

Children and Learning Update for Scrutiny Panel

Aiming Higher, Family Safeguarding Model, Budget 2025 / 26

January 2025



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Aiming Higher



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Introduction

Ofsted ILACS outcome 2023 - *Good with outstanding leadership*

This part of the presentation outlines how the service is sustaining good practice and outstanding leadership. And then, how we aim to further improve outcomes for children and young people in Southampton.

The Ofsted ILACS guidance provides an important framework for us to benchmark practice against – however, it is important to outline that our aspirations for children and their families are broad and informed by our understanding of best practice and our local context.

We are aiming higher for children in the city because their outcomes are integral to Southampton's success as a city. We have a moral imperative to do so.

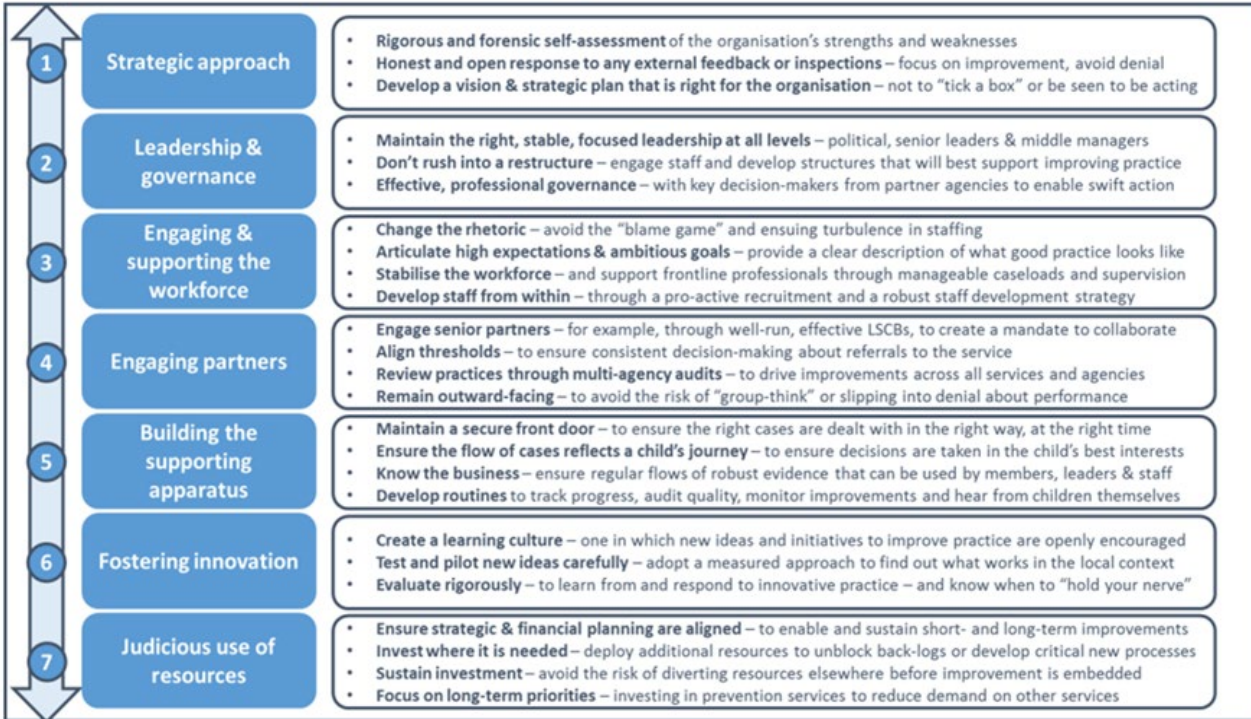


Evidence base Continuous improvement

ACTION RESEARCH INTO IMPROVEMENT IN LOCAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Practical implications for lead members and senior leaders

Seven enablers of improvement in children's services



‘For local areas seeking to improve from good to great, or sustain excellent performance, the emphasis was on maintaining consistently high-quality frontline practice and managing risk effectively. In this stage of the journey, improvement activities are no longer something discrete and separate from the day-to-day operations of children’s services. Instead, they have become the norm, or “what we do”. There are robust routines in place to ensure oversight of key service areas, but these are so embedded as to be able to embrace disciplined innovation – clear planning, precise implementation, and rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness – to drive ongoing improvement.’



Evidence base

Ofsted characteristics of an outstanding service

- A focus on getting basic social work practice right
- A consistent understanding and application of thresholds – essential for making good decisions
- Well-supported, confident and knowledgeable managers who understand the quality and impact of practice
- Performance management and quality assurance arrangements that support managers in monitoring work and to take action where necessary
- Manageable caseloads and a stable, knowledgeable and committed workforce
- Strong learning culture and a strong focus on practice
- Effective working with other agencies
- System that focuses on providing help early to children and their families and a “preventative” approach across all the levels of need, vulnerability and risk
- A child-centred system with robust arrangements and processes
- A focus on achieving sustained improvements in the lives of children and their families



Evidence base **Ofsted outstanding judgement**

The experiences and progress of: children in need of help and protection, children in care, care leavers – *‘consistently good or better and results in sustained improvement’*

‘The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families’ *is likely to be outstanding if, in addition to meeting the requirements of a ‘good’ judgement, there is evidence that leaders (both professional and political) and managers are confident, ambitious and influential in changing the lives of local children, young people and families, including children in care and those who have left or who are leaving care.*

They inspire others to change the lives of these children and young people and their families. They innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest-quality services, including early help services, for all children and young people. They know their strengths and weaknesses well and both respond to and are resilient to new challenges. Professional relationships between the local authority and partner organisations are mature and well developed. Accountabilities are embedded and result in confident, regular evaluation and improvement of the quality of help, care and protection that is provided.’



National Context – Social Care Reform

Keeping children safe, helping families thrive

Family Help and Multi-Agency Child Protection:

- *Objective:* Support more children to stay safely with their families and improve outcomes.
- *Approach:* Integrated support from multi-agency and multi-disciplinary teams.

Lessons from FFC Pathfinders:

- *Co-Design:* Collaborative work with local authorities, multi-agency partners, and families.
- *Activities:* Setting up change programs, workforce engagement, and multi-agency governance.

System Transformation:

- *Principles:* Align with the National Framework and Working Together.
- *Focus:* Multi-agency working, leadership, and workforce effectiveness.

Family Help:

- *Vision:* High-quality, end-to-end support system for families.
- *Features:* Family Help Lead Practitioner role, community-based teams, integrated front door for services.

Multi-Agency Child Protection:

- *Teams:* Establish Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs) with expert practitioners.
- *Roles:* Lead Child Protection Practitioner (LCPP) for statutory decisions.

Family Networks:

- *Goal:* Prioritise family networks to support children and prevent local authority care.
- **Method:** Embed Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) throughout the system.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA):

- *Aim:* Greater consistency and accountability in safeguarding.
- *Structure:* Lead and delegated safeguarding partners, partnership chair, and independent scrutiny.



Local Context Corporate Plan, City Plan *Adapt Grow Thrive* Transformation Programme

The Corporate Plan recognises the significant financial challenges faced by the council and sets out twelve strategic objectives, six external and six internal, to guide our initial phase of change.

External objectives	Internal objectives
Safe and stable home environments	Strong centralised enabling support services
Accessible education and skills pathways	Positive organisational culture
Healthy and active residents	Increased self-serve
Sustained infrastructure investment	Good governance
Growth that benefits local people	Consistent good practice
Welcoming and supporting communities	Balanced budget



A focus on prevention led by a public health approach



Residents have support, where necessary, to live independent lives



Budget set for 2025/26 without additional Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)



Ten-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) agreed based on growth and devolution



Investment portfolio for the region and city to increase growth and productivity



An engaged council at the heart of city partnerships



A more resilient community with improved housing, labour market participation and pay



Children and young people are safe and valued

We are calling our transformation programme: **adapt | grow | thrive** to reflect the specific challenges and opportunities of Southampton.

adapt... to achieve a sustainable financial position and succeed within a volatile world, we will create a more effective and agile organisation focussed on outcomes for our residents.

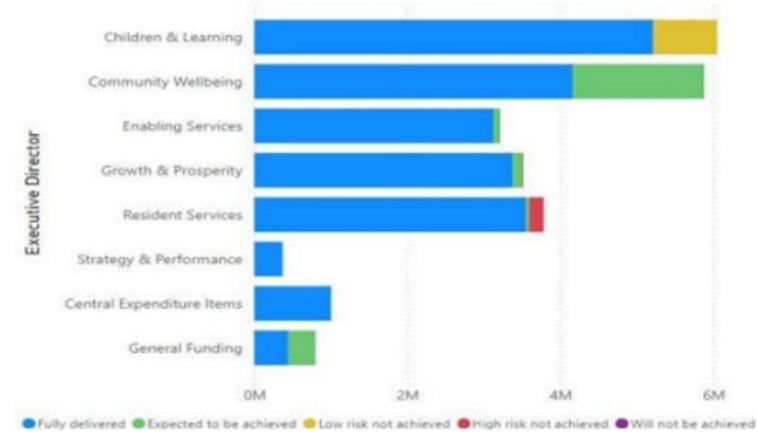
grow... for longer-term success, we will work with our partners to achieve growth and prosperity for our region and our city.

thrive... the work that we are doing with our partners will enable our residents and the city to thrive.

Adapt | grow | thrive not only drives how we improve council services, but also how we step up work with partners to deliver growth, prosperity and long-term success for our residents, region and city.

It is about rethinking what we do, not just doing things differently, but doing different things and making fundamental changes to the way we operate to offer better value for money and contribute to at least one of the outcomes set out in the graphic.

Savings Targets per Directorate



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Dependencies

Deprivation	Relatively high levels of deprivation provide a challenging context in which to deliver services for children.
Budget	Sufficient budget to provide good services and ensure that necessary service developments or improvements are made. This is particularly important in the context of the social care reforms outlined earlier in the presentation. The service continues to work proactively with Newton Europe.
Leadership	Strong and stable leadership focused on the areas outlined in the evidence base.
Corporate Support	Robust commitment across the council to the welfare and wellbeing of children – and particularly corporate parenting responsibilities.
Capacity	Operational (with specific focus on social work), strategic and stakeholder (enabling services, partners) capacity to support service development and innovation.
Evidence based approaches	The service is using <i>Outcomes Based Accountability</i> as a framework for further improving outcomes.



Ofsted Improvement Plan Keeping focused on being consistently good

Ofsted ILACS inspection 2023

Focus on Practice: Focus Five

Chronology
Visit
Assessment
Plan
Supervision

Informs

Service Delivery Plans

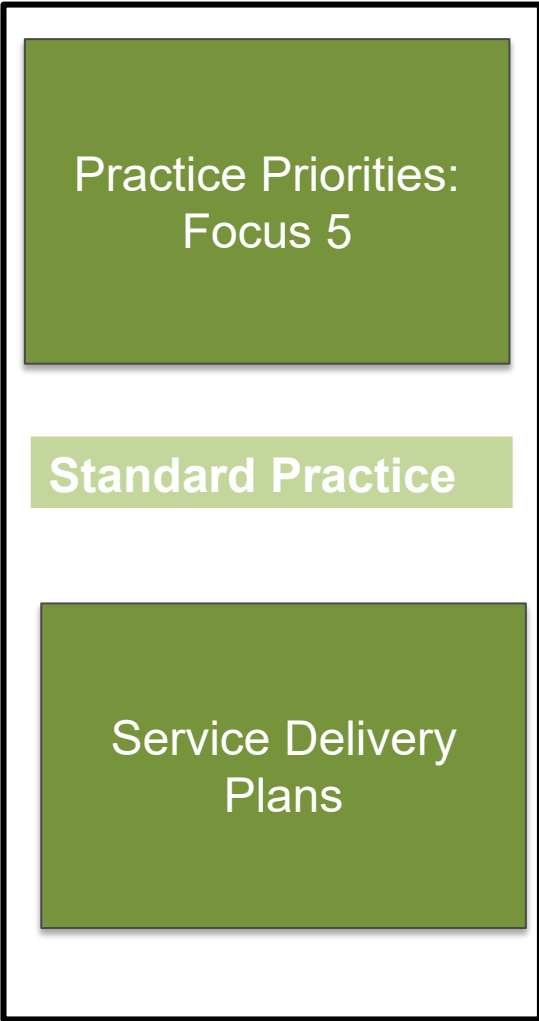
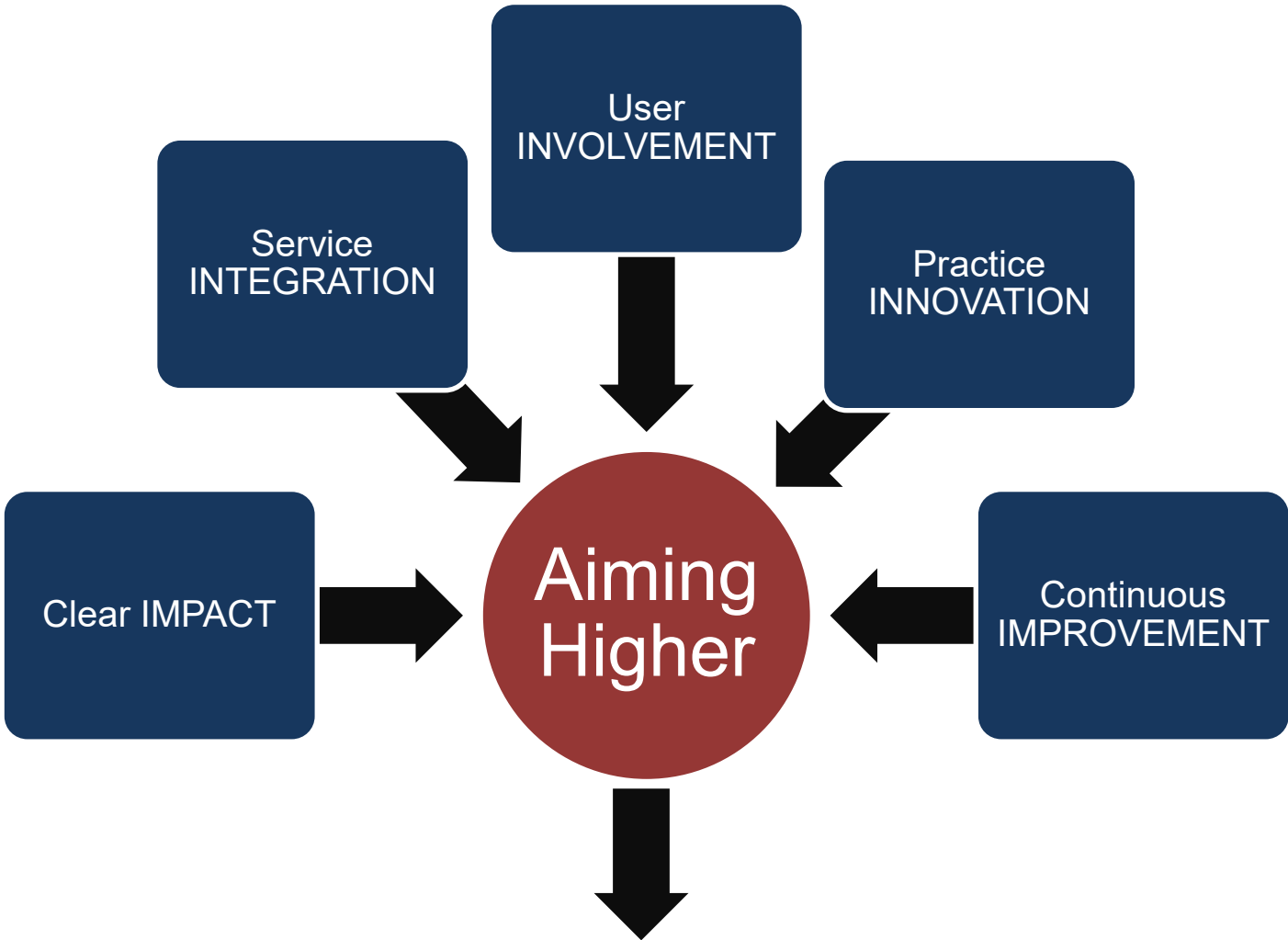
Right Service Right Time
Localities
Reunification
Permanence and Stability
Recruitment and Retention
Practice Framework

Monitored through

Quality Assurance and Performance Framework

Audit Performance	Assurance clinics CMB / DMT / SMT	Self evaluation Peer review
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Even better outcomes for children and young people in Southampton



Clear Impact Embedding an evidence-based approach to show we are supporting sustained improvements to children's lives.

	2025 / 2026				2026 / 27			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Outcome Based Accountability	Embed approach across assurance clinics, performance reports etc.	Test out impact of plan	Update QA and performance framework	Business as usual				

User Involvement Service users at the centre of everything we do; as we move beyond participation to co-production

	2025 / 2026				2026 / 27			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Young researcher project with University of Southampton	Review project findings – how to embed Child Friendly council processes	Implementation plan with core stakeholders	Feedback and discussion regarding implementation	Activity to be determined by research outcomes				
Young inspectors	Confirm Child Friendly Inspection Framework	Trial approach with housing providers	Review business case for wider implementation	Agree young inspection focus for 26 / 27	Business as usual			
Family Safeguarding	Develop plan for parent reference group	Implementation plan		Reference group feed into local response to social care reforms	Activity to be determined through local approach to social care reforms			



Service Integration

Social care, education and our partners working together to provide effective services

	2025 / 2026				2026 / 27			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Localities	Develop Thornhill focused plan as part of Early Help / Prevention OBC	To be determined by full business case plan						
Improving EET outcomes for care leavers	SLT to agree integrated action plan by 1/4/25	To be determined through integrated action plan						
'All in' reducing absence initiative	SLT to agree integrated action plan by 1/4/25	To be determined through integrated action plan						

Practice Innovation

Trialling new approaches to improve local practice

	2025 / 2026				2026 / 27			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Artificial Intelligence	Confirm platforms for social work use	Aligned to Data and Digital Board Strategy						
Risk Outside the Home	Develop transitional safeguarding panel	Co-locate multi-disciplinary teams	Launch teams / delivering evidence informed approaches.	Review impact	Business as usual			



Continuous Improvement Responding to new developments, using evidence-based approaches

	2025 / 2026				2026 / 27			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Social care reforms	Agree local implementation plan	Activity to be determined through local approach to social care reforms						National requirement to implement reforms
Research and evaluation	Agree strategic approach with local and regional universities	Strengthen links with public health and Health Determinants Research Collaboration		Review impact	Business as usual			
Mutual work with other LAs	Southeast Sector Led Improvement Partnership (SESLIP) peer review				SESLIP peer review			



Recommendations for Scrutiny Panel Oversight

- Panel visits to teams – to get their understanding about Focus 5 and service delivery plans
- Aiming Higher and social care reform updates in 2025 / 26 schedule
- Rigorous promotion of corporate parenting
- Briefing on localities and integrated working pilot
- Meeting with young researchers



Family Safeguarding Update



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Workstream Updates

Partnerships and governance	Strategic oversight of Family Safeguarding sits within the new, integrated children and adult partnership arrangements. Our safeguarding scrutineer has been well engaged with implementation.
Operational group	The project implementation group has transitioned into a monthly operational group, which is well attended by partners. An area of development has been the partnership data set, and we are close to finalising a regular data report which will inform local practice.
Recruitment	We have been most successful at filling domestic abuse work posts. We are in the process of agreeing a long-term strategy to maintain our substance misuse staff. The main area of challenge has been recruiting mental health staff – and, we have now secured a practitioner and psychologist. To mitigate the impact of recruitment delays in this area we agreed a mental health pathway for adult services.
Evaluation	Cases are audited regularly as part of our own programme (see overleaf). A follow up audit with Hertfordshire is scheduled for early summer 2025. We are also exploring research opportunities with Southampton and University College London universities.
Training and development	Extensive training was successfully rolled out across the service at implementation phase. Our training needs analysis takes review training into account. We have commissioned further motivational interviewing training to support developments in specific service areas (CRS / conversational model).
Next steps	We are beginning to explore extending FSM principles to our work with parents with a learning disability, with support from adult services and Hertfordshire to further develop our thinking in 2025.



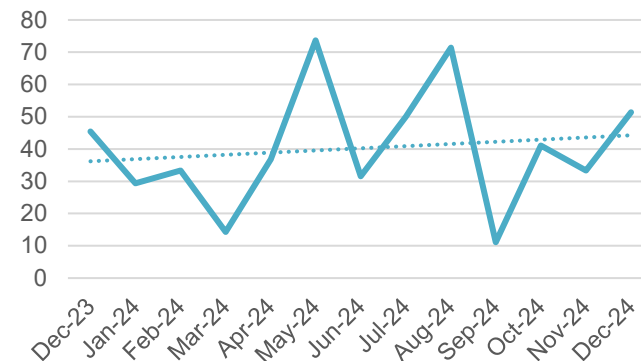
What we know about performance

405 children are currently supported by the FSM that launched in July 2024.

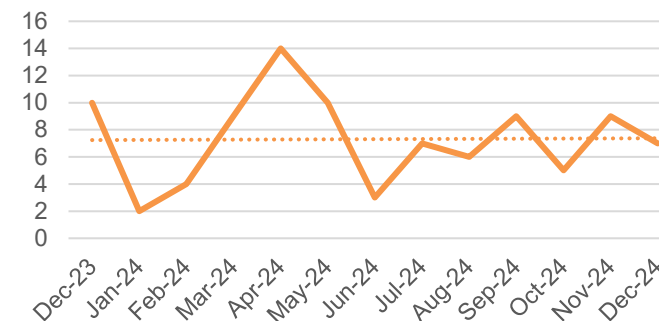
The model aims to support families at an early stage with multi-agency support for domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance use. This will result in fewer children requiring a child protection plan as the harm is reduced. The trend from July is an increasing percentage of children starting CP from a CIN plan, however, the period in question covers the Q3, which is when there is often a spike in escalating harm for children, so is expected to reduce in the spring. We have not been able to fulfil the full FS model due to the difficulty in recruiting adult mental health workers. A mental health worker is due to start with the service shortly. As this worker is embedded, and further MH workers join, this should impact on the outcomes for children.

Similarly, with support that addresses the underlying causes of neglect and harm for children being provided through specialist workers that influence the team understanding and approaches with families, the expectation is that fewer children will need to come into our care from a CIN or CP plan. Since December 2023, the trend for children entering our care from CIN/CP plans has remained level, however, it has stabilised since the FS model has been implemented. The spikes in numbers of children coming into care has been linked to children not already on a CIN/CP plan.

Percentage of Child Protection Plans started in month escalated from Child In Need

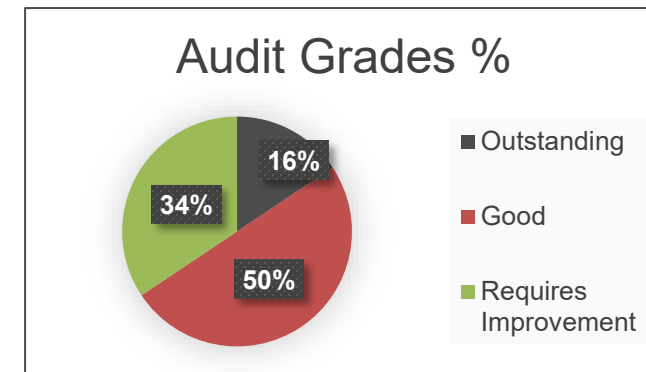


Number of new children in our care escalated from CP or CIN plans



What we know about practice

From July to November 2024, 32 out of 37 allocated full audits were completed by Family Safeguarding. The service is invested in the audit programme and completion of audits is prioritised. During audits, most auditors speak to the allocated practitioners and/or manager. The breakdown of gradings is shown in the graphs, 66% of audits were graded outstanding or good with 34% graded requires improvement. There were no audits graded inadequate.



Areas of Good Practice:

- Allocated practitioners know children's needs well and plans are child focused.
- Relational approaches and transparent conversations with families
- Overall timely visits, assessments and planning leading to timely progression of work
- Good multiagency working alongside working with Adult Workers and Family practitioners in Family Safeguarding to support families and improving outcomes for children
- Creative and flexible approaches to support children to return the care of parents or family
- Persistent attempts to work with parents during pregnancy who have had a previous child removed so that the baby can safely remain with the family
- Children and parents' views are gained and including in assessment and planning
- Multiple examples of positive feedback from families regarding the impactful of the service
- In the main there is timely supervision.

Areas of Development

- There is some variability in chronologies and genograms being up-to-date and showing the breadth of the family network and history
- Some inconsistencies in recording in the Family Workbook across the service and easily locating specific recordings.
- Ensuring that evidence informed toolkits such as Neglect Toolkits are used to inform practice
- Some plans would benefit from more specificity on the actions so they can be measured at reviews.
- Sometimes more evidence is required of recorded management oversight on key events (aside from supervision)
- Progress on work graded 'Requires Improvement' should be tracked by team managers, we are introducing dip sampling for assurance on this..

What we know about the experiences of our families

Making the Difference Awards

Practitioners nominate their colleagues for practice that has made a difference to children and families and carers. At these monthly celebrations practitioners from Family Safeguarding have often been nominated. Examples include:

The service worked with a pregnant mother whose elder child had been adopted. There was very creative use of the family safeguarding model, Adult Workers and a Family Practitioner to allow the baby to remain safely with parents following birth. The mother said 'I am now getting support that I need... I am relying on professionals and communication has been very good... To (the social worker): 'You are a fantastic social worker and I am really glad that we are getting along.'

The service worked with a family of 5 children due to long term neglect and physical harm. The social worker was tenacious in partnering with parents, undertaking late night and weekend visits, getting the right support in at the right time and would advocate for the family to stay together. There was significant positive progress and the family will be closing.

Family Safeguarding – December 2024 Participation Event

Family Safeguarding West 2 organised a Christmas Party in December for children and families working with the team. Around 38 children attended, usually with their parents. During the party practitioners spoke to children and parents to gain their feedback on experiences of the service.

Parents and children were very positive about their experiences and fed back that they felt listened to, understood why they had a social worker and felt things had got better. Children said they would like more events like this.

One non resident father was happy with the support to his children and their mother, but would have liked more contact. The team explored whether children liked being visited at school, older children tended to say they did not, particularly if it was not by their allocated social worker. The team have shared this feedback with the wider service and are incorporating it into practice.



Recommendations for Scrutiny Panel Oversight

- Report on dip sampling of requires improvement audit cases.
- Update on group supervision development.

Budget Update



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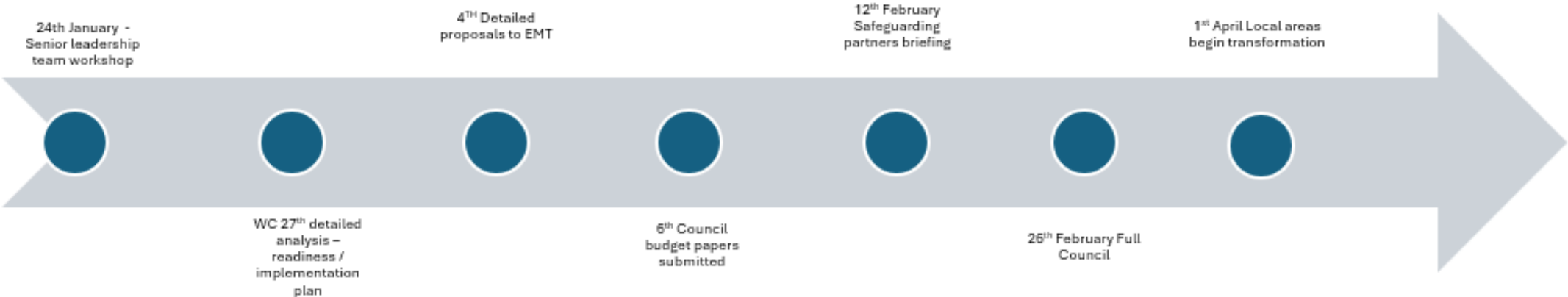
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Budget Update

Work is proceeding relating to the transformation process with Newton. This work is based around the following transformation workstreams :

- Right Child / Right Home
- Managing Demand

The transformation programme aims to meet both budgetary and service requirements to improve both financial and quality of care outcomes for residents. In children’s social care, there is also a focus on the national reforms. **Further budget updates** will be part of the budget reporting process for Cabinet and Full Council.



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