



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

CHILDREN'S SERVICES SOCIAL CARE & EARLY HELP SELF-EVALUATION

April 2024

A Borough in which all children and young people are safe and cared for, enjoy and achieve, are healthy and resilient, grow up ready for adulthood, and feel happy, hopeful and loved

Introduction

As the newly appointed permanent DCS for Wokingham I am proud to present this overview and evaluation of social work practice in Wokingham. Our focus in Wokingham Children's Services has always been on improving outcomes for children and young people, and in creating the right conditions for social work practice to flourish. Children remain a corporate priority in Wokingham and investment continues to be made in their futures through strong political support and partnerships.

Since our ILACS inspection in March 2023, Wokingham has undertaken a significant and multifaceted programme of improvement work with these core aims in mind, which has been underpinned and evidenced by a Children's Services Improvement Plan. This improvement plan's focus has primarily been shaped by the findings of that last ILACS, but the detail has also continuously been informed by the intelligence that we obtain from our quality assurance activity - drawing on the insights generated by our busy programme of audit work, our performance data, and of course the feedback we regularly receive from families and children.

In February of this year, Wokingham received a further Focused Visit from Ofsted, looking at the local authority's arrangements for children in need, including those subject to a child protection plan. The inspection team's findings were overwhelming positive, with the main area for improvement identified being supervision - an issue that we were already aware of and continue to prioritise. We believe that this report was a strong endorsement of how far we have already progressed since March 2023, which evidences our trajectory towards becoming a Good or Outstanding rated service.

In line with Ofsted guidance, this self-evaluation document seeks to provide a brief overview of the progress that we believe we have made over the last 12 months, and crucially what we plan to do next in order to maintain and improve our practice. The document begins by setting out an overview of our Borough and the context that we work in, followed by a brief outline of what we have done in response to recent inspection. It then sets out more detail about what we currently know about our practice more broadly (and how we know it), before moving on to some more detailed analysis of our plans going forward, broken down by service area or theme.

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Wokingham Borough Council

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Section 1:

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1.1 Our context

Historically, when compared to statistical neighbour and national averages, the number of children requiring statutory social care services in Wokingham has been very **low**. The reasons behind this are complex and cannot be explained purely by the demographics and relative affluence of our local population.

We believe that this trend correlates with the following:

- 1 Investments in our **Early Help** and wider preventative services, including our Compass Team;
- 2 A robust approach to supporting children to **exit care** via appropriate options for permanency, including SGOs.
- 3 A strong record of keeping children **within their family** or wider network, wherever safe and possible to do so.

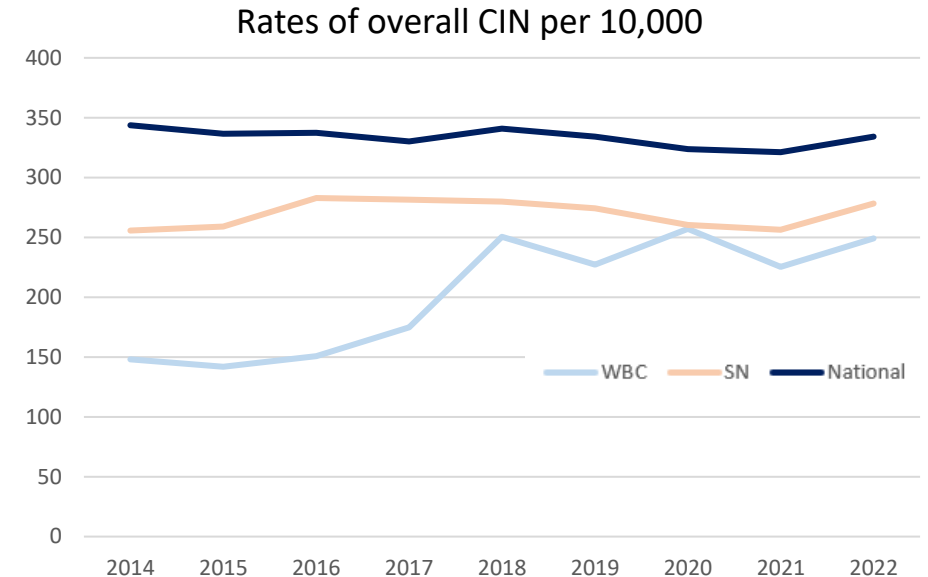
This has all helped Wokingham to achieve some of **the lowest rates of children in care** in the country. When looking at the latest comparable data (2022), Wokingham's rate of 33 CIC per 10,000 fell within the lowest 5 rates nationally.

However

Since 2017, pressures on statutory and Early Help services have steadily risen in Wokingham.

Consequently, Wokingham now has rates of Children in Need that are on par with its statistical neighbours, and which are much closer to national averages. (See right side of chart above)

As is being seen nationally, this trend has also been accompanied by a continued rise in the complexity of cases that we are working with. e.g. extra-familial harm, child criminal exploitation and complex mental health issues.



1.2 Key statistics

Growing CYP Population

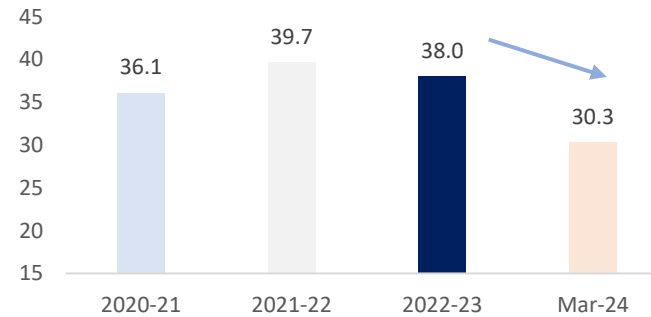
Total: 175,706 **0-24:** 52,620

Growth Estimates for 0-24:

2025: 1.7% increase

2030: 2.5% increase

Rates of CP per 10,000

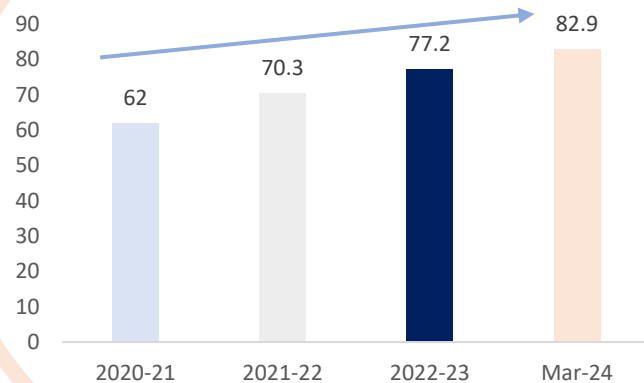


Previously, our CP Rates were broadly in line with Statistical Neighbour (32.75) and national (41.40) rates - but have recently started to decline.

Growing SEND cohort

1,983 EHC plans maintained (up from 1,685 in Jan 23). 139 (7%) of these children known to children's social care. 2,963 children receiving SEN support, with 33 (1.1%) known to children's social care.

Rates of CIN* per 10,000



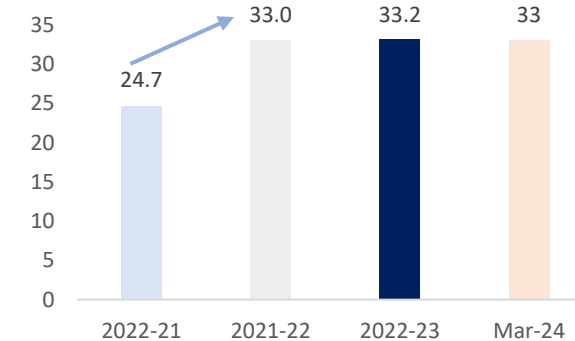
CIN rates Currently increasing year on year.

*Excluding CP and CIC

Growing impact of economic deprivation

3,573 children in relative low-income households in 2021/22. Up from 3,531 in 2020/21 and 3,101 in 2019/20. (WBC JSNA)

Rates of CIC per 10,000



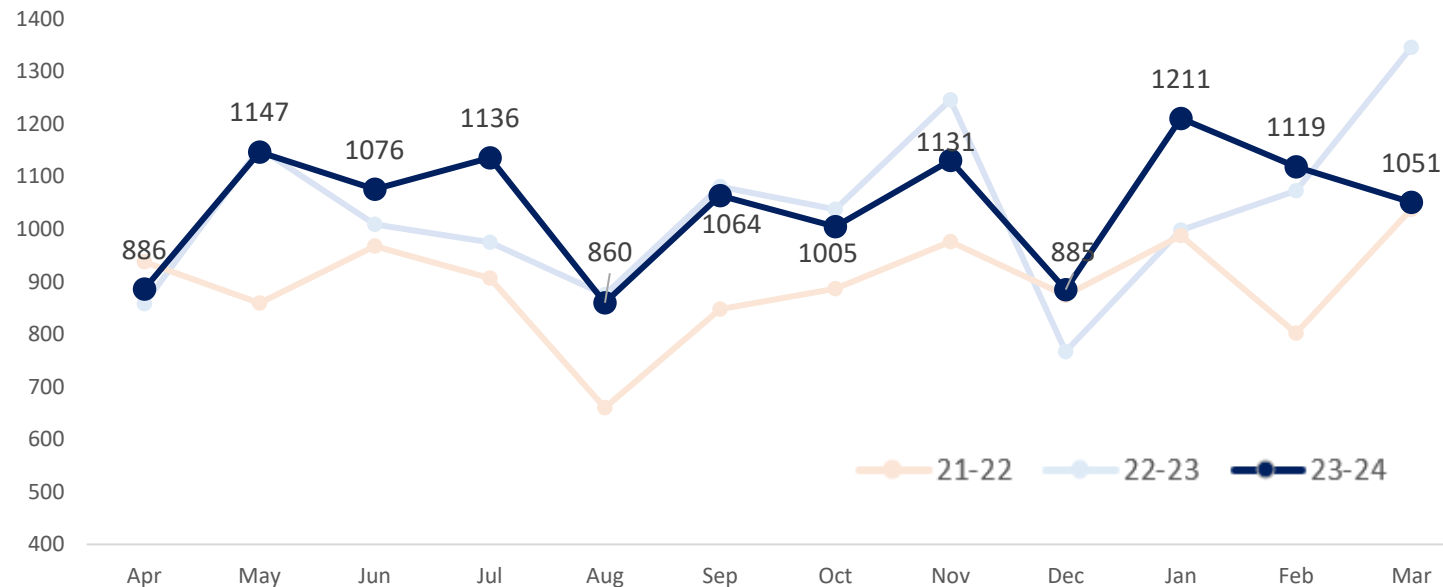
Rates increased significantly in 21-22, but are now stable and still well below national (71) and Stat Neighbour averages (51)

As is explored in more detail in the following slides, although our CP rates are stable, we believe that the backdrop of our work remains as one of increasing demand and increasing complexity.

1.3 The front door

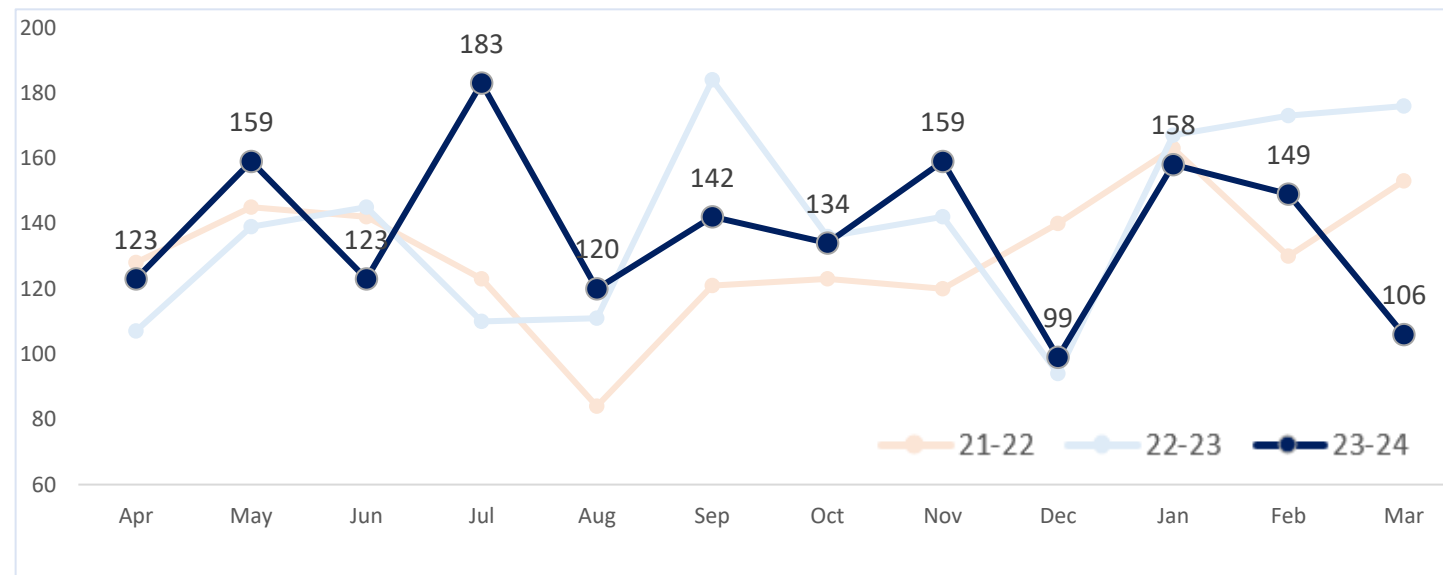
Contacts:

During 22-23, we saw our contacts rise significantly in comparison to 21-22. For this financial year, although numbers have still grown slightly (with a 1.2% increase overall in comparison to last year), the overall trajectory has been much closer to that of 22-23. This is also reflected in the year end averages, with 23-24 recording an average of 1047 contacts per calendar month, which is almost identical to the 22-23 equivalent of 1035. Although we continue to experience a backdrop of increasing demand at the front door (as is being seen nationally), it appears that 22-23 marked a more significant shift in demand, possibly as we transitioned out of the Covid era. The rate of increase seems to have stabilised this year, often with spikes in demand being centred around certain months - see for example July and January, where traditionally busy months became even busier.



Referrals:

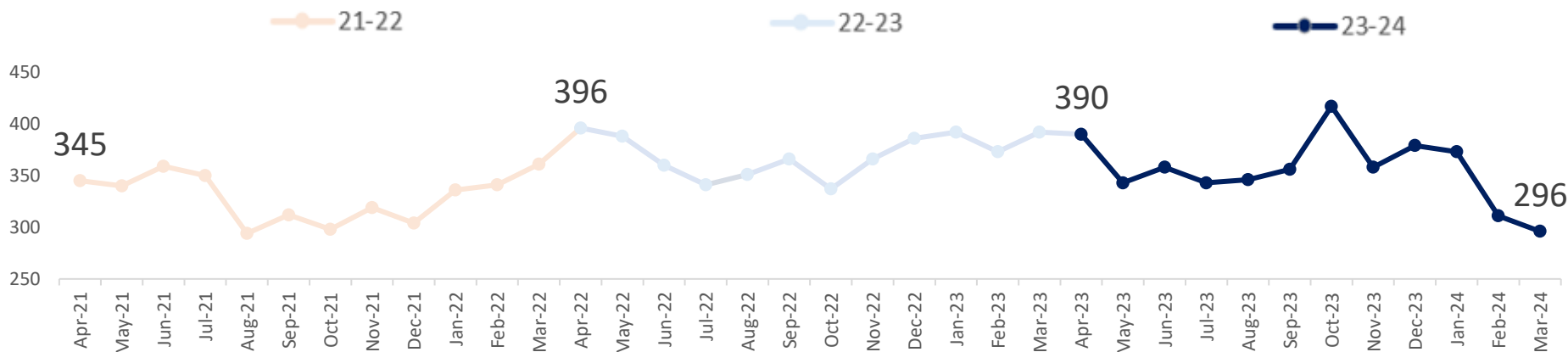
In comparison to contacts, our numbers of referrals have fluctuated more sharply across the last financial year - even after accounting for the usual peaks in activity that are associated either side of holiday periods. Whilst figures have often broadly been in line with the trajectory experienced in the last two financial years, busy months have generally exceeded previous recorded volumes. There have also been notable outliers this year, where demand for social care intervention has reached unprecedented levels - see for example July and November. However, our overall numbers of referrals for the year (1655) have been very similar to 22-23 (1684). Similarly, the average monthly conversion rate of contacts to referrals for this financial year (19.9%) is also similar to previous years.



1.4 Caseloads (Part 1)

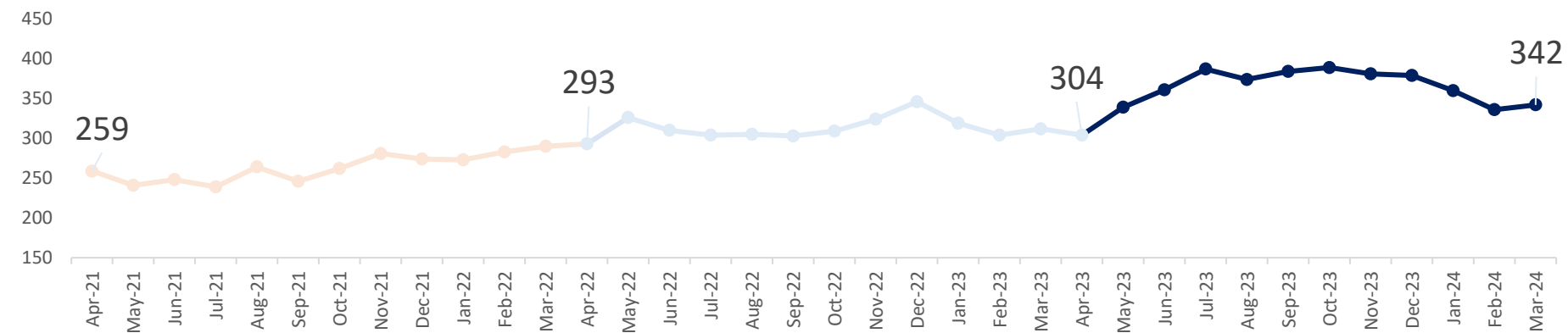
Early Help

During 202-21 our allocations of Early Help cases per month were averaging at around 250 per month. However, as we entered the latter part of the pandemic era , we saw allocations rise into the high 300s, and stay there. This year, although we have seen a small drop off in recent months, allocations have continued at this rate, with an average of 354 per month, and a peak of 407 recorded in October 23.



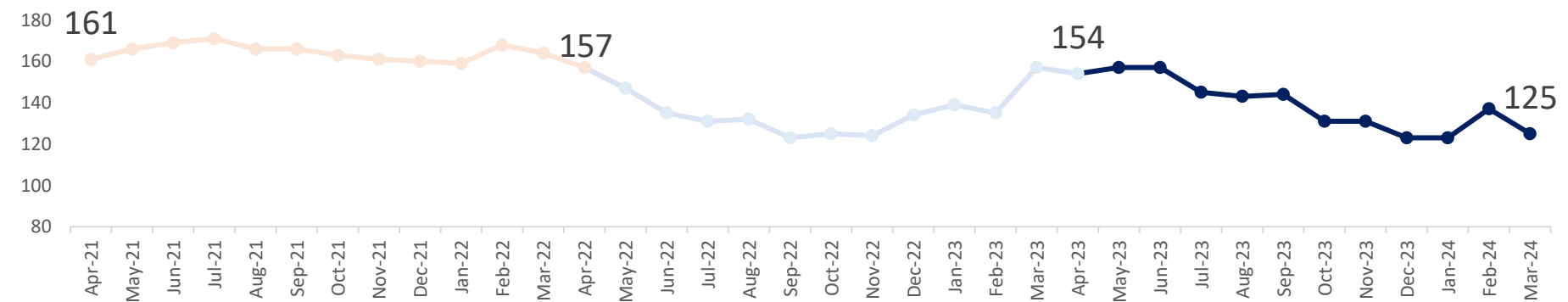
CIN

A trend of increasing CIN work has continued into 23-24, with our current caseload of 342 representing a 12.5% increase on the figure recorded at the start of the year (304). There is a possible link here with our slight decline in CP numbers, but this needs further investigation, and is just as likely a reflection of growing demand on our Front Door as a whole, as is being seen in our Early Help numbers above.



CP

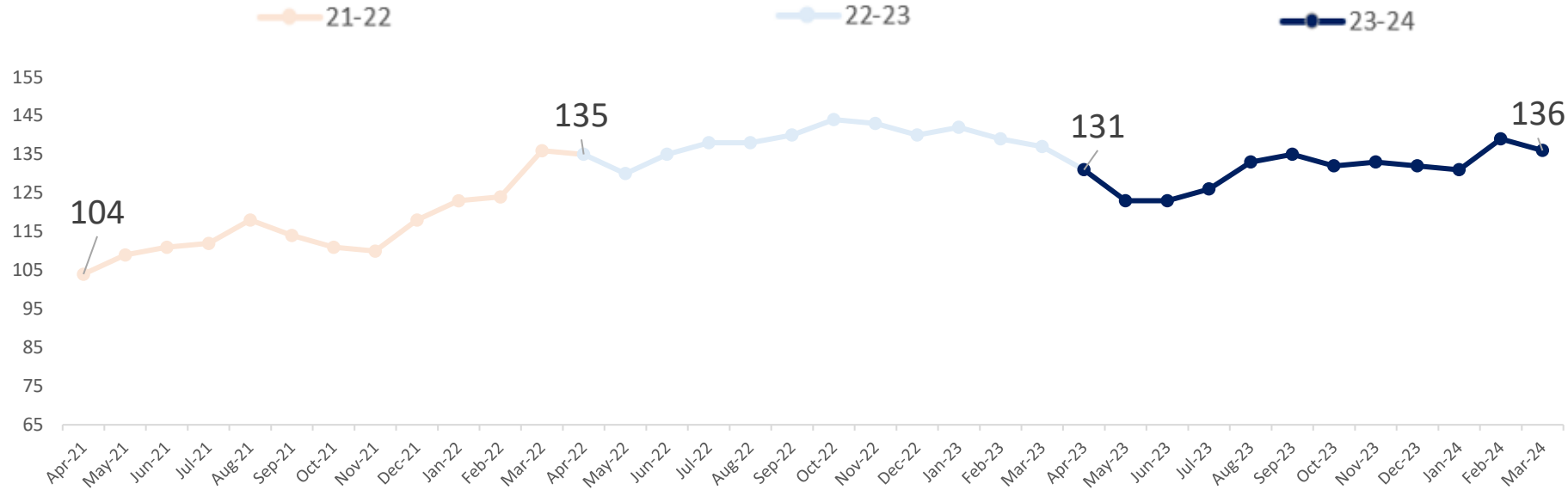
Child Protection cases have been relatively stable over the course of the last 2-3 years but have gradually reduced over the last 12 months. Although we are conscious that short team trends like this can often rebalance themselves over time, we are curious as to whether this decline demonstrates any changes in our thresholds and/or practice. (See 1.5)



1.4 Caseloads (Part 2)

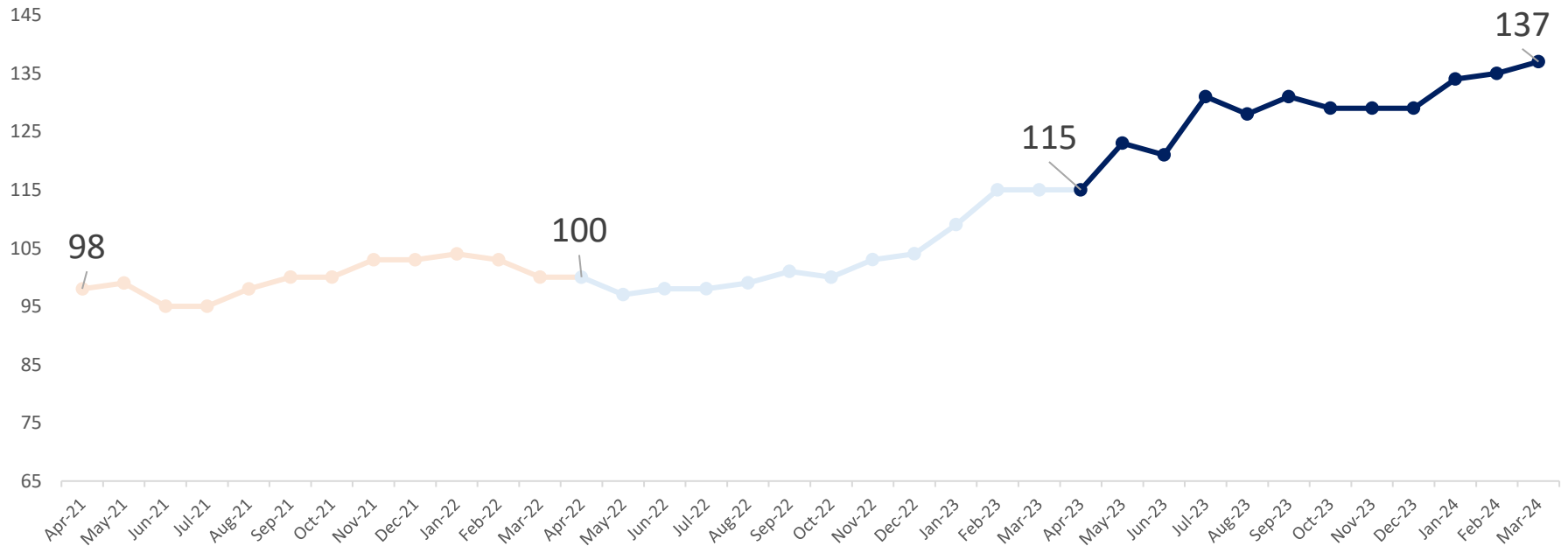
CIC

Our numbers of children in care have grown considerably over the course of the last 3 years but have stabilised over the last 12 months. Our current cohort of 136 represents a 31% increase on where we stood in April 2021. The principal driver of growth over these years has been the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), which saw our numbers of UASC children grow from 7 in April 2021, up to 41 by the close of 22-23.




Care Leavers

As our modelling from previous years has predicted, our care leaver population continues to grow year on year. Our current cohort of 137 represents a 28% increase in numbers, when compared to where we were at the start of 21-22 (98). The primary driver of this trend continues to be our obligations under the National Transfer Scheme - which typically sees UASCs in their teens come into our care, who then age out relatively quickly before being replaced under the scheme (so we can continue to meet our quota).



1.5 What does this all mean?

Overarching analysis



When considering the raw data presented on the previous slides, one might be tempted to conclude that there has been a notable drop in CP plans, linked to an increase in CIN plans - and that this may be due to a change in the application of our thresholds. We are Interested in this hypothesis and are currently undertaking a series of dip samples across our system to explore and assure ourselves of the underlying reasons. Our latest CP analysis for Q3 actually showed a slight increase in the numbers of children being made subject to a CP plan, but this was outweighed by a sharp increase in children stepping down from CP to CIN. Assuring ourselves that these step downs were the result of effective and timely intervention (rather than any overarching change in our approach to threshold), will be a key line of enquiry. We are also exploring a slight dip in our latest conversion rates of ICPCs to plans, which could also be a factor.

We are however confident that the principal factor behind our growing CIN cohort is our response and intervention to the rise in contacts and referrals at the front door. We are helping families who are suffering as a result of the ongoing cost of living crisis, and managing risk early on CIN planning, before significant harm arises. This growth in demand is also reflected in our persistently high Early Help allocations since the pandemic.

Recent rises in our children in care population are primarily (although not wholly) due to an increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children needing support via Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. This growth has now stabilised as we have continued to meet our NTS quota. As has been predicted by our modelling, the impact of the NTS is now being seen most dramatically in our growing care leaver cohort. This year our rate of former UASC Care Leavers as a proportion of total care leaver population rose to just under a third at 32%, up from 19% at the start of 21-22.

1.6 Key themes identified from recent inspection

Our last ILACS in March 2023 identified 5 key areas to improve upon:



1) Assessments

Progress of contacts and subsequent decision-making is often slow; Many assessments are not completed swiftly enough

2) Plans

CIN and CP plans are variable in quality; Some are too long, contain numerous objectives, with the most important concerns not sufficiently clear.

3) Supervision

Insufficient oversight and challenge by managers; Many supervision records are long and lack a sharp focus on the key issues for children

4) Recording

The systems for maintaining records are not clear or consistent. There is variation in where, and how, children's records are stored.

5) Exploitation

No clearly defined approach to children who are at risk from exploitation. Social workers do not have access to specialist expertise for advice and guidance

From the report's findings, we also identified 2 further improvement themes to respond to:



6) Neglect:

No clear approach or use of tools to assist social workers in identifying and fully understanding the impact of long-term neglect on children; Planning, intervention, case direction and management oversight are not effective in improving the experiences of these children.

7) Care Leavers

Supporting those with the most complex needs; clarity of Care Leaver Offer; quality of pathway plans; quality of supervision; supporting access to employment and apprenticeships; care leaver involvement in service development; support for those who become homeless; contact and support for those in staying put arrangements.

In light of these findings, our Children's Services Improvement Plan was comprehensively reviewed in April 2023, and we have taken forward a wide-ranging programme of improvement work in response. See next slides for detail.

1.7 A summary of recent improvement work

1) Assessments

AIM: *Effective assessments within timescale, ensuring swift decision-making and timely support for children and families.*

Actions

Internal processes revised across our R&A Team, including “Day 25” supervision & Daily allocations meetings. (Apr 23). New team-level data set created to provide the R&A Team Manager with improved oversight of barriers. (Oct 23)

Impact so far

Since August, our performance in this area has gone from strength to strength, and we are now well above our 85% target (see slide Section 2.6). Our recent Core Audits have also shown 72% of cases as Good or Outstanding with regard to Referral and Assessment practice.

Next steps

We have recently appointed a further MASH manager, who will support us to strengthen the timeliness of decision making at the Front Door and will enable us to evidence case direction at the point of contact (which were also issues noted in our last ILACS).



2) Plans

AIM: *Improving the quality, clarity and timeliness of plans, so that they effectively drive progress for children and families*

Actions

New plan format designed and rolled out in October 2023 (informed by consultation with families), providing a workable, SMART format for CIN and CP Plans. Continual programme of workshops and coaching delivered to embed new template and approach.

Impact so far

In December we Dip Sampled 18 plans - most were found to have clear and simple language; clear actions with a recorded network. Our recent Focused Visit agreed with our findings, stating that “*Children benefit from stronger plans, which have been improved and simplified in consultation with families and staff*”.

Next steps

Both our Core Audit and our Dip Sampling work has prompted TMs to think about strategic actions that they can take at team-level, to further drive performance in this area, and we are confident that our trajectory of improvement will continue into 2024.



3) Supervision

AIM: *Delivering high-quality, reflective, timely and high challenge supervision, which drives child-centred plans*

Actions

New supervision template designed and rolled out in April 2023, following consultation with staff. Training for all managers on *Developing Effective Supervision* delivered, alongside a *High Challenge, High Support* workshop for leaders.

Impact so far

A Team Manager Supervision audit programme initiated over the summer, showed a broadly positive picture of progress – e.g. 80% of supervision records made direct reference to the child’s plan. Recent Core Audit samples have had 42% of cases graded as Good or Outstanding for Supervision.

Next steps

Following the findings of our Focused Visit (which agreed with our assessment of supervision needing further improvement) we are currently working on further revisions to our supervision template. Our L&D programme in this area also continues into 2024.



1.7 A summary of recent improvement work (part 2)

4) Recording

Aim: *The timeliness, accuracy and accessibility of children's records.*

Actions

All document storage processes standardised across our Service, in order to promote consistent practice (Nov 23) . Preparations are also underway for the launch of new document storage infrastructure in the summer of 2024

Impact so far

In our last 2 Core Audit cycles, 59% of cases scored Good or above in relation to Case Recording, demonstrating an improving picture.

Next steps

A programme of spot checking of records is planned in the lead up to our infrastructure update, to ensure compliance with our current naming convention guidelines is maintained



5) Exploitation

Aim: *Ensuring a clearly defined practice approach to exploitation, supported by an enhanced strategic response via EMRAC.*

Actions

New "Harm Outside The Home" process agreed and rolled out with partners (Nov 23); Formal adoption of the Home Office *Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit*; Structural changes made to EMRAC, seeking to improve the timeliness and quality of discussion/impact; JD for a new specialist exploitation post agreed. (Jan 23)

Impact so far

A thematic audit on our partnership response to the early signs of exploitation found good quality MASH records and CFAs across the 10 cases it considered. Our recent Focused Visit was also very positive about this area of practice "*Children at risk of exploitation are well supported by their workers, who focus on building effective relationships with them*".

Next steps

The thematic audit work has prompted various team-level actions in relation to ensuring our exploitation tool is uploaded and regularly reviewed in supervision. Exploitation is also the focus of a team away day for our R&A team in March. A further dip sample audit is planned for May 24.



6) Neglect:

ACTIONS: Neglect Screening and Intervention Tool developed (Oct 23); Staff Workshop on Affluent Neglect delivered (Oct 23); Practice Week delivered on the theme of Neglect (Nov 23);
Next steps & impact: we are currently in the process of developing a bespoke data set that will allow us to better understand and evaluate our effectiveness in this area of practice. A thematic audit on the theme of neglect is also planned for summer 2024. In our Feb 23 Focused Visit, inspectors commented positively on our work around longstanding neglect, stating that "*There is now more robust action in place to ensure that plans do not drift and that timely decisions are made to reduce risks to children*"



7) Care Leavers:

ACTIONS: Revised guidance on hard-to-reach care leavers produced (Sep 23); Care Leaver Supervision Policy developed (Feb 24); Review of pathway plan format underway; Refresh of Care Leaver offer commenced; New performance clinic for Care Leaver service started (Sep 24); Care leaver cases brought into Core Auditing process (Nov 23).

Next steps & impact: A range of improvement activity around care leavers is planned for the rest of 2024 - more detail on this is included in section 3.



1.7 A summary of recent improvement work (part 3)

Our recent Focused Visit in February highlighted two areas for improvement, and we are currently in the process of developing our plans in response to these findings.

Supervision

Improvement work under consideration

- 1) Revising our existing Supervision Template:** with the intention of simplifying the format, so that it can be used to record all forms of management oversight and case discussion, in addition to formal supervision sessions.
- 2) Reviewing our system of recording supervision and management oversight:** with the intention of making our recording of management oversight (in all its forms) much more easily accessible and central to the child's file.
- 3) Reviewing our Supervision Policy:** to reflect the above framework, and to ensure expectations are clear and consistently understood across our service.


Engaging parents more fully in direct work

Improvement work under consideration

- 1) Revising our Core Audit Tool Guidance:** to ensure auditors review whether all members of a child's family and network have been invited and encouraged/facilitated to attend key forums and meetings (where appropriate to do so)
- 2) A review of our existing training offer around "working with resistance"**
- 3) The development of a new pledge to families:** which would document our commitment and approach to working in partnership with families, in alignment with the focus of Working Together and the new National Framework for Social Care.



Next Steps: A formal plan with timescales for the above will be presented by Service Managers at our May Improvement Board



Section 2:

What do we know about the quality & impact of our practice?

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2.1 How we evaluate our practice: Quality Assurance





CONTEXT: Since 2021, our QA framework has consistently received positive feedback during inspections. For example, in our March 2023 ILACS it was noted that

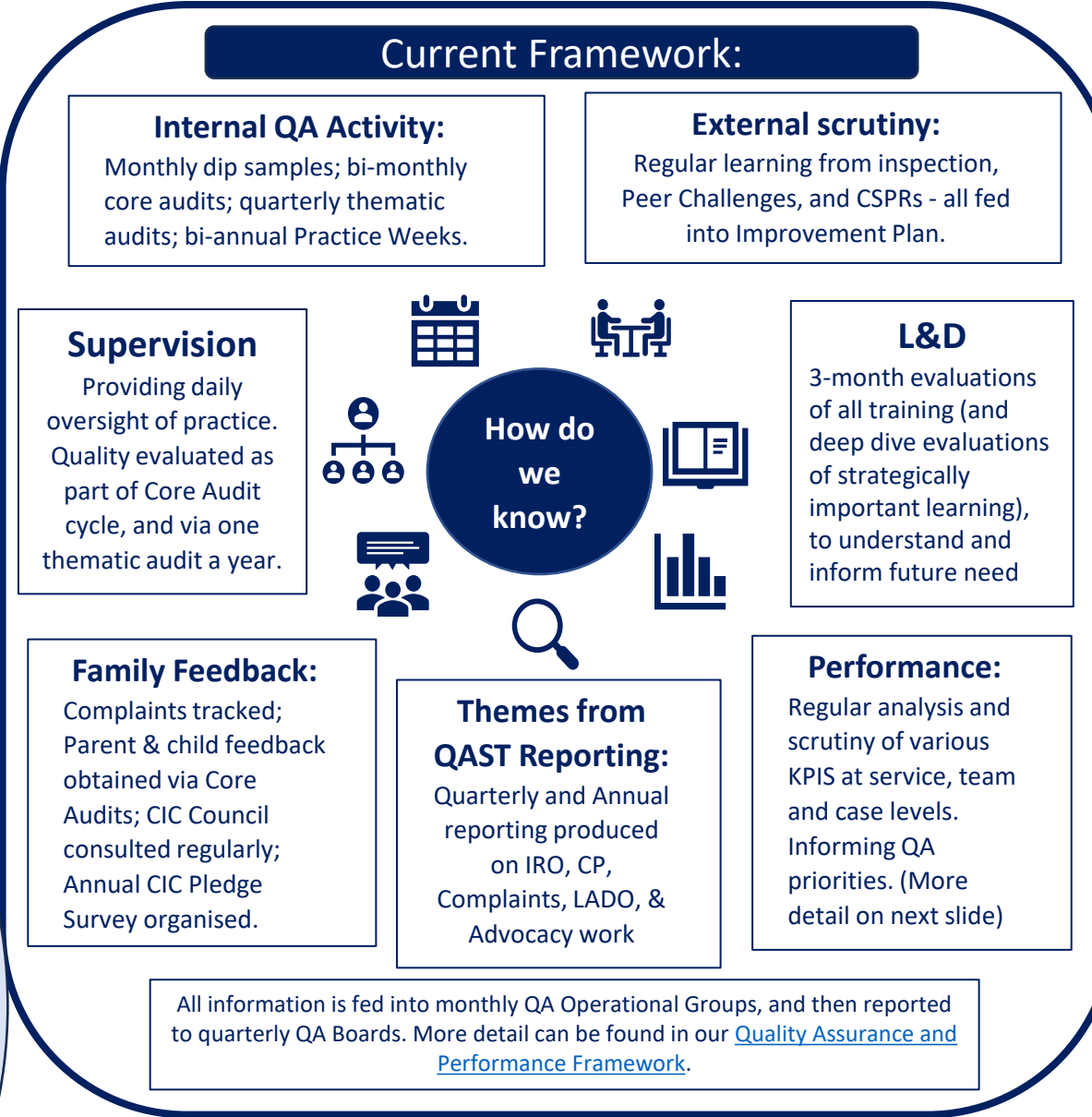
“Practitioners value the opportunity that a well-established audit programme provides to reflect on their work and to have an independent and moderated assessment of their practice”

This year we reviewed our QA processes further, taking forward various reforms to strengthen the framework’s impact (see summary below). This was once again commented on positively in our most recent Focused Visit report, which noted that

“The reviewed and strengthened quality assurance framework has increased the level of audit activity, which the local authority uses well to inform the learning cycle. Audit activity demonstrates a reflective, self-critical and thoughtful approach, with a clear focus on the quality of work with children.”

Recent Improvement Work to further strengthen QA

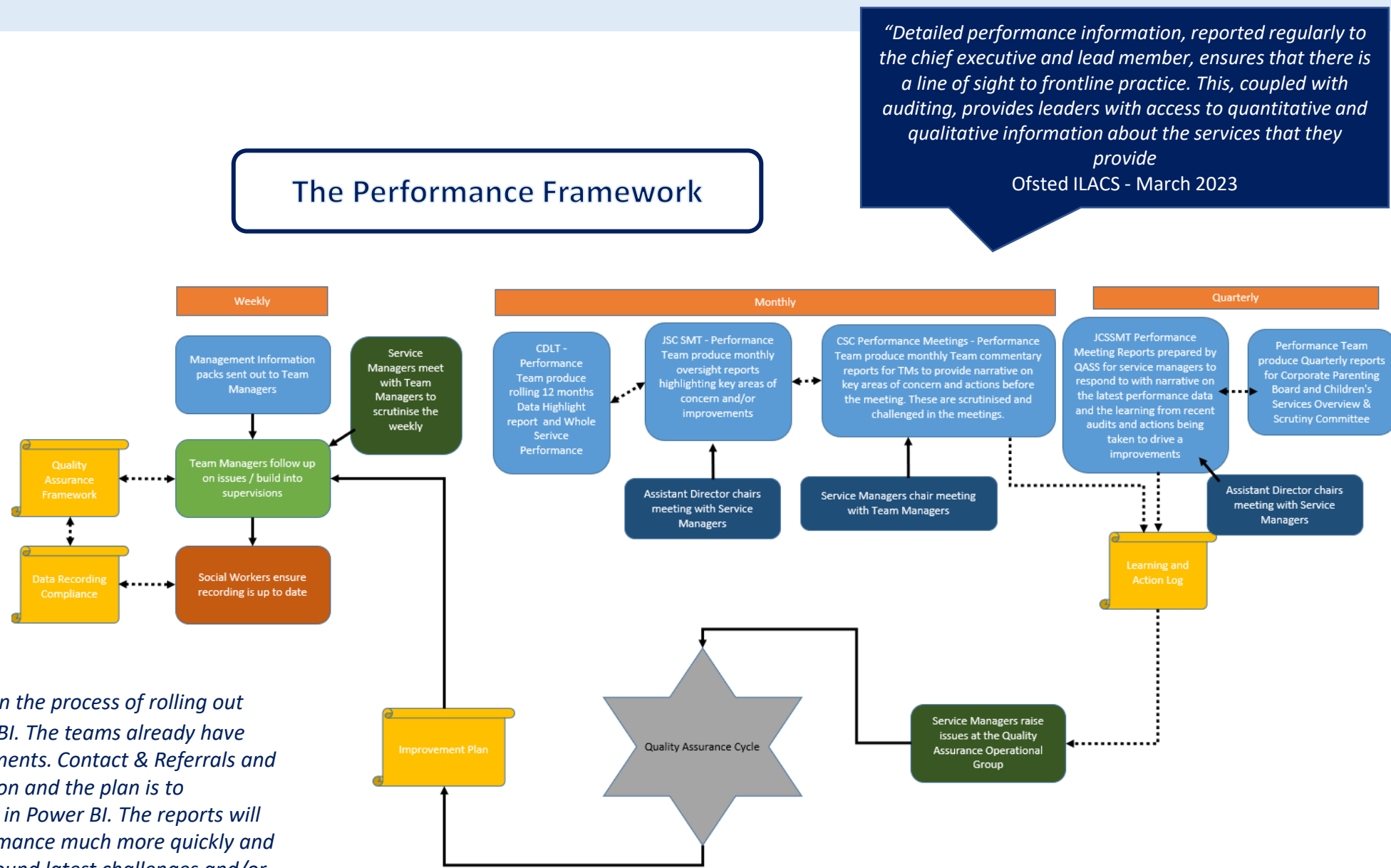
-  **Core Audit Programme enhanced:** audit tool revised to provide a greater focus on practice (over compliance); frequency of audits upped to bi-monthly to provide more regular insights into practice; analysis broken down by team to ensure improvement activity is targeted and purposeful.
-  **QA activity broadened:** our programme now includes the use of monthly dip sampling exercises - conducted and owned by Service Managers, allowing exploration of themes and improvement priorities - alongside the continued use of thematic audit work (quarterly) and Practice Weeks (bi-annual).
-  **Learning log:** a learning log has recently been re-established to track all learning from QA activity and improve our ability to see through strategic level actions to completion.
-  **Self-assessment framework refreshed:** which will see us transition to a cycle of quarterly reporting of whole service performance, utilising the regular insights generated by the above.



2.2 How we evaluate our practice: Performance

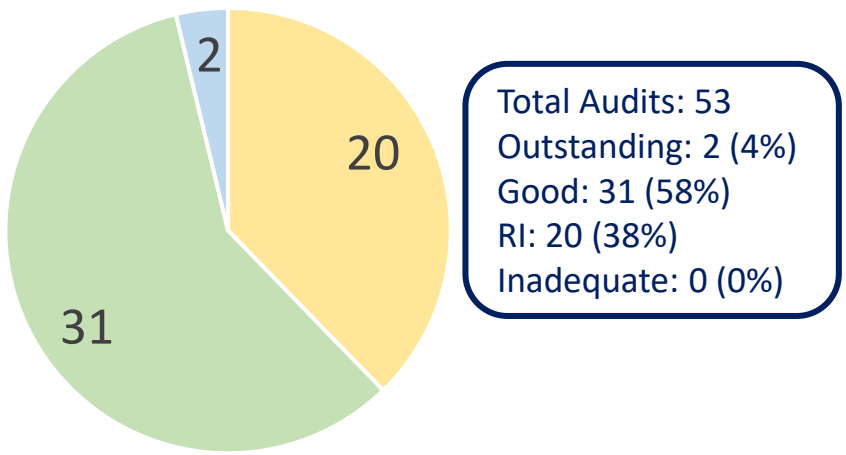
Current framework: The core components of our Performance Framework are weekly children’s social care reports and information packs (which are sent to all service and team managers), alongside monthly oversight reports that highlight key trends and areas of concern to Service Managers and ADs. The framework has also been strengthened further with the addition of a quarterly performance meeting to review a full KPI suite, with all Team Managers, Service Managers and ADs in attendance.

Looking ahead: we are currently in the process of rolling out performance reports via Microsoft Power BI. The teams already have access to live reports in relation to assessments. Contact & Referrals and Supervision live reports are being worked on and the plan is to implement all key management indicators in Power BI. The reports will alert us to any gaps in recording or performance much more quickly and will also provide us with greater clarity around latest challenges and/or areas of strength.



2.3 Learning from Audits - Reflective Practice Core Audits

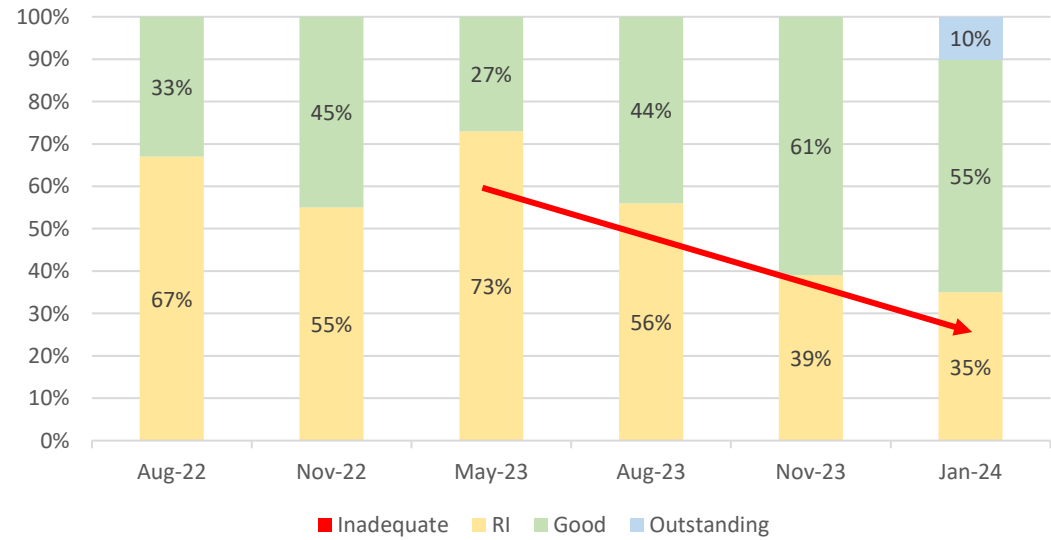
Overall Scores Since Nov 2022



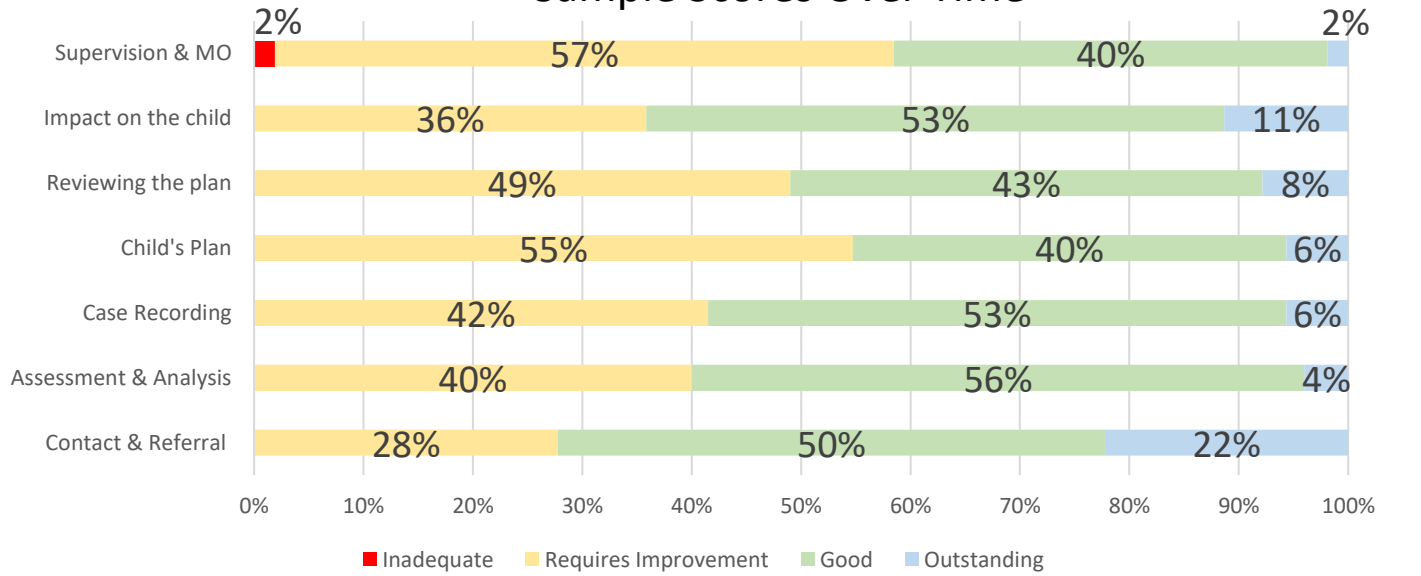
Total Audits: 53
Outstanding: 2 (4%)
Good: 31 (58%)
RI: 20 (38%)
Inadequate: 0 (0%)

- In November 2022 we launched a revised Reflective Core Audit programme (see 2.1 for more details)
- Over two cycles of activity, we have completed 53 case audits, with 62% scoring Good or above (see left)
- Although audits prior to November are not fully comparable (due to the introduction of a new tool), overall scores for each sample show a clear trajectory towards Good and away from RI over the last 12 months. (see bottom left)
- Practice Scores suggested strengths in relation to **Contact & Referral**, as well as **Impact on the Child**. (see bottom right)
- Although they show some signs of improvement, **Planning** and **Supervision** have been comparatively weaker scoring areas in recent months. This correlates with our understanding of our service, and our improvement priorities.
- Our reporting now provides team-level breakdowns of scores for each practice area. Data is only indicative at this stage, but over time we will have a much clearer understanding of how strengths and weakness fall across our Service.
- Team-level reports are also circulated to Team Managers after each cycle, who are asked to provide strategic actions in response - this has prompted a cycle of regular review and reflection from managers about how they can drive consistency in priority areas.

Sample Scores Over Time

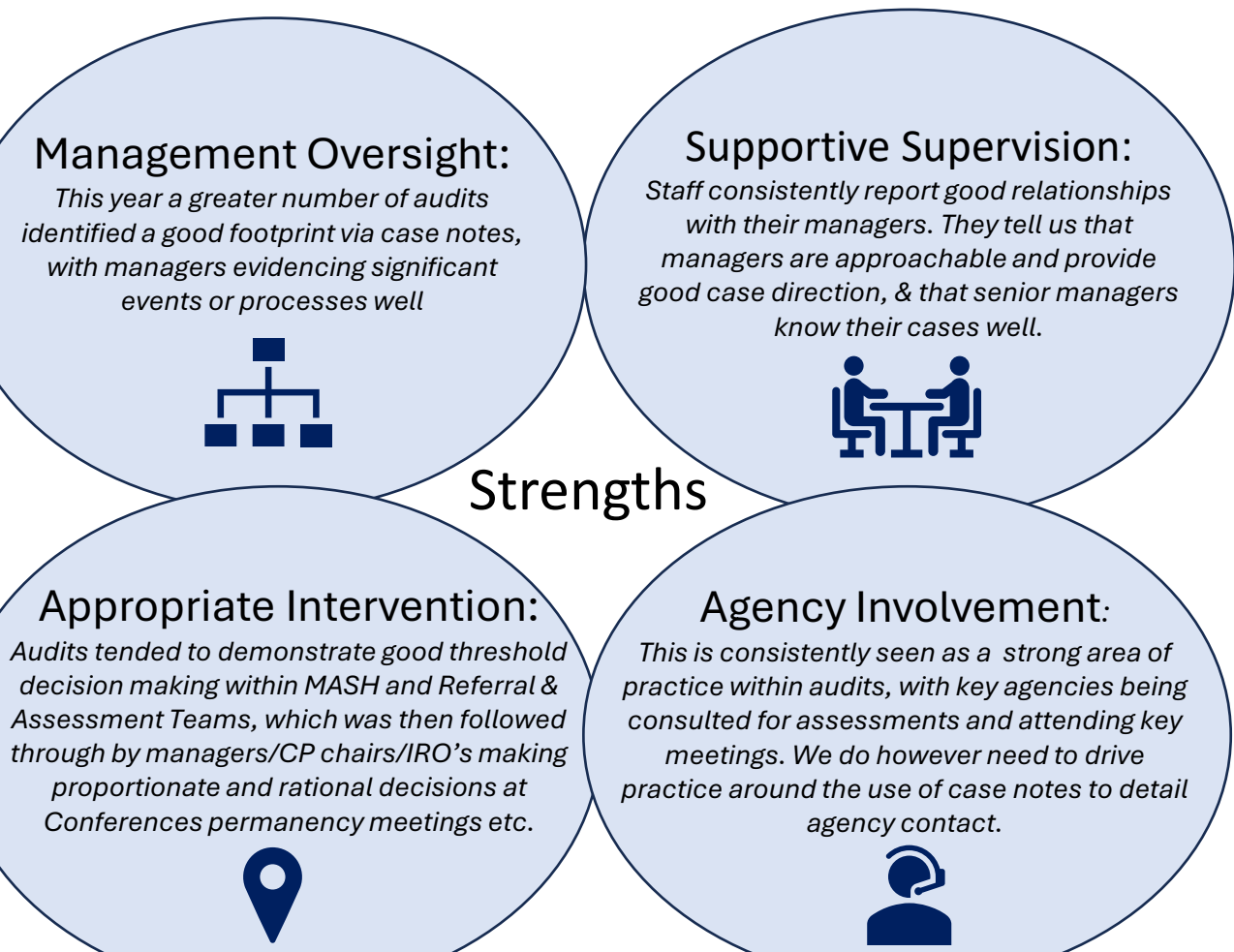


Sample Scores Over Time



2.3 Learning from Audits - Reflective Practice Core Audits (Part 2)

As part of our recently revised Core Audit process, our Moderation Panel now review between 20-30% of all audits. The primary purpose of this is to review the quality and consistency of auditing across each cycle of work, and to drive standards in our auditing practice over time. However, the panel is also uniquely placed to identify service-level practice themes that emerge across the year. Along with the quantitative findings detailed on the previous slide, these themes are fed-back to practitioners regularly in our bi-monthly feedback sessions. A summary of some of the Moderation Panel's most recent findings is presented below.



Areas for development

Quality of Supervision:
Although some improvements have been made in this practice area, audits show that our supervision is still not consistently reflective or analytical - with relevant fields to record Reflection, Scaling and Analysis not always completed. In addition, audits show that many supervisions need to more explicitly focus on the child's plan, and evidence that they are being used as a mechanism to drive progress in children's outcomes.

Evidencing Direct Work:
Although fantastic examples of direct work are regularly seen via audit, the child's voice remains absent in much of our case recording, particularly in the context of child visits - where practitioners should be routinely quoting what children tell them. A number of audit cycles also show that workers need to improve their recording of observations of pre-verbal or non-verbal children. In a related point, staff often need to more clearly evidence that children are being seen alone during visits and in different settings.

SMART Planning:
Auditors have identified in the last 2 cycles (Nov 23 and Jan 24) that the new Mosaic plan template is making our plans much clearer. However, there is still some work to be done to ensure that all plans are SMART, with actions linked to timescales and mapped clearly against dates. The production of a child-friendly version of the plan is also a WBC practice standard, which auditors rarely see evidenced.

2.4 Learning from Thematic Audits

Early Signs of Exploitation Thematic Audit

November 2023



Rationale:

Our March 2023 ILACS highlighted our response to exploitation as an area of improvement, particularly in relation to lower risk cases.

Strengths identified

- ✓ Contact records were generally very good with vulnerability to exploitation considered.
- ✓ The quality of CFAs were generally good - holistic, and identifying push/pull factors
- ✓ Good examples of pastoral support work from schools and colleges were also noted.

Areas for development:

Some 'trigger incident focused' contacts/referrals; Some Lines of enquiry identified not being followed up in the CFA process; Two cases needing more mapping with other vulnerable young people; 3 CFAs lacked curiosity; 3 cases where the screening tool was referred to but had not been uploaded; 2 cases where the CSE tool had not been used when there was a need for this; 4 cases where there was a delay in Early Help support and then the families withdrew; Questions over how we maintain oversight where there is no ongoing CS involvement; 3 cases where schools had referred in without having completed the CE screening tool

Actions:

1. MASH refreshing use of short screening tool for all children 8 years plus (Feb 2024)
2. ATMs to routinely review exploitation tool, risks and associates in supervision. (Feb 2024)
3. New process for Managers to provide direction re LOE at point of contact (Mar 24).
4. MASH Manager to share learning from audit with DSLs (Feb 2024)
5. Practitioner-led Duty System to be implemented to manage EH waiting list (Jan 24)
6. Business Case progressed and agreed to expand EH capacity (Jan 24)

Next steps:

Dip Sample Audit planned for May 2024, and a full multi-agency thematic audit planned for later in 2024.

Care Leavers Thematic Audit

January 2024



Rationale:

Our March 2023 ILACS indicated that we needed to improve the quality of our pathway plans, and that we could do more to support our most vulnerable care leavers with complex needs.

Strengths identified

- ✓ 78% of pathway plans were judged to be well written.
- ✓ Pathway Plans included the young person's voice, with quotes regularly used.
- ✓ PAs were working hard to build positive relationships and provide targeted support.
- ✓ Two examples of PA visiting that exceeded practice standards (in line with wishes of YP)

Areas for development:

Pathway plan reviews being held in timescale (and recorded promptly); Ensuring multi-agency input into pathway plan reviews, where relevant; Ensuring consistency in the use of the Pathway Plan Review step on Mosaic; The timeliness of management sign-off of pathway plans and reviews; Completing pathway plan documents fully, with SMART actions and contingency plans; Providing copies of pathway plans to all young people (+providing translated copies).

Actions:

1. Revised Practice standards on timeliness of pathway plan reviews launched (Jan 24), with target set to achieve 80% of plans being up-to-date and signed off by Aug 24.
2. Ongoing work to support SWs and PAs to navigate reviews when the young person is not engaged or choosing not to participate - including an away day in Sep 24, and plans for new practice guidance by the end of May 24.
3. Project underway to develop more meaningful data around timeliness of pathway plan reviews and sign off processes. (Initial data sets commenced in Jan 24)
4. All plans to be translated into first language (where required) by Aug 24

Next steps:

A full dip sample schedule for Corporate Parenting is currently being agreed, which will provide more regular opportunities for review and reflection across our Care Leaver service.

2.5 Learning from recent Dip Sample work

CIN and CP Planning

December 2023



Rationale: to assess impact of our new plan format, following roll out in Oct 24

Methodology: 18 cases reviewed (6 CIN, 12 CP) by QAST Service Manager and 4 CP Chairs

Strengths: *Plans were generally written using clear language and were easy to understand; Most of the actions that were recorded supported the family to achieve required outcomes and had clear timescales; plans were also recorded within timescale.*

Areas to improve: *Required outcomes were not always recorded concisely, or in separate boxes; Actions sometimes needed to more explicitly align with the outcomes to be achieved; Timescales often needed more clarity over dates/timeframes; Examples were seen where the name and role of professionals responsible for actions were not recorded; Examples of contingency planning that could have been stronger; Plans no routinely identifying safety/support person.*

Actions: Findings shared with relevant operational teams (Jan 24); New guidance on contingency planning produced by QAST (Feb 24); Further dip sample scheduled (Apr 24).

S47s Enquiries

January 2024



Rationale: Line of enquiry developed via Strategy Meeting dip sample in December. (See above)

Methodology: 15 cases looked at by Service Manager, alongside 4 TMs and 7 ATMs

Strengths: *Section 47 outcomes are routinely reviewed by 2 managers; Managers generally agree on threshold for progressing to ICPC, with clear rationale for decision making recorded; Only one example of a SW having a different recommendation; All Section 47's referred to the support to be provided to the family; Actions from the strategy meeting followed though in the S47 in most cases;*

Areas to improve: *7 cases where the threshold was in question by the audit team. Some inconsistencies around our approach to undertaking agency checks, including the agencies that we should be contacting routinely; Some issues agency checks not being returned before the S47 is concluded; SW analysis not always on file.*

Actions: Team Managers to develop content for a team-level workshop, focusing on threshold application, agency checks and risk assessment/analysis work (Mar 24)

Strategy Meetings

December 2023



Rationale: to assure ourselves re: swiftness of decision making and application of threshold

Methodology: 15 cases reviewed by the Service Manager for Safeguarding, and 4 TMs.

Strengths: *Wherever meetings were held out of timescale, the decision could be justified; Decision making to convene a strategy meeting was appropriate and in accordance with thresholds; 80% of strategy meetings were attended by key partners.*

Areas to improve: *The justification for out of timescale meetings was not always recorded; Decision making around S47 was only found to be proportionate in 7 of the cases (with a further 4 partially so); only 5 of the Strats looked at had SMART actions; and only 6 met our expectations around recording.*

Actions: *Reminder sent to all managers about recording rationales for out of timescale meetings; Further dip sample around S47s to take place (see below); R&A SMART action checklist to be replicated for long-term team use; Practice Standards around recording to be clarified, to clarify that only actions need to be circulated within 24 hours.*

Pre-Proceedings

February 2024



Rationale: to evaluate progress in improving the clarity of pre-proceedings letters, following a point raised by inspectors on this issue in our March 2023 ILACs.

Methodology: 15 recently concluded PLO cases reviewed by Service Manager for Safeguarding

Strengths: *Most letters were clearly set out - relating the concern to the impact on the child, and listing our expectations concisely; In almost all cases, progress was being made in line with the child's plan; Of the 9 cases that stepped down, 2 were only just outside of the 16-week timescale*

Areas to improve: *Some letters could have been improved by making the concerns clearer and more focused, alongside more realistic & SMART expectations for change; correlation found between the use of experts or ISW parenting assessments, and the likelihood of delays.*

Actions: Further guidance around Pre-proceeding letters and a good example to be shared with the teams (Mar 24); internal QA process for letters to be developed, to avoid dependence on Joint Legal Team; Shift towards our internal Compass team coordinating and instructing ISW's to progress, to help reduce delays; Preferred provider for cognitive assessments to be explored.

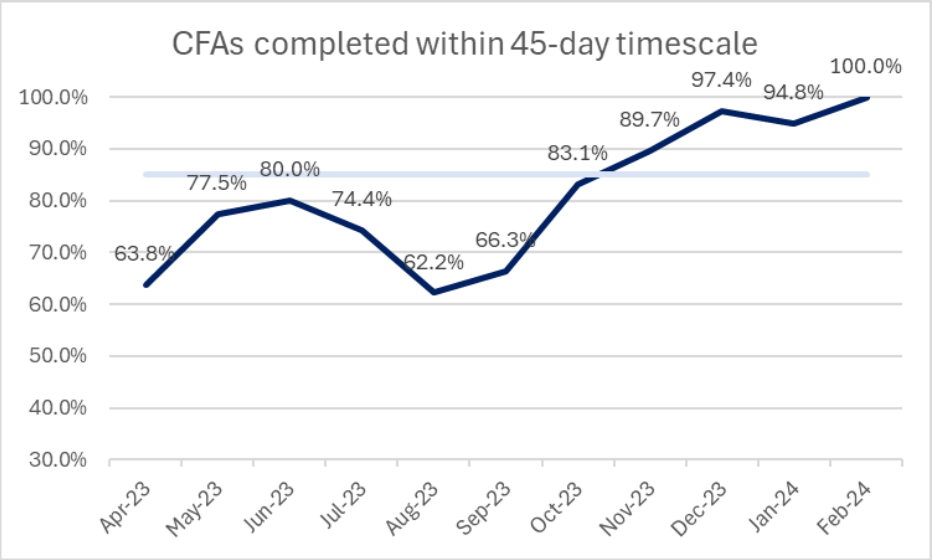
2.6 Learning from performance data (Part 1)



In Wokingham, our Performance Data is routinely reviewed and scrutinised via various forums (see 2.2 for detail), so that we can better understand the quality of our practice and where it might need to improve. This year we have paid particular attention to ensuring that our data provides more granular detail about where barriers to progress might exist, with breakdowns of team and practitioner-level performance being increasingly used. This approach has led to examples of sustained improvement in various areas of our work.

Assessments within 45 days

In October, a new data set was created to provide the R&A Team Manger with improved oversight of barriers to increased compliance against this important indicator. This provided data broken down by worker and team, allowing for a more focused responses. We have subsequently seen our performance rise (and stay) above our 85% target.



CP Conferences

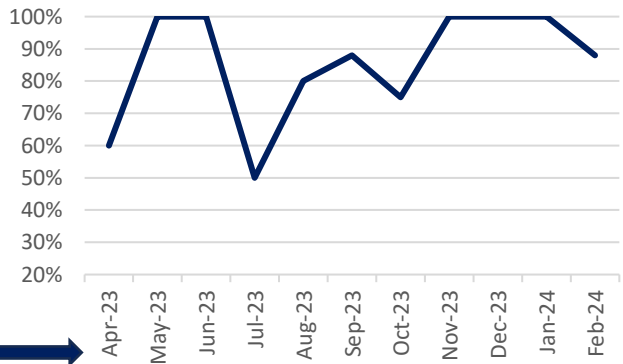
CP Conferences being delivered within timescale has remained a strength for Wokingham, with a rate of **100%** compliance maintained for the financial year so far. Our performance in distributing CP plans following conference is also good, with latest Q3 data indicating a **93%** compliance rate within agreed timescales (95% in Q2 and 87% in Q1). Similarly, the distribution of CP minutes within timescale has been consistently strong, with **83%** sent within timescale during Q3 (90% in Q2 and 73% in Q1).

Key Care Leavers outcomes

In-touch rates for our current cohort of care leavers (who accept a service) have remained very high this year, averaging at **98%** for the financial year. In addition, this cohort are almost all in suitable accommodation, with our data indicating an average of **96%** of our young people meeting this criteria for the year.

IHAs in timescale for CIC

Last year we had variable outcomes against this measure, which prompted us to instil regular reporting to our Corporate Parenting Board. A concerted effort from our service has seen compliance improve considerably, with the financial year reporting an overall compliance rate of **85%** so far, compared to **45%** last year.



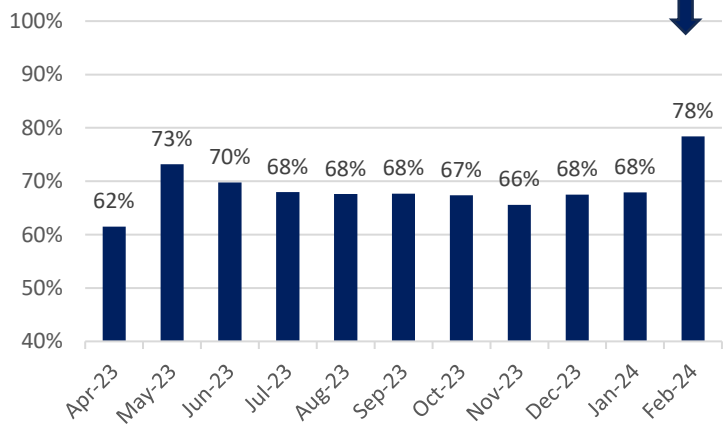
2.6 Learning from performance data (Part 2)



Our ambitions to further refine our performance data, in order to maximise its impact and drive service improvement, will continue next year. Some examples of the metrics that we know we need to improve upon further, or where we anticipate performance data will be used more effectively going forward , are set out below.

Children in Need Visits

Our current calculation of CIN visits taking place within timescales suggests that we need to improve in this area of practice, with the indicator struggling to get above 70% for much of this year. However, we are aware that our use of data needs to improve, to provide a truer representation of practice. Currently, percentages are calculated from the number of visits that took place that month – thus not accounting for those that did not occur and should have done, and not allowing us to understand where barriers to progress are arising. Work is underway to address this, and evidencing an improved picture in terms of CIN visiting will be a priority for 24-25.

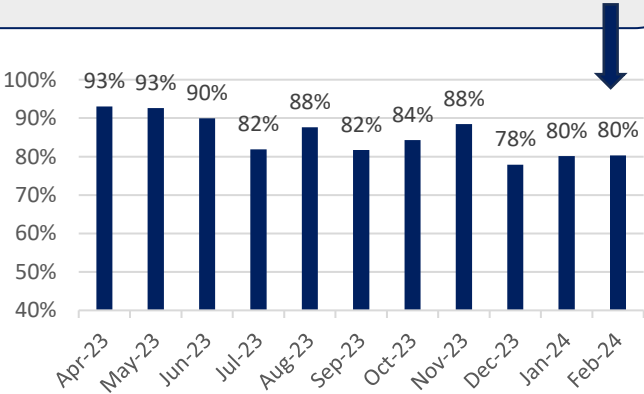


Frequency of Supervision

In line with our Improvement Plan, improving the quality and consistency of supervision is a core priority for us as a service. However, our understanding of whether supervision is happening within timescales has been limited to snapshot data, and what we learn from core audit samples. A revised data set was finalised in February 2024, which means we will now be able to consider compliance across particular time frames and teams - allowing us to gain a much better understanding of how we are performing as a service (and any barriers to improvement). Frequency of supervision will remain a key area for improvement in the next financial year.

Corporate Parenting

Understanding our data across Corporate Parenting, and particularly in relation to Care Leavers, is a core component of our current Improvement Plan. In response to this, monthly Corporate Parenting Performance Clinics have recently been established, which involve each relevant team (Here4u, Family Placement, Compass and soon our residential homes) providing a short SOS report. These reports offer narrative around respective data sets and provide the team's understanding of progress and any areas of development. Ensuring this new format of performance clinic leads to tangible improvements in service delivery, and child outcomes, will be an ongoing priority for next year.



2.7 Learning from child safeguarding practice reviews

Wokingham has had three Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in recent years, known as “David”, “A&C” and “Harry”. Each review’s action plan is monitored closely by our Quality Assurance Service, with updates provided as standing items to our monthly QA Operational Group. A summary of the three reviews and the key learning they have provided is below.

DAVID

Published Feb 2023

CONTEXT: 16-year-old black British boy - Periodically missing from care placements and the family home for two years - Ongoing concerns about criminal exploitation - David seriously assaulted in 2020 with long term effects - Carers report feeling let down, judged & not listened to by agencies - David involved in a separate serious incident and is charged with murder - David is subsequently found guilty and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment.

LEARNING THEMES: Consistency in professional involvement; Agencies listening to the experiences of those exploited; Schools and communities informing safety plans; Learning from the experiences of other authorities; Effective support plans for Special Guardians; Carers managing complex needs requiring compassion; Out of borough care needs being seriously risk assessed; The need for culturally sensitive practice and a wider understanding of vicarious trauma.

ACTIONS: Learning Briefing distributed across partnership (Sep 21); All staff workshop provided with 68 attendees (July 22); Training programme reviewed to reflect key themes e.g. sessions on Anti-racism in Social Work, Street Gangs and coercive control; Thematic audit on early signs of exploitation undertaken (Nov 23); New HOTH Practice Process rolled out (Nov 23); EMRAC Terms of reference reviewed, and processes strengthened (Apr 23); Business Case agreed for new specialist exploitation post (Jan 24)

A & C

Published July 2022

CONTEXT: Two siblings under 6 sexually abused by an adult male known to their mother. (Male found guilty and convicted). Mother with borderline learning disabilities and victim of domestic abuse - Services had long-standing concerns about dangerous males accessing the home - Review agreed to consider the contact the family had with agencies and the children’s journey through services.

LEARNING THEMES: Identifying and understanding parental learning needs (and their understanding of processes); Ensuring a structured/analytical approach to child neglect; Taking a whole-family approach to assessment and intervention; Communicating with children with limited verbal skills; Recognising and acting upon “gut feelings”

ACTIONS: Learning Briefing circulated to all staff (July 22); All staff workshop with 75 attendees (Sep 22); Training programme reviewed e.g. Communication and Consultation with Children with communication difficulties (Nov 2022); New neglect screening tool and approach rolled out (Nov 23); Neglect Practice Week delivered with bespoke training (Nov 23); Safeguarding partnership progressing a neglect framework/strategy; Pan-Berks policies on children of parents with learning disabilities and sexual abuse reviewed & updated

HARRY

Published Dec 2022

CONTEXT: young male with diagnosis of Asperger’s syndrome moves to Wokingham from Reading with an EHCP - Considerable difficulties arise in securing an appropriate school placement - Various social care referrals made about threatening behaviour and possible criminal exploitation, but limited direct work takes place - At the age of 13, H uses a knife in the assault of another young person and is sentenced to a substantial period of youth detention.

LEARNING THEMES: Ensuring children with SEND are better understood; Improving information sharing when a child with an EHCP changes educational establishment; Strengthening Police culture around safeguarding; Fully understanding the needs of the family at the point of referral; The absence of specialist SEND knowledge in the Social Care Front Door; The limited impact of the Early Help offer in these circumstances.

ACTIONS: SEND team now arrange multi-disciplinary meetings for children moving LA areas; Vulnerable Learners Panel piloted to support schools; Practice standards now mandate a check of EHCP status at points of contact and assessment; Multi-agency audit of Early Help involvement with children with SEND undertaken (Jan 23); MASH now have access to EHCP plans at point of referral, and there are plans to have an education rep sit within the team; An Exclusion Prevention scheme pilot is ongoing, with 100% success rate so far.

2.8 Learning from children

In Wokingham we regularly seek the feedback of children and young people on the way in which we deliver our services. A core mechanism for obtaining this feedback is via our annual children in care **Pledge Survey**, which provides a regular check on how we are performing against the 6 key promises we make to children and young people. We are also incredibly lucky to have a very engaged and active **Children in Care Council** in Wokingham, who are supported by a Child Friendly Project Officer to regularly input into our processes and strategic thinking, with all output routinely captured in a “you said, we did” format. Finally, our recently relaunched bi-monthly **Core Audit** programme now stipulates that auditors should seek the voice of the child as part of the audit process.

Some recent examples of feedback that we have received and responded to from children & young people are as follows:

“More could be done to celebrate our achievements at school”



ISSUE: In our most recent CIC Pledge Survey, 6 respondents indicated that they did not always feel like their educational achievements were being celebrated enough. When discussing this issue with our CICC, one young person also mentioned that they sometimes forget what had been agreed in their PEP.

RESPONSE: Building on the already strong relationships that the VS has established with children, the following actions were taken in response: 1) To support participation, the VS redesigned the PEP to incorporate the STAR mission (every child is Successful, Thriving, Achieving & Resilient). 2) Since the Autumn term of 23-24, “Termly target postcards” have been sent to the child, the school, SW, & foster carer, to summarise the education priorities for the following term. 3) The VS now awards end of year certificates to all children in care to mark their educational progress and achievements.

IMPACT: Responses to a recent Virtual School questionnaire showed that our young people liked the thought that had gone into these new processes, and that they felt recognised. One young person suggested that printing the achievement certificates on card would make them feel even more special. A celebratory Awards event in the summer of 2024 is also planned, as a further opportunity to celebrate achievement.

“Tell us more about who will be caring for us, in advance”



ISSUE: Children have often told us that they want to know more about their foster carers and their new homes before being placed, and this theme arose again in our most recent CIC pledge survey for 2023, where 8 respondents indicated that they had moved without meeting their new carers in advance.

RESPONSE: The service have made a concerted effort to improve the maintenance and accuracy of Foster Care Profile documents over the last year, with a full refresh completed across May and June 2023. During the year we also consulted with our CIC Council around what these profiles should specifically focus on, who told us that information about the carer’s religion, culture and diets was often helpful, alongside lots of photos and an early indication of likely house rules. This has been fed back to our Family Placement Team for the next review process.

IMPACT: All FCs currently have a profile on file, and they are now being used regularly, including for emergency moves. A good example of their recent use was for a 15-year-old young person (ML) on an interim care order. Practitioners were able to share the profiles of the prospective foster carers in advance of ML’s placement starting, which encouraged her to meet the foster family face-to-face prior to her move.

“Help us to remember all the new names and faces”



ISSUE: In recent discussions with our CICC, our young people told us that when coming into care, it often felt difficult and overwhelming to try and remember new names and faces, at what was an already stressful time. This theme of children not always being entirely clear on who their allocated professionals were also came out in our last Pledge survey (where not all respondents said they knew who their advocate or IRO were).

RESPONSE: In light of this feedback, we decided to create “Meet the Team” postcards to give to children when they enter care. We consulted with our CICC on the design and look of these postcards, eventually settling on A5 booklets with a different colour scheme for each professional. We learned that the younger children in the group preferred the use of avatar images to represent their professionals, as these seemed friendlier. However, older groups were clear that they wanted to see real photos included, and where this was not possible, for there to be no image at all.

IMPACT: We are currently in the process of finalising these postcards, but aim to have them published and available to children entering care from April 2024. We will continue to discuss this issue with our CICC and will look to monitor impact via future Pledge surveys.

2.9 Learning from parents and carers

Listening to feedback and learning from complaints and compliments is a crucial component of our Children’s Services Quality Assurance Framework in Wokingham. Learning in these areas is collated throughout the year by a dedicated Complaints & Representations Manager and is fed back to staff and leaders regularly to ensure it drives improvement. When compared to similarly sized authorities, it is important to note that we receive a relatively small number of formal complaints (and typically complaints are outweighed by compliments). Given the low numbers, it is difficult to draw out distinct “themes”, and those that we do identify are often not representative of systemic issues. We do however take all feedback very seriously, and ensure actions are taken in response where appropriate, even if case-specific. Some examples of our recent work are set out below.

Themes from this year’s compliments

- Appreciation for how supportive Social Workers are
- The caring nature that is displayed by staff members when interacting with children and their families.
- The clarity provided in written records – such as assessment documents – that make things easy for individuals to understand.
- Positive feedback for staff who have been required to attend court hearings – ranging from internal staff feedback, legal representatives, and even Judges

Recent examples of work undertaken in response to complaints

Delay in service provision

THEME: Concerns around the timeliness of service provision and the impact that delays can have on children and their families



EXAMPLE: REDACTED



RESPONSE: REDACTED

Communication

THEME: Typically where parents feel that workers have not conducted professionally when communicating - either in their manner/tone, the timeliness of responses, or appropriateness



EXAMPLE: REDACTED



RESPONSE: REDACTED

Report accuracy

THEME: Challenges around the accuracy and style of writing in reports - including issues around what could be considered ‘matters of opinion’.



EXAMPLE: REDACTED



RESPONSE: REDACTED

Section 3:

Our plans to maintain and improve practice

3.1 Early Help

3.2 Children with Disabilities

3.3 Safeguarding children who need help and protection

3.4 Children in Care

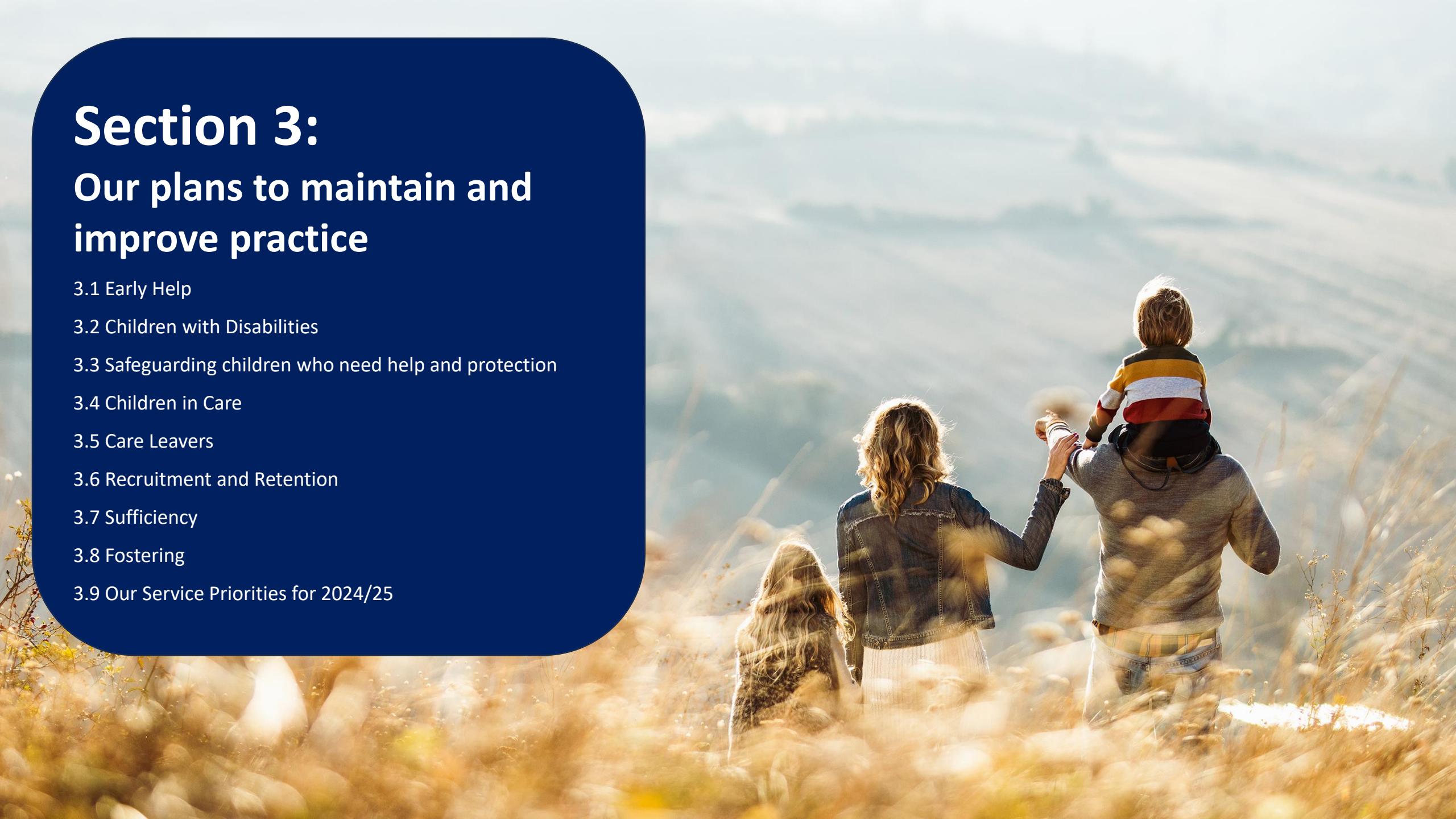
3.5 Care Leavers

3.6 Recruitment and Retention

3.7 Sufficiency

3.8 Fostering

3.9 Our Service Priorities for 2024/25



3.1 Early Help

Key achievements and progress this year

- Timely and focused interventions** - continued to be delivered to children and their families
- Key staff trained in systemic approaches** - enhancing the delivery of systemic whole family activity - including individual/group supervision.
- Delivery of a range of evidence-based parenting groups** - since Jan '23, we have delivered 6 teen courses to 37 parents, 4 primary courses to 24 parents, and 4 under-4 courses to 14 parents
- Emotional Health & Well-being Hub embedded**- sitting alongside EH to assist children access online & in person services to support emotional well-being (ARC, Kooth and Here4Youth).
- A high performing Supporting Families programme** - targets consistently achieved across the last four years; target for 2023/2024 was achieved by the end of the third quarter.
- Better Together project underway** - seeking to realise benefits of a jointly owned dataset and improve our response to need. (in partnership with Reading, West Berks and Swindon.)
- Multi-agency Early Help Assessment** - process formally launched in February 2023, seeking to reduce the number of referrals into Council-led Early Help and statutory Social Care services.
- The Palm Centre (Wokingham's centre for supervised family time)**, continued to deliver a family focused high quality service.

What's next?

- Development and implementation of the **Family Hub Model**.
- Refresh of the **Early Intervention and Prevention Partnership Strategy** to be completed by June 2024, in collaboration with our partners and the voluntary and community sector.
- Further work to embed and evidence the impact of the **Multi-agency Early Help Assessment (MEHA) framework**.

3.2 Children with Disabilities

Current
Strategic
Priorities

- **Communication** – following recent work to develop and embed a Communication Rights Charter for children with disabilities, alongside the commissioning of various communication training opportunities for staff, the service is now focusing on the development of a new communication **practice guide**.
- **Review of CANMAP** – this year we have undertaken work to improve the referral process for CANMAP (our multi-agency forum for reviewing requests for resources for children with disabilities), with the intention of improving the multi-agency decision making process.
- **Short Breaks review** – we are currently exploring the range, capacity and accessibility of our short breaks provision – considering the strengths and limitations of our Direct Payments model. This is being carried out in collaboration with young people, parents & providers, and is expected to conclude this year.
- **Improving the Register for CWD** – we are working to implement a more accessible system to hold the register for children with disabilities, which allows for self-registration and supports future service planning. An online self-referral model has now been developed and is currently being tested.
- **CAN Network** – the Service is currently looking to re-align an existing post to focus on our CAN Network, which will sit alongside the Short Break and Early Help Team. This will avoid overlap with a recently created Local Offer Officer post and will also allow for a more ‘hands on’ approach to delivery. We also have plans to make our CAN CARD more widely recognised and accepted locally.

Team-level Highlights

ASSIST

(Autism support services)

This year: Regular opportunities for parent support extended so that families can dip in & out when required; Successful hybrid working offering a range of parent learning across the day and evening. **Next year:** Partnership working with Reading University planned on student placements and joint development of programmes to help young people’s own understanding of their autistic self; and widening the licenced training team for NAS programmes to include EPs and Early Years.

FIRST

(Sleep issues, anxiety and behaviour)

Development of new courses for young people, professionals and parents. *Switch Off to Sleep* – delivered to 6th form students at Addington School (positive feedback); *Engage your Rage* workshop to be delivered to students to help them regulate their feelings & emotions. *The Importance of Sleep* and *Making Sense of Behaviour* workshop planned for the spring (in addition to regular training for parents/carers).

Short Breaks & Early Help

Currently supporting 181 children with disabilities to access a form of short breaks; all cases have an allocated worker and a single point of contact, all have met face to face; strong connections with service providers, education and health built over the past 2 years; streamlined service that offers consistency and a joined-up approach to the work that we do with families.

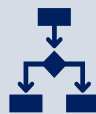
CWD

(Social Work)

Outstanding and Good gradings received in last two Core Audit cycles; Positive Ofsted Focused Visit findings; Social workers know their children well, apply thresholds correctly, and build positive relationships; stable team.

3.3 Safeguarding children who need help and protection

Identifying need and applying thresholds



- 1) This year we have undertaken significant work to drive the numbers of CFA's completed within 45 days. Next year we want to review similar check points within the post-assessment journey of a child, to better understand case progression.
- 2) We have recently appointed additional management capacity to our MASH Team - this will allow us to respond to two points raised in our recent ILACS, by a) permitting us to evidence written management oversight at the point of contact, and b) rolling out a more sophisticated framework of timescales for responding to contacts in the MASH.
- 3) We also have plans to bring dedicated education and domestic abuse posts within our MASH team, to strengthen multi-agency work and broaden expertise.

Management oversight of practice



- 1) Our Supervision template was revised and rolled out in April 2023, providing a renewed focus on the tracking of SMART actions. Although some progress has been made, we know we have more to do in this area. Our Service Managers are currently working on a plan to simplify the supervision form further, so that it is more consistently used to drive plans.
- 2) This year we clarified our expectations around the use of Management Oversight. Our current thinking is that our new supervision form will also be used for MO, to create a more fluid and easy-to-use system for managers to record all forms of case oversight.
- 3) Expectations around mid-way reviews of CP Plan were clarified last autumn, with CP Chairs now undertaking these for all cases. We have created a recording mechanism to measure compliance and will monitor progress via CP quarterly reporting next year.
- 4) Our ongoing L&D focus on supervision continues next year, with a programme of learning opportunities for both supervisors and supervisees.

Participation & direct work



- 1) Obtaining the voice of the child is perceived as an ongoing strength across our practice, but our core audits tell us that our direct work is not always being recorded or evidenced, and at times we do not do enough to bring out the views of children within sibling groups in our recording.

Making good decisions and providing effective help



- 1) In October we rolled out our new plan format for CIN and CP Plans, which was commented on positively in our most recent Focused Visit. We also have positive early indications of impact from recent Dip Samples of plans, and look forward to undertaking a full thematic audit on this subject in the summer, once the new format has fully embedded.
- 2) We recently dip sampled our decision making around Strategy Meetings and S47s, with broadly positive findings. We do however want to sharpen our use of SMART actions following Strats, and we want to explore our S47 decision making in more detail in the coming months, to understand whether we are taking a consistent approach, and the factors that influence decision making
- 3) The timeliness of CP conferences has remained strong over the last year, but we know there is more to do to improve the timeliness of social work reports being produced within 5 days – this remains a priority for 24-25.
- 4) We are confident that our PLO letters have improved significantly since our last ILACs, in terms of how accessible and clear they are for parents and carers. However, work to assure ourselves of this has alerted us to delays often being caused by ISWs and expert assessments. Next year we want to transition towards our Compass team coordinating and instructing ISW's to help reduce delays & we also want to explore a preferred provider system for cognitive assessments.

Responding to all types of abuse & vulnerability



- 1) Following our Harry SCPR, last year we introduced new expectations for social care practitioners to check and review the EHCP status of all children.
- 2) We recently introduced a new Harm Outside the Home (HOTH) process, providing flexibility for practitioners around visiting timescales, and introducing the use of "Context Meetings". Our approach to exploitation will also be strengthened further by the creation of a specialist exploitation post, which will be appointed to imminently.
- 3) Our strategic response to exploitation has also been sharpened, with all EMRAC processes reviewed and strengthened. Next year we are looking to expand this forum's remit to include 18–25-year-olds.
- 4) Our recent thematic audit on exploitation evidenced strong practice but highlighted some required work around the use and recording of screening tools – this will be a priority for 24-25.
- 5) Following the launch of a new Neglect Tool and approach last year, inspectors were very positive about our response to neglect in our most recent FV. We are planning thematic audit work in the summer to assure ourselves that this progress continues.

3.4 Children in care

Making good decisions for children in care



- 1) CIC reviews continue to be held promptly - 96% of 111 reviews were held within timescales in Q3, with 80% of review decisions completed in 5 working days.
- 2) Permanency Tracker Meetings continue to take place monthly within our long-term teams to tackle any instances of drift and delay.
- 3) We believe we are making good progress towards ensuring all children experience smooth transitions into adulthood, driven by strong pathway planning and supervision - ensuring consistency in this area of practice will be a priority for 24-25.
- 4) We believe our assessments are robust, but timely sign-off by managers remains an area for improvement.
- 5) Our care plan template is also currently in the process of being reviewed, with input from our young people to ensure it is as effective as it can be.

Helping and protecting



1) Our missing data for 23-24 is showing an increasingly improving picture, with just 98 episodes of children missing from home (compared to 161 in 22-23) and 34 episodes of children missing from care (compared to 51 last year). In March we published a new [Children Missing from Home or Care Policy](#), seeking to standardise our practice and improve uptake of RHIs. Uptake of RHIs remains an area of focus for us going into the next financial year, with this year's figures showing an acceptance rate of 68% for children missing from home, but only 46% for CIC, We are aware that we still need to do more to learn from children's experiences in this area, and plan to undertake more regular and robust analysis of our missing data on a quarterly basis next year. This work will be supported by our new specialist exploitation post, which will be appointed to in the coming months.

Learning and enjoyment



- 1) Virtual School attendance at all PEP meetings has continued this year, and we have improved the QA of our PEPs, with 4 personalised versions of the document for Early Years, Statutory Aged Children, Post-16 Children and UASCs.
- 2) Our VS offer to UASC continues to expand, - we have delivered an ESOL Summer Camp, ESOL tuition package and 'college ready bags. Next year we are seeking to build on this further, by producing a UASC Handbook in partnership with the SE Virtual School network
- 3) 93% of our CiC of statutory age (5-16) are in schools rated by Ofsted as Good or better.

Participation and direct work with children in care



- 1) Participation in CIC reviews remains strong - in Q3, 100% of children over the age of 4 participated in their reviews. Our Team of IROs also now meet with children and parents before review meetings, to promote meaningful participation. This practice will continue next year.
- 2) Following feedback from children last year about not always receiving their review documentation, we started to write summary letters directly to children following their reviews. It will be a priority for 24-25 to ensure that this practice expectation continues and is fulfilled.
- 3) Our children's advocate is currently supporting 15 CIC (including 3 UASC) and 7 care leavers & continues to play a crucial role in our service.
- 4) With the support of a Child Friendly Support Officer, our CIC Council has had the opportunity to regularly engage with our service this year, with a robust "you said, we did" framework now established. We are hoping to use our upcoming Pledge Survey to assess how we have progressed against some of the priorities they have communicated to us. (see slide 2.8)
- 5) An interim project has been set up to help provide later life letters to our young people who have not yet had this. We know that focused work is needed around Life Journey/Story work, as this is not yet taking place consistently.

Stability and permanence



- 1) The number of children with 3+ placement Moves in the last 12 months is just 3 (2% of our cohort).
- 2) Permanency tracking panels have recently been set up to ensure matching/ permanence is actively being pursued across all settings - the panel also track younger age groups to ensure plans are proactively progressed then presented to Fostering Matching panel
- 3) As part of our Improvement Plan's objectives to strengthen the recording of our permeancy decision making, we have recently rolled out a new Permanency Planning Meeting Agenda and a fortnightly Permanency Planning Panel – impact will be monitored.

Health



- 1) We have seen strong performance across our key health indicator e.g. 68% immunisations up to date: 71% dental checks: 88% health checks (as of Jan 24).
- 2) Our recently established Children in Care CAMHS service (joint with Reading & West Berks) is providing young person-centred support without significant waiting times, and has received 39 Wokingham referrals so far this financial year. Standardised outcome measures are being developed for our reporting in Q4.

3.5 Care Leavers

Relationships and participation



- 1) Following our ILACS last year, we have put renewed focus on our work with hard-to-reach/engage care leavers. We undertook case reviews of those considered not-in-touch last summer, which prompted us to publish revised [guidance](#) on working with hard-to-reach individuals, with new expectations around management oversight for those not in touch.
- 2) Care Leavers aged 21+ who no longer need formal pathway planning are written to on an annual basis to remind them of the service available to them, should they need it. Work is underway to establish a Local Offer platform on the ICS system for this cohort.
- 3) A thematic audit undertaken in Jan 24 found that PA's knew their young people well, and worked hard to build positive relationship, and to deliver tailored support.
- 4) We have continued with a busy programme of participatory events for our young people, including Eid celebrations, CIC summer event, camping and a Christmas lunch.
- 5) We have created a dedicated **Care Leaver Forum**, to try and develop more opportunities for young people to inform the delivery of our services. Although this has led to some meaningful engagement, (including input on our pathway plan template), we know that this forum needs to be further embedded, to make engagement with our young people more routine.
- 6) We are delighted to have a Care Leaver on our Governors Board for our Virtual School.

Employment, education and training



- 1) EET and HE figures amongst Care Leavers remain strong. At the close of the last financial year, In 2023 we had 12% of our care leavers at university (Quartile A), which compares with 6% nationally.
- 2) Last year we introduced a dedicated Care Leaver Apprenticeship Programme within the local authority. We are yet to receive interest in this scheme from our current cohort, and so we are exploring how we might be able to broaden its appeal, with input from our young people.

Local offer for care leavers



- 1) We know that we need to do more to make care leavers aware of the content of our offer, & the services we can offer them. Following feedback in our March ILACS, we also want to review the wording of the document, to ensure the entitlements are as clear as possible. We are planning a full review in the coming months, followed by a period of consultation with our young people, to assure ourselves that the document is as effective and clear as possible.

Support into adulthood



- 1) Our joint-housing panel is now well embedded and continues to meet fortnightly, in order to discuss latest housing need and promote joint working with housing. This has offered some good multi agency collaboration to help support our young people into independent living but also support some of our young people where they are at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. A new SHAP housing project has been launched and will be able to offer opportunities for our most vulnerable care leavers.
- 2) An interim project has been set up to provide later life letters to an identified group of young people who have not yet had this. However, we are aware that this is only a short-term solution, and that more work is needed. Next year we hope to explore ways in which we can move towards more informal mechanisms for life journey work being captured, to support our improvement.
- 3) Our Staying Put Policy has recently been reviewed, with a renewed focus on contact and supervision during these arrangements.

Making good decisions for care leavers



- 1) We have recently commenced a review of our current Pathway Plan format, to consider if it does enough to support effective/concise plans, with co-production with our young people. A final draft will be drawn up shortly for final sign off by our young people, before being progressed
- 2) We continue to allocate PAs at 16 to ensure smooth and effective pathway planning.
- 3) We have continued to embed Systemic Practice across our Care Leaver Team, with various team members having already completed recent training opportunities in this field.

Health and emotional well-being



- 1) This year we have made significant progress on the timely completion and actioning of IHA and RHA's (see previous slide), which followed a focused piece of work and monthly multiagency meetings between CS and health. Building on this, the team ensure that all care leavers are provided with their health history before they turn 18, providing as much meaningful information as possible, and supporting their transition into adulthood and independence.

Helping and protecting



- 1) Monthly Contextual Safeguarding meetings have been set up with our local provisions - London Road and P3 - and we have plans for these to be relaunched, with inclusion of other agencies such as PYJS, Police and Housing.

3.6 Recruitment and Retention

At Wokingham we believe that our staff are our greatest asset. Over recent years we have worked hard at creating a supportive and nurturing working environment for practitioners, which is conducive to high quality and relationship-based practice. Key updates this year were as follows:

- **A strong pipeline of newly qualified social workers:** In 2023/24 we had a total of 12 ASYEs join our ASYE Programme. In 2024/25 we are working towards achieving a similar number.
- **Clear and equitable routes for progression:** We continue to promote our SW Progression Policy, with 11 workers promoted via this scheme over the last 18 months (all are still with Wokingham).
- **Maintaining a competitive R&R offer:** including a recently approved a £3,000 Market Supplement for qualified social work staff from April 2024.
- **Partnering with Frontline:** Frontline have recently approved our request to partner, and we plan to receive and support 5 'frontline trainees' later this year.
- **Apprenticeships:** We were successful in our application to DfE to receive a grant to support 5 Children's Social Work Apprentices. Recruitment is underway with successful candidates starting in September 2024



Agency Staff

2023 National Average: 17.8%
2023 Stat Neighbour Rate: 22.7%
2023 WBC Rate: 18.9%

Latest rate of agency: 27%

Analysis: although the market for experienced social workers remains challenging, our agency use has been stable for the last 6 months and is forecast to remain at this level for the coming three months. It is also notable that around 30% of our locum workforce is in place to cover sick or maternity leave (as opposed to vacancy cover). Our locums are also managed carefully as important contributors to our workforce and are encouraged to take up permanent roles.



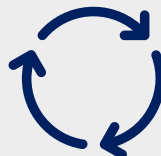
Caseloads

2023 National Average: 16 cases
2023 Stat Neighbour Rate: 15.6 cases
2023 WBC Rate: 14.4 cases

Latest average caseload by team:

Referral & Assessment Team: 15.8 cases
Brambles Long-Term Team: 17.3 case
Conifers Long-Term Team: 17.36 cases
Here4U: 14.7 cases
Family Placement: 10.9 cases
Children with Disabilities: 14 cases

Analysis: Averages naturally vary significantly between teams, but our figures are stable and compare favourably to national equivalents. Inspectors noted manageable caseloads across much of our service in our recent March ILACS, and again in our most recent Focused Visit.



Turnover Rates

2023 National Average Rate: 15.9%
2023 Statistical Neighbour Rate: 20.9
2023 WBC Rate: 12.9%

Latest rates of turnover:

Q1: 10.9%
Q2: 14.25%
Q3: 16.67%

At a local level we monitor our Qualified Social Worker turnover rate on a quarterly basis. We continue to perform well against this metric when compared to our statistical neighbours and national averages. We feel that this is a good indication of our growing strength in relation to R&R, and correlates to the findings of our recent Focused Visit, where staff were said to feel valued.



Absence Rates

2023 National Average Rate: 15.9%
2023 Statistical Neighbour Rate: 20.9 %
2023 WBC Rate: 12.9 %

Latest calculation of average absence: 14 days.

Our latest calculation of absence across social care & early intervention staff is relatively high. However, our overall absence rates compare favourably nationally, as can be seen by the 2023 LAIT data above. Absence naturally presents us with additional challenges, in an already difficult environment for R&R. However, we feel that we have a clear understanding of the reasons behind our absence and are able to take appropriate action to ensure our service remains unaffected.

3.7 Sufficiency

Sufficiency Review

Context: In 2023, Wokingham undertook a comprehensive review of its placement sufficiency. This found that children were often being placed too far away from Wokingham, and that there was a clear need to open additional local residential provision.

Response: following our review, Wokingham purchased two new properties - one local 4 bed Emotional Behaviour Difficulties (EBD) home and a 2 bed Complex home. The intention of this local provision will be to allow more children with complex needs to remain in (or return to) Wokingham. We also believe that it will support us to avoid the use of unregistered placements. It is also our hope that this investment in local children's homes will, where appropriate, allow some of our most vulnerable children and young people in care to live closer to the things they hold dear – allowing them to maintain ties with their family and friends, build effective community networks and continue their education, employment or training with the least possible disruption. We anticipate that our plans will also increase local sufficiency for the medium to long term - helping us to control unpredictable external placement spend.

Next steps: We have successfully recruited the Registered Manager and Assistant Head of Homes, and further recruitment is underway at present. Renovation works have started, and we aim to open both homes in August 2024.

Housing Needs Review

In 2023 we also completed a housing needs review for Children in Care and Care Leavers. This project determined that we needed to increase local provision in a number of key areas, including:

Supported Lodgings

RESPONSE: A tender is currently live, inviting providers to bid for a contract to provide 10 Supported Lodgings placements and 2 emergency beds. The contract commences in July 2024.

Semi-independent Accommodation

RESPONSE: A business case is currently being drafted to purchase a property in Wokingham to provide an additional 8 placements.

Care Leavers Housing

RESPONSE: We have purchased and/or are renovating a number of properties within the borough to provide shared housing locally for our care leavers. Current plans will offer 30 new places to care leavers.

A note on the registration of Supported Accommodation

In May 2023 WBC wrote to all Providers of supported accommodation to confirm their intentions in relation to registering with Ofsted under the new regulations. They were invited to share any concerns they had regarding compliance, costs and their ability to meet the registration requirements. We have been working closely with providers to ensure they are prepared, and we have offered support where needed. All Providers commissioned by WBC have registered with Ofsted.



3.8 Fostering

In 2023 we initiated a Fostering Transformation Project, and this year we have entered the implementation phase of the project. Progress against some of our core objectives is summarised below.

1) Creating dedicated management, duty & specialist posts, to ensure a sufficient focus on recruitment, utilisation & permanence

Progress this year: 0.5 R+A ATM and 2 x Family Support Workers are now in post, supporting carers and managing duty. As a result of this, SSWs can now provide more of a focus on permanence work and providing strong reflective supervision.

2) Ensuring we continue to have competitive fees, allowances and benefits for Foster Carers

Progress this year: We have implemented a Council Tax policy that ensures equity amongst our carers. A comparative analysis against other LAs has been undertaken, to ensure we continue to provide a competitive and fair offer, with equal or better than new National Minimum Allowances for all carers.

3) Bringing carers to the forefront of everything we do

Progress this year: Our two new Family Support Workers are allowing SSWs more time to undertake bespoke and purposeful work with their carers. The post-holders are also able to offer the team support with complex placements.

4) Preparing and supporting carers to meet the needs of more children and young people

Progress this year: As noted above, our Family Support Workers now add another layer of support and strength to our offer - offering hands on, routine-based support. Our new R+A ATM also delivers foster carer preparation training themselves, and often in creative ways, with a focus on including different carers with different experiences, so that individuals are well prepared for the fostering journey

5) Increasing fostering household approvals

Progress this year: Due to our increased focus on recruitment within our Fostering Service, this year has seen 10 new approved households. This planned increase in approvals has been achieved 12 months ahead of schedule.

6) Initiating a Regional Fostering Recruitment Hub

Progress this year: WBC has been playing a leading role in the development of a Southeast Regional Recruitment Hub. The pilot scheme will see a £390k regional recruitment campaign across 18 LAs/agencies.



Mockingbird Fostering Model

Our first Mockingbird constellation was initiated last year, and we are already seeing impact. Our hub home carers are providing weekly tuition for a child; hosting group sessions for families during school holidays; organising coffee mornings and offering regular 1:1 support for carers, which is all being well received. We believe this is having a tangible impact on the morale and retention of our foster carers, and we will continue to monitor impact next year.



3.9 Our Service Priorities for 2024/25

Responding to *Stable Homes Built on Love* & the National Framework

In the context of significant national reform, we will review & evaluate the Best Start for Life, Helping Early and Family Help approaches, with our approach supported by an improved and better understood integrated ordinarily available & specialist offer.

Maintaining high levels of school attendance & support for vulnerable learners

We will achieve this via the delivery of our local area SEND and Inclusion strategy, and by developing the support provided to kinship carers, in alignment with the new national strategy on kinship care.

Working with key partners to further develop preparation for adulthood pathways and positive transitions.

Increasing the Recruitment & Retention of WBC Foster Carers

We will continue to develop our network of fantastic local foster carers, supported by our ongoing Fostering Transformation Programme, the continued development of our Mockingbird programme, and our recent work to support the creation of a *Southeast Regional Recruitment Hub*.

Strengthening joint-commissioning through collective understanding of needs

Continuing to listen to the voices of children, young people & families

Utilising the various channels of feedback we have established, we will continue to ensure that the voices and experiences of children, young people, families and carers remain central to our decision making and are at the heart of our ways of working.

Improving Placement Sufficiency for Wokingham's CIC and CL

Building on our work this year to review and better understand our long-term sufficiency, we will develop our in-house local resource, enabling children and young people to remain closer to their homes and communities.

Continued workforce development, retention & learning culture

Building on the positive comments we received during our FV around workforce, we will continue to increase our channels of recruitment through apprenticeships, Front Line and ASYEs - all of which will be supported by our new academy, sustaining a strong culture of learning, support, and development.

Developing the council-led and partnership offer of short breaks

Following the conclusion of our current Short Breaks review, we will seek to further develop the range, capacity and accessibility of our offer to children with disabilities - including overnight respite care and the ways in which we support families with the care of their children.