



Scrutiny for Policies, Children
and
Families Committee

Monday 7 November 2022

Progress on Action Plan

Children's Services – Somerset 2022



- Children and families receive **good-quality services** in Somerset. The DCS and senior leaders across the council **work together effectively** to improve services for children and have responded well to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The council is **committed to driving up standards** for Somerset's children and is rightly proud of the **significant progress** it has made since the last inspection in 2017.
- Investment in management capacity has resulted in **greater consistency of practice** and preventative services are **making a real difference for children**.
- Children's identities are particularly well understood by professionals, and children are central to their plans.
- IROs and child protection chairs **progress plans effectively** for children.
- Care leavers receive a **high level of support** that really benefits them.
- Senior leaders have **responded effectively to the challenges** faced in recruiting and retaining staff.
- There is a workforce **culture of openness, support and respectful challenge** in Somerset which helps workers to feel confident in their practice. They value this positive culture and the **high level of support** provided by their managers and the local authority.



What Needs to Improve?



Ofsted 2022: two named areas for improvement:

- Placement sufficiency, including for emergency admissions, for older children with complex needs.
- The take-up of return home interviews and use of data to inform individual and service planning.

Strategic Partnerships (sufficiency)



**Homes and
Horizons**

Our innovative and nationally recognised strategic partnership with the Shaw Trust is providing:

- Up to 20 foster carers for complex children as well as up to 10 local children's homes by 2025.
- 2 therapeutic education provisions integrating a CAMHS assessment model
- Developing a system wide career pipeline to recruit and retain staff and provide a career pathway
- 3 homes opening January to March
- Further 3 in late stages of development
- 23 staff recruited and inducted
- Joint commissioning of therapeutic education provision with CAMHS



Sufficiency

- Monthly Directors Panel overseeing and scrutinising unregistered placements and plans to move children in to regulated placements
- Reduction in numbers of unregistered children from 11 (July 2022) to 4 (January 2023)
- Fostering recruitment campaign launched, including via Prime Time TV, social media. Significant increase in website hits seen.
- Evaluation of 2022 fostering reorganisation planned to ensure that changes are effective
- Learning from placements endings audit work is being updated and refreshed.
- Independent fostering reviews – significant improvement in timeliness and quality, raising standards of care and support to carers.
- Positive Activity weekends now part of our core offer – 20 weekends per year plus holiday schemes, to support placement stability



Missing Children

- The return home interview form has been reviewed and reworked to ensure capture of all the information gathered allowing effective data reporting (reporting is in final completion stages with BI colleagues)
- The recording process has been changed to reflect a child has been given the opportunity to discuss a missing episode through direct contact, even if they then decline. The number of children subsequently being recorded has having engaged has risen by 26% since Ofsted visited.
- Work completed with Avon and Somerset Police to roll out the Philomena Protocol (ongoing into the spring of 2023) – audit of two care providers responses to missing to take place February 2023. This should result in a reduction in recorded missing incidents with a more child focused pragmatic approach to managing the behaviour of children,
- Updated the Local Guidance for Missing Children (awaiting sign off) to ensure *meaningful social work contact post return* is better recorded
- Working group established to engage the wider CSC management team (through the County Managers' Meeting process) to refresh the purpose and process of MRI work and identify challenges and barriers.





3. Further improvement needed....

- Early Help demand management
- Missing children and RHIs
- Strategy Discussions
- Life Story Work
- Permanence
- Semi Independent Placement Care Planning
- Follow up on Practice Evaluations
- Unregistered placements

Early Help demand management



- Demand for EH support continues to increase
- Clear management process in place to triage new referrals, risk assess waiting cases.
- Transfer and Allocation meeting reviewed and further work planned to include wider service areas (Kinship)
- Working group planned to look at how SWs can support EH work around step-up and step down (Care Review)

Semi independent provision

- Quality Standards for semi independent providers have been updated (alongside commissioning) to better highlight the expectations on providers and in the LA in supporting placements.
- Placement planning meetings and reviews involving young people are taking place every three months to monitor the provision and support provided and to work towards a smooth transition into adulthood.
- CLA case tracking will monitor the appropriateness of placements and plans for transition into adulthood
- We are working closely alongside existing providers around upcoming regulatory changes to supported accommodation to ensure that we can provide continuity and quality in advance of the introduction of inspections. At present, all current providers have indicated they plan to register.



Permanence



- Though significant progress has been made in securing permanence early, there is further work to do to ensure that a number of different processes to monitor permanence are rationalised and streamlined, including how we can consistently use permanence planning meetings, how we can better track the planning for all our looked after children
- Permanence tracking panel is establishing a baseline form formally recognising all long term placements – to be completed by February 2023.
- As a result of work undertaken in permanence tracking panel, the vast majority of children in long term placements have been formally matched.

Life Story Work



- Life Story Work is taking place for the majority of CLA
- Lack of clarity around the definitions of LSW, when this is started, how it is described and recorded, is recognised
- Working group has been set up, led by Head of Service for CLA, but including other areas of service, to look at this topic and the wider topic of direct work:
 - What is direct work and how and where do we record it?
 - What is life story work and how does this differ from other direct work? Where and how is this recorded?
 - How do work differently with children in the community and children in our care?
 - How can we include our partners in contributing to life story work?
 - How can our recording and database support better practice in this area?

Strategy Discussions



- Audit work completed post Ofsted to understand the decision making at the decision to progress to C & F assessments
- 41 children considered across all geographical localities
- 95% cases reviewed indicated that the decision making was appropriate, with no evidence that a strategy discussion as required.
- Parents were spoken to in all cases reviewed
- 25% of cases highlighted delays in CSC receiving information from the Police
- Updated guidance to First Response TMs around clearly identifying the rationale for not proceeding to strategy where the decision could be questioned.

Other key areas of focus



- Levelling up – ensuring that the highest standards of work are recognised, celebrated, shared and embedded across the service.
- Confidence and consistency in court work – working with the Local Family Justice Board to improve quality.
- Continued focus on exploitation; supporting parents to help children
- Improving our support to kinship carers
- Supporting our staff to be their best – CSWs; SSWAs; team support; back to the floor
- Service obsessions:
 - Education
 - Listening to parents
 - ??

Questions?

