

Achieving our Aspirations

Roadmap to Excellence For Children's Social Care

May 2022-May 2024

Our Core Vision:

Working together with our partners we will ensure that every child in Wiltshire receives the best support when they need it, to keep them safe and enable them to reach their full potential.

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Foreword

Families and Children are at the heart of everything we do in Wiltshire. We are ambitious for them, for our staff and for ourselves and together we share a determination to see all Wiltshire families thrive.

The core of our practice is a shared value base; we ensure that all decisions we make are always for the betterment of the most vulnerable in our community.

With strong, passionate political, strategic and operational leadership, and with a robust culture of learning, self-evaluation and high-performance culture, we have a good understanding of our strengths and areas for development.

We have worked relentlessly to improve our services and multi-agency partnerships over recent years through the Families and Children's Transformation (FACT) Programme. We aim to deliver consistently good services that ensure the needs of families and children are met at the right time by the right people. This is reflected in the Ofsted inspection report from July 2019 which rated children's services as 'Good' across the board. This is a credit shared by every member of staff who has or is currently working in children's services. The focused visit undertaken by Ofsted in January 2022 further confirms the strong delivery of services.

Continuous improvement is part of our learning culture and core values, as we want the best outcomes for our children, young people and families. Whilst we share an ambition for our services to be judged 'Outstanding' we know that the real reason that we are here is to improve the outcomes for children and families in Wiltshire and this is what drives our improvement planning.

How do we review the quality of our Practice?

To deliver our aspirations we must have a well-developed knowledge of self and a clear focus on the areas where further development is needed. We have a mature and comprehensive quality assurance framework and a detailed self-assessment which stands up well to internal and external scrutiny.

In delivering continuous improvement we need to ensure that our practice is kept up to date and enhancing the outcomes for each individual child and young person.

We have a long-standing performance and outcomes review culture with each service area having a Performance and Outcomes Group where performance measures and audit outcomes are reviewed, these groups feed into an overarching Performance and Outcomes Board which looks at the holistic picture across children's services. This system is key to providing a clear line of sight for the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member (see Line of Sight document for further detail).

Furthermore, with partners we have the Families and Children's Systems Assurance and Partnership Practice Review Groups that meet regularly to share practice and innovation across children's and adult social care services and the wider partnership. These partnership groups operate under the governance of our Safeguarding Vulnerable People's Partnership (SVPP), within these structures there is a strong culture of high challenge and mutual support.

The interaction between the groups and boards is a constant driver for practice, service and strategic development. Our managers have the information they need to drive performance forward including a secure suite of data, key performance indicators and learning from audit. This enables us to be prepared with data to hand to support peer reviews and inspections as they arise. There are other forums in which performance is also scrutinised; Senior Management Team (SMT) quarterly performance meetings, SMT Audit Group (which oversees the effectiveness of our Quality Assurance Framework) and team Performance Review meetings. Members also have regular opportunities to rigorously scrutinise and oversight practice through established groups including Children's Select Committee, Corporate Parenting Panel and Safeguarding Children Panel.

We listen carefully to our children, young people and families and recently implemented our Children and Young People Voice Service to continue to develop our practice and processes so we can ensure that children's voice is central to everything we do. There have been key successes in this area including developing the Wiltshire Youth Council. Youth Councillors have met with the senior leaders within the council, engaged with our local MP's and developed the Youth Union. While we are proud of what has been achieved to date, we recognise the critical importance of this work and have therefore set this as an ongoing strategic priority to support us in delivering our ambitions.

We regularly audit our own practice and also lead and participate in the sector led improvement programme which ensures that we are regularly benchmarking against other authorities within the South West region, statistical neighbours and 'Outstanding' authorities across the country. This means we have a clear grasp of where our performance is positioned, and which areas need further review and improvement. We continually learn through review and will be working on incorporating smaller, more discrete services into the quality assurance framework such as Canon's House and Aspire House our two registered children's homes which are regulated and inspected by Ofsted. This will strengthen the visibility of these services ensuring that issues that arise can be addressed in a timely manner and quality of services monitored more closely.

We operate a clear complaints process and ensure that we respond appropriately and in a timely manner to our children, young people and families where concerns are raised.

Our Mission Statement



As an authority, Wiltshire's ambition is to improve the lives of our most vulnerable children and young people. This includes children and young people in need of family support, children in need or at risk (in or outside the home), children with disabilities, children on the edge of care and/or

involved in criminal activity and children in our care who need permanence through kinship care, fostering and adoption. In order to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people our service mission statement is:

- *We strive to promote good outcomes for children and young people; for them to be happy, safe, and emotionally resilient; to fulfil their own potential, have opportunities, and engage in their communities. Families are supported to be autonomous and to be together.*
- *We work collaboratively with partners to support families to sustain change. We work in partnership with families, promoting their strengths, listening to their voice, developing family led plans, and empowering them to flourish.*
- *We provide the right help at the right time, empowering parents, and carers to be their best.*
- *We are committed to listening and learning from the families we work with and build this into our practice and service development plans.*
- *We are proud of all the people who are in our teams, who show commitment and dedication to the families and teams they work with. We have a highly skilled workforce who are supported to develop. Our communities have a strong voice and are listened to, informing our practice and service development. Our communities feel part of a service with shared values, to provide the best service to the families we work with. Our people feel well supported by managers and happy in their roles and are encouraged to be autonomous and creative.*

To ensure that we achieve the best outcomes for our children and young people, we recognise that we need to continually review and adapt our approaches to improve our practice and thus opportunities.

What are the key areas of focus to achieve our ambitions?

This Roadmap brings together identified areas for development from a wide range of sources including:

- Self-assessment
- Performance Groups and Board
- Consultation with children and young people
- Audit
- Inspection and peer review
- National learning

In order to achieve our ambition, we have set ourselves the following five key strategic priorities:

1. Enhancing and embedding the voice of children, young people and families to inform practice development

2. Empowering our workforce through effective leadership and oversight

3. Partnership development of Family Help (Early Help)

4. Improving sufficiency and choice of suitable placements and post 16 support

5. Good access to mental health/SEND support and services for children and young people

We have agreed these following a broad consultation exercise and drawn evidence from a wide range sources. These priorities are reflected in service development plans where the detailed actions to deliver our objectives sit. The overarching improvement plan will be reviewed through the Children's Performance and Outcomes Board and locally through Service Performance and Outcomes Groups. The Director, Families and Children's Service hold responsibility for its delivery. Progress will be reported to and monitored by Children's Select Committee, Children's Safeguarding Panel and Corporate Parenting Panel.

We have included the Ofsted inspection framework for local authority children's services as an appendix to this document, which will serve as a guide to enable us to benchmark against.

1. Enhancing and embedding the voice of children, young people and families to inform practice development

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
1.1 We will undertake training with practitioners to ensure that records are written to the child and that the views of children, their family and carers are made explicit within their records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service plans 2022/2023 • Audit • Feedback from parents and children 	Improved evidence and inclusion of the views of children and young people	Children and young people will be able to identify their feedback clearly ensuring that they feel their thoughts and views have been taken into account. They will better understand their life story and influence their care planning
1.2 We will continue to improve how we listen to and involve children, young people and families so that their views inform all aspects of service planning and delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service plans 2022/2023 • CYP Voice Service 	Improved voice information and user engagement	Children, young people and families feel their views are valued and inform service planning so that the service they receive is better suited to their needs
1.3 We will continue to develop and explore routes for gathering the views of children and young	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service plans 2022/2023 • Audit • CYP Voice Service 	Improved engagement and feedback from young people	Children and young people can give their views in a way that suits them and have confidence

people e.g. Mind of My Own and family fun days		including children with a disability and non-verbal children	that this will inform the way we work with them
1.4 We will work to increase the evidence of the voice of fathers and male partners across contacts, single assessments, planning meetings and focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service plans 2022/2023 • Self-assessment • Audit • Ofsted 2019 	Improved engagement of fathers and male partners, more accurate assessment and analysis	Children and young people will know that the holistic views of the family will have been sought and taken into account in decision making

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2. Empowering our workforce through effective leadership and oversight

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
2.1 Ensure that all staff have balanced and reasonable caseloads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workforce strategy Ofsted inspection and framework Service plans 2022/23 	Our staff have the time to work meaningfully with families and children	Children and families benefit from relationship-based practice, with a dedicated practitioner who knows them well and understands how best to support them to achieve their potential
2.2 All staff have attended the council's equality, diversity and inclusion training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service plans 2022/2023 	Improved evidence of inclusion in their practice	Children and young people are treated fairly and consistently
2.3 We will review all processes to ensure that transitions and handovers are minimised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service plans 2022/2023 Self-assessment CYP Voice Service 	Improved consistency of worker for child/family	Children and young people are supported by a consistent practitioner who they can build a relationship with
2.4 We will ensure that discrete services, such as our registered children's homes, have their performance embedded into the existing quality review processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted Inspections 2022 Performance reviews 	Improved and consistently high quality of services	Children and young people attend or have placements in children's residential homes that are at minimum rated 'good' by Ofsted
2.5 We will ensure that all managers have refresher training in the Council's Our Identity values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service plans 2022/2023 Council priorities and business plans 	Improved application of the Our Identity values	Children and young people benefit from staff who feel empowered to their best
2.6 We will ensure that staff have access to Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) for social care practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service plans 2022/2023 Covid stocktake Staff consultation 	Improved resilience in staff group	Children and young people are supported by resilient staff and improved consistency in worker
2.7 We will provide regular forums and methods for staff to feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service plans 2022/2023 	Improved engagement and understanding of staff views	Children and young people will be supported by a workforce that feels supported by its leadership

2.8 We will continue to enhance an effective safeguarding culture in all Wiltshire schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofsted annual conversation November 2021 	Improved continued professional development within schools and effective support delivered	Children and young people will be safeguarded from harm
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3. Partnership development of Family Help (early help)

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
3.1 We will work with partners to deliver the Family Help pilot from September 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and Children's Transformation (FACT) Programme Ofsted Annual Conversation November 2021 	Intelligence will be gathered through the pilot to inform how family help can best be delivered across Wiltshire	There will be a cohesive Family Help offer across all partner agencies within Wiltshire so that families and children get the right support at the right time from the right people, reducing the requirement for statutory intervention
3.2 We will embed the Early Support Assessment (ESA) across the multi-agency partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and Children's Transformation (FACT) Programme Ofsted Annual Conversation November 2021 	Increase in the number of registrations of ESAs	Children and families will receive the support they need following a comprehensive assessment of Early Support needs, planning and review
3.3 We will agree basic building blocks for a shared understanding in practice and language with partners e.g. the rollout of Five to Thrive Attachment Trauma, Resilience training and Restorative Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and Children's Transformation (FACT) Programme 	Staff from all partners working with children, young people and families have a consistent approach and language	Children and families receive more consistent and understandable interactions for professionals regardless of the agency they are from
3.4 We will continue to work regionally across the South West to access funding and share best practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Priorities and Recovery Plan for the South West 	Best practice seen regionally can be implemented locally within Wiltshire	Children and families will benefit from national and regionally recognised innovation programmes which improve outcomes
3.5 We will continue to embed Contextual Safeguarding and Transitional Safeguarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted Annual Conversation November 2021 	Staff in organisation across the safeguarding landscape will be effectively trained in the	Children and young people will be safeguarded from harm

<p>approaches both within the Council and across multi-agency partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and Children's Transformation (FACT) Programme 	<p>Contextual Safeguarding/Transitional Safeguarding approaches</p>	
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4. Improving sufficiency and choice of suitable placements and post 16 support

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
4.1 We will work across social care and commissioning to continue to develop a robust placements strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted Annual Conversation November 2021 Self-assessment Performance review POB 	Improved understanding and identification of placement needs	Children and young people will have access to local placements that meet their needs
4.2 We will work regionally and with partners to review and ensure that specialist placements are available as close to home as possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted Annual Conversation November 2021 Self-assessment Performance review POB 	Increased provision for children and young people with more specialist needs	Children and young people will have access to the support they need in order to thrive and in/or close to Wiltshire
4.3 We will continue to identify funding opportunities to improve and increase placement provision within Wiltshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-assessment Sufficiency Strategy 	Increased provision through market development and an increase in the number of placements available	Children and young people will be supported in placements within their community
4.5 We will continue to ensure that suitable supported accommodation is available for those aged 16+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change of legislation September 2021 Self-assessment Sufficiency strategy 	Fewer young people will be in unregulated/unregistered provision	Young people will be appropriately supported in the right environment
4.6 We will ensure that sufficient supply of permanent accommodation is available to disabled young people and care experienced young people providing support when they need it	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service plans 2022/2023 Self-assessment Sufficiency strategy 	Fewer young people will be homeless or in temporary accommodation	Young people have a permanent home and can call on support when they need it and for as long as they need it
4.7 We will continue to raise the profile of private fostering in local communities in Wiltshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted inspection report July 2019 Performance review 	Awareness of private fostering increases across community areas	Children and young people live in the right environment where they

			are safe and have the opportunity to thrive
4.8 We will continually review our local offer from the Corporate Family to care experienced young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service plans 2022/2023 • Visit from DfE Adviser 2021 • Ofsted Focussed Visit 2022 	Increased offer to young people and extend opportunities that are available to them	Young people have access to a wider range of services and support

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5. Good access to mental health/SEND support and services for children and young people

Action	Where identified	Output	What will this mean for children and young people?
5.1 We will continue to improve access to mental health support within schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted Annual Conversation November 2021 Self-assessment 	<p>Assessment and increase of mental health support teams in schools</p> <p>Development of emotion coaching support within schools</p>	Children and young people can access support when they need it
5.2 We will work with partners to improve access to and support from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted Annual Conversation November 2021 SEND Strategy 2020-2023 	All eligible requests for support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are met within the national required standards within 24 weeks	Children and young people can access specialist support when they need it
5.3 We will work across partners and the voluntary sector to fully understand the impact of the pandemic on the demand within mental health services for children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted Annual Conversation November 2021 Families and Children's Transformation Programme 	Increased understanding of demand through partnership modelling and identification of gaps	Across the partnership there will be greater understanding of what support is available for children and young people and how they can access it
5.4 We will explore more innovative ways of providing mental health support to children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEND Strategy 2020-2023 	Improved digital offer across home and educational settings including schools and colleges	Children and young people are able to access support in a way that is meaningful for them
5.5 We will continue to work with health and education partners to ensure that Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are completed in a timely manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEND Strategy 2020-2023 	A reduction in the number of plans exceeding the set timescales	Children and young people will have effective plans that meet their needs when they need them
5.6 We will extend the target age group of the Young People's Service to include those up to age 25 and remove system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families and Children's Transformation Programme 	Ensure appropriate resources and skills are in place to support smoother transitions	Young people and young adults will be supported across transitional boundaries

barriers associated with the transition from children to adult services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted Annual Conversation November 2021 		
5.7 We will establish an integrated approach to the commissioning, design and delivery of services and pathways (including crisis response) related to Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autistic Spectrum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted Annual Conversation November 2021 	Improved understanding of and simplification of pathways based on need	Children, young people and families are involved in co-production for the development of pathways
5.8 We will develop and implement Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) and the graduated response as part of the inclusion strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ofsted annual conversation November 2021 SEND Inclusion Strategy 2020-2023 	Improved information available for school and parents	Children and young people will be supported effectively

Evaluation criteria for Ofsted inspection of local authority children’s services framework

Priority 1:

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection

Early Help

- Children, young people and families are offered help when needs and/or concerns are first identified. The early help improves the child’s situation and supports sustainable progress. The interface between early help and statutory work is clearly and effectively differentiated.

Identifying and responding to children’s needs and appropriate thresholds

- Professionals identify children and young people in need of help and protection. They make appropriate referrals to children’s social care and are able to access social work expertise and advice. There is a timely and effective response to referrals, including out of normal office hours and referrals to the designated officer. Professionals understand thresholds. This leads to children and families receiving effective, proportionate and timely interventions, which improve their situation.

Making good decisions and providing effective help

- Children and families experience child protection enquiries that are thorough and lead to timely action, which reduces the risk of harm to children.
- Allegations of abuse, mistreatment or poor practice by professionals and carers are taken seriously. Steps are taken to protect children and young people and the management of allegations against staff is robust and effective.
- Assessments and plans are dynamic and change in the light of emerging issues and risks. Assessments (including early

help assessments) are timely and proportionate to risk. They are informed by research and by the historical context and significant events for each child. They result in direct help for families if needed and are focused on achieving sustainable progress for children. Help given to families is proportionate to the level of need. Information-sharing between agencies and professionals is timely, specific, effective and lawful.

- Children in need of help and/or protection have a plan setting out how they will be helped, how their needs are going to be met and how risk will be reduced within the timescales appropriate for the child. If families refuse to engage, clear contingency plans are in place. These are based on the assessment of need and risks to the child. Action is taken to avoid drift and delay. Plans and decisions are reviewed. Alternative decisive action is taken if children’s circumstances do not change and the help provided does not meet their needs, or the risk of harm or actual harm remains or intensifies.
- Children and young people are protected through effective multi-agency arrangements. Key participants attend multi-agency meetings (for example, case conferences, strategy meetings, core groups and multi-agency risk assessment conferences). These meetings are effective forums for timely information-sharing, planning, decision-making and monitoring. Actions happen within agreed timescales and the help and protection provided reduce risk and meet need.

Management oversight of frontline practice

- Decisions are made by suitably qualified and experienced social workers and managers. Actions are clearly recorded. Systematic and high-quality management oversight of frontline practice drives child-centred plans and actions within the timescales appropriate for the child. Effective and timely planning, support and decision-making takes place during pre-proceedings work.

Participation and direct work with children and families

- Children, young people and families benefit from stable and meaningful relationships with social workers. They are consistently seen and seen alone by social workers if it is in the best interests of the child. Practice is based on understanding each child’s day-to-day lived experience. Children are safer as a result of the help they receive.
- Children and young people are listened to. Practice focuses on their needs and experiences and is influenced by their wishes and feelings. Children, young people and families have timely access to, and use the services of, an advocate. Feedback from children and their families about the effectiveness of the help, care or support they receive informs practice and service development.
- Neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse and emotional abuse are effectively identified and responded to. Children and young people who live in households where at least one parent or carer misuses substances or suffers from mental ill-health, or where there is domestic violence, are helped and protected.

This includes, but is not limited to, disabled children, children who are privately fostered, children not attending school, vulnerable adolescents and children at risk of radicalisation or exploitation or becoming involved in gangs.

- Children and young people who are missing from home, care or full-time school education (including those who are excluded from school) and those at risk of exploitation and trafficking receive well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them. The local authority has arrangements in place to identify the number of children not in full-time school education and to respond if there are concerns about their welfare. For those who are missing or often missing, there is a clear plan of urgent action in place to protect them and to reduce the risk of harm or further harm.

Identifying and responding to all types of abuse recognising the vulnerability of specific groups of children

- Social workers recognise the factors that can make children more vulnerable and tailor their interventions appropriately.

Priority 2:

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers

Making good decisions for children

- Children and young people become looked after in a timely manner and in their best interests. Decisions that children should be in care are based on clear, effective, comprehensive and risk-based assessments, involving, if appropriate, other professionals working with the family.
- If it is not possible for children to return home, suitable and timely plans for permanence are made for them to live away from the family home.
- If the plan for a child is to return home, there is purposeful work carried out with the family so that it is safe for the child to return. Further care episodes are avoided unless they are provided as a part of an appropriate plan of support.
- The wishes and feelings of children, and those of their parents, are clearly set out in timely and authoritative assessments and applications to court. Assessments of family members as potential carers are carried out promptly to a good standard.
- Children’s care plans comprehensively address their needs and experiences, including the need for timely permanence. Children’s plans are thoroughly and independently reviewed with the involvement, as appropriate, of parents, carers, residential staff and other adults who know them. Plans for their futures continue to be appropriate ambitious

Participation and direct work with children in care and care leavers

- Children are seen regularly and seen alone by their social worker and children understand what is happening to them. Children have positive and stable relationships with professionals and

carers who are committed to protecting them and promoting their welfare.

- Children in care and care leavers are helped to understand their rights, entitlements and responsibilities. They know how to give feedback or complain and understand what has happened as a result of their complaint. Their complaints are treated seriously and are responded to clearly. Urgent action is taken and services improve when necessary. Children and young people have access to an advocate and independent visitor when needed. Care leavers are well-informed about access to their records, assistance to find employment, training and financial support.
- The local authority celebrates the achievements of children in care and care leavers. It shows it is ambitious for their futures.
- Children in care and care leavers are well represented by a Children in Care Council or similar body, which is regularly consulted on how to improve the support for these children and young people.

Helping and protecting

- Children in care and care leavers are protected or helped to keep themselves safe from bullying, homophobic behaviour and other forms of discrimination.
- Any risks associated with children and care leavers offending, misusing drugs or alcohol, going missing or being sexually exploited or exploited in any other way are known well by the adults who care for them. Children receive help to reduce the risk of harm or actual harm. Children and care leavers are safe and feel safe. They are helped to understand how they can keep themselves safe.

Health

- Children in care and care leavers are in good physical and mental health, or are being helped to improve their health. Their health needs are identified and met.
- Care leavers have access to and understand their full health history.

Learning and enjoyment

- Children and young people make good educational progress at school or other provision since being in care. They receive the same support from their carers as they would from a good parent.
- Children and young people who do not attend school have prompt access to suitable good-quality registered alternative provision. There is regular review of their progress. Urgent action is taken if children are missing from education or if their attendance reduces.
- Children and young people enjoy what they do and have access to a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities. Adult carers have suitable delegated authority to make prompt decisions about children’s day-to-day lives.

Stability and permanence

- Children and young people are safe and settled where they live. They move only in line with care plans, when they are at risk of harm or are being harmed. They do not live anywhere that fails to meet their needs. They are able to live with their brothers and sisters when this is in their best interests, including when they are adopted. Children and young people have appropriate, carefully assessed and supported contact with family, friends and other people who are important to them.
- Children and care leavers who live away from their ‘home’ local authority have access to education and health services that meet their needs as soon as they move outside of their ‘home’ area. Placing local authorities notify the

‘receiving’ local authority that a child is moving to their area promptly and ensure that services are in place to meet the child’s needs before the child moves.

- There is a sufficiently wide range and choice of placements available to meet the needs of children in care.
- Effective recruitment, assessment, training and support of carers (including, as appropriate, foster carers, adopters, special guardians and residential staff) ensure that children and young people receive high-quality, safe and stable care that meets their diverse needs.
- All agencies and professionals work together effectively to reduce any unnecessary delay in receiving support and achieving permanence for children.
- Children are effectively prepared for, and carefully matched with, a permanent placement. Their wishes and feelings influence the decisions about where they live. Children are helped to develop secure, primary attachments with the adults caring for them. They are helped to understand their life histories, experiences and identities.
- The accessibility, style and clarity of case records enhance the understanding that children in care and care leavers have about their histories and experiences.
- Adoption is considered carefully and promptly for all children who are unable to return home or to their birth families and who need a permanent alternative home. This includes good use of concurrent and parallel planning, the Adoption Register and Fostering for Adoption.
- Fostering and adoption panels, and the respective decision-makers, ensure that children are effectively matched with families. Local authorities have arrangements in place to ensure consistently good practice and receive regular feedback on the effectiveness of the work of panels.
- Children who are adopted, their adoptive families, their birth relatives and adopted adults are informed, and are aware of, their entitlement to receive an assessment of their adoption support

needs. When support is needed, it is provided quickly, effectively and leads to improved circumstances for the children, young people, families and carers involved.

Care leavers and transitions

- Care leavers have timely, effective pathway plans (including transition planning for children in care with learning difficulties and/or disabilities). These plans address all young people’s needs. Reviews of plans for care leavers are thorough and involve all key people, including the young person, who understands their pathway plan and contributes to its development. Plans for their future continue to be appropriate, as well as ambitious.
- Care leavers develop the skills and confidence they need to maximise their chances of successful maturity to adulthood, including parenthood. Care leavers have trusted relationships with carers and staff from the local authority and develop supportive relationships within the community, including with family and friends. They receive the right level of practical, emotional and financial support until they are at least 21 and, when necessary, until they are 25.
- Care leavers move towards independence at a pace that is right for them. Young people are encouraged to remain in care until their 18th birthday when this is in their best interest. They can remain living with their carers beyond their 18th birthday or, if more appropriate, receive ongoing support to live in permanent and affordable accommodation that fully meets their needs.
- Care leavers have good education and employment opportunities, including work experience and apprenticeships. They are encouraged and supported to continue their education and training, including those aged 21 to 24 years. Care leavers are progressing well and achieving their full potential through either being in further or higher education or in their chosen career/occupation.
- Care leavers have accommodation that best meets their needs and helps them to develop their independence skills safely. Risks of tenancy breakdown are identified and addressed; alternative plans are put in place promptly when necessary. Houses of multiple occupation are only used when it is a young person’s preferred option and it can demonstrably be shown to be in their best interests. When young people live in unregulated settings, the local authority takes steps to ensure that their accommodation is suitable and that they are protected against any risks to their safety or welfare.
- Care leavers are provided with all key documents they need to begin their lives as young adults, such as national insurance numbers, birth certificates and passports.

Priority 3:

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

Strategic leadership

- The leadership of the council, including the chief executive, lead member (and other members) and the DCS recognise and prioritise the needs of children and this is reflected in corporate decision-making, action and active attendance at key committees and boards.
- The chief executive and lead member are well informed and hold the DCS and their leadership team to account for the quality of practice and the challenges in the local area. This is exemplified through accurate assessments of practice that drive improvement.
- Strategic leaders ensure that relationships with key partners, including the health community, the police, schools, Cafcass and the family courts, provide a helpful and effective context for social workers and practitioners to work effectively with children and families.
- The local authority is an active, strong and committed corporate parent – in line with the corporate parenting principles (see Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017). There is a corporate sense of responsibility for children in care and care leavers and the chief executive leads a local authority that recognises and prioritises the needs of children in all aspects, such as housing, career opportunities, education and learning.

Learning culture

- The local authority has a track record of responding appropriately, effectively and quickly to areas for development, service deficiencies or new demands, and shows resilience to new challenges. The local authority’s self-evaluation of practice is accurate.
- The local authority has detailed and relevant knowledge of its local communities, including children in care

and care leavers and uses this knowledge effectively to meet their needs. Leaders identify the vulnerable groups in their local areas and their needs and ensure that there is an effective response for these groups of children. Commissioned and in-house services have sufficient capacity and meet the needs of local children, young people and families in need of help, care and protection.

- The local authority can demonstrate evidence of practice that is informed and sustainably improved by feedback, research and intelligence about the quality of services. The experiences of children, young people and families who use them are important, including learning from their complaints and from successful or disrupted placements or adoption breakdown.

Performance management

- The local authority, through performance management and monitoring, has an accurate and systematically updated understanding of its effectiveness and uses this to drive improvement.
- Management oversight of practice, including practice scrutiny by senior managers, is established, systematic and used clearly to improve the quality of decisions and the provision of help to children and young people.

Workforce

- Careful monitoring of workloads and oversight of the impact of wider systems on working conditions for practitioners ensure that practitioners have the capacity and ability to develop meaningful relationships with children and families. The impact of any systems change is well managed, with a sustained focus on the experience of children and families.

- The local authority social care workforce is sufficient, suitably qualified and accredited to deliver high-quality services to children and their families. (For more information about accreditation, see the [national assessment and accreditation system \(NAAS\)](#)). Managers and practitioners are experienced, effectively trained and supervised and the quality of their practice improves the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families. There is effective organisational support for the training and professional development of social workers and managers. Leaders and managers have created an environment where good social work can flourish and this is evident in the overall quality and impact of social work.

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