



Telford & Wrekin  
Co-operative Council

Protect, care and invest  
to create a better borough

# Telford & Wrekin Self Evaluation 2022-2023



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# Introduction



# INTRODUCTION

Our values as an authority here in Telford and Wrekin are at the heart of what we want to achieve as a Children's Service and at the core of how we want our social workers and social care practitioners to work with children, young people and their families.

We continue to be on a journey and know that there is always room for improvement and as a service we need to frequently assure ourselves about the quality of practice.

We want to draw on the expertise of those who have experienced our services, to listen, to learn and to change our approach where needed to work in partnership with families. We must ensure that we are getting the basics right, alongside identifying new, innovative approaches in supporting those who need our help and support. Our newly published Practice Framework "sets the scene" for relational practice when it highlights "only by working together, with each other and with children and their families can our practice flourish and positive outcomes be achieved".



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# Our values



# OUR VALUES

As important as what we are going to do is how we are going to do it. Our co-operative values provide the framework for how we will work. They set out the basis for the Council's relationship, or our "deal", with residents, a commitment for what the Council will do but also that we are asking our residents to accept and act on their own responsibilities.

## Openness and Honesty

**We will** - be open and honest in the way we work and make decisions and communicate in a clear, simple and timely way.

**We would like everyone** - to be open and honest about what they want to improve in their community.

## Ownership

**We will** - be accountable for our own actions and empower others with the skills to help themselves.

**We would like everyone** - to the best of their abilities, to take action and responsibility for themselves and their community.

## Fairness and Respect

**We will** - respond to people's needs in a fair and consistent way.

**We would like everyone** - to respect and care for themselves and others, valuing the different ideas and skills that people bring and treating each other as equals.

## Involvement

**We will** - work together with our communities, involving people in decisions that affect their lives and be prepared to listen and take on new ideas.

**We would like everyone** - to work with and support others, get involved and share their views to help us develop the way we do things.

This document will set out what we know about ourselves as a service, how we know that, and will evidence the impact that we are having. We will demonstrate where we see ourselves on a journey of continuous improvement, providing examples to some of our developments and achievements in the past year, but more importantly providing feedback from families to demonstrate what they think about us. Through our regular quality assurance activity and feedback opportunities such as compliments and complaints we are constantly re-visiting our practice to make further improvements. We will also share areas of development going forward within our plans for the forthcoming year.



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# Context of Telford and Wrekin



# CONTEXT OF TELFORD AND WREKIN

**185,842**  
POPULATION 2021 


**+11.4%**  
POPULATION INCREASE  
(LAST 10 YEARS)




**FASTEST GROWING  
IN WEST MIDLANDS**


**45,504**   
CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 0-19  
**24.5% OF THE POPULATION**

**+4.7%** INCREASE IN 0-19  
POPULATION  
(ENGLAND 3%)

**7,700**   
**21.4%**  
CHILDREN AFFECTED BY INCOME DEPRIVATION  
ENGLAND AVERAGE 18.5%

**22%**   
SCHOOL CHILDREN NON-WHITE BRITISH  
INCREASE FROM 13% IN 2011

**25.8%**  **21.9%**  
PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS ENGLAND 23.1%  
SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS ENGLAND 20.9%

**31,527**   
PUPILS IN  
OUR SCHOOLS

**257** CHILDREN ON A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN RATE PER 10,000 AT MARCH 2022 50.4 ENGLAND 42.1

**1,070**   
CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING CONTACTS PER MONTH

**449** CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER FEBRUARY 2023 RATE PER 10,000 AT MARCH 2022 102 ENGLAND 70

**5,630** **17.9%**  
SEND CHILDREN ENGLAND 16.3%

**1,562** **4.6%**  
CHILDREN WITH LONG TERM HEALTH PROBLEM/DISABILITY THAT LIMITS DAILY ACTIVITIES. ENGLAND 3.7%



The population of the borough continues to grow at above national rates – driven by the expansion of the local economy and record levels of housing growth. As the population grows, it has continued to change in line with national trends, with the population becoming more diverse and ageing. The median age of residents is now similar to regional, having previously been a borough with a younger population, although there still areas of the borough which have concentrations of younger residents.

One of the biggest challenges for the borough remains health inequalities. It is important though to emphasise that the health of the borough is improving overall, however, for a number of key measures the health of the population is not as good as the national average. This gap to the national position is most evident in the most deprived communities of the borough with key challenges including a lower life expectancy, higher rates of long-term illness and disabilities, high obesity rates and high rates of admissions to hospital for a variety of conditions.



## JSNA Headlines

The population of Telford and Wrekin is 185,842 (2021), with 45,504 0-19 year olds. The 2021 Census shows that between 2011 and 2021 the population aged 0-19 increased by 4.7%, a higher rate than the West Midlands (3.4%) and England (3%). Differences were seen across different age groups, with the population aged 0-4 decreased, changing by -7%, whereas there were increases in the age groups 5-9 (+19%) and 10-15 (+14%).

The population of the borough is projected to continue growing and reach 200,000 by 2032 (8.9%). Within this growth the borough will see notable changes in growth of different age groups, with the 0-19 age group projected to increase to 47,800 (3.3%), whereas the 65+ population will increase by 30% in the same period.

Telford and Wrekin has a higher proportion of households with dependent children than England overall (T&W 33.0%, England 29.1% 2011 Census) – around 22,000 households – and the same proportion of lone parent households with dependent children as England overall (24.4%), around 5,400 households.

As the population grows, it is also changing, becoming more ethnically diverse, with 22% of school pupils being of non-white ethnicity (increase from 13% in 2011).

Telford and Wrekin is a place of socio-economic contrasts. Parts of the borough are amongst the most deprived in England, with deprivation rates comparable to inner cities, whilst other areas are amongst the least deprived in England. More than one in five children in the borough are affected by income deprivation (21.4%), higher than the England average (18.5%), around 7,700 children. There are 16 areas out of 108 in the borough that are ranked in the 10% most deprived nationally for income deprivation affecting children.

Around 25.8% of primary school and 21.9% of secondary school pupils are eligible for free school meals, higher than the England rates of 23.1% and 20.9%

The population of the borough faces some significant health challenges and inequalities. Life expectancy in the borough is significantly worse than national, and our young people have higher rates of long-term health conditions and disabilities and higher rates of obesity.

As seen nationally and globally, the Covid pandemic has had a profound effect on some young people and services. Many of the long-term impacts of this are only just starting to be seen in the data and will continue to impact on some of our young people for many years to come.

Prevalence of SEND in Telford and Wrekin has historically been higher than for England, but has remained broadly unchanged in recent years, with 17.9% of pupils SEND compared to 19.3% nationally. Around 1,861 school age children have an EHCP, 3.8% of the population, lower than the national rate of 4%. For the first time since 2016, the number of EHC plans is just below the national average and the trend is levelling out. However, requests for an EH&C assessment are double the national rate.

Educational attainment data has been disrupted due to the pandemic, so 2022 attainment data has not been compared to previous years.

- **Early Years Foundation Stage:** 63.6% of children achieved the expected standard across all learning goals at the end of Reception, similar to the national average (63.4%)
- **Phonics:** 77.6% of children in the borough achieved a pass in Phonics, higher than the national rate of 76.0%

- **Key Stage 1:** the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard at Key Stage 1 in the borough was the same as the national average for reading (both 67%), and below the national average for writing (borough 57%, national 58%) and for maths (borough 67%, national 68%)
- **Key Stage 2:** 57% of pupils at Key Stage 2 achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, lower than the national average of 59%
- **Key Stage 4:** The proportion of pupils achieving a 9-5 pass in English and Maths, at 43.1%, is worse than the national average of 46.6%. Attainment 8 for pupils was similar to the national average (47.2 in Telford and Wrekin, 47.1 England). Progress 8 performance, at -0.29, was worse than the national rate of -0.06

Around 895 young people aged 16-24 claim unemployment benefits, around 4.8% of young people, similar to regional rates (5.0%) and higher than the England rate (3.9%) as at February 2023. Of those young people aged 16-17, around 101 are classed as not in education, employment or training (NEET, including those who are not known), a rate of 3.2%, lower than the England rate (5.1%)

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# Ofsted



# OFSTED

## Our ILACS Inspection was in January 2020 when we were judged overall outstanding.

Whilst the feedback was extremely positive, this did not mean that we could be complacent and that there was not more to do; we set ourselves a plan of improvement and development. Directly following the Inspection, the Pandemic led to us taking different, creative approaches to working with children, young people and their families, which we believe were successfully embedded. We have reflected on these approaches and those that were positive have been maintained. The impact of the pandemic on our workforce cannot be underestimated both throughout lock down and beyond, which has continued to result in more recent challenges for us as an authority, as other local authorities have also experienced.

## Ofsted Focused Visit

In April 2022, a Focused Visit took place, with Inspectors focusing on our arrangements for children in need or subject of a Child Protection Plan. Our feedback included “senior leaders have maintained a focus on keeping children safe and maintaining the quality of social work practice in Telford and Wrekin. As a result, children continue to benefit from an effective range of support and services, despite the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Social work practice is making a positive difference to vulnerable children subject to child in need and child protection plans”. Whilst there were positive comments in the feedback letter about visits to children, direct work, assessments and plans, referencing “highly capable social workers keeping children at the centre of their practice”.

There were also challenges. In terms of what needed to improve – “consistency in the escalation into

pre-proceedings of children who are experiencing chronic neglect” was highlighted, together with “a small number of visits to children were adult focused”, “plans were not always timebound” and “the quality of supervision not always consistent”.

As with the ILACs feedback, we have focused on the findings from the Inspection to review our arrangements and to identify how improvements can be made. We know ourselves well, where we are now and where we want to be going forward in our journey of improvement. This document will share what we have done in order to progress the improvements identified and what our plans are for moving forward.

## Our overarching key strengths

- We keep children at the centre of our practice and practitioners know their children well.
- We have re-launched our Threshold Document, with a conference being held across the Partnership and on-going workshops across services and the partnerships to embed it to ensure that any service intervention is at the right level for children and their families.
- We have a clear ethos of “working alongside children and their families”, reflected in our Family Safeguarding model, Dandelion Parent Carer Panel and contributions of practitioners with lived experience.
- We know ourselves well as a service.
- We have gone “back to basics” to ensure that we have the right foundations in place for our services and to have a real focus on effectiveness.
- We have refreshed our Housing Policy to ensure a robust approach.

- We have written a new Practice Framework, providing a clear model of practice, incorporating systemic and the family safeguarding approach to work relationally with families.
- We have a proactive Executive Director, who Chairs our Best Start in Life Board, the newly established DALP following legislative changes, with a new commissioned service that supports the whole family, building on the work of Family safeguarding regional work. She also Chairs the regional Board to establish a blueprint in terms of establishing a care leaver offer for the region.
- We have a strong dedicated workforce, recognised as our most valued and precious resource by Ofsted.
- We have the support of senior leadership who continue to invest in our services.
- We continue to be aspirational and creative to further improve our services.
- We work well with Education and Skills Colleagues, and link closely with the Virtual Head and SEND and will continue to do so to achieve one Children's Service.
- We have robust management oversight throughout the child's journey.
- We continue to further improve our offer to our care experienced young people.
- We are seeing and hearing of the benefits of multi-disciplinary teams.
- We receive a range of compliments from families and professionals.
- We are outward facing and use research and proven good practice to improve our own services.
- We have produced a guide to language and are embedding this across our own service and with partners, including promoting the practice of writing to children.
- We have a comprehensive training offer for our social care practitioners.
- We led on the CRABBB, "Reducing Court Backlogs" project supporting the region in reviewing their pre-proceedings processes and completing self-assessments, in order to provide a benchmark for the work in this area.
- We are diverting children away from pre-proceedings successfully.
- We are continually developing our management information and have implemented Practice Clinics where Team Managers and Service Delivery Managers produce reports to reflect on what's going well and what the challenges are around key performance, budget and staffing in their services. These are shared with Senior Managers at monthly Performance Meetings and Performance Board.

## What are our plans going forward?

- We will continue to embed the Family Safeguarding Model.
- We will continue to work with the Dandelion Group (Parent Care Panel), involving them in a range of activities to improve our services.
- We will enhance our arrangements around participation alongside children, young people and parents to inform and shape our practice.
- We have launched our guide to language and have a continued focus of the use of language and best practice and will embed this in our recordings, with our staff and with partners.
- We will continue to strengthen our work around neglect and have commissioned Professor Jan Horwath to work with us.
- We are championing work around protected characteristics and a motion has been passed to agree care experience as a protected characteristic by full council and cabinet.
- We will continue to review our recruitment and retention arrangements and are recruiting social work assistants to provide additional capacity.
- We have a strong "grow your own" culture to support our recruitment and retention.
- We are committed to a "family first" approach, where children remain in their own family networks wherever this is possible and will embed this through workshops and our Family First Conference.

- We will continue our close working with our Education and Skills colleagues to promote one Children's Service.
- We will continue our approach of relational working and provide training and support to our staff and partner agencies.
- We will work with partners to fully embrace the refreshed threshold document.
- We will develop Family Hubs to provide early support for families.
- We will work to improve performance areas that require strengthening and ensure a robust approach to monitor these.
- We will continue to improve our management information and our audit activities, to be confident that we know what is working well and what needs to improve.
- We are currently in the process of recruiting a Youth Development Officer to coordinate a refreshed youth offer within the borough. This will include completing applications for funding opportunities and working through consultation and engagement to establish a Telford and Wrekin Youth Partnership.
- We will develop child impact chronologies to support social work practice. These will provide a foundation for relationship-based practice and will enable both practitioners and parents to identify patterns of risk, harm and protective factors and how they have occurred over time.



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# Service updates



# SERVICE UPDATES

## Early Help, Emergency Duty, Family Connect, Strengthening Families

### What do we know about ourselves?

All services continue to scrutinise and review robust detailed data to inform and develop service delivery and staffing structures and workflow changes required to achieve best outcomes for children and their families.

Whole family working is embedded into practice and holistic needs are considered when supporting families by completing Early Help Support Plans and Early Help Assessments.

*“N was an amazing support worker nothing was too much trouble if I phoned her with a problem, she would make arrangements to come and see me and sometimes it would be on the same day if I needed anything sorted she helped me sort it. N was great with the children seeing them at school making sure they were happy she kept me updated on every visit she did I’m very happy with the service that N gave me and my family we as a family are sad to see N go but with her support and dedication to her job she has made us a better family and so much more comfortable with each other N is a great asset to your team.”*

Feedback from Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities identified in January 2022, that our work is fully bespoke to the family needs and that we are employing the use of a wide range of tools and strategies. Feedback was that

practitioners work in tandem with other services as part of a team around the family and the role of the Supporting Families Employment Advisor was highlighted, in respect of working flexibly to enable progress to work Early Help Assessments are completed to a good quality and Early Help Plans are progressed in a timely way to reduce drift and to ensure that families receive the right support at the right time.

Family Circle is embedded within practice with families and partners that evidence progression of needs of children and their families. This data is also used at a strategic level around patterns, themes and trends.

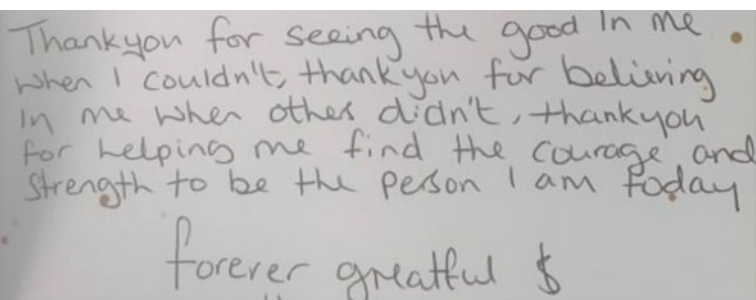
*“Working with L has been great and she has been very understanding. She has been a fantastic help and a joy to work with. L has always been a great support to us and has been there with support and advise. I couldn’t be happier working with her and it’s sad to see her go. Thank you for everything”*

*“Really fantastic support and very helpful, I do not want L to close as she is such a big support. L has helped me and my family and I’m very grateful to her and I will miss her.”*

Heat Maps are produced annually to reflect on areas of need to direct services. A new Family Circle was piloted in Strengthening Families which met Government guidelines, but also allowed us to draw out key themes such as SEND, Neglect and RPC. Strengthening Families know children and their families well, they undertake direct work and consider their wishes and feelings throughout their involvement. Strengthening Families keep the child



and children at the centre of their involvement. We audit bi-monthly, and this is part of our QA Framework.



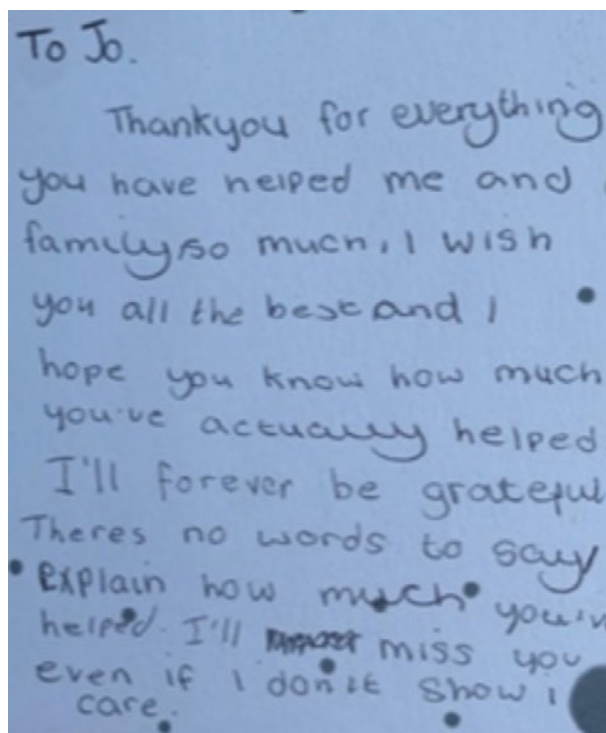
Telford are on track to reach our target, set by the Department for Levelling Up of 232 families evidencing significant and sustained progress. This will mean that Telford has been able to claim all the funding available.

The Partnership Threshold of Need Guidance document has been refreshed and launched on 13 February 2023 via a Partnership Conference to achieve children and families receiving the right help at the right time across the Partnership.

Following the Reducing Parental Conflict multi agency conference, we launched Telford's bespoke Toolkit to assist practitioners' discussion with adults and children to happen in a positive manner.

*"We were at first upset that we had been referred but looking back we have realised how lucky we are to have this support. Since you have been involved you helped me with the PIP application, supported me and health visitor helped me get the peri natal support and it's been on the up ever since. So, thank you so much for helping me".*

Regular compliments received from adults and children around support and intervention offered by Strengthening Families that has had such a positive impact and outcomes for children, young people and their families.



The Dandelion Parent Carer Panel have supported the local authority in reviewing its parenting offer, recruitment of staff, and presenting at local and national conferences about their lived experiences in order to improve our services.

The Best Start in Life Board chaired by our Executive Director, Children and Family Services to implement Family Hubs and bring together Children's Services and Public Health has commenced.

A project with Strengthening Families to work intensively with families and teenagers who are not attending school due to SEMH needs has been launched. BlueSky is now working with 6 children. All Strengthening Families staff have been trained in ACT and 12 with the BlueSky Model.

Family Connect offers a robust early intervention and targeted support offer for children and families with the objective of addressing needs at the earliest opportunity to prevent needs increasing and requiring statutory services.

Partnership contribution within Family Connect remains strong and effective in identifying holistic needs of families.

Daily Case Consultation TRIAGE meetings held within Family Connect are attended by partners to review the holistic needs of the family, identify threshold of need and formulate multi agency support plans for children and their families.

Family Connect continues to benefit from experienced Social Workers and Managers who are skilled at speaking with families and other professionals to ascertain information and identify harm and need. Social workers are professionally curious and passionate about safeguarding children and young people and consistently use tools available to them to identify threshold of intervention.

*“Since I left my son to stay with his girlfriend early January I have interacted with several different professionals with no change being made during this time. The case was finally passed to the Telford team less than a week ago, and I received a call from V from the family connect team. The call was extremely helpful, informative and V showed care and consideration when we spoke about what had happened. Something I don’t think I have got during this time. Since then, she has spoken to my son and has updated me on all occasions, with useful information provided to all involved, to the point my son has agreed to come home on Sunday. This is something I have been wanting to happen for several weeks now. I wanted you to know how helpful and considerate your team member has made me feel at such a tough time, please pass on my sincere thanks, praise and gratitude to V.”*

Family Connect offers a robust early intervention and targeted support offer for children and families with the objective of addressing needs at the earliest opportunity to prevent needs increasing and requiring statutory services.

Family Connect benefits from Experienced Social Workers who have individual specialisms, such as child exploitation and private fostering to promote current learning, developments and areas of focus to enable timely support for children and their families. Timeliness of responses when significant harm is identified within Family Connect and contributions from across the partnership when this is required. This is reflected within data and performance where there is 100% attendance at strategy discussions by LA, Police and Health.

There is robust child exploitation screening within Family Connect by using child exploitation descriptors that are now included within Partnership Threshold Guidance. Weekly child exploitation allocation meetings being held to identify service response available, Climb, Steer Clear, St Giles, CATE etc.

The Police Early Help Officer is fully embedded within Family Connect. This has continued to increase quality of information sharing and knowledge of services and identify Police Early Help offers to children and their families.

Strong partnership arrangements remain in place. Family Connect Safeguarding representatives attend key multi agency meetings, such as MARAC, Channel Panel and Youth Justice Panel.

There is an on-going focus on recruitment, induction, and retention for qualified Social Workers within Family Connect.

Increased staffing has remained within EDT which has promoted staff wellbeing and improved service delivery. Due to this increased staffing ratio, the Emergency Duty Team have continued to benefit from a stable, consistent, flexible, and knowledgeable team, led by an experienced Team Manager.

The homelessness referral process has been reviewed and strengthened by EDT, Housing and Partners. This has improved service delivery to individuals and families.

All permanent EDT staff are approved mental health professionals, with extensive experience and undertake continuous professional development. Partnership working between the Emergency Duty Team and children and adult daytime services is taking place to promote better outcomes for children and their families. There is evidence of clear transition of handover of work to daytime services.

Quality Assurance activity evidence clear and concise recording by the Emergency Duty Team and good communication around significant events. Positive feedback is received around hand over of work to daytime services and arrangements implemented at times of crisis for children and families.

### What are we doing going forward?

Linked to the Reducing Parental Conflict conference, a new Reducing Parental Conflict coordinator commenced January 2023 and has been working with Tavistock relations and Amity to further develop our training. A new App 'Between Us' has been purchased and will be rolled out Summer 23. We have reviewed our parenting offer and through Family Hubs are adding Triple P for Babies online, and training 24 practitioners across the partnership in May 23 for roll out in group and home settings. To embed this, Family Hubs funding will be used to contribute to staff time to facilitate the embedding of this new offer.

A parenting booklet is being designed in co-production with the Dandelions parent and will be available by Summer 23. The Dandelions are also working with PODS and Libraries to develop a SEND resource for families.

Following the successful partnership between the Richmond Fellowship and Strengthening Families, we are looking at developing our offer further with The Voice Training and creating a DA pathway across FSM, Strengthening Families and VSC partners. This will include Caring Dads UK.

Family Hubs: Telford are delighted to have been nominated to receive a share of £83 million to be shared across 75 top tier local authorities and for the work already started to be continued. Family Hubs

Delivery Plans have been developed on the following strands:

- Perinatal mental Health and Parent Infant relationship
- Infant Feeding
- Parenting 0-1
- Home Learning Environment
- Start for Life Offer and Parent Carer Panels

We are refreshing the EHA/EHSP to embed our new Family Circle and over the summer/autumn term will be promoting these and offering workshops for partners to attend. It is anticipated this refresh and promotion will increase completion and support delivery against DfE targets.

The work on the Working Journey Model (development of a working journal/life journey/family handbook, that is then kept and owned by all family members), has now progressed into our Planning for Success End of Involvement Tool. This is co-produced with Educational Psychology in line with our Family Safeguarding Motivational Interviewing practice. We are anticipating this being launched by September.

Professional standards and framework are being scoped for Strengthening Families to demonstrate required behaviours, expectations and setting minimum standards of practice for our service. This includes working in partnership with our Principal Social Worker on the delivery of a training package focusing on relationship-based practice, trauma informed care, and EHWB.

We aim to increase timeliness of contacts to promote children and families receiving the right services at the right time.

There is ongoing partnership quality assurance activity, including for multi-agency information and information being progressed into Family Connect, with a focus on quality of information sharing and neglect.

Ongoing configuration process in place in respect of introduction of a data mature matrix system in

respect of collating and analysing partnership data. We plan the introduction and implementation of a Children's Portal to reduce duplication of recording within Family Connect.

A business case is being presented to the Senior Leadership Team for additional funding within EDT to remain in place - linked to service demand across Adults, Housing and Children Services.

We will continue to work with Health colleagues to strengthen their role in providing Early Help Assessments, currently being reviewed.

We will embed the new Threshold of Need Document by a series of workshops for internal practitioners and across the Partnership.

## Children in Need of Help and Protection, Child Protection and Family Support Assessment

### What do we know about ourselves?

We knew that we needed to focus upon the completion timeliness of our Child & Families assessments. Following a successful review of our performance management arrangements and working with our Social Workers timeliness has now improved.

Our social workers are skilled in communicating and engaging with children being able to very quickly form positive relationships with both children and their families. This enables social workers to engage children in direct work to better understand their lived experience strengthening the quality of assessment and the support that can be provided to meet children's identified needs.

Hi C,

*S here, E's granddad, I did not know what to expect when we were going to meet you for the first time due to social workers having a bad name but from the first time I met you we felt at ease*

*with you, you were quietly spoken and very easy to be able to communicate with you.*

*Without using any bribes or anything your manner really got E to communicate with you and to like you so much she asked us to get you some imperial mints as she knows that you like them. And for E to take to a male like she has with you just shows that you have the right touch, and as for myself I appreciate everything you have done for my daughter all the help and advice and helping her sort things out when we didn't have a clue what to do you have restored my faith in the social system and I would like to wish you all the very very best in the future knowing that anyone you go to assist they will have the very best help and advice they can possibly have.*

Our auditing tells us that our assessments are proportionate in response, child focussed, well written and clearly articulate the voice, views and perspectives of the child and the child's family.

Our arrangements are robust around threshold decisions, reflecting the needs of the child. Our performance shows us that our Strategy Meetings are timely and are well attended by lead agencies and where there are immediate harm concerns decisions are swiftly made and children are seen promptly. We continue to enjoy good partnership arrangements with the police and when needed s47 enquires are undertaken in a timely way.

We recognised that there was an increase in concern for children's emotional health and wellbeing both in terms of quantity and significance of need requiring assessment. We have developed further our understanding of this area of need for children and the impact on family relationships.

*I just wanted to pass on our thanks for the amazing support that V has given both our team at Student Engagement Programme and Telford Langley School over the past couple of weeks with young person EMW.*

*She has been available to us all through some really tricky times over the past two weeks. EMW has a strong attachment to school, House I and V and it is an amazing example of cross service working to meeting the needs of vulnerable students and giving them the right support at the right time.*

*I hope that EMW is more settled over the coming weeks and gets the support she needs.*

#### **What are we doing going forward?**

We are currently undertaking 'back to basic' development with our social workers. We believe that in Assessment & Duty Teams this is important to do this periodically ensuring that we continue to do well the basics such as assessing and supporting children's identified needs and that our practice continually develops consistently throughout our teams and management group.

Linked to our Language Guide we are reviewing our Child & Family Assessment report template with a focus upon the language used for this. Alongside this we are developing with our social workers a 'writing to the child' model ensuring that assessment reports are written jargon free with the emphasis being this report is for child and the family.

We are working with partners to review and further develop further our collective response to children who harm others and children who are harmed by children.

We will contribute to the embedding of the multi-agency threshold document across all services which

will strengthen our early help offer to families across partnerships – early intervention and support will improve. Improved work to prevent crisis situations and interventions that then require a S47 response.

It was identified following our QA activity that we want to strengthen our approach and response to domestic abuse following the implementation and embedding of the Family Safeguarding model. We will continue to work with our colleagues from Family Safeguarding to ensure that families continue to receive the right service at the right time.

We will use the learning from parent experts' participation (Dandelion Project) to better understand and support families and our use of MI with families. We continue to work with Camden to benefit from their experiences.

*Hi there, hope ur ok, just want to say thanks for your help, we need a lot more people like you who are realistic, don't judge, don't assume, not scared to ask anything and most of all having answers and listening, you really don't know how much you have helped me so thank you. Don't ever leave, more people will need you. I would go as far as saying we need people like you in the social services area. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything you have done for us. You have changed my view of social workers you have been amazing – keep it up.*

## **Family Safeguarding**

#### **What do we know about ourselves?**

Over the past 12 months, we have continued to embed our Family Safeguarding Model, moving in to phase 2 of implementation and ensuring that the model is fully embedded with support offered to all appropriate children and families. Family Safeguarding has been supplemented by the appointment of a Senior Probation Officer to support perpetrators of domestic abuse and we

have now appointed a Group Specialist for Family Safeguarding who leads on the operational delivery of the service.

*“N has been a massive help. She explains everything and is so patient. She has a great relationship with my daughter, and we will be so sad when we don’t have contact with her anymore. Nothing is too much for her. Huge help. We wouldn’t be where we are without her, if there could be an award, I would want her to have it. She is an amazing lady. Without social services the family would have been broken up. N has been amazing. Opened my eyes to the way I was acting. She even went above and beyond at Christmas for example getting presents for my daughter. Thank you so much keep up the good work.”*

We have diverted children and their families away from pre-proceedings successfully. Between April 2022 and February 2023, 74% of children subject to pre- proceedings have been diverted successfully from care proceedings in an average timescale of fourteen weeks.

We have developed a robust data dashboard via Power Bi to ensure that we can chart and track the impact of the Family Safeguarding Model and service performance alongside oversight of existing KPI's.

We continue to see the impact of direct work with children and families. Senior managers also complete desk side discussions with Social Workers and practitioners and within the service with a clear focus on reviewing direct work completed with children and young people supported by the service.

There have been improvements in performance around Care Planning Meetings and Statutory Visits for our cared for children, however, we continue to challenge ourselves to improve this further.

*During my visit, the external care team shared how well supported one of their residents R is by his social worker. The care team reported that R’s allocated social worker has always been extremely supportive, is very responsive when R is in crisis and demonstrates very good insight in respect of R’s needs.*

Performance for core group meetings is positive with 90% plus being held in a timely way.

Following on from our Ofsted Focussed Visit (April 2022), we are working with Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children’s Partnership to develop our response to neglect. We are working with an external expert (Professor Jan Horwath) to ensure that we can support children and families experiencing neglect consistently and at the earliest opportunity. We also use our tracking mechanisms to ensure that children experiencing chronic neglect receive the correct support at the earliest time.

We have extended the New Beginnings project which works with parents who have previously had children removed from their care, who are experiencing challenges with their emotional well-being and mental health.

As part of the Reducing Court Backlogs project delivered through Covid Recovery and Building Back Better, we have worked with an expert by experience to develop and deliver a suite of ‘best practice’ workshops across the region. Attendees included local authorities, CAFCASS and the Judiciary with an action plan developed which has been fed back into local LFJB arrangements.

**...the judge made clear that the social worker’s team manager should be informed about the quality social work that has been undertaken. He said:**

*“You have done a first-rate job. If it wasn’t for you, this child may not be in the family, and would likely be adopted.*

*You have allowed this child to grow up in his family. Your manager must be told. Thank you.”*

We have received positive feedback from parents about our new Family Safeguarding Model and approach to service delivery.

#### **Extract from a parent:**

*“I still have a long way to go until I believe I’m where I should be in my life’s journey but I can tell you this, I am in a place mentally now that I never ever thought reachable and continue to discover more about myself and the world around me... Thankyou x”*

*P shared how she feels the FS model has changed her life, she has never received support before for her MH or alcohol use and feels this model as benefitted her immensely. After completing the parent programme with me, reducing her alcohol use completely and working with C to prepare her mentally for rehab. She feels this came around at the right time for her and has changed her life.”*

We held a twelve-month celebration event of Family Safeguarding in November where those present heard directly from children’s and adult practitioners and parents who have worked with us using the FS Model.

We are seeing an improvement in the timeliness of our care proceedings, with an average duration of thirty-nine weeks.

We meet with colleagues from CAFCASS and Legal Services on a regular basis to develop our working relationships and share good practice/areas for development. Colleagues from CAFCASS talk positively about the working relationships they have with our Social Workers.

Our audit activity highlights that Social Workers know their children and young people well and can clearly articulate their journeys and support offer.

The quality of wellbeing supervision held with Social Workers has been audited by the SDM which highlights that Team Managers offer good levels of support to their teams.

#### **Family Court Adviser and Children’s Guardian:**

*“A surprising conclusion to L’s proceedings today, but a welcome one, nevertheless. I wanted to thank you on L’s behalf for your focus and dedication to her as her Social Worker. Please don’t ever lose the wonderful and caring approach you clearly have. L’s solicitor wrote to me earlier and said “this social worker is such a breath of fresh air...” I hope you’re enjoying social work and L has really benefitted from having someone like you in her corner. Have a great Christmas and speak to you again.”*

#### **What are we doing going forward?**

We are undertaking a review of the work that we have completed in the court arena with an external partner to consider how we can work with partners to further reduce delays for children, young people and their families.

We are reviewing and enhancing our Changing Futures offer to parents who have had children removed from their care to support them to access support services.

Our Child Protection and Family Safeguarding Action Groups continue to support the development of the service to ensure that additional training and workshops are delivered where required, as well as monitoring progress and reviewing audit activity. We are developing a Family Safeguarding Best Practice Guide for staff to ensure consistency of approach across the service and will monitor

family programmes closely to ensure that they are completed in a timely way.

We know that our number of children subject to a child protection plan is high and following an in-depth audit looking at consistent application of threshold, we have improved our monitoring and review of this cohort.

## Adoption

### What do we know about ourselves?

We have appointed a part time Quality Assurance Strategic Lead for Adoption to have a greater focus on achieving timely permanence for our children. The Permanence Coordinator and QA and Strategic Lead provide a direct link from Telford and Wrekin into Together4Children (T4C) on any issues relating to adoption practice.

We have started a Best Practice for Adoption Group focusing on the following:

- That we have a cohesive approach and understanding of adoption processes across children's services and promote early permanence
- Embedding current adoption practice, policies, and procedures as part of T4C
- That we have a joined-up approach between the Shropshire and Telford Joint Locality Hub and T4C
- That children's social workers and team managers receive the training and support they need to increase their knowledge and confidence in undertaking adoption work and improve the quality of CPRs.

We are working closely and have improved links with our T4C colleagues. The Permanence Coordinator is attending family finding meetings, and we have linked in with the Joint Locality Hub to streamline processes for adoption medicals. We have also improved the ADM process around SHOPBA decisions in collaboration with the Lead Regional Adoption Agency Adviser.

We have presented an introduction to the UEA model 'Moving to Adoption' to social workers in CPFS and IROs, to ensure transition plans are individual to the child's specific needs.

We have started to develop an adoption resource bank which includes relevant books and guides, and our social workers can access the Coram BAAF website. We have provided resources for our social workers to share with children when there is a plan of adoption.

We have been considering the quality of CPRs in collaboration with the RAA Agency Adviser and shared information with Team Managers in CPFS to highlight key areas for improvement.

We have produced a comprehensive flowchart for adoption that has streamlined and clarified processes to ensure that a child's adoption journey and key points of decision making are captured on the children's records.

We know we are an outlier in terms of our adoption numbers and are working to ensure that we are always considering family and wider networks.

### What are we doing going forward?

We will be supporting processes that identify children for whom early permanence (through Fostering for Adoption) could be achieved at the earliest stage.

We will be rolling out the completed adoption flowchart to the relevant social work teams, IROs and the Joint Locality Hub to ensure each child's adoption journey is clearly captured on their files.

We will be developing a flowchart for early permanence and non-consensual adoption.

We will ensure there is robust tracking in place for all unborn children to make sure planning for permanence takes place at the earliest opportunity.

This will include parents who have previously had children placed for adoption or with kinship carers. We will be promoting the importance of lifelong links



for all children, and particularly for those placed for adoption.

We will be working closely with the T4C Principal Manager to develop and contribute to CPR training that will be rolled out across the T4C partnership.

We will make sure that foster carers and fostering social workers in Telford receive training on the UEA model 'Moving to Adoption' to enable them to understand the key role they play in transitions.

There will be ongoing auditing activity to ensure that Telford is following best practice when a child has a plan of adoption and to feed into a continuous learning cycle.

Following our Family First Conference where our Family First Permanence Strategy will be launched, we will develop an action plan to continue the approach of looking to family and wider networks and improving our approach to lifelong links.

## Children in Care/UASC/Children with Disabilities/Care Leavers

### What do we know about ourselves?

We keep children at the centre of our practice and have high aspirations for our children in care and care leavers.

We have an experienced management team and stable workforce in this area.

We are continuing to work towards step down for appropriate children in line with their care planning, to return home where possible or to step down from residential to long-term fostering or semi-independent living to support transitions to adulthood.

Audit activity throughout the year has been positive for children looked after, with the majority scoring good or exceeding good.

Our Joint Housing Protocol is improving arrangements and support for any young person at risk of being homeless and we are developing sufficiency in terms of accommodation options for our care leavers.

Our close working with education and the Virtual School Head Teacher ensures that we have robust arrangements in place to support our looked after children in education.

Our Children with Disabilities staff work creatively to involve children in direct work to gain their wishes and views in individual and supportive ways.

We organise activities for our children and young people to participate in activities such as our annual arts and music programme where young people gain nationally recognised accreditation. We have also taken young people on archaeological digs at National Trust sites, hold annual driving courses and have spent time engaging with the local exotic zoo to support individual hobbies and interests.

We have reviewed and updated our Sufficiency Strategy.

We have promoted life story work within our service, both through consultations with our life story workers but also through links with Birmingham Teaching Patronship and all practitioners have copies of their life story work publication. Practitioners feel more confident in progressing life story work.

We have seen an improvement in Care Planning Meetings, but we know we have more to do.

We have appointed a new Group Manager who is the Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) for SEND, who will link through from early help to adult transitions.

### What are we doing going forward?

We know that we need to further improve our performance for care planning meetings. This will be a focus and will support the progress of plans. We will have an aspirational target and will monitor performance regularly.

We know that more young people are experiencing mental health and well-being issues and will work with colleagues to identify additional resources and therapeutic support. Discussions are taking place with Health about having a mental health practitioner within the team.

We are working with health colleagues in our weekly Resource and Monitoring Panel to provide additional health resources including therapeutic support. The Associate Director of Health Commissioning attends RAMP and children and young people with any health and wellbeing issues are discussed and funding is agreed from different partner agencies.

We are aware that the impacts of the pandemic have had an impact placement stability. We are refreshing our arrangements to ensure that we have a robust approach to respond and support placements.

We know that we need to ensure that the transition to Adult Services from Children's Services for young people with complex needs happens smoothly and preparing for adulthood via My Options will be a focus in coming months. An updated transition policy for moving from children to adult services will be implemented in the next 12 months.

We now have outcome-based support planning with peer group support planning meetings for children and young people with disabilities and will be working on a support plan combined with a CIN Plan going forward.

We have appointed a short breaks co-ordinator who is identifying short breaks within the community for parents to access. This includes the introduction of a regular newsletter and leaflets. We are working with commissioning to diversify our approach to respite resource and further build fostering respite sufficiency.

We are following up purpose-built respite facility working within the universal services within community to provide grants to be more inclusive for children with additional needs.

We will continue to develop our Parents Forum to engage a wider cohort of parents. The group now meets quarterly, alternating between day and

evening sessions for improved access and numbers are increasing. Parents feedback that they are more listened to, and we are gaining lived experience feedback. This "co-production" will support us to achieve better outcomes for our children.

We will be taking the learning from the CWD consultation forward to make improvements. An analysis report has been written and we have now signed off our Short Breaks statement for 23-24 which will be reviewed on an annual review schedule.

As support plans come for renewal, we will be reassessing need – using criteria in the Short Breaks statement offering our services to specialist, with others going to targeted and universal resources with a plan to be able to reassess support plans and direct people to a programme that best meets their need.

#### UASC

Specialist lead for UASC post has been made permanent to improve outcomes for our UASC. This offer provides a lead for all immigration issues and thus achieving better outcomes within earlier timescales, to enable young people to settle earlier. We have improved join up for housing specialist provisions for UASC young people, including external foster carers.

We have established good links with immigration solicitors.

We have a smooth process through the national transfer scheme with positive liaison with the Home Office and the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership.

We have met our targets on the mandatory rota and within the required timescales.

We have not made any temporary placements for UASC young people.

The specialist lead facilitates the transfer from wherever the young people are in the UK until they arrive in placement and organises smooth handover to the young person's social worker. The lead attends placement planning and other meetings in

and advisory capacity; alongside chairing pathway planning meetings for post 18 UASC young people. We have improved our links with finance and therefore reporting, to ensure that the income return is accurate.

We have accepted spontaneous referrals arriving in Telford and Wrekin, with the same streamlined process without any delays.

We have been able to identify wider family to promote life-long links and have placed a small number of young people with relatives where this has been assessed as appropriate and have enabled a best interest transfer to place siblings together. We triple plan pathway plans to prepare for whether status to remain is achieved or otherwise.

### **What are we doing going forward?**

We are now on NRPF connect and intend to expand the role to cover this area to ensure appropriate use of resources and fundings channels. This will provide better pathway for support - not reliant on LA but utilising other resources.

We continued to work with the Home Office to care for UASC working towards or full allocation based on our population.

We will further develop our links with foster carers and seek to have younger UASC via the Home Office to provide better outcomes for those young people and to provide stability in all areas at an earlier point.

We are developing a UASC forum linking with regional partners to provide culturally appropriate resources for UASC across the West Midlands.

## **Care Leavers**

### **What do we know about ourselves?**

Our NEET clinic is making improvements. Whilst we still have thirty-six young people identifying as NEET, only eleven of these are actively seeking EET, due to

their current circumstances, which will be reviewed regularly.

We have refreshed our local offer and a motion has been passed to agree care experience as a protected characteristic by full council and cabinet. The national lead for this has agreed to work with Telford and Wrekin Council to implement and embed.

We have a monthly care leaver covenant meeting chaired by our Virtual Head. Regular feedback is provided to both the Director of CSFS and Director of Education and Skills. We are working with local businesses on an ongoing basis to identify pledges to support care experienced young people as well as linking in with our Care Leaver Covenant link, to look at all options to provide opportunities and support for young people locally.

We have extended our participation worker's contract and are looking to introduce a permanent full-time position. We also have a care experienced apprentice who is based at our Leavers Lounge. The existing role includes coordinating the participation work plan for care leavers, overseeing the care leavers come first forum, independent living skills programme, care leaver's week etc. We are also recruiting to a voice of the child coordinator post to join up participation activity across forums and activities.

We are involved in regional participation activity and sit on the West Midlands Participation Steering Group. This activity has also enabled us to be part of various working groups and taking a key role supporting the development of a regional Care Leaver Offer, ensuring that there is less of a postcode lottery through Local Offers in the West Midlands for young people. This enabled us to play a key role at the launch conference, attended by regional colleagues and the Care Leaver Covenant.

### **What are we doing going forward?**

We are continuing to work with other LA colleagues to develop a regional local offer to provide a standard approach.

We have drafted a range of policies and procedures which will be implemented over the next 12 months.

This includes information through various platforms such as social media and leaflets for young people. We are further exploring lifelong links – a pilot with regional peer programme to develop lifelong links for care leavers.

We are further developing our care leaver’s web resources.

We are undertaking a self-assessment, using the OFSTED care leaver judgment, and identified best practice through the national advisor for care leavers recommendations and subsequent publications to identify what further improvements need to be made.

We are recruiting a full-time voice of the child coordinator.

We are developing a new build option, specifically for our care leavers, to support transition.

## Specific Groups (contextual safeguarding/missing/CSE)

### What do we know about ourselves?

We know that assessments completed by our specialist child exploitation team, CATE, are of good quality, holistic in nature and underpinned by a contextual safeguarding approach to assessing children who are vulnerable or experiencing harm outside of the home.

We continue to develop our assessment skills for this cohort of children informed by the findings from our audit activity and feedback from our partners. Our CATE Practitioners know the children well and are very skilled in engaging and forming trusted relationships with the young people.

We have increased our exploitation offer to children and families in Telford by commissioning St Giles to work alongside us out in the community (early help offer) and have also embedded a St Giles practitioner into the CATE Team to work alongside us to reach out to those young people who are entrenched in criminal exploitation.

CATE have led the development of a CE Continuum of Need alongside refreshed Contextual Safeguarding Descriptors. We have included these in the newly refreshed Partnership Threshold Guidance. Contextual Safeguarding Workshops delivered by CATE continue to be included in the launch and roll out of this document across the Partnership.

Following the publication of the Telford CSE Independent Inquiry we have reviewed and refreshed our multiagency CE pathway.

We continue to have strong partnership relationships that are supported well at all levels.

We have developed further our CE allocations meetings that take place in Family Connect to include St Giles, CE police and Children’s Society and using the CE descriptors and continuum of need ensure that every child referred receives a service that meets their level of need.

We have added an Adult Transition Panel to our CE pathway to support children access the right services through transition periods in particular child to adult services.

Our performance around our response to missing children continues to be strong. We work well with partner agencies to respond to children missing from home or care. We have a Missing Co-ordinator who ensures return home interviews are completed within timescales and monitors and tracks these to ensure the right response.

We have the narrative for any young people where RHIs have not taken place enabling us to understand why and remove any barriers going forward.

We offer all staff internal and external access to weekly consultations with specialist CE staff and this has expanded over the last year.

We have a strong multi-agency operations group to discuss missing children and young people to ensure that all missing children are accounted for and agree actions around children of high concern. We have refreshed our Resource Allocation and Monitoring Panel and now have representation from

health in attendance alongside input from the virtual school headteacher. This has enabled enhanced oversight from a therapeutic perspective and also tri-partite funding for placements for children with health needs.

We now have in place and attend CSE Education Leads Network Meetings which have enhanced our information sharing about exploited children.

### **What are we doing going forward?**

We have a detailed action plan in place in response to the recommendations made in the CSE Independent Inquiry Report. We have achieved many of these recommendations or are on track to do so. We continue to work through this action plan.

Following our review of our CE pathway we are developing our CE services further by increasing our CATE capacity by increasing our social work staff within this team.

We are also putting in place a permanent Group Manager into this service area who will be able to enhance existing links with other Local Authorities and Partner initiatives, Safer Stronger Communities, Prevent Agenda, Public Protection and Enforcement which will enable us to look at the wider contextual safeguarding elements, focussed on community, places and spaces and increase safety in these areas alongside our direct work with young people and their families.

We will be reviewing our Missing pathway, procedures and protocols as we have done so with our CE pathway to support continues development in this area. We will continue to review and improve the quality of our return home interviews.

## **Independent Reviewing, LADO and Advocacy Service**

### **What do we know about ourselves?**

Recent changes in the management of the team have settled well.

The return from remote to face to face working is a time management challenge for IROs.

The team are long term and consistent and know the children and young people well.

The service has embraced the Family Safeguarding Model.

We have well embedded arrangements for progressing both Child Protection Conferences and Children in Care reviews.

We are confident about our thresholds for Child Protection. We know that drift and delay within Child Protection Planning is being reduced. The new Threshold Guidance is sent to all partner agencies to consider when completing reports for Child Protection Conferences.

Mid way reviews are being held for both Child Protection plans and Children in Care plans. Children and young people receive a consistent service from a knowledgeable and experienced group of Independent Reviewing Officers. Our Advocate support children to attend and or contribute to both Child Protection Conferences and Child in Care Reviews.

Our escalation arrangements are robust. We have a Quality Assurance document in place for both Children in Care and Child Protection Conferences. A separate Dispute Resolution Process is in place for any concerns not resolved by rating the Care Plan as RED.

The right partners are involved in our meetings. Our aspiration is to include Lived Experience advocates when our collaborative parents are qualified.

We have a full time LADO in place and a robust procedure for responding to allegations against adults who work or volunteer with children, which lead to a timely response and intervention.

Annual Foster Homes Reviews are undertaken by a designated officer, who works closely with the Fostering Service, ensuring and monitoring the quality of service to children.

We have two Rights and Representatives officers who provide skilled independent advocacy support to children in care, care leavers and children and young people involved in child protection procedures.

Chairs of Conference have attended the Family Safeguarding and Motivational Interview Training and we are seeing a change of language and approach within conferences.

Our quality assurance activity via audits shows that the right agencies are involved in meetings, with a strong collaborative approach.

94% of Child Protection Conference held in timescale.

97.8% of Children in Care Reviews are held in timescales.

Regular QA Management Oversight Meeting to assure ourselves about thresholds for child protection activity have been met and actions are proportionate to need.

The Service Delivery Manager CPFS and Team Manager (ISAS) review CP Plans from six months to consider the progress of Child Protection Plans. The Group Manager and Team Manager (ISAS) meet weekly to review the following weeks Child Protection Conferences.

Closer working relationships between the operational teams and the service, support actions to progress plans effectively.

Audit activity relating to the service has shown an improvement in evidencing appropriate challenge.

Our quality assurance activity (RAG) for monitoring Children in Care Reviews, evidence response to challenge.

Timescales for LADO Meetings evidence timely activity and progress. The LADO is experienced and readily available for consultation.

## Advocacy

Young people have been supported where they have been at risk of being Homeless, to advocate for S20 where needed.

Support has been provided for children to see family – brothers, sisters and parents.

Support has been provided to access solicitors.

Support has been provided through complaints challenging financial issues and financial entitlements when moving on from care.

Support with positive placement moves (Step Down) and maintaining placements.

### What are we doing going forward?

Continuing expectation of return to face to face with children and families.

Each child will receive a letter following their Child in Care Review.

The IRO will write their minutes to the child rather than about the child. This will be shared with the child. Conference Chair will contact the parent /young person two days before the Child Protection Conference. They will continue to work with the Social Worker for child to ensure that the child is supported to attend/contribute to the meeting. If a child does not attend their views will be shared by the professionals and family. At the end of the conference the Chair will sum up the meeting including referencing the child's views and wishes and agreeing who will feed back the outcomes to the child and when.

Working with the Principal Social Worker and Parent Partnership on Video with QR code to provide parents or young people with information about the meeting at an earlier point. It is planned that this work will be completed by August 2023.

Feedback to be obtained from parents and children following ICPC/RCPC. IRO Team to work

collaboratively with Dandelion project to update the current forms and explore other ways of understanding family experience.

Developing new information for families in collaboration with our lived experienced parent group.

Aiming to develop best practice for family participation in conference and review meetings. We are looking at regional and national developments in relational Child Protection Conferences to ensure families who are 'held' in the Family Safeguarding service, experience the same respectful experience in Child Protection Conferencing. Working with Principal Social Worker to start engagement with the Dandelions, Parent Peer Advocacy, and arranging to pilot a model trialed in Walsall to create a Child Protection conference venue which moves away from the table to a more family friendly room arrangement.

Feedback from professionals to be gathered at Child Protection Conferences.

Continued improvement of quality assurance methods by the service. Use of peer support for less experienced and new team members.

Monthly Service Development meetings are held to explore our outcomes, progress and develop the service.

Monthly POD meetings held, where discussions about themes and practice issues are discussed.

Plans to continually improve and enhance evidence of the child's voice and their wishes and feelings.

We want to improve our communication/ narrative for families to better understand the child protection process and enable improved participation. Working together with the Dandelion Project.

We will further embed the arrangements for children to attend their Child Protection Conference and for the Chair to consult with the child before the meeting.

The LADO will continue to deliver training to partnership agencies.

## Fostering – Recruitment, SG, Family and Friends, Support

### What do we know about ourselves?

We have seen an increase in applications from the previous year, increasing from 22 to 39 with 15 applicants in assessment and 16 approved foster carers this financial year.

We have approved 13 connected carers for 18 children this year.

We have enhanced the financial offer by enabling carers to claim more mileage to support them with the financial challenges facing everyone currently in the cost-of-living crisis.

We are looking to recruit more BME carers in order that we can better place children more appropriately. We have increased fees and allowances to make our offer to carers more attractive, which are resulting in approaches from IFA carers to move to our service.

We have implemented funding to support carers with housing in order to extend their offer for fostering and are continuing to do so.

Our training offer to carers is extremely positive and includes inviting foster carers to wider learning opportunities such as practice week.

Support groups, walk and talk groups, support workers continue to offer support to our foster carers.

*"I hope you are well. I just wanted to email and say how impressed I've been with J and how she has managed all the unusual requests for N. J has and continues to be an incredible advocate for N and has put N at the centre of all her plans. J is currently supporting A to*

have contact with N, allowing him into her home and making him feel welcome. We need more foster carers like J. I'm sure you know how professional, caring and kind she is however wanted to make it known that this plan would not have worked without her, and N would not have had an opportunity to remain with family."

We have been granted ten Special Guardianship orders for children in connected person's foster placements this year, five being at the end of initial care proceedings – securing permanence for these children.

We have enhanced our foster panel membership with the intention to have a more diverse, inclusive panel and some key roles have changed, our Panel Chair, Vice Chair and Panel Advisor.

The additional staff that were recruited last year as part of the investment in our service are settled into the team and offering more support to carers in general and enabling us to drive up the quality of the service and recruit and retain more foster carers.

We have a Staying Put Support Worker in the team to strengthen the support given to carers who have children remaining in their care post 18.

Over the last year the number of referrals for Private fostering arrangements has increased ensuring that these arrangements continue to be overseen by the local authority.

Assessments across the service are detailed and comprehensive outlining areas of need and risk.

*"On behalf of Panel Members and myself, I would like to thank and compliment you for your presentation at Panel today, of the Form C Assessment for L. The Assessment was thorough, balanced with a high level of reflection and analysis. Your personal presentation in support of the*

*Assessment was excellent and displayed a high level of detail and knowledge of the Case, the applicant and family members and was very balanced. Panel were left with very few questions to ask, which is a great reflection on the quality of the information that we were presented with."*

Feedback from carers about family finding, training, supervising social workers, support workers continue to be positive via foster carer review feedback and annual Foster Carer survey.

We also continue to receive compliments from Special Guardians about the support they receive.

We get frequent compliments about foster carers and our staff.

*"The children's social worker has been a brilliant support from day one. She's been really helpful around organising contact days and has kept me fully up to date with proceedings or any issues that have arisen"*

Feedback from carers in the Mockingbird model speak positively about the impact on outcomes for children and placement stability.

Children's event in February including sons and daughters' event at Arthog Outdoor activity centre which was well attended and the feedback from the children and carers has been very positive. This is an event that we have booked in again as it is our way of supporting and thanking our unsung heroes who share their main caregivers.

*"I did a CIC visit to the U children yesterday and just wanted to feedback how lovely it was to see A with the children. I've heard lots of good things from C but seeing her interact with the children, manage both of their needs so*



*well and be so warm and welcoming really was an absolute pleasure. A is clearly so invested in both children and has brought them such a long way.”*

### **What are we doing going forward?**

We are planning to support the senior social workers to take on more management roles and tasks to develop their practice and learning and to enable the managers to focus on service development.

We continue to support staff to complete DDP training, the aim being that all practitioners are DDP trained. Data shows that we require more foster carers that can offer care to our children aged between 11-15 years. Our recruitment strategy does have focus on recruiting carers for this age of children, however, it will take between 6-12 months to see an increase in carers for this age range. We are developing the carer portal.

We continue to embed learning from audit activity within the fostering service.

We are enhancing wrap around support to foster carers utilising the learning from our one Mockingbird constellation and are co-designing this support with a care experienced adult to reach more families.

There will be an ongoing focus on continuing to raise awareness of private fostering arrangements in the local community.

We will focus on ensuring that Special Guardians receive the right level of support and advice when needed.

We are looking to introduce a no detriment policy for Special Guardians.

We will ensure foster carers are fully informed of the support available under Staying Put arrangements.

We will ensure family and friends carers receive the right advice and support when considering permanency options for the children in their care.

We will raise awareness and support knowledge and development across Children's Services about Family and Friends fostering and Special Guardianship. The focus is on the need to secure happy, healthy, safe futures for children, consider family first and make plans at the earliest point to secure the least intrusive legal order or no order for our children. We will work collaboratively across services to seek earlier permanence options for children within their families.

We will continue to work with our housing colleagues to enable carers to adapt or extend their housing arrangements to care for additional children and children with disabilities.

## **Partnership Board**

### **What do we know about ourselves?**

We have commenced a review of the Children's Safeguarding Board with a specific focus on the role of the Chair and sub-groups. This is expected to be shared with partners by the end of May.

We have launched the NSPCC Harmful Sexual Behaviour audit.

We have reviewed and relaunched the partnership 'Threshold' document with a conference and now following up with workshops.

We have a clear focus on CSE with regard to implementing the recommendations of the Independent Enquiry.

We have driven forward the work of the Board with a focus on evidence-based decision making with specific reference to enhancing our multi-agency performance dashboard and neglect and child exploitation dashboard.

We have commenced a review of our Child Exploitation strategy to articulate and formalise our approach to contextual safeguarding.

## What are you doing going forward?

We will complete and implement the review of the Partnership.

We have commissioned Professor Jan Horwath to support the development of a new neglect strategy which is focussed on Child Lived Experience.

This will review key elements of our safeguarding pathway to ensure that we engage effectively with children and their families to support and drive the improvements necessary to ensure that all needs of the child are met.

We will have a key area of focus of mental health services for children (as agreed as 2 March 2023 board meeting) due to concerns about capacity in the system and to explore new model of service delivery that ensures practitioners from different agencies work more effectively together to support children.

We will continue to roll forward a programme of MACFAs – the next focus will be on strategy meetings.

We will continue to roll out our training programme with reference to partner practitioner participation in strategy meetings.

We will complete the implementation of the CSE Inquiry Recommendations by December 2023.

## Complaints

The Child Protection and Family Support service is supported by a Quality and Complaints Officer. The officer supports the complaints management and monitoring processes, alongside the corporate Customer Relationship Team, across Adult Social Care, Child Protection and Family Support and Education and Skills. The officer also works with the CPFS Quality Assurance Group to use the feedback from complaints to improve services through quarterly reports to the group.

These included the importance of:

- Keeping in touch with parents, providing notifications and updates
- Answering communication and providing a timely response
- Ensuring sensitivity in gathering information and asking questions
- Good practice in arranging and administering meetings.
- Sharing reports, minutes and other documents in a timely manner
- Working together during transition; communicating processes, roles and responsibilities
- Being clear about different involvements
- Preventing breakdown of communication when a worker leaves or a case transfer.

The Quality Assurance group identified further actions in response to emerging trends. For example:

A number of complaints about lack of communication resulted in the group looking at ways to ensure there are suitable arrangements in place for when staff are absent from work. Special consideration was given to the challenges of email correspondence in these circumstances. A reminder was issued to all staff in the service via the Director's Newsletter.

The group also reflected on the number of complaints from extended family members; complaints/enquiries involving multiple teams and services; complaints/enquiries where investigation did not identify fault but there might still be something to learn, in particular, cases where parents/family members felt concerns they raised were not taken seriously.

The Quality Assurance group identified the following key themes to take forward in service learning.

- Communication (including the need for sensitivity)
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities
- Involvement of parent, family and young person; recognising the value of the extended family and honouring them in the child's life.
- Providing additional assurance around concerns raised/reported.

The Council records the positive feedback it receives from children, young people, and families, as well as compliments from other professionals we work with. Compliments are regularly included in quarterly and annual reporting, so that senior leaders have sight of the positive feedback which has been received.

During the year, several managers from the service have attended Effective Complaints Handling workshops delivered by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. There are plans to extend this offer next year and make improvements to local complaint handling.

Telford & Wrekin  
**Self Evaluation**  
2022-2023

# Leadership



# LEADERSHIP

## Strategic leadership

Our Senior Leadership team is committed to achieving best outcomes for children and has continued to invest and fully support our services. Our Chief Executive is involved in our Performance Board and poses regular challenge to the Director when data fluctuates.

Our Chief Executive is the regional lead for Children's Services and has a close focus on all aspects of our services.

Both our Chief Executive and Lead Member for Children attend events such as service conferences, practice week, launches etc.

We deliver an annual Leader and Cabinet Member Young Person's Grant Scheme and really focus on opportunities to engage and access support with children accessing support through our services. Young people successful in their applications have accessed funding to support them in Education, Employment and Training as well as funding to support them in overcoming adversity. We host an annual celebration event with Cabinet Members and Members of SMT to celebrate their aspirations and successes.

Our Executive Director Chairs the Council's Best Start in Life Board, which ensures the effectiveness of partnership and joint work for the delivery of the Start of Life Programme Vision: "To help ensure that every child in Telford and Wrekin experiences the best start in life so that they are able to achieve their potential."

Senior Managers from other Directorates are involved in projects and events such as our Fostering Recruitment and sufficiency strategy; the development of our Joint Housing Protocol; the development of our Local Offer to Care Leavers, including in year an associated business event with business pledges made to extend our offer to care

experienced young people even further. Regular meetings are held with Cabinet Members and our Chief Executive Officer to monitor, and challenge spend, invest to save projects and demand in the context of our Cost Improvement Plan.

Our Director is the Co-Chair of the Regional Quality, Practice and Performance Group supporting the dissemination of best practice across the region.

Our Director is also part of the West Midlands Clinical Network through NHSE, working as the Local Authority Lead for CYP Mental Health.

We have strengthened our Corporate Parenting Board with the child's voice and lived experience featuring at the centre of the Board and have launched our refreshed Corporate Parenting Strategy.

We sit on and chair various regional Boards such as the regional PSW network; regional participation network.

We continue to hold regular staff consultation and drop-in sessions with the Executive Director and Director. The staff consultation group has representation from across the breadth of the service, enabling oversight of the staff health check and the 'you said, we did' action plan.

We hold regular staff briefings to cascade information across services and for the Leadership Team to collectively meet with practitioners. We recently held a marketplace event for staff to hear and learn about the different teams and roles across the directorate and to showcase their work and current approaches to practice.

We have a variety of different communications out to the workforce including 'Executive Director's weekly news' which includes key updates from across the service and national practice updates. This is also

one of our platforms for celebrating successes from across the service.

*“I think there is good communication between higher management and practitioners, and that good practice is celebrated” – extract from staff health check*

Sector Led Improvement is offered by Telford and Wrekin having been successful through an application to the Department for Education. This activity is overseen by the SDM, Service Improvement and Efficiency and Director of Children’s Social Care.

The Executive Director of Children’s Services is the named strategic lead for Equality Diversity and Inclusion and chairs the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Board for the Council. We have an annual calendar of key dates for both awareness raising and celebration and have made EDI a key priority in several key areas. We encourage employees to apply for the annual BALI (Black and Asian Leadership Initiative) programme run through the Staff College and have run focused projects to support foster carers with black hair care and to look to recruit foster carers from different cultures and backgrounds.

We have introduced Cross Director Briefing Sessions quarterly with all senior leaders from across social care and education and skills. This enables us to come together to look at solutions to any key challenges and to consider how we can further improve our joint arrangements for the children across service areas.

## Management oversight

We have developed performance clinics where Team Managers link with SDMs to prepare monthly performance reports for Senior Management, including performance, workforce, developments, quality assurance and budget updates. These are shared with the Director and Executive Director at a

Performance Board for discussion and challenge. We have reviewed our recording system to strengthen our approach to recording management oversight.

Our quality assurance activity has identified that there has been improvement in management oversight across services, with additional opportunities for management comments within the recording system.

Feedback from staff about supervision and support from management is positive, evidenced by audit activity.

*Flexible working is great, Management is great and supportive. Support is always there; management will be available for concerns/discussions/decisions.*

*I enjoy my role, but what makes it even better is having a great supervisor and seniors.*

*I am happy with my Team Manager and my SDM. They work very hard and motivate us all as role models.*

Our Legal Gateway Panel is Chaired by either our Director or a Service Delivery Manager.

We have strengthened our management capacity by securing Group Manager posts to report to SDMs. We emphasise the importance of management decisions and oversight in respect of the child’s journey and this being evident within the child’s chronology.

Our Director for Children’s Safeguarding and Family Support chairs a monthly residential oversight meeting. All key practitioners come together to discuss permanence planning arrangements for children and young people placed in residential settings with an ongoing aspiration for all to move on to a family placement when it is right for them. The meeting discusses support from Family Solutions,

Family Finding arrangements and the views and wishes of the children we support. This provides us with rich oversight of all children at all levels. Actions are monitored in between meetings and any drift or delays are escalated appropriately.

## Quality assurance

The Chief Executive, Lead Member, Executive Director and Director are involved in regular audit activity.

Those above and Service Delivery Managers have started a timetable of deskside discussions with practitioners across the whole service, talking generally about work that they are proud of and challenges that they have.

Complaints and compliments are regularly shared at our Quality Assurance Meeting where we identify learning themes to share with teams.

We have a robust approach to quality assurance and in addition to overarching Practice Evaluations undertake deep dive activity and service audit activity.

We have brought in external consultants to undertake audit activity on our behalf to identify consistency and good practice.

We have held workshops for auditors, facilitated by an external consultant who undertook a range of our audits, to discuss consistency of auditing and good practice.

The PSW and Quality Assurance Manager work closely together to discuss learning and how this can be taken forward, draft documents together, share findings from research and from external parties, identify training raised via QA and discuss audit findings to identify further activity. This has influenced our production of the Language Document, Family First Permanence Strategy and a new Practice Framework.

Our Service Delivery Managers feedback to the Quality Assurance Group what they have identified

from Practice Evaluations about the quality of practice but are also asked to feedback about the quality of the audits themselves, acting as moderators.

Themes identified at Performance Board, through data or in specific audit activity have led to wider deep dive activity, from which learning is shared and actions identified.

We have strengthened our approach to quality assurance work around adoption activity, CPRs, pre-ADM etc, and are linking closely with our T4C (RAA) to ensure consistent practice.

We contact parents and young people to gain feedback alongside audits and feed this into QA. We undertake audit activity within our fostering service and gain feedback from foster carers about their reflections of the support they receive.

We regularly review our audit tools to improve language and guidance for auditors.

## Learning/PSW

The key focus in relation to practice development across Children's Services is as follows:

### Participation

We have recently completed for the third time the Bright Spots subjective wellbeing survey for children in care achieving our highest ever return rate of 52%. We plan to run the care leavers' survey later this year. Each of the surveys will result in the coproduction of a you said we did action plan through our young person's forums.

We sit on the regional participation network and have fed into various focus groups to develop consistent approaches to participation across the West Midlands. This has included attending a regional football match and engaging with a variety of different regional events, attended by our young people.

We have recognised that whilst a lot of participation activity is taking place in children's services, there is

the need to draw feedback together and ensure that we are closing the loop with all of the rich information shared within various forums. As such, we are recruiting to a Voice of the Child Coordinator post.

In order to build the cultural structure to aid our development in terms of parental participation we are in the process of devising workshops to embed the concept of advocacy within our service which will involve our family safeguarding and IRO teams. In addition, two briefings have been held in respect of parent advocacy with these services.

The team managers from Family Safeguarding and members from the IRO service have met with the parent experts by experience group to explore our shared vision for family support and safeguarding moving forward. Further areas of co-production are planned and included within our workforce development plan.

The learning and reflections from experts by experience also now feature as part of our learning events.

We are working to develop a refreshed youth offer for young people in Telford and Wrekin that will sit within children's services.

We have appointed a Volunteer Coordinator to revive our use of volunteers within children's services post COVID and will be establishing new posts to support capacity and increase support available to children, young people, and families in a variety of areas. This has been especially positive over recent years with Child and Family Ambassadors in our Strengthening Families Service supporting step down and exit planning following successful offers of support but where lower-level support would be beneficial.

### **Permanence strategy**

As part of our permanence strategy, we are planning a programme of workshops to aid our ethos of family first.

**Genogram training** – to support our evidence of relational working and systemic practice our Systemic Psychotherapist is delivering genogram

workshops across the workforce, with an aim to identify family patterns, themes of strength and family stories to inform how we work alongside families and understand their needs. In addition to identifying members of the extended relational network from an early point to support the parent/care giver with meeting the needs of the child to compliment the professional network of support. In addition, looking to identifying potential carers that could care for the child should this be required.

**Proposed impact** – practitioners will be able to understand family stories, intergenerational patterns of strengths as well as trauma to work alongside the family from their positions. This will support families to understand the impact that their generational history has on the present day. In addition this will support the building of memory work for children who are cared for. From the child's record we should be able to evidence who in the relational network can support the child either residing in the care of their birth parent or by a member of their extended relational network where it is safe to do so.

### **Family Safeguarding**

The Principal Social Worker has co-delivered a number of assessment and recording workshops across family safeguarding and strengthening families to ensure that our recording aligns with the values and principles of the model.

We have been working closely with the Department for Education, Mutual Ventures and Hertfordshire Council to deliver phase two of implementation. This has included a core focus on sustainability and impact. As part of this, we have implemented a Family Safeguarding QA Framework and developed a comprehensive data dashboard to support with monitoring, oversight and impact.

### **Motivational interviewing**

The Principal Social Worker alongside other managers/practitioners have delivered an introduction to Motivational Interview training across children's services and DSL's.



We continue to model **systemic practice** and the systemic team continues to facilitate PODS and consultations in relation to this approach across our service, all this work is now reportable and evidences the footprint of this approach.

There are plans for bite size training to be provided on themes of systemic practice to follow on from the genogram workshops for all practitioners. In addition to an in-house introduction to systemic practice for new employees.

The Principal Social Worker has presented the language guide across children's services to ensure our language is reflective of the principles underpinning our practice. The language guide has also been presented to multi agency forums. The Principal Social Worker has presented the Life Journey document across children's services and to our foster carers, to embed our approach to the lived experience of children receiving support from our service.

The Principal Social Worker regularly presents themes of continued development for our fostering preapproval group including, the panel process, language and life journey work.

The Principal Social Worker continues to present relevant research findings on key areas of practice across the service.

The Principal Social Worker jointly with LCS colleagues continue to facilitate Family Safeguarding and chronology workshops.

We commission specific training for our Principal Social Worker, Consultant Social Worker and our Systemic team to inform learning for practitioners. We have implemented a plan of workshops in respect of direct work with children, to explore what we do well and what we need to strengthen, to support practitioners with working alongside children and evidencing the impact of this work to ensure the child's voice and lived experience is at the centre of our support and decision making.

We are learning from our internal Child Safeguarding Practice reviews to explore the findings of other

rapid reviews. We will ensure that any learning is captured following rapid reviews and followed up with training for the wider work force.

We ensure that our training and development plan is informed by national and local practice themes.

## **Workforce**

We have refreshed our recruitment and retention strategy and have updated market factors to ensure alignment with benchmarking from across the region and beyond. We have also had refreshed recruitment social media campaigns, updated our website and have altered our approach to recruitment which is now coordinated within the project team. This has led to an increase in applications from outside of the region. Having said this, our turnover and vacancy rate remains comparatively low across the region.

We have invested in the workforce, introducing additional capacity with the appointment of a new practice lead and are in the process of recruiting to ten social work assistants to support capacity across services. This will in turn support our focus to grow our own.

*"I feel supported, regular supervision, Manager easy to get hold of and approachable".*

*"T feels that her team 'bounce off each other and take on different tasks' and added that 'Telford is supportive', compared to what she has experienced elsewhere".*

*"There is lots of training and I am booked on 3 or 4 sessions within the Practice Week; I have also just finished my ASYE which involved lots and lots of training".*

*"Strong network in the team. Good supervision always available to provide advice to each other".*

We are continuing to support our ASYE's within their practice in collaboration with adult services, we have refreshed our training plan in terms of the generic support offered to ASYE's and we hold monthly group supervision sessions in relation to the KSS and PCF, this will also be in place when we transfer to the Early Years Career progression framework. In addition to facilitating bespoke training to ASYE's within their area of work.

We have a strong links with local universities and the apprenticeship scheme and continue to promote the learning from academic study into practice, we are a member of the West Midlands Teaching partnership and continue to contribute to their training and development programme.

We promote the development of alternatively qualified practitioners into Social Work via the apprenticeship scheme.

We continue to offer placements for trainee Social Workers. In addition to promoting Social Workers engaging in the Practice Supervisor and Practice education programme.

The Principal Social Worker has begun practice development work alongside consultees from the CSE enquiry.

The Principal Social Worker holds regular community of practice sessions with adult practitioners to aid development across Family Safeguarding.

## **Performance Management**

We have developed a wider range of Power BI Reporting functionality and the Insight (data) Team have provided training and support to Managers to use this. There is a range of drill down functionality to individual staff in some areas, covering data cross services. Licenses have been made available to access Power BI across all services.

The Insight Partner for Children's Services meets regularly with the Director and Quality Assurance Manager to discuss forward planning around extending data reporting.

We have regular Performance Meetings and discuss data and performance from across services, identifying further analysis where needed. Team Managers attend these meetings quarterly.

We have a Performance Board to review performance with the Executive Director, who challenges and requests further feedback.

We have recently implemented Performance Clinics which involves Team Managers, feeding in from their own team perspective into performance reports that Service Delivery Managers collate into their own service reports to be shared with the Director and executive Director. These are wider than data and include aspects about staffing, capacity etc.

## **Summary**

This self-evaluation draws together what we know about ourselves, what we feel are our strengths, but also where we need to make improvements. We are continuing our journey, acknowledging that there is always more to do, to support better outcomes for our families – children, their parents and family networks within our community.

We are keen to learn from research, good practice by colleagues regionally and nationally, by working collaboratively and sharing learning. We strongly believe that our staff are “our most valued and precious resource”, as highlighted by Ofsted and we want to encourage the creativity and aspirational ways of working which continue to drive our service forward.