

Children & Young People Improvement Plan

Highlight Report

July 2026

PRIORITY 1

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

Upcoming milestones

- August - Opening of The Ark Live Well Centre and Radcliffe Family Hub
- October – Begin staff consultation re. FFP implementation
- October – Phased implementation of FFP begins

Effective information sharing to support full understanding of history within the MASSH

Learning sessions taken place with managers and MASSH partners in October to ensure family history consistently taken into account when making decisions about families. We are seeing better chronologies informing decision making with 96% of those records dip sampled having complete histories. Thematic multi-agency audits are scheduled quarterly, and learning shared with the MASSH Strategic and Operational Boards.

Consistent and holistic planning

44% of CIN/CP plans were judged good through our core audit programme in the last 3 months. Joint audits have been completed to provide peer reflection and challenge around quality of practice but SMART planning remains inconsistent. We are taking a more targeted approach to practice judged to require improvement, by holding learning circles on audits that require improvement and directing staff back to training where needed, in an effort to shift more practice from requires improvement to good.

Appropriate identification of the different forms of neglect

Neglect is one of our key partnership priorities for our BSCP. There have been issues with membership and attendance of the sub-group and so it has not been meeting regularly, this was escalated as an issue and meetings are now scheduled. We have seen an increase of referrals where the primary reason is neglect and continue to work with the MASSH Strategic and Operational Board to ensure a robust response at the front door and increased use of Early Help support. We are seeing increased use of GCP2 within Children's Social Care but is used less by partners. A GCP2 awareness video has been produced by the partnership which will be finalised in July. Neglect training is in place and delivered regularly by the BSCP, with 5 sessions having taken place in 2026 and 65 attendees in total.

Private fostering

We continue to raise awareness of Private Fostering via Private Fostering Week (November), a refresh of promotional materials and multi-agency training. There are 6 children formally identified as privately fostered (August 2026) which is an increase on previously reported numbers but remains lower than we would expect. The HoS is part of a North-West Private Fostering Development Group to improve practice.

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Children are supported to access to education

Our **Education & Inclusion Strategy** was launched in November 2025, with a well attended launch event. A Delivery Plan is in place, an Education Board has been established and will meet in September. An Executive Group will support the Board, reviewing all highlight reports and ensuring focused discussion at Board of the key issues where more detailed challenge or oversight is needed. Our Graduated Approach was launched in September 2025 across the 5 neighbourhoods, and school engagement is high (90% regularly attending). This will form the foundation of our Experts at Hand (EaH) offer as part of the national SEND reforms.

There remains lots to do to improve internal **management information systems**. Progress has not been made in relation to developing the Education Systems (Eyes, PowerBI) – this has been escalated to the Executive Director, Strategy & Transformation and agreed as a priority for Autumn term 2026.

We are strengthening support for children with a social worker through enhanced **Virtual School** engagement. A stronger Early Years Partnership is now in place, through a Virtual School Advisory Teacher, who is tracking attendance of CIN/CP children in the absence of access to live attendance data. A new toolkit/pathway is being developed across Children's Services (requiring CSC representation) to address Barriers to Education (previously EBSNA), which has VS involvement. There has been attendance at Teaching Tuesdays to raise awareness of processes, issues and strategies and we will ensure this is repeated on a half-termly basis, focusing on the different areas of education e.g. SEND, Attendance, EHE, CME, Admissions and Alternative Provision. Previously Looked After Children (PLAC) and Kinship Care Advisor has developed different training packages to deliver in a variety of fora and rolled out.

Children Missing Education (CME)

Multi-agency Children Missing Education (CME) Panels are now fully embedded, bringing together colleagues from Education, SEND, Children's Social Care and Health to review cases and co-ordinate timely reintegration planning for vulnerable children and young people. Particular focus is given to those with complex SEND needs, Children in Care, children who have experienced exclusion, and those with medical or emotional barriers to attendance.

Through the refreshed Education & Inclusion Strategy, engagement with schools has increased to strengthen challenge around children who are not accessing full-time education. This includes greater scrutiny of reduced timetables, children receiving alternative provision and the appropriateness of support arrangements in place. As a result, schools are being supported and challenged to promote earlier intervention, maintain educational engagement and secure a return to full-time education wherever possible. Quarterly audits of CME practice provide additional assurance that statutory duties are being fulfilled and that children receive appropriate educational support. Audit findings are reported through senior leadership governance arrangements and safeguarding partnerships.

Nationally, attendance stands at 93.3% for all pupils and in Bury at 93.0% at the end of Spring Term 1. Bury's Primary Attendance is 94.7%, Secondary 90.1% and Special School 85.2% for comparison. The biggest issues with attendance of our pupils are presenting within the secondary cohort year 8-11, however our primary cohort has excellent attendance currently at 95.9% including Nursery, 95.87% not including EYFS. Overall Secondary attendance is currently 75.9% however there is significant variation across age groups, with older year groups having much weaker attendance (year 7 is at 91.5% and yr 8 is 83.4%).

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Elective Home Education (EHE)

Elective Home Education (EHE) notifications are routed through the MASSH to ensure safeguarding is considered at the earliest opportunity. Robust quality assurance arrangements have been embedded, including half-termly audits of EHE casework which are providing assurance that statutory EHE processes and School Attendance Order (SAO) procedures are being applied consistently and appropriately, with decision-making evidenced within children's records.

Practitioner challenge and scrutiny have strengthened suitability assessments undertaken by the Local Authority. As a result, there is clear evidence of improved identification of unsuitable educational provision. Where education is not deemed suitable, School Attendance Orders are issued promptly, enabling children to return to school and reducing the risk of educational neglect. The Children Not in School (CNIS) Panel provides a strengthened governance route for reviewing complex cases, monitoring outcomes and considering escalation through School Attendance Orders where appropriate, ensuring that children's educational entitlement and welfare remain at the centre of decision-making.

As with many local authorities, there has been an increase in the number of children electively home educated, often linked to wider system pressures such as SEND sufficiency and school-related factors. This has created additional demand on the service and has, at times, impacted on timeliness and consistency. There is a continued focus on improving the quality of recording and ensuring that the impact of interventions is consistently evidenced.

This is also a priority with the Education & Inclusion Strategy.

Delivery of Children's Social Care reforms

We will move to a phased implementation of the **Families First Programme (FFP)** in October, with teams aligned to localities, allocation of new work on a locality basis and trialling of new ways of working including new assessment and threshold document, which is pending final sign-off via the BSCP (expected early September). There is some delay in recruitment to partnership roles to support the implementation, although Health are now progressing to recruitment and GMP are part of a test and learn in another GM LA, which can then inform the Buy implementation.

Our first **Best Start Family Hub**, Chesham Fold, officially opened in March 2026. In March 2026, Bury submitted our Best Start in Life Plan to the DfE, setting out a clear three-year vision to improve outcomes for children and families. The recent award of £3.2 million in Family Hub funding for the current programme period provides the opportunity to strengthen and expand the local offer. The funding will support key developments including the introduction of Best Start Inclusion Practitioners to provide targeted support for children with emerging or identified additional needs, expansion of outreach and community engagement to reach underrepresented and vulnerable families, continued development of a high-quality Early Years parenting offer, and strengthening of the home learning environment offer to support parents in promoting early development, language and school readiness.

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Effective work within Pre-Proceedings

Our PLO Impact Board is well established and provides challenge and oversight of the lived experience of children in proceedings, to ensure that timescales are met and actions progressed. Though we have not eliminated delays, we are tracking and challenging them consistently. Compared to other GM LAs, we are timelier in this space. The number of children entering pre-proceedings has reduced over the last six months, indicating that more families are responding positively to support and intervention at an earlier stage. For those children who do enter care, an increasing proportion (8 children as opposed to 3) have first been supported through pre-proceedings, demonstrating stronger assessment of need and risk, improved planning and appropriate use of legal planning before care becomes necessary. This provides greater assurance that children only enter care when all realistic opportunities to safely support them within their family and wider network have been fully explored.

PRIORITY 2

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

Upcoming milestones

- September – revised timeline for practice guidance on direct work
- September – revised timeline to complete procurement of digital life story work solution

Robust, holistic, outcomes focused care planning

Plans remain variable - some do it well, but time pressures can be an issue for those who would otherwise do them well. There has been gaps in reduced Team Manager capacity in this area with long term absence of managers in this area since January 2026 which is a potential factor in terms of signing off plans which do not meet our standards. Our audits of practice relating to children in care show 29% of plans are judged good and 71% require improvement, based on the last 3 months of audits (improvement since 20%/80% reported in previous update). Tangible positive outcomes have been delivered through strong care planning in the past year – children safely discharged from care orders, children kept within their wider family at the end of court proceedings.

Transitional safeguarding arrangements protect children as they transition into adulthood

We are working with Adult Social Care and partners to establish our Transitional Safeguarding approach. In April 2026 it was agreed that 2 areas will be tested: Joint complex safeguarding – subgroup and a task & finish group re planning to test a new approach in neighbourhoods. We attended the GM Transitional Safeguarding event in June and presented our experimental approach.

Children are supported to understand their life story and family relationships

Direct work training was delivered from Research in Practice in April & May 2026, and our WFD team will continue to deliver training across the department as part of our training by role matrix. Practice guidance and tools/exemplars remain under development.

Following some delay, we have now identified a digital solution for life story work, this is in the final stages of procurement – currently with IG colleagues for review and sign-off.

Following the learning from our ILACS inspection, there is more to do to ensure that our practitioners are completing trauma informed work with our young people to fully understand their experiences and ensure their support takes into account the trauma of their journey to the UK. A weekly Unaccompanied Children group takes place at the Care Leavers Hub to provide opportunity for discussion. We are planning to develop our BeeBot platform to provide more information for our newly arrived young people, and we will ensure that user profiles capture their status so that we can monitor usage and identify areas of interest to strengthen the offer. We will work with the monthly group at the Hub to further develop the local offer to ensure it meets their needs.

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

Emotional wellbeing of young people

The service will launch in July with the Clinical Psychologist and 1 social worker in post (second out to advert). In addition, Pennine Care have recruited a Senior Mental Health practitioner (0.6FTE) and Assistant Psychologist (0.8FTE) who are currently being onboarded.

There is a weekly meeting between Service Managers from Family Safeguarding, CASS & Health to ensure that initial health assessments, review health assessments and SDQs are being completed in a timely way, this is chaired by Director of CSC & EH. Completion of SDQs is an issue for children out of area, as other health providers are not commissioned to collate as part of the Review Health Assessment.

Children in our care attend school and make progress

Real-time attendance monitoring is in place via Welfare Call for children who are looked after. Alerts to absence or suspensions are picked up daily and the Attendance and Inclusion fortnightly meeting within the Virtual School, ensures oversight for children who are persistently absent or receiving suspensions. Actions to support increasing attendance are discussed and established including direct work with the Attendance and Inclusion Advisor linking with the school, social worker or care placement to identify the barriers to attendance and establish the support required. We will strengthen oversight of the educational progress of our children through a focused monthly Strategic Oversight Group (SOG) via include CYP XELT meetings. Plans to expand the PEP audits to include schools has stalled due to GDPR issues – this will be referred to our DPO for advice, and we will explore the approach in other LAs.

Wide range of home options for children and young people

We currently have 8 foster care households in assessment (June 2026), with 3 approvals since the beginning of the year. Our current number of fostering households in Bury is 61 (mainstream) and 49 (kinship carers). We are recruiting to Step Forward carers and are being assisted by Reconnect.

The end-to-end GM Fostering Hub to be up and running by the end of September and we are fully engaged in planning.

We have been exploring options around in-house Bury Children’s Homes, including short breaks, and while the Council have agreed funding discussions are ongoing with a local provider and there is no confirmed decision.

Our supported lodgings offer has been on hold since the introduction of the new regulations in 2024. Providers are in place, but we cannot use them for young people under the age of 18 without the Ofsted registration. The application process has proved challenging. A completely new application was submitted July 2026 and we have received confirmation this is now progressing.

Dfe Funding has been received for another Mockingbird constellation. We have also begun a 12-month pilot of the Step Forward Foster Carers Scheme. The proposal aims to recruit a specialist group of foster carers who have the knowledge, skills and experience to support children and young people with complex needs who would otherwise be living in, or be at risk of entering, residential children's homes. We are now actively recruiting to these carers. The pilot will initially recruit six specialist foster households to care for six children currently in residential care or assessed as likely to require a residential placement.

PRIORITY 3

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

Upcoming milestones

- Autumn – pathway plan training

Safe and suitable accommodation

Over 94% of care leavers live in suitable accommodation supported through strong partnership working with housing services and commissioned providers. A monthly Joint Housing Panel chaired by the Director of Social Care and Early Help and attended by children social care, adult social care and housing is effectively ensuring the post 18 years accommodation needs of our young people from 16 years are being planned for, met and to oversee support to young people to reduce the risk of home instability and address any issues which may arise.

As part of the council's approval of housing developments, we are ringfencing a small number of properties in suitable developments for care experienced young adults – a total of 50 units by the end of 2030, across 10 separate developments spread around the borough; and 30 units by the end of 2028. Timescales on some projects have slipped slightly.

We are also working with a registered social housing provider to develop a wider range of available accommodation (14 units) for post-18 UASC care leavers with no final decision on immigration status. We are also exploring opportunities with Barnardo's GAP housing for an additional 4 highly supported, supported accommodation homes for older children currently in residential care.

Access to health services and understanding of history

Health histories are currently up to date for all young people who have turned 18 and work is ongoing to ensure that these remain timely, where Review Health Assessments fall close to their 18th birthday they are being completed at the same time. In touch case proforma completed by PAs following each visit has been updated to ensure there is a focused discussion around health.

Robust and holistic pathway planning

An independent consultant has undertaken reviews of pathway planning and care leaver services (report pending). This work has informed a targeted improvement plan focused on improving the quality, consistency and impact of pathway plans, strengthening multi-agency involvement and ensuring plans better reflect the voice, aspirations and lived experiences of care experienced young people. Pathway plans remain variable however there is greater challenge from managers, and the new Team Manager will be coaching individuals to improve the quality of plans.

PRIORITY 3

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

Young people have access to education, employment and training opportunities

A weekly EET Panel, chaired by the Head of Service, provides oversight of young people who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET and drives timely intervention. Multi-agency working between Next Chapter, Connexions, the Virtual School and post-16 providers ensures coordinated support plans are in place. This approach is strengthening participation in education, training, apprenticeships and employment opportunities and reducing barriers to progression. Through the year we have seen the impact of this work with improvement - comparing the position in May 2025 to May 2026, there has been a 4% improvement, moving Bury up to 54% of care leavers in education, employment or training, in line with the national average and the average for similar authorities.

The EET/NEET Plan on a Page (POP) is now in place, and our Post-18 Lead is using it with the full cohort of young people this year. Feedback from colleges is positive and it is providing a better insight re. achievements and support needed. Post-16 EET Lead continues to work with our young people and provide support e.g. taking to University visits further afield, college interviews, buying specialist clothing for courses & job interviews. Post 16 EET Lead re-evaluated to reflect needs of the cohort and duties being undertaken - now Post 16 Advisor. Approval to recruit to an additional 2 Year FT advisor to support transition to post 16 and additional opportunities to be sought.

PRIORITY 4

Ensure effective multi-agency governance, partnership arrangements and support for children, young people and their families

Upcoming milestones
September – first meeting of Education & Inclusion Board

Effective governance arrangements support the children’s transformation programme
The Strengthening Outcomes Board oversees progress against the Improvement Plan and monitors impact. The Corporate Parenting Board arrangements have been recently refreshed (June 2026) to ensure our young people have a clear role and that members are appropriately sighted on the Corporate Parenting Plan. The CPB Operational Board oversees delivery of the Plan, replacing the three task & finish groups which previously existed. Operational Board meets monthly and reports to the CPB Board, with Operational Board highlight reports shared. The social care reforms (FFP) are overseen through a Families First Programme Board, and in July 2026 it was agreed this was a formal sub-group of the BSCP, ensuring multi-agency governance and oversight.

Effective governance arrangements support Education & Inclusion Strategy
Education & Inclusion Board will include stakeholders across health, social care and the school sector to be established. The first meeting was delayed due to local area SEND inspection followed by SEND Reforms activity but will take place in September 2026. An Executive Group has been established which will review the detailed highlight reports from the workstream leads, and will decide what needs to be presented at Board for more detailed challenge and oversight. The SEND Improvement and Reform Board (replacing the SEND Improvement & Assurance Board (SIAB)) will report into the Education & Inclusion Board.

PRIORITY 5

Ensure a stable and effective leadership and management team that enables good social work practice to flourish

Upcoming milestones	
Revised timeline of Sept – agree management training programme	
Quality of supervision	Managers driving progress
Quality of supervision has been positively impacted by the introduction of Beam Notes. Social Workers and managers are reporting significantly reduced administrative burden associated with recording, practitioners report having more time and space for meaningful reflection, analysis and professional discussion during supervision. This is strengthening the quality of managerial oversight and supporting more thoughtful decision-making for children and families. As a result, we are seeing improved quality of supervision records, with stronger evidence of reflective discussion, challenge and consideration of children's experiences and outcomes, rather than a focus on capturing notes alone. At the time of inspection, our audits identified 19% of management oversight judgements as good or better, with 16% judged inadequate. More recent audit findings show that the quality of supervision and management oversight in Quarter 1 continues to improve, with 37% of judgements now assessed as good or better within only 2% Inadequate. To improve further managers, need to more consistently follow up on actions and evidence the impact of their oversight of the quality of practice and performance.	Heads of Service are committed to observation of supervision, some have taken place however an online template has now been developed (June) so we can track activity and identify themes more readily. We are co-producing a new management training programme with our extended management team. We expect this to be finalised in September 2026 (was April), and once agreed will deliver this through both internal and external provision. The Workforce Board has been reviewed and as part of a refreshed agenda will focus on identified training needs, at an individual level but also team and service.

PRIORITY 6

Ensure a skilled, confident & experienced workforce

Upcoming milestones

- September – decision regarding Beebot AI and Social Work Academy

Children and young people can build trusting relationships with practitioners

We continue to get a strong level of interest in posts in Bury. Over the past year, we have been more successful recruiting permanent social workers, and this has improved the **stability of the workforce** and decreased changes of social worker - currently, 65% of children open to the service for longer than 6 months have had the same social worker for 6 months or longer. We have achieved increased workforce stability over the last year, in June 2026 14.3% of posts were covered by agency workers (up from 55% 2 years ago), with a true vacancy rate (allowing for agency workers covering full-time post holders absent currently for maternity leave or long-term sickness) of 11%.

Motivational interviewing training is delivered as part of our training by role matrix programme and will be part of the FFP Learning & Development plan to ensure this is trained out across all practitioners (including partners). However audits indicate use of MI is not yet consistently evident in case file recording.

Clear induction pathways

We are developing our Social Work Academy through the Beebot AI app, we have discussed our requirements with the provider and now have a formal proposal – hoping to gain approval in September. We are increasing scrutiny of attendance at mandatory training, with improved tracking in place to enable reporting to HoS on attendance. Induction checklists have been amended to ensure that new to Bury practitioners have their work sampled after their first month in Bury, this is not yet embedded.

Training to support quality of practice

We have a targeted approach to delivery of training, although attendance continues to be a challenge; non-attendance is escalated to Heads of Service. Practice guidance is being reviewed to support FFP implementation. There is a tighter approach to closing the loop following audit, with practitioners/managers directed back to training following inadequate or require improvement audit judgements. WFD team also have access to the audit data to enable a targeted approach to practitioner training.

PRIORITY 7

Ensure effective Performance Management, Quality Assurance and Management Information Systems that support good social work practice

Upcoming milestones
- September – Beebot Care Leavers Local Offer soft launch - September – Beebot SEND Local Offer launch

IROs and CP Chairs driving improved outcomes for children
Escalation protocol is embedded within IRO and CP Chair practice, with weekly escalation reports reviewed by Heads of Service giving clear line-of-sight to themes, timeliness and outcomes for children. Warrington SLIP support was delivered in March 2026, focused on strengthening IRO impact, IRO understanding of role within the organisation and importance of scrutiny and challenge and in training was delivered on safe uncertainty and defensible decision-making. Performance management arrangements have been strengthened through review trackers, weekly monitoring meetings and a focus on timely distribution of minutes and follow-up activity. We have struggled to recruit skilled and experienced IRO's which has impacted on their ability to retain a tight grip on practice and planning for children. IRO posts have now been through a job evaluation process and are gradings are now consistent with the Team Manager gradings which will support more effective recruitment strategies and approaches going forward.

Consistent management of allegations by LADO
We have refreshed our LADO training offer to strengthen understanding of roles, thresholds and professional accountability, supporting more consistent and effective decision-making. In addition, we have worked with our LADOs to strengthen the consistency of practice and recent audit activity has highlighted further work is needed. LADO capacity was increased with recruitment of an additional permanent LADO. A new workspace within LCS was designed to support clearer recording, this was implemented in June but some further work has been identified – this will be agreed in August 2026.

PRIORITY 7

Ensure effective Performance Management, Quality Assurance and Management Information Systems that support good social work practice

MI Systems support good social work practice

LCS development continues, with an external consultant recruited to support FFP implementation and also wider improvement priorities. This work is overseen through SMT. Through this resource we have delivered improvements to the section 17 payments process (C61), IRO resolution process, LADO workspace, fostering and adoption.

Beam Notes (formerly MagicNotes) is progressing well since implementation in October 2026, with over 10 templates in use across the service. Dip sampling indicates positive impact on supervision and other recording, although more in-depth dip sampling has been carried out recently with a report due to SMT in August to inform next areas for development. We are also working with other teams/services in exploring potential for efficiencies elsewhere.

Invision VITA is being tested by the EHCP team, to be used to produce EHCPs. Some initial teething issues have been identified, we are working in partnership with Invision to resolve these and ensure the system meets our needs. We are part of 3 NW LAs receiving a subsidised offer under NW ADCS SLIP arrangements.

The **Beebot AI** platform is being developed initially across 3 key areas: the SEND Local Offer, Care Leavers Local Offer and Family Hubs. These are in varying stages of development, there has been some delay in pulling the content together due to capacity in the respective services. This has now been addressed:

- Care Leavers Local Offer is undergoing final checks and should go live in mid-September

- SEND Local Offer is undergoing final checks and should go live in mid-September (soft launch) with a formal launch at the end of September via a schools inclusion event
- Family Hubs content remains under development and we hope to go live in October/November.

Further development is planned once the above 3 areas are live – we are reviewing other LA examples and would like to develop a single front door and our Social Work Academy.