent including how consent is clearly recorded.

Any children where consent is being withdrawn now needs agreement from the Service Manager prior to a decision to close. It is positive to note that since this commenced there has been only a small number of cases have been flagged. Other cases when explored further was the social worker incorrectly using no consent which was discussed with the social workers and practice leads for their learning.

It did become apparent that previous to the agreement that the service manager would have oversight a small number of cases were being closed down without risk fully being considered. To address this consent workshops have been completed with the team by the SW academy team and due to the falling numbers in no consent being the factor in NFA action cases this is telling us that SW /TM are understanding consent and considering risk where consent is being withdrawn, for example strategy being completed and views of other partner agencies being sought to agree next steps in line with risk.

Currently performance data from September in respect of assessments tells us that we have a number of assessment showing 'no consent' that were not presented to me for oversight so when exploring this further we have found that within the closure form that social workers complete if a 47 has taken place they are directed to select "Services ceased, other reason", a drop down box then provides 3 options

In all the cases in the September social workers ticked the box no consent to progress the closure so they pick the consent one even though parents have not withdrew and a full assessment has been completed.

This issue will be taken to the Eclipse task and finish group to agree another option.

The Social Work Academy conducted 5 consent workshops between the September 11th to September 13, 2024, with the ICART Safeguarding, ICART Early Help, and Duty and Assessment teams. ICART Early Help (EH): 6 participants (including Early Intervention Workers and manager). ICART Safeguarding: 8 participants (Social Workers and managers). Duty and Assessment Team (DAAT): 11 participants (Social Workers and managers)

On September 10, 2024, an audit dip sample was completed, focusing on: Evidence of informed consent in assessments and contact screenings, Practitioner persistence and challenge when consent was withdrawn, Management oversight where consent had been withdrawn. The audits evidenced the above in some of the sampled assessments and contacts, though additional work is necessary to ensure further improvements. One-on-one sessions have since been completed with 14 practitioners within the ICART Safeguarding, ICART Early Help, and Duty and Assessment teams. Additionally, "One Minute Guides" on consent have been re-circulated to the workforce through Team Managers. A follow-up audit dip sample is scheduled for November 18, 2024, to further evaluate the impact of consent practices within assessments and contact screenings.

4. Review of CSOG

Review of CSOG has been completed and has confirmed that it does not undertake the tasks it was intended to do. Multiple options were presented to the contextual safeguarding group for considerations. This was concluded in October so it is too early to determine the impact that the re-focusing of the group will have.

5. Recruitment of Contextual safeguarding workers

All the workers will be in post by the 16/12. It is soon to see the impact of this work. One worker has reviewed the children currently identified as at risk of Exploitation, they have reviewed the screening tool and presented recommendations to the contextual safeguarding group. They are currently working on developing a pen picture of all the young people who are identified as at risk of exploitation in order to identify trends and themes. It is acknowledged that this is a piece of work that CSOG will do moving forward in order to support the strategic group to track progress against the plans.

CICOLAS, the CICOLAS have been reviewed by CSC manager. These are relating to missing from care episodes. One was in relation to a strategy discussion due to an incident which occurred in our area, we arranged and attended the strategy meeting, chaired by the placing LA. Contacts to ICART in respect of CICOLAS have been reviewed by CSC manager. These are relating to missing from care episodes. One was in relation to a strategy discussion due to an incident which occurred in our area, we arranged and attended the strategy meeting, chaired by the placing LA. There is evidence of social workers in ICART contacting the CICOLA allocated social workers via email. I have asked social workers to contact via telephone to ensure we have any CE tools, risk/safety plans etc.

6. Family network meeting workers.

Two posts were advertised for the role of CSW with a responsibility for undertaking Family Network Meetings. They were initially advertised as 12 month posts. During the initial recruitment period we were successful in appointing for one post the worker commenced her post on the 14th October based within the Duty and Assessment Team. The second post was also recruited following further advertisement but this candidate withdrew. As a result of this the advert has gone back out and the closing date is the 24th November. The supporting templates were presented to DMT for approval and further amendments were requested. The current worker is undertaking direct work with families whilst the post starts to embed.

7. Family hubs support will be seen as an entitlement and offered to all families open to CSC.

Age 0-4

CIC - 8.8% attended at least once in last 6 months

CIN - 13.7% attended at least once in last 6 months

CP - 18.4% attended at least once in last 6 months

MAP - 14.4% attended at least once in last 6 months

EH Interventions - 17.3% attended at least once in last 6 months

The figures for CIC, CP, CIN and EH are not a complete reflection of the numbers attending, issues have arisen around the data for family Hubs, it is proving difficult to get a full data match between Eclipse and EIS. The data also does not reflect one to one work, for example on parenting or baby massage, when it is undertaken outside of the Families Hubs sites in family homes, or other locations. This usually recorded on Eclipse, and work is on-going to enable the full range of Family Hub work to be captured and reported. Currently work is being undertaken to find a more effective way of offering Family Hub registrations, recording of activities, and Family Hub Interventions. Data is also collected for all Family Hub workstreams in the Management Information for Family Hubs to DFE. The collection for the previous 3 Quarters is currently underway, and can be reported on in January 2025.

8. Develop and implement the Edge of Care service

Discussions have taken place with MerseyCare regarding the employment of the clinical lead and Mental health support worker. This has been received positively and a further meeting held to progress finances. MerseyCare will recruit the post and supervise the worker to ensure clinical supervision. The workers will sit in the team. The SLIP partners are undertaking further work in respect of the EOC model and our partners have been invited to these sessions. Foster 4 have been approached and advised to undertake some targeted recruitment work for respite and emergency carers that will support the service. The service manager has been identified and the jobs are ready to go to advert.

9. Monthly multi-agency meetings looking at referrals and responses

The ICART Audit of referrals is attached to this report. The quality of the written recordings on the audit will need to improve moving forward. The meeting is now chaired by the HOS.

10 Training regarding strategies and S47 is being written by Social Work Academy (SWA) and will be launched as a multi-agency piece of work.

The independent auditor has completed the audit on the quality of S47 investigations. The report is attached to this report. The findings of the audit will be shared with partners and support the training programme in respect of S47. S47 training is currently included in the working together training undertaken by the partnership.

11. Multi-agency training on consent and threshold application.

The training is due to commence in Feb 2025 but working together training touches upon thresholds and consent currently. In preparation, findings from the multi-agency audits in ICART will be used to formulate the training in conjunction with findings from our internal audits looking at assessments that do not result in further work and close.

Impacts & Evidence – What impact are we having or expecting, based on what evidence?

The schedule of thematic audit will support us in understanding the impact that improving practice is having for children and their families. The outcomes of these audits will continue to be reviewed and the LA will adapt our intervention to meet identified areas of development. Initial auditing work has highlighted some improved practice and performance data is supporting this. There are examples of good practice across the services and these are celebrated within teams. It is however to soon to see consistent improvements across services.