

Children's Services Improvement Plan

Progress report: December 2023

Ratings definitions used in this report



Major issues identified which may prevent priority outputs being delivered as expected



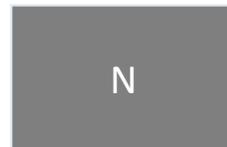
Issues identified which may delay the progress and require action but do not threaten overall delivery



On track to deliver the programme/work stream/output as expected



Finished – work stream or output successfully completed



Not started

Overview

Outcomes

Create the conditions for good practice:

1. Strengthen the effectiveness of multi-agency governance and partnership arrangements and support provided to children, young people	A
2. Establish a stable and effective leadership and management team	A
3. Build a skilled, confident and experienced workforce	A

Improve the quality of practice:

4. Improve Performance Management, Quality Assurance and Management Information Systems to develop and support good social work practice	A
5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection	A
6. Ensure purposeful and timely care planning that directs proportionate and effective interventions for children and improves their outcomes	A
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Key achievements

Formal launch of Family Safeguarding (October)
Launch of GM Social Work Pledge (November)
First Family Hub opened – East Bury (October)

Key challenges

Recruitment/use of agency staff
Consistency of practice

Upcoming milestones

January – SLIP support for managers (Cheshire West & Chester)
January – reconvene Workforce Board
January/February – Liquid Logic systems diagnostic

1: Strengthen the effectiveness of multi-agency governance and partnership arrangements and support provided to children, young people and their families

A

Work Stream Lead: Lynne Ridsdale & Jeanette Richards

Impact of activity so far

Strengthened governance arrangements mean that the Safeguarding Executive and the sub-groups are meeting regularly with clear terms of reference, and priorities led by the partnership. Ofsted recognise that the arrangements for children who are at risk of exploitation have been strengthened with enhanced governance arrangements in place and greater accountability.

Upcoming milestones

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Governance arrangements

Following review by an Independent Scrutineer of the Bury Integrated Safeguarding Partnership (BISP), there is a clear structure in place for the refreshed Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in the form of a Bury Safeguarding Children Partnership (BSCP). The BSCP have agreed the following priorities:

- Complex Safeguarding
- Neglect
- Safer Sleeping in the context of safeguarding
- Embedding learning from local and national reviews
- Ensuring that the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Agreed sub-groups are:

- Scrutiny, Performance & Assurance – chaired by Head of Strategy, Assurance & Reform (Bury Council)
- Learning & Development – chaired by Associate Director for Nursing, Quality and Safeguarding (NHS GM)
- Case Reviews – chaired by Director of Social Care Practice (Bury Council)
- Complex Safeguarding – chaired by Detective Superintendent (GM Police)

There are challenges in relation to Rapid Reviews/Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) with a backlog of reviews and historical delays. In the last 6 months, the sub-group re-reviewed all referrals which resulted in some retrospective notifications to national panel. Systems and processes have been reviewed and strengthened.

Under the refreshed partnership arrangements, key strategies have been launched including the

Continuum of Need, with virtual briefing sessions led by the PSW. These sessions were shared via the BSCP and 165 staff attended from across the partnership, mostly from schools and local authority staff. Performance data shows that there is still more to do: there has not been any sustained significant reduction in contacts, although the number declined during the last two months of 2023. There is a potential positive impact on those early help assessments being led on by other named lead professionals outside of Children's Services, however the volume of work heading to children's social care remains quite high.

SEND Strategic and Operational Boards have been collapsed into a single Strategic Partnership as part of this activity and an independent chair with regional and national expertise has been appointed to take this forward to ensure the board is appropriately focused.

Refreshed Early Help Strategy

The Early Help Strategy was launched at local neighbourhood events across October and November 2022, with a partnership approach to the launch and its delivery. The delivery of the strategic vision is overseen by the Starting Well & Early Help Board, which is chaired by the AD for Early Help. The Board has agreed refreshed terms of reference, membership and a high level action plan with a small number of task & finish groups in place to address areas of the plan, including co-producing a partnering strategy, implementation of the Family Hub, improving our early years pathways (1001 days) and extension of early help across the partnership.

Impact of the strategy in respect of a strong multi-agency offer of early help for families is reported under section 5 of this plan.

1: Strengthen the effectiveness of multi-agency governance and partnership arrangements and support provided to children, young people and their families

A

Work Stream Lead: Lynne Ridsdale
& Jeanette Richards

Partnership strategies to ensure co-ordinated response to missing & exploitation

The Complex Safeguarding Strategy and Operational Principles were reviewed and refreshed in July 2023. The Complex Safeguarding sub-group of the BSCP is chaired by Detective Superintendent and the group holds clear accountability for the refreshed Complex Safeguarding Delivery Plan.

A Missing Panel considers the most at-risk missing children in terms of formulating safety planning, disruption strategies and multi-agency approaches to manage risk and support young people and their families. The missing panel shares information which helps identify hot spots or requirements for mapping meetings, and the meeting also considers those children placed within the Bury borough by other LAs with Placing Authorities invited to attend the meetings when required.

All Missing From Home (MFH) resource has now been brought together under the Complex Safeguarding Team (CST) to ensure a consistent approach to Return Home Interviews (RHIs) for our young people. RHI templates have been reviewed and updated as part of the Strategy refresh in July 2023. Interviews are being offered but there is a proportion of children who decline, and this needs further work.

Daily Governance meetings take place with the CST Team Manager, Police, Health and the MASH Team Manager to consider information from the previous 24 hours (or weekend) in relation to complex safeguarding issues. Ofsted noted this as a strength in the August monitoring visit, however children's records are not consistently updated to reflect these discussions and so for some children there is a missed opportunity for this to be used to inform subsequent decision making.

Training to other professionals, around identification and support to victims, is underway with training to schools and some training to A&E staff and GP surgeries (approx. 30 GPs attended). There needs to be a more consistent delivery of an agreed training programme for wider partners, which remains an area for development.

Implement a Neglect Strategy to support identification of all forms of neglect

A refreshed Neglect Strategy was approved by the BSCP Executive in October 2022; the strategy includes practice guidance and links to the Council's Poverty Strategy. A number of sessions were delivered in June 2023, led by PSW and Safeguarding Team Specialist Nurse (Northern Care Alliance, NCA). The sessions were intended to ensure a shared partnership understanding of the 6 forms of neglect an impact of cumulative harm.

A Communications Plan & Training Offer is being developed by the L&D sub-group. A practice response is to be developed by the PSW/Director of Social Work Practice.

Partnership strategies to ensure a co-ordinated approach to Domestic Abuse

As part of the Domestic Abuse strategy there are 4 priorities: improving processes, improving partnership arrangements, prevention and work with perpetrators.

The domestic abuse partnership board meets on a 6 weekly basis. Data collection has been changed to ensure this now shows children affected by domestic abuse and work is underway to include wider data from all services.

We are seeking to improve local connectivity between the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board/Strategy with the emerging Bury Serious Violence Duty Strategic Needs Assessment across all specified authorities of the duty including local authority, integrated care system, GMP, Fire & Rescue and Probation.

The introduction of the Family Safeguarding Teams is expected to have significant impact, with the inclusion of a DA Officer and Practitioner in each team. DA Officers (employed by the Probation Service) will deal with domestic abuse in a different way, supporting adults in the change cycle, identifying risk and supporting change. Domestic Abuse Practitioners will work with the children and family to ensure that they do not suffer significant harm from domestic abuse. The Strategic and Operational Boards will be considering outcome measures and impact of the FS model, and as part of this will need to consider the impact on the wider offer around domestic abuse.

2. Establish a stable and effective leadership and management team

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Work Stream Lead: Jeanette Richards

Impact of activity so far

There are no vacancies at HoS level, although some secondment and interim arrangements are in place to cover long term absence of two Heads of Service: HoS IRT is being covered by substantive HoS Family Safeguarding, HoS Family Safeguarding covered by a Family Safeguarding Team Manager on secondment and HoS CASS being covered by Service Manager Safeguarding Unit. In addition, the Practice Director is interim, pending permanent recruitment. All Team Manager roles are filled, with 3 agency staff across 20 social care team managers.

Upcoming milestones

- Recruit to permanent Practice Director
- Begin SLIP support for managers with Cheshire West & Chester (January)
- Development session for managers led by Research in Practice (January)

Permanent leadership team with sufficient senior leadership capacity

Our Executive Director of Children's Services (EDCS) has been in post since January 2022 (interim moving to permanent in April 2022). Following the departure of the Practice Director in September 2023 an interim Director commenced in post November 2023, and recruitment to the permanent role is underway.

In July 2022, restructure proposals were approved at Cabinet which sought to ensure clear lines of accountability and responsibility, with reasonable spans of control to provide clear line of sight to practice and to support a high support, high challenge culture. This saw the dis-establishment of the Service Manager role and the creation of 5 Head of Service roles to replace Strategic Leads. A dedicated Principal Social Worker (PSW) was also established to lead on practice development and learning, recruitment and retention and development of a social work academy approach.

There are no agency arrangements at HoS level, although there are interim arrangements in place with permanent staff to cover long term absence of 2 of the HoS roles.

The majority of the social care team manager tier is permanent: 3 of the 25 team managers are agency (1x Mash, 1x Court Team 1X Safeguarding). In addition, 2 of the managers in safeguarding are in interim positions.

Leadership & management development

Monthly Extended Management Meetings (EMMs) take place chaired by the PSW as a forum to support and develop managers.

22 managers from Children's Services have completed or are currently enrolled on the Council's Management Development programme, with a further group enrolled for the fourth cohort which launched in December 2023.

A Head of Service recently joined the Council team participating in the North-West Tri-Sector Challenge to support their Leadership Development.

In December 2023, a SLIP proposal was agreed by the DfE which will see bespoke support for our Team Managers delivered by Cheshire West and Chester. This will focus on the fundamentals of being a social care team manager and what good looks like.

20 managers from across the department attend the bi-monthly Senior Managers Forum (SMF). This provides space to ensure all Council Leaders are updated on key topics, support cross-organisational collaboration and deliver masterclass learning in a range of areas.

3. Build a skilled, confident and experienced workforce

A

Work Stream Lead: Jeanette Richards & Sam McVaigh

Impact of activity so far

Use of agency staff remains too high at 46% (end of November 2023), despite recruitment activity underway, The number of social workers recruited is greater than those leaving and this has been consistently the case over the past 12 months, but the numbers are not substantial enough to reduce the dependence on agency workers. There has been a reduction in use of managed teams (down to 1 from 3 teams in late 2022/early 2023) but there is still a significant reliance on agency staff. Ofsted feedback in monitoring visits noted that management oversight of children's cases in supervision does not consistently focus on progression of plans and that supervision remains an area that requires improvement. Staff report that they enjoy working in Bury and feel supported, with senior leaders who are approachable and accessible. Case loads remain higher than we would want, averaging 20 per worker.

Upcoming milestones

- Re-constituted Workforce Board to reconvene (January)
- Review of induction checklists by PSW (January)
- Practice Standards (February)

Grow our own approach to staffing sufficiency

We increased our financial reward to Practice Educators (PEs) in August 2022 to grow the number of PEs available to provide support to students.

- We have 7 university students who joined us between September and Nov 2023
- We are engaged in the Step up to Social Work Programme and 2 have recently completed the programme in Bury with 2 more due to join in Spring 2024.
- There are 3 apprenticeships working in Family Safeguarding, IRT & CASS and 2 are due to complete September 2024 and the 3rd in September 2025.

Rolling recruitment

The overall direction of travel in relation to recruitment continues to be positive with progress made in relation to conversions from agency staff and external recruitment. Out of 114.5 social workers, 38 (25%) are agency workers (December 2023).

In January 2023 we appointed 23 social workers from South Africa through international recruitment. The original plan to have social workers in post by May has been delayed due to delays in SWE registrations (a nationally recognised issue) and English competency testing (IELTS). We have 7 in post and 2 more expected February 2024. The remaining 14 remain committed to Bury. A meeting with Frontier is scheduled for January to ensure appropriate support is being provided.

Analysis continues to suggest that, when these workers join us the Council's level of agency staff will align with the regional average (estimate reduction to 19.5%). The Council continues to offer an attractive employment package including agreed retention payments, agile working, free car parking and a comprehensive development offer.

In November the GM Pledge was launched, setting out a series of commitments in how we will use agency social workers across GM. The Pledge includes an agreement not to pay any agency social work staff above agreed rates of pay, to not engage with candidates leaving a permanent contract in GM to take up an agency role for a minimum of 6 months and to refrain from headhunting staff from within GM unless for a promotional role.

Key areas of future planned activity include:

- A renewed communications campaign in the new year with a new recruitment video and more proactive advertising, including positive stories from current staff and an emphasis on the Family Safeguarding model
- Development of options around the market competitiveness of our entry level social work posts (ASYE). – this is the area where Bury is least competitive regionally.
- Discussions with potential specialist recruitment partners to explore the opportunity for enhanced external support on a payment-by-results basis.
- A review of duties and responsibilities across Social Work roles and others (Business Support and Family Support Workers) to explore different models which may support a re-balancing of role.

3. Build a skilled, confident and experienced workforce

A

Work Stream Lead: Jeanette Richards & Sam McVaigh

Restorative approach to engaging with workforce

The Voice of the Workforce Board meets 6-weekly and is chaired by the PSW, with feedback from staff being shared with Improvement Board and feeding into practice development and service improvement.

"You said, we did!" - morale has been reported as improving and some of the requests by staff, for example free car parking have now been agreed. There has been positive feedback about staff morale and engagement with the improvement journey in DfE Reviews.

In July we launched our LET'S Do It Challenge, an immersive experience for staff to attend and engage in Bury vision for 2030. Staff are taken on a 2 hour tour, to learn more about the Borough, and how they play their part in delivering in our success in Bury. Almost 180 staff from the department attended the challenge.

The HR team have also supported the induction process for our new recruits from South Africa, including hosting in person sessions, along with guides to support the settling in process.

Social work academy approach

The PSW will build on work which has already commenced which has included a refresh of the Workforce Development Strategy, L&D opportunities for staff, ASYE Programme, exit interview process and work on retention issues.

We expect to the academy approach to provide:

- Defined career pathways
- L&D opportunities for staff within Children's Services
- ASYE Support
- Formal induction process
- A wider approach to bring in other professionals (phase 2)
- Exit interview process with analysis to understand the reasons staff wish to leave, and feed this back into our cycle of learning, staff development and retention
- Clear understanding of retention issues and action plan to address these

A draft outline of the SW Academy approach document has been developed and discussed with senior leaders in December 2023 and further work will take place in January/February 2024.

Effective management oversight & reflective supervision

The Supervision Policy and associated forms has been refreshed by the PSW. The Director of Social Work Practice led a management development group in September 2022 focused on supervision and Research in Practice held a reflective supervision training session with managers in February 2023.

Audits and feedback from Ofsted tell us that supervision is mostly taking place but is not yet reflective and actions remain too generic.

Supervision is one of the Bury Commitments and as such is a priority in the Learning & Development Plan which is being refreshed by our PSW. This will also feature in the support being provided by our SLI Partner Cheshire West & Chester in Spring 2024.

4. Improve Performance Management, Quality Assurance and Management Information Systems to develop and support good social work practice

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Work Stream Lead: Jeanette Richards & Andrea Stone

Impact of activity so far

The basic performance framework for the core of the social work service has now been in place for the past 9 months – providing a weekly overview of Team level performance in key metrics and a searchable summary of relevant information on a child-by-child basis to support Team Managers. This had a positive impact on the currency of key social work practice, such as visits, assessments, reviews and supervisions, but progress has slowed and performance remains lower than we would expect. Ofsted note in their monitoring visits that while there is progress overall in practice overall it remains too variable. In the light of this judgement and the continued prevalence of work that ‘requires improvement to be good’ in audits, we need to refocus and reconsider our approach to improving practice.

Upcoming milestones

- QA Officers commence in post (January)
- Practice standards for review (January)
- LCS System Diagnostic (January/February)

Ensure Quality Assurance Framework supports focused, ongoing improvement

Monthly audits are undertaken by Team Managers and moderated by Heads of Service, with independent moderation (re-audits) taking place each month on a small sample by the WFD team.

In January 2023 a new internal architecture was created to focus on performance, audit and improvement plan progress:

- Assurance Improvement Meetings (AIM) take place bi-monthly and are chaired by the EDCS. Performance and QA information are triangulated with stocktake style reports prepared by Heads of Service to ensure a shared understanding of issues.
- Closing the Loop meetings take place bi-monthly and are chaired by the Practice Director. These meetings focus on the learning from audit and consideration of L&D needs.

Learning circles should take place on all inadequate or outstanding audits. Managers should also discuss audits as part of supervision with explicit reference to the audit and any remedial activity that may be required. Service level data on outstanding actions is reviewed as part of the Closing the Loop meeting.

MASH sampling is taking place weekly; this includes a review of the triage and decision making. Monthly reports are shared through the MASH steering group however work is needed to ensure that this activity is part of the wider dept QAF.

Early Help locality team managers audit each month with close the loop, action tracking and monthly performance meetings all in place. Again, this needs to be included in the main QAF activity so there is a whole system approach to QA with shared learning and understanding.

In August 2023, external moderation of audits was undertaken to test the effectiveness of our QA activity and this indicated some over-optimism in audit judgements and a need for audits to be clearer in their rationale. There is not yet evidence of audits being routinely discussed in supervision. The approach to QA was reviewed in September; the toolkit has been aligned to the Bury commitments and while audits are taking place monthly, each Team Manager only audits bi-monthly so as to create the space for good quality audits and to ensure a clearer focus on audits as a tool for learning and reflection.

Policies, Procedures & Practice Standards

Practice Standards were reviewed and shared with staff in October 2022 however a further review took place in December 2023. The standards have a ‘back to basics’ approach and there will be a learning & development workstream under each commitment. This development work will continue in January/February and we will also develop a central Sharepoint site which will serve as a single point of access on a range of useful information.

Tri.x documents were reviewed and updated in February 2023. The PSW reviews all proposed amendments to procedures as part of the Tri.x update process, as well as any new procedures.

4. Improve Performance Management, Quality Assurance and Management Information Systems to develop and support good social work practice

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Work Stream Lead: Jeanette Richards
& Andrea Stone

Develop performance reporting to ensure shared understanding

An Improvement Dashboard and revised approach to performance reporting was presented at Improvement Board in January 2023. A new system of meetings focused on performance, QA and improvement seeks to develop a greater understanding of strengths and weaknesses shared by Heads of Service.

In addition to individual child level and team level and service level reports that are available weekly. Reports for each key service area are shared monthly, along with overview reports for the whole service. There is a clear understanding of the pattern and nature of performance and the challenges and issues that the service faces

In our August Ofsted monitoring visit, it was noted that “the quality assurance and performance management frameworks are firmly embedded and making a difference to outcomes for most children. The newly established dashboards provide an additional line of sight for senior leaders on performance in practice.”

In relation to Early Help, we will utilise the family hub implementation plan to pilot joint KPIs and quality assurance. Regular updates from the contract monitoring meetings in respect of school nursing and health visiting will be shared in order that we are fully able to explore opportunities around quality assurance and interdependencies and pressures across the services.

Reduce system complexity to enable a focus on purposeful practice

All forms re. MASH, CP and CLA were reviewed as part of the exit of the Signs of Safety model. Changes to Liquid Logic have been routed via the Digital & Technology Change Partner with some examples including:

- Legal Pathway, including PLO and pre-proceedings were developed and launched in line with Public Law Working Group recommendations
- CSE Assessment form updated in January 2023 to match the CSE WISE assessment format
- IRO resolution form updated to add a new informal stage to support revised processes
- Configuration changes in respect of CP review conference outcome forms to add additional manager authorisation
- Configuration change re. CIN Pathway to be opened during the assessment period to enable CIN planning to take place at an earlier stage

In recent months a number of issues have been identified, including the workflow around pathway plans, short breaks, children with disabilities and fostering. We have secured an external consultant to complete a diagnostic of our LCS implementation, to understand any ‘quick wins’ that can be made to support improved processes. A workshop will be held in January with all HoS’ to understand issues across the child’s journey, following this a more detailed plan will be scoped with timescales.

5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection

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Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Impact of activity so far

Aside from the early Autumn of 2023, when there was a surge of new work for assessment, overall during 2023 there has been a substantial reduction in the volume of new incoming work for Children's Social Care, with an even more marked reduction in the volume of that work that results in child protection activity. In the latter part of the year, this finally led to a reduction in the number of child protection plans and the number of plans starting and ceasing. Overall, Bury has moved from a position of being substantially above the average of similar local authorities to one in line with them. We have also seen a recent reduction in the amount of work returning to the service (re-referrals) - again moving into line with similar local authorities. Ofsted commented positively in 2023 monitoring visits on the application of appropriate thresholds for intervention and there are potential early signs of the impact of Family Safeguarding practice model.

Upcoming milestones

- Recruit to remaining adult practitioner roles in Family Safeguarding teams (January)

Implement Family Safeguarding

A Family Safeguarding Strategic Partnership Board was established in January 2023, chaired by our EDCS and including senior representation from across the Council and wider partners. A multi-agency Family Safeguarding Operations Board was established in March 2023, chaired by the Director of Social Care Practice and meeting fortnightly, to work through the detail of the implementation and escalate issues to the Strategic Board as required. Operational Board has moved to monthly from January 2024.

The model was soft launched in June 2023 with a formal launch in October; both of these events were multi-agency events. There are 5 family safeguarding teams which are not yet fully staffed:

- Substance recovery workers (Early Break) – 2 of 3 in post, recruitment underway Dec 2023
- Mental health practitioners (Pennine Care) – 0 of 3 in post, delays in approval processes within Pennine Care, hoping to go out to recruitment January 2024
- Domestic abuse officers (Probation Services) – 2 of 3 in post, recruitment underway Dec 2023
- Domestic abuse practitioners (Bury Council) – 2 of 3 in post, 3rd will join following return from maternity leave in April 2024
- Business Support Officers – 5 recruited, 4 in post

Use of the workbook remains inconsistent, and it has been agreed that workbooks will be mandatory from March 2024, with no C&F assessments triggered in the FS service after this point.

Getting the basics right

The Bury Commitments were launched in February 2023 and are the cornerstones of good practice – a Learning & Development Plan has been produced setting out a programme of learning. A new timetable for training is to be devised which will be influenced by areas of practice identified through audit activity. The main audit toolkit has been aligned to the commitments (Sept 2023) to support learning and development, and the focus on these areas.

The PSW leads Extended Managers Meetings (EMM), Teaching Tuesdays and Management Support Sessions with a continuing focus on the Bury Commitments.

Monitoring visits have identified that progress is being made in some areas, although there remains variability in social work practice. The most recent monitoring visit in November 2023 highlighted some areas which have not achieved the same pace of progress and others and there is a need to ensure the work we are doing around the Bury Commitments reaches all areas of the service.

Recent performance data shows that compliance is still not where it needs to be and this will be the focus of January's Assurance Improvement Meeting (AIM).

5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone
& Stephen Holden

Further transformation of the front door model (phase 2)

Phase 2 is focused on expansion of the front door: the addition of education, an Early Help Manager, Early Help practitioners (x3) and mental health practitioners. The aim is to develop a more consultative approach with greater community integration and support, enabling professionals to discuss before making a referral.

Early Help Manager and practitioners in post and the early help team is now completing early help assessments as part of the support at the front door. The schools lead (DSL) will be in post from Jan 2024, and will focus on supporting schools and developing relationships and a shared understanding. CAMHS have appointed 3 mental health practitioners who will rotate on duty to act as front door for mental health, which while still being separate through co-location will enable effective triage and will support shared decision making. A formal launch with partners took place in October 2023, with a soft launch having taken place over summer to test systems.

Following concerns raised in relation to health resources and the impact on decision making within the MASH/EHASH, NHS GM identified additional capacity at the end of 2023, providing an additional 2-day resource within the MASH.

Space at the Police Station remains a blocker to full co-location - there is not currently sufficient space for the mental health and early help practitioners, with an additional 8 desks required. This is currently with Detective Superintendent Rollinson.

From January the MASH performance will report directly in to the Safeguarding Partnership.

Embed restorative approaches through use of Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

The FGC team is recruited to, trained and now delivering. The manager sits on legal gateway to support in pre-proceedings and proceedings work as well as referral through to our new Family Resource Panel. Initial feedback has been positive.

Consistent offer of Early Help across universal and targeted services

The first family hub opened in East Bury (Redvale) in September 2023 with a soft launch of the programme, followed by a formal launch in October.

We are working with parents to understand what they need and forming an advisory group to develop the offer across the borough. The core offer will include early years, Holding Families (DAAT), midwifery, health visiting and an ante-natal programme.

A working group led by the DE for NHS and adult service is meeting to scope the roll out across the other 4 neighbourhoods by September 2025.

We are seeing an increase in early help led by partners (at 40%) which is an improving picture. Our locality early help teams will increase from 3 to 4, to support a stronger and more consistent reach across our neighbourhoods.

We have created a family resource arm through department restructures to develop a family offer in Bury. We now have a Resource Panel in place although it is its early days – terms of reference have been developed and the initial meetings held, although currently only single agency. The intention is to direct all requests for support from the youth service, family group conference team and Victoria Family Centre through the panel and develop a better offer.

We are working with Triple P to develop a workforce strategy in terms of support to parents and this links to our new Parenting Strategy which was signed off in August 2023.

We have completed a self-evaluation in respect of our early help offer, and we have formed a small multi-agency working group to look at gaps in delivery.

We are working on a new media platform which will support easy access to both digital services and information about our offer at the hub.

5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone
& Stephen Holden

Develop a culture of co-production & listening to the voice of the child

The co-production strategy has been re written to establish clear procedures, governance and guidelines on what effective co production means. The strategy is reviewed by the Children's Strategic Partnership co-production sub-group every six weeks.

The young people's recruitment and selection toolkit has been reviewed; the toolkit sets out guidelines of effective co-production when working with our young people to interviews new staff within the local authority.

The Co-Production Charter has been reviewed to build on good practice with SEND. The EDCS attends Youth Cabinet and regularly meets with the Children in Care Council. Our young people are now routinely involved in the recruitment of staff, including the recruitment of the Chief Executive in December 2022. Care experienced young people have been involved in many interviews for local authority staff such as Senior Practitioner for the development team, Advanced Personal Advisors, Children's rights worker, Workforce Development manager and many more.

We have established and developed a programme of training that is co-produced and co-delivered by our young people – this includes:

- Total Respect (where do you keep the ketchup) training delivered by care experienced young people a minimum of twice a year to professionals across the authority, last delivered on the 18th of July 2023
- Takeover challenge - toolkit has been co-produced by young people for partners. This explains how to set up and deliver a co-produced Takeover challenge day and acts as a guidance of how to do this effectively with our young people.

Care experienced young people have reviewed the way Corporate Parenting board functions - they have now changed the format to be more child-led. Care experienced young people have now been trained to co-chair corporate parenting board, this is well established and young people have co-chaired every corporate parenting board since April 2023.

Young people have chosen the priorities for the board which are: Mental Health, Changes in Workforce and Transitions.

Improve the effectiveness of work within pre-proceedings

New policy & procedures are now in place, along with a PLO tracker. There is much closer monitoring with the weekly Permanence Tracking Panel overseeing children's plans for permanence (including those subject to PLO). Cases are also reviewed within Legal Gateway.

In our third monitoring visit in February 2023, inspectors noted that "Leaders are strengthening their oversight of early permanence for children in pre-proceedings through the introduction of more effective legal gateway panels. These are leading to timely escalation from child protection plans into pre-proceedings when circumstances for children do not change.... Plans made in pre-proceedings are being reviewed more effectively by senior managers to ensure that actions are completed within agreed timescales."

A case progression officer is now in post (Aug 2023) which will increase oversight of Pre-Proceedings and any matters before the court, ensuring a consistent approach from all Bury social workers and positive representation to the courts.

5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone
& Stephen Holden

Review procedures and protocols for EHE

An Education Access Board has been established with terms of reference: NFTE, CME, EHE & all aspects of access to ED. The first meeting took place in July 2022 and monthly meetings have been taking place since September 2022.

A revised EHE policy has been agreed and will be in place from September 2023, available on the Bury Council website and via the Headteacher's Hub. Policies have been strengthened so that all children will be seen within four weeks of application, and processes are in place for School Attendance Orders to be issued where no suitable education is being provided. Training around EHE processes for schools to be implemented in localities November 2023.

Families of children who are electively home educated will receive visits twice a year from the service. As part of the launch of the new hub at Redvales (opening October 2023), we will be establishing an annual coffee morning for EHE families which we hope to move termly as our engagement activity results in more families wanting to attend. We will be arranging fire prevention training for EHE families, and we have arranged for HPV vaccines to be available via the NHS vaccination team through the new coffee mornings.

The EHE team/service works closely with other teams: close links with MASH have been established to ensure any safeguarding concerns are picked up from the initial referral. Where it is found that no suitable education is being provided, the child is referred to the CME register as per our CME Policy. Information relating to children EHE will also be shared with Connexions to avoid NEET. An additional qualified teacher has been seconded from the additional needs team to increase capacity to access whether suitable education is being provided for those students with an EHCP.

The lead for exclusions & attendance is part of the family hubs operational working group, ensuring links between EHE, CME and the community. The GRT officer will promote the coffee morning to their EHE families so as to bring together the agencies providing support.

Review protocols and procedures for CME

The Education Access Board has a focus on CME as part of its terms of reference. All CME is recorded within LCS. Group call access now has access the majority of registers across Bury schools.

Information is being shared with the DWP, and children thought to be CME are now triaged through MASH. A system is in place for re-screening all cases closed negatively after 6 months. There are weekly checks of CME against admissions.

Phase 2 of the CYP restructure was completed in September 2023, which sought to align the services within education and strengthen focus on statutory elements, including attendance, EHE and CME with increased capacity in education safeguarding. There is a dedicated new CME and EHE officer based within the school's admissions team who works closely with the Community learning CME officer. Training is currently being provided to the post-holder.

A revised CME Policy is now in place on the Bury Council website and Headteacher Hub, and the service have developed stronger working relationship with MASH in relation to new referrals. The Vulnerable Childrens Group and CME working together to ensure that complex cases are reviewed.

School Attendance Orders are processed efficiently to ensure that children are returned to school appropriately, and the CME team are working very closely with EHE team and the new policy.

Training for schools around CME processes was delivered via the school attendance forums in 4 localities (November 2023).

Links to the health service have been strengthened through training and regular meetings. Request to work with UK Border Force has been completed which will impact on any children moving abroad or extended holidays. Links with electoral registers and benefits within the Bury locality have strengthened.

Through the restructure of the School Attendance, Exclusions and Community Team, there is more support available to support the CME area. Other officers are able to carry out home visits to this vulnerable cohort.

5. Identify and effectively support children and families in need of help and protection

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone
& Stephen Holden

Develop our Adolescent offer

Through restructures we have established a new post -Service Manager for Family Resources. This post took some time to recruit but the new lead is now in post and the resources of our teenage cohort has been brought together into the Family Resource service under the service manager: youth service, youth mentoring, young carers and prevention for children on the edge of crime, reducing knife and violent crime. All of these will be accessible through resource panel.

As part of the wider development of our approach and support to young people we are looking at the offer to young people as part of the Family Hub approach. Whilst we are currently focused on East Bury our youth service is now aligned to our neighbourhoods and they are establishing youth and detached work in hotspots across our Borough.

Plans around an edge of care service have been paused pending implementation of family safeguarding and a review of how edge of care support could be provided.

Ensure practice for CwD is child focused with a timely response

The team has been expanded from 2.5 to 7 social workers in order to reduce caseloads to an acceptable level, including an Assistant Team Manager post. An experienced safeguarding team manager has been appointed to manage the team.

Social workers no longer hold short breaks work, to provide more time for safeguarding and assessment work. 50% of the expanded team is permanent, due to a shortage of social workers in the complex safeguarding field, however 2 agency workers are longer term.

CwD team attend Teaching Tuesdays, to ensure that the team are kept up to date around safeguarding and also that SEND & CwD issues are understood more widely.

In November 2022, Ofsted saw improved quality of assessments within the CwD team due to improved use of multi-agency information sharing.

Review procedures and protocols for use of Alternative Provision in Bury

QA visits have been in place since November 2021 and all providers who have students placed with them have been visited at least once and the majority, twice, since that point. The QA format has been revised for this academic year to promote increased rigour. A procurement exercise was carried out in summer 23 and a new AP Directory has been produced and shared with LA Teams.

Discussions are ongoing with new providers with a view to increasing the range of providers available in the new year, including with regard to Primary 6th day provision.

An AP Assurance board has been established in order to gather intelligence and maintain a strategic oversight of the AP landscape.

Half-termly data collections are now in place to ensure an effective overview of Bury pupils in Alternative Provision. Schools are asked to inform the LA of AP placements and secondary age placements are checked through Partnership meetings.

The hub provisions have ceased in their previous form and been replaced by the AP Directory and PRU AP placements.

The current PRU model has been reviewed, and simplified to ensure sufficiency for students who are Permanently excluded.

Section 19 policy and multi-agency panel is in place to oversee AP placements because of Section 19 duty being met.

6. Ensure purposeful and timely care planning that directs proportionate and effective interventions for children and improves their outcomes

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Impact of activity so far

The number of children leaving care slowed through the latter part of 2023, although it is expected to rise in 2024, with the impact of the long-term care planning panel. Across the year, we have seen tighter control of entry into care and stronger care planning – with relatively few children entering care and remaining at home with parents (only 6 at the end of December 2023), which also indicates more effective planning for those on the cusp of care and more planned entries into care where that is required. However, since May there has been a small but significant rise in the number of children entering care and being placed rapidly in residential homes – which raises questions concerning the quality of planning for children (as well as the sufficiency of local placement options for those entering care).

Upcoming milestones

- Recruitment to Psychologist for Family Safeguarding role (January)

IROs driving improved outcomes for children through permanence planning

The team was expanded to reduce caseloads and promote stronger relationships between children and their IROs. There are 3 permanent members of staff, 2 agency staff and 1 agency worker covering the FIRO post with the agency team manager's post converted to a permanent one.

LCS forms have been updated to include consistent reporting of permanence plans for children.

Work has been undertaken with the IROs to strengthen their oversight and challenge:

- There are a number of reviews that have fallen out of timescale due to agency IROs not setting dates for the next review or postponing meetings without setting a new date and then leaving the authority. This information is only now coming to light as we have new staff and a new manager.
- There is an established Final Care Planning Process in place, with IROs invited to Final Care Planning Meetings and their views are represented in the final SWETs of all children prior to their final hearings.
- IROs team manager attends the Permanence Panel each week to ensure that the IRO's view is represented and contributes towards permanence planning.

IROs are challenging where there is drift and delay and recent examples are IROs challenging care plans where children have remained on s.20 for several months and IROs have scrutinised court made decisions for long term foster care of very young children.

Achieving permanence through reunification, SGO or longer-term matching

38 children and young people are placed in registered children's homes; these are being actively reviewed to determine step-down arrangements and plans are in place to ensure that for those in therapeutic placements, they have been presented to complex care panel to ensure there is health funding to meet their needs.

- 241 are in foster placements, of these:
- 78 are with relatives/friends (51 long-term).
- 163 are living with mainstream foster carers not with relatives/friends (69 long-term).

The Head of Service, MyHome is reviewing those placed with foster carers which could potentially be SGO if we had a no detriment policy in place, and will prepare a report for ADCS/EDCS. There is currently 1 officer providing support to approximately 130 SGOs which is not sufficient, and we will need to consider the support if we wish to have more SGOs.

6. Ensure purposeful and timely care planning that directs proportionate and effective interventions for children and improves their outcomes

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Ensure the sufficiency of commissioned placements to meet identified need

Bury is an active member of the GM Commissioning Group and Placements North-West. A GM Sufficiency Strategy is in place for children and young people in care with a localised annex for sufficiency, which includes vulnerable children.

A weekly Placement panel is in place & is reviewing all residential placements & semi-independent accommodation. All new requests for residential placements are approved by the Director and retrospectively presented to panel for review.

A meeting has taken place with finance to review the monthly tracking of placements.

Improve permanence through delivery of Permanence Strategy & Framework

A new Permanence Strategy, Framework and tools were launched at a Permanence event which was held in February 2023. The event was led by children and young people, so that they could help practitioners in understanding what permanence meant to them.

Permanence Panels have been established and are chaired by respective Heads of Service, focusing on children at different points in their journey. These weekly panels were established in March 2023.

Inspectors have noted that there is “a renewed focus on securing earlier permanence for children ... leading to clearer expectations about permanence across the workforce and with partners and supporting a more structured approach”. (MV, Feb 2023).

Increase in-house fostering sufficiency

A development plan is in place to deliver the identified improvements in this area, including the work to increase recruitment of in-house foster carers such as:

- Increased emphasis on digital marketing which has proven most successful in generating interest and enquiries in fostering
- New website as part of the GM work
- A new Recruitment Strategy
- Implementing an improved financial package for Bury foster carers

Greater Manchester has undertaken a sufficiency analysis of placement needs for children in care which is now maintained as a [GM website](#). This brings together, for the first time, a sub-regional understanding and analysis of the placement types, needs and outcomes for looked after children. This information across the GM 10 will drive forward joint working and commissioning approaches to deliver the provision we need. This includes a shared approach to fostering recruitment, retention and utilisation.

Reduce delays in accessing bespoke support

Our Psychologist for Family Safeguarding post is vacant and our third round of recruitment closes in early January. It is hoped there will be some capacity to provide oversight to our looked after children. A Service Level Agreement is in place for referrals in to mainstream support.

Significant investment over the last 18 months has seen an increase in provision in Bury. September 2022 saw the launch of the Mental Health Support Teams - 2 new teams dedicated to supporting CYP MH in schools and colleges, reaching 30% of all schools. In line with national prevalence, Bury is still seeing an increase in demand for services.

6. Ensure purposeful and timely care planning that directs proportionate and effective interventions for children and improves their outcomes

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Develop role of Virtual Headteacher to cover all children known to social care

An experienced SENCO joined the Virtual School in September 2022 as the VS SEND Lead.

An overall Attendance Policy for the LA has been developed and we are now obtaining termly data for CP/CIN from Bury schools. Most schools are now supplying attendance data via Group Call. The data team are working on a system to align LCS data with Group Call and we were initially told that by September 2023 we would be able to filter Group Call data for children with a social worker (CWSW). We have now been told that the LCS/Group Call alignment will be delayed.

Other methods of attendance data collection are available but are not currently in place in Bury, therefore we do not have access to accurate and up-to-date attendance data for children with a social worker (who are not CLA).

Lead for Children with a Social Worker and Virtual School Inclusion Adviser are offering a fortnightly clinic for social workers and a weekly clinic for schools - appointments can be booked to discuss individual CWSW and gain advice and support around education.

This offer has been expanded and we have an offer of support specifically for children on CP/CIN called the Wellbeing Pathway, which can be accessed by schools and social workers. The Inclusion Adviser co-ordinates this and reports on it quarterly.

The Inclusion Adviser supports children on CP/CIN who are at key transition points (going into Y7 and Y11) to offer advice, support and small-group targeted interventions as part of our offer to schools.

Virtual School Conference took place in July 2023, and highlighted the barriers to learning which CWSW experience and strategies to overcome these to make their needs visible to schools and social workers. Feedback was extremely positive, with 99% of delegates rating it Very Useful/Useful and numerous examples of positive comments received. Over 120 delegates attended from schools and social care.

Improve the quality and impact of PEPs

The Virtual School Action Plan is in place to track and monitor progress and a Quality Assurance framework has been established. The Virtual School are active in meeting Heads and designated teachers to ensure a shared understanding of PEPs. All PEPs now receive individual QA, with ratings of Gold, Green, Amber and Red and clear explanations as to why they have been rated this way. The Virtual School uses this system to monitor school performance and provide support and intervention where PEP quality is a concern.

We have accurate attendance and attainment data for all CLA with daily live collection of data. Attendance is reviewed weekly and persistent absence is scrutinised. The PEP report on LCS allows for monitoring of academic attainment and progress and this is reviewed termly for all children and is used to prioritise VS attendance at PEPs for children causing concern. We use NCER NEXUS for analysis of external examination data.

Schools with PEPs which are identified as of poor quality are offered individual training. All new social workers are offered PEP training and while training has been available for all social workers this has been on a voluntary basis. There is planned mandatory training for social workers which will focus on attendance/exclusions, while PEP training will be built into the training delivered to CASS teams.

The PEP template has been completely updated to strengthen the section on voice of the child and allow for review of targets.

Termly Designated Teacher Forums take place and PEPs are a standing agenda item. Individual training is offered to schools with high numbers of CLA.

7. Develop a strategic and co-ordinated approach to providing support for care leavers to improve their outcomes

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Impact of activity so far

Outcomes achieved for care experienced young people remain relatively strong around the proportion of care leavers in suitable homes. Performance around education, employment and training has begun to improve and move more into line with similar local authorities during the last 2 months of 2023, following a sustained period of consistently weak performance. More children leaving care are staying put with their foster carers post-18, but we still have a higher proportion of our care leavers living either semi-independently (for 17 and 18 years old), or independently (for those aged 19 and over); and housing options for care experienced young people is a key area for improvement.

Upcoming milestones

- Launch new local offer for care leavers (January)

Review and develop our transitions planning

A Transitions Board has been established and meets monthly, co-chaired by the Head of Service for SEND & Inclusion and the Principal Social Worker in Adult Services. A virtual 14-25 service will be launched by the end of the year.

A tracker has been established which identifies all 16 year olds who may be eligible to receive adult services, pending a LCS systems solution which is being developed. Workers in both the children's and adult teams have been identified as transition specialists.

Our CASS team have now adopted the My Life, My Way paperwork (used in Adult Services) for all looked after children when they reach 17 years of age to support their transition.

In the Autumn term (2023) we are delivering training across all of the children's teams around PFA, supported by the DfE and including parents with lived experience.

We are seeking to establish 2 additional adult worker posts and a transitions co-ordinator to ensure greater focus on transitions; this will need approval from both Adult and Children's as these will be jointly funded (September 2023).

Access to suitable housing as part of the Care Leaver Offer

88 % of 18-year-olds & 94% of our 19–21-year-olds are deemed to be in suitable accommodation. We have a tenancy sustainment officer who has assisted care leavers with accommodation and avoiding homelessness which has provided some added resource and support to our care leavers.

Bury are collaborating with Rochdale and Oldham as part of the Greater Manchester National House Project. A cohort of 6 young people are identified and then supported to secure tenancies. The House Project Steering Group continues to meet; there is still an issue in terms of housing sufficiency. House Project Workers are developing relationships with the team and are based in the office one day a week.

A Joint Housing Protocol has been drafted by the substantive HoS CASS & Leaving Care and will be progressed by the interim HoS.

The Housing Growth Sub-Group is leading on a review of Bury's wider housing strategy and needs analysis, to ensure understanding of needs and strategy focused on areas identified and will also consider the use of voids for care leavers as part of the Housing Sufficiency plan and the Empty Homes Strategy which will link in with the wider GMCA activity. The group is also tasked with a review of the Allocation Policy to review the offer for care leavers.

In the November monitoring visit, young people told inspectors that housing was their number 1 priority but that they did not feel that this was a shared priority by all professionals.

7. Develop a strategic and co-ordinated approach to providing support for care leavers to improve their outcomes

A

Work Stream Lead: Andrea Stone

Develop opportunities for continuing education or employment with partners

EET strategy in place with monthly EET meetings chaired by the Service Manager for early intervention to divert NEET and actively move NEET to EET status.

Our Post-18 EET Worker commenced in post in November 2023 and will work in conjunction with our post-16 EET worker to create connections for our young people by targeted work with potential employers and training providers.

We are supporting young people with their employment readiness skills through partners including DWP and Ingeus.

We are considering how we work in partnership with local businesses and education providers to create a clear local area understanding of need and challenges to collaboratively provide solutions and renew the offer for young people.

All new apprenticeships are now offered as permanent posts, subject to successful completion of the apprenticeship, and are paid Grade 1/2 i.e. the real living wage, from the outset. This approach means apprenticeship opportunities provide a route into permanent employment and a clear career pathway.

Since 2017 the Council has successfully appointed 8 individuals through apprenticeships who declared they were a care leaver. These young people have undertaken apprenticeship training in areas including IT, Youth Work, Public Service Operational Delivery, Waste Management and Business Support. This represents around 10% of externally appointed apprentices during this period.

The Council's apprenticeship plan for 2023/24 includes an increased focus on the external recruitment of apprentices with plans to recruit approximately 21 new apprentices during the year which will be advertised to care leavers in the first instance. National Apprenticeship week is taking place 5th to 11th February and as part of this the Council is hosting Let's Try It Tuesday, an opportunity for care experienced young people to job shadow for the day.

The Designated LAC Nurse will revisit the offer for Care Leaver apprenticeships in GP surgeries (Tower Practices) which was previously under development.

Ensure the Council offers high quality apprenticeships to care leavers

Report shared with Children's Strategic Partnership Board in September 2022 outlining the apprentice and work experience offer being prioritised to support Children in Care and Care experienced.

All new apprenticeship vacancies are made available to children in care and care leavers alongside those at risk of redundancy, prior to wider advertisement internally or externally. When applying through this route, young people are guaranteed an interview if they meet the essential criteria and are granted a reduced assessment benchmark for appointment of 60% compared to the standard 70%.