



## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

# AGENDA PAPERS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: Tuesday, 27 September 2022

Time: 6.30 p.m.

Place: Committee Rooms 2&3, Trafford Town Hall, Talbot Road, Stretford,  
M32 0TH

<b>A G E N D A</b>	<b>PART I</b>	<b>Pages</b>
1.	<b>ATTENDANCES</b>	
	To note attendances, including officers, and any apologies for absence.	
2.	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>	
	Members to give notice of any interest and the nature of that interest relating to any item on the agenda in accordance with the adopted Code of Conduct.	
3.	<b>MINUTES</b>	1 - 8
	To receive and, if so determined, to approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 July 2022.	
4.	<b>QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC</b>	
	A maximum of 15 minutes will be allocated to public questions submitted in writing to Democratic Services ( <a href="mailto:democratic.services@trafford.gov.uk">democratic.services@trafford.gov.uk</a> ) by 4 p.m. on the working day prior to the meeting. Questions must be relevant to items appearing on the agenda and will be submitted in the order in which they were received.	
5.	<b>SCHOOL PLACEMENT PLANNING</b>	To Follow
	To receive a report from the Director for Education Standards, Quality, and Performance.	

6. **ABSENCE AND PERSISTENT ABSENCE** 9 - 16
- To receive a report from the Director for Education Standards, Quality and Performance.
7. **OFSTED UPDATE** 17 - 32
- To receive a presentation from the Corporate Director of Children's Services.
8. **OFSTED IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY OVERVIEW** 33 - 42
- To receive a report from the Corporate Director of Children's Services.
9. **BIKEABILITY** To Follow
- To consider the attached report.
10. **URGENT BUSINESS (IF ANY)**
- Any other item or items which by reason of:-
- (a) Regulation 11 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, the Chairman of the meeting, with the agreement of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairman, is of the opinion should be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency as it relates to a key decision; or
- (b) special circumstances (to be specified) the Chairman of the meeting is of the opinion should be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency.
11. **EXCLUSION RESOLUTION**
- Motion (Which may be amended as Members think fit):
- That the public be excluded from this meeting during consideration of the remaining items on the agenda, because of the likelihood of disclosure of "exempt information" which falls within one or more descriptive category or categories of the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, as amended by The Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, and specified on the agenda item or report relating to each such item respectively.

**SARA TODD**  
Chief Executive

### Membership of the Committee

Councillors D. Western (Chair), Miss L. Blackburn (Vice-Chair), J. Bennett, L. Dagnall, R. Duncan, F. Hornby, S. Maitland, S. Procter, M.J. Welton, G. Whitham, A.M. Whyte, D. Acton (ex-Officio) and M.P. Whetton (ex-Officio).

### Further Information

For help, advice and information about this meeting please contact:

Alexander Murray,  
Tel: 0161 912 4250  
Email: [alexander.murray@trafford.gov.uk](mailto:alexander.murray@trafford.gov.uk)

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## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**5 JULY 2022**

### **PRESENT**

Councillors Mrs Denise Western (in the Chair), Miss L Blackburn (Vice-Chair), Councillor Acton, Councillor Whetton, Councillor Duncan, Councillor Hornby, Councillor Maitland, Councillor Welton, Councillor Whitham and Councillor Whyte.

#### In attendance

Councillor Adele New	Lead Member for Education
Jill McGregor	Corporate Director, Children's Services
Karen Samples	Director Education Standards, Quality and Performance
Simon Hughes	Governance Officer
Alexander Murray	Democratic and Scrutiny Officer

### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dagnall and Bennett.

#### **1. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE**

RESOLVED: That the Membership of the Committee for the 2022/23 Municipal Year as listed below be noted.

Councillors Denise Western (Chairman), Linda Blackburn (Vice Chairman), Fiona Hornby, Sue Maitland, Graham Whitham, Amy Whyte, Mike Whetton (Ex-Officio) and David Acton (Ex-Officio).

#### **2. TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee received a report detailing the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee's Terms of Reference

RESOLVED: That the Terms of Reference be noted by the Committee.

#### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

#### **4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no questions submitted.

#### **5. OFSTED MONITORING REPORT**

The Corporate Director of Children's Services presented the report and outlined that Ofsted had visited Trafford recently but, because of Purdah, the report could not be published until the 6<sup>th</sup> of May. The inspection found services had improved particularly in respect of children in care.

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The Council had responded to the impact of covid and had actively improved their ability to address issues caused by the pandemic. There were plans in place to address issues around staff turnover in response to the recommendations made by Ofsted around instability within the workforce. However, improvements were starting to be seen with 62% of staff having been employed at the Council for 6 months or longer. Another positive development was an increase in the number of case file audits, which ensured that staff were not given too many cases to handle.

The service had implemented a new approach in respect of child improvement and a child improvement chronology was being developed which would assist with this. There had also been a 12% reduction in care orders, which was a positive development. The Council had accepted the Ofsted recommendation that care plans needed to be more meaningful and the team were working hard to meet that recommendation. The Corporate Director of Children's Services concluded the overview of the report by informing the Committee that there would be 2 inspections the following week, which the Service were fully prepared for and further monitoring visits would take place in due course.

Councillor Maitland asked if any of the agency staff currently working would be interested in a permanent contract with the team. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that a small number of staff had been recruited to permanent contracts and meetings had been held with staff to encourage this. The Council were looking to highlight the advantages for Council workers in comparison to agency roles. The Committee were assured that the care review would look at what the Council could provide for its staff.

The Chair asked if Trafford salaries competed with other employers, particularly other Local Authorities. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that the Council had provided a market supplement, which made salaries competitive. However, for staff, pay was no longer the biggest issue and the service was continually analysing what the biggest issues were for those wishing to join or leave the Authority. Exit interviews with staff had been conducted and the feedback received had influenced the services approach. Agency pay was difficult to compete with, so it was vital that the Council provided a good environment for employees.

Councillor Acton welcomed the improvements recognised in the Ofsted report. He then noted that children in care were not always able to attend review meetings so not always able to contribute. Councillor Acton then asked whether this was an area for development and, if so, what the development process would be. The Corporate Director of Children's Services replied that there had been a review of review meetings and they were now taking place in a different way, which included strengthening the role of Independent Review Officers. There were also plans to strengthen the meetings the Council had with children, both before being taken into care and in after-care. The Corporate Director of Children's Services added that performance within the team was continually monitored and improvements had already been seen.

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Councillor Hornby welcomed the potential introduction of a Not-for-Profit agency and queried what the latest position on this was. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that all Local Authorities had signed up to this and once details had been confirmed a report would be submitted to the Committee.

Councillor Welton questioned whether any other local authorities had a good level of performance in retaining staff Trafford could learn from. The Corporate Director of Children's Services replied that this was a national issue. However, Trafford were doing well in respect of retaining staff.

Councillor Welton asked what the highest level of seniority for agency staff was and what the shortest period an agency staff member would be employed was. Councillor Welton also asked how changes in staff would affect young people. The Corporate Director of Children's Services stated that it was a big priority for the Service to maintain a stable workforce and Ofsted had recognised Trafford's progress. The service could not compel people to stay however, the Council did offer attractive workplace conditions. The Council were looking to recruit experienced workers, but it would be challenging to do so.

Councillor Blackburn enquired about the status of interim employees and whether they were able to apply for permanent positions. The Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that interim employees were entitled to apply for permanent roles and the Service was trying to reduce the level of agency staff recruited. There were also plans in place to extend fixed term contracts to support children and families.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted
- 2) That the Committee are to receive further updates
- 3) That the Committee receive a report on the Not-for-Profit Agency once details were available.

## **6. SOCIAL CARE REVIEW**

The Corporate Director of Children's Services introduced the report and outlined that a National Report Services Review had been undertaken. The Government had not yet committed to a response. The review had identified a number of causes for concern which increased the pressure on Children's Services. Those causes for concern included an increase in Section 47 Reviews which did not move forward to a Child Protection Plans and increasing pressure on Foster Carers.

The Review had 87 recommendations and the main ones were highlighted within the presentation. The Committee were informed that the majority of recommendations from the review had not yet been enacted nationally.

Following the presentation, Councillor Blackburn expressed her concern about the removal of Independent Reviewer Officers and asked whether the Council was meeting its requirements. The Corporate Director of Children's Services outlined

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that this would require changes to primary legislation and was one of the more controversial of the recommendations.

Councillor Blackburn questioned whether the recommendations were similar to the Stronger Families programme. Corporate Director of Children's Services responded that the Stronger Families Programme still existed and the team were considering taking a multi-disciplinary approach moving forward. The Stronger Families programme looked at support that was needed for adults in order for them to be able to support their children.

Councillor Whetton enquired if there were any technological solutions which would be available to support staff. Corporate Director of Children's Services replied that the Council needed to clarify how different services collected information and how this was shared to ensure compliance with GDPR. It was accepted that the Council needed to be more proficient in sharing information. The Corporate Director added that this was a comprehensive review which would need further detailed examination by Officers.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

## **7. SCHOOL FUNDING**

The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance, introduced the report. The report outlined the funding formula for how grants were allocated to Schools. The primary formula allocated to schools was £3,500 per pupil and, in secondary schools, this was £5,000 per year. Additional funding could be granted in respect of Special Educational Needs and English as a second language. Grant funding was also available from the Government which, if accepted, would be very useful for Boroughs such as Trafford.

The Pupil Premium was supportive funding for students who had been eligible for free school meals and was around £950 per pupil. The pupil premium was to be used, in part, to ensure children had access to physical activity opportunities. There was also additional funding allocated for children in care or care experienced children.

Councillor Whitham asked how many schools were struggling with their budgets and required support. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance replied that there were 2 schools currently in that position, but they were being supported. There were no schools carrying big surpluses. There was a limit of 8% on this and the Council required schools to account for that.

Councillor Whetton requested that budget plans for schools be submitted to the Committee and this was agreed. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance commented that there was a report on regular meetings with schools in respect of budgets which could also be shared.



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Councillor Blackburn asked what the timeline was before the Council intervened. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance responded that the general policy was three years, but it was examined on a case-by-case basis.

Councillor Blackburn asked if any support was provided to Governing Bodies in respect of this. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance responded that training for Governing Bodies had been offered.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That budget plans for schools be shared with the Committee.

## **8. ELECTIVELY HOME SCHOOLING**

The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance introduced the report and commented that home schooling was a decision for parents. They could use private tutors to support this but there was no requirement to do so. The Council had made it clear to parents of the financial and educational impacts of the choice to home school, but this was a decision for themselves. All children were entitled to be home schooled unless there was a School Attendance Order in place. However, if there was a safeguarding issue, the Council would need to intervene. If the child had an EHCP provision would need to be made to ensure their SEND needs were being met. Parents were provided with a named Support Officer at the Council who would be able to provide support. If there were other areas of concern, contacts would be provided to establish support networks.

The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance informed the Committee of the numerous ways a child could be educated if parents did not wish their child to attend mainstream schooling, such as flexible schooling. Where Officers were aware that a child was being home schooled a questionnaire was sent out to the parents. There was no requirement for home schooled children to follow the National Curriculum, but suitable questions were asked to ensure the child was being educated effectively.

The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance spoke of the difficulties in obtaining information about children who were home educated. The Council sought to gather information on home educated children and everything they received was always welcomed. Any concerns identified by Officers or parents were raised with the family of the child. However, if concerns remained this would be referred to the Family Education Panel to reach a decision. However, it was very rare that stage was reached.

There had been 190 EHE (Electively Home Educated) cases classed last year. There were now 208 which would need reviewing, particularly during the pandemic and 93 cases had been closed last year. The levels of home schooling fluctuated depending on the school year the child was in. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance stated that there were many reasons why a parent might choose to home school. Some may have been due to the pandemic and the resulting impact on the anxiety and health of the child.

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However, there were a number of other possible reasons such as dissatisfaction with the system and it was difficult to determine what the reasons were.

The Committee were assured that Officers continually monitored children with social care issues who were home schooled and many had returned to school. The Government had proposed a register for Local Authorities to track children who were home schooled and enable a clear policy to be established. The Council had made it clear to parents who chose to home school that if they then wanted to return their child to mainstream education they may not be allocated their preferred choice of school.

Councillor Maitland enquired what the category was for children not wishing to attend school or parents not wishing their child to attend school. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance replied that this was a complicated issue. There were some children with anxiety and the Council would refer them to the Medical Educational Panel if there were significant issues.

Councillor Hornby asked how Trafford compared to other Boroughs in respect of this. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance replied that the levels in Trafford were very comparable to other Local Authorities. When the comparison had been completed it could be shared with Members.

Councillor Blackburn asked if there were issues with EHE children having difficulties in qualifying for further or higher education in later life. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance commented that the questionnaire highlighted that they were not disadvantaged. When they reached an appropriate age EHE children would be referred to Careers Advisors who would provide support.

Councillor Blackburn further asked if a family chose not to enrol their child for an exam, how an assessment would be conducted on what they had learned. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance responded that this would be a decision for the parent to determine.

Councillor Blackburn enquired if there were any young people who were home schooled which the Council were not aware of. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance acknowledged that this was a legitimate concern. It was difficult to monitor as Government regulations did not allow for that level of scrutiny. The Council needed to ensure that a child's education complied with the Department for Education's guidelines.

Councillor Blackburn asked if safeguarding procedures were adequate. The Director of Education, Quality, Standards and Performance responded that if there were any concerns, then home visits would be conducted.

Councillor Duncan asked whether there was a minimum requirement for parents to home school and, if so, whether schools checked that level. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance clarified that there was no requirement in respect of this. The number of EHC was monitored at each school.

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Councillor Whitham asked how new arrivals to the Borough were monitored and captured within the system. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance replied that they would be requested to proceed through the monitoring process and the guidelines of the process were available on the Council's website. Councillor Whitham requested that guidelines be shared and this was agreed.

Councillor Whetton asked if Officers had contact with any parents with an extremist religious position which could affect their education. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance commented that she was not aware of this from an EHC perspective. There was, however, a Panel which scrutinised data and information received by the Council. This allowed the Council to ensure children were not missed. The Corporate Director, Children's Services added that it was the duty of Local Authorities to prevent radicalisation and Trafford had Panels to ensure this.

Councillor Acton asked a question regarding traveller's education as they moved around regularly and how the Council responded to this. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance commented that the Council previously had an offer for minority groups. One of the current Council Officers did have a supportive relationship with them. Traveller sites would be visited but it was difficult to perform those visits with current staff capacity.

Councillor Welton enquired whether there were any networks for EHC parents and how formal they were. The Director, Education, Quality, Standards and Performance confirmed that the Council did not hold any rigorous monitoring in respect of this. However, the Council held regular network meetings with EHC parent groups which were very useful and informative.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the report be noted;
- 2) Information be circulated to Members on levels of EHC compared to other Local Authorities; and
- 3) Information be shared to Members on how the Council monitored new arrivals and how their education is monitored.

**6. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee looked at the draft work programme for 2022/23 and discussed some matters which might be reviewed during this municipal year.

Councillor Welton asked for a report on the current position regarding the bikeability programme to be submitted to the November meeting of the Committee.

Councillor Whitham further asked for a report regarding the provision of childcare support in the Borough be submitted to the September meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

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- 1) That the draft work programme for the 2022/23 municipal year be agreed
- 2) That the suggested items be added to the work programme.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and finished at 8:25 pm.

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

**Report to:** Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** September 2022  
**Report for:** Information  
**Report of:** Director of Education, Standards, Performance and Quality Assurance

### Report Title

**Overview of School Attendance**

### Summary

Trafford council wants all children to have the best possible attendance at school to enable each and every child to reach their full potential. There is a strong link between good school attendance and achieving strong outcomes for children. This report provides an overview of the current position in Trafford, legislative measures and support strategies to improve attendance rates.

### Recommendation(s)

That the contents of the report are noted.

### Contact person(s) for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Karen Samples: Director of Education, Standards, Quality and Performance  
Karen McCallum: Head of the Education of Vulnerable Children Service  
Martina Mould: School Attendance Officer

#### **1. Introduction**

The law entitles every child of compulsory school age to an efficient, full-time education suitable to their age, aptitude, and any special educational need they may have. It is the legal responsibility of every parent to make sure their child receives that education either by attendance at a school or by education otherwise than at a school.

Central to raising standards in education and ensuring all pupils can fulfil their potential is that pupils need to attend school regularly to benefit from their education. Missing out on lessons leaves children vulnerable to falling behind. Children with poor attendance tend to achieve less in both primary and secondary school. Indeed, statistics report that

The government expects schools and local authorities to:

- ✓ promote good attendance and reduce absence, including persistent absence
- ✓ ensure every pupil has access to full-time education to which they are entitled
- ✓ act early to address patterns of absence

- ✓ parents to perform their legal duty by ensuring their children of compulsory school age who are registered at school attend regularly
- ✓ all pupils to be punctual to their lessons.

## 2. Attendance data for Trafford

The following data captures the reported attendance figures over the last 3 years. Due to the pandemic and school closures, 2020 data was not collected.

### i. Total absence

		2019	2020	2021
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Trafford</b>			
	National			
	SN			
<b>PRIMARY</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>3.20</b>	-	<b>2.90</b>
	National	4.0	-	3.60
	SN	3.78	-	3.30
<b>SECONDARY</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>4.60</b>	-	<b>4.80</b>
	National	5.50	-	5.50
	SN	5.29	-	5.04
<b>LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>4.80</b>	-	<b>10.30</b>
	National	5.10	-	9.10
	SN	4.87	-	8.84
<b>CHILD IN NEED</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>10.10</b>	-	<b>14.60</b>
	National	11.50	-	13.80
	SN	11.96	-	14.19
<b>SEND</b>	<b>Trafford</b>		-	<b>5.2</b>
	National		-	6.8

\*Data source: Local Authority Interactive Tool: An interactive spreadsheet for comparing data about children and young people across all local authorities in England

## 3. The importance of attending school regularly

Regular attendance at school is critical as evidence shows that the students with the highest attendance throughout their time in school gain the best GCSE and A Level results.

This is what the data shows:

- Pupils with higher attainment at KS2 and KS4 had lower levels of absence over the key stage compared to those with lower attainment.
- Pupils who did not achieve the expected standard in reading, writing and maths in 2019 had an overall absence rate of 4.7% over the key stage, compared with 3.5% among pupils who achieved the expected standard and 2.7% among those who achieved the higher standard.
- Pupils who did not achieve grade 9 to 4 in English and maths GCSEs in 2019 had an overall absence rate of 8.8% over the key stage, compared with 5.2% among pupils who achieved a grade 4 and 3.7% among pupils who achieved grade 9 to 5 in both English and maths.
- Generally, the higher the percentage of sessions missed across the key stage at KS2 and KS4, the lower the level of attainment at the end of the key stage.

- Among pupils with no missed sessions over KS2, 83.9% achieved the expected standard compared to 40.2% of pupils who were persistently absent.
- Among pupils with no missed sessions over KS4, 83.7% achieved grades 9 to 4 in English and maths compared to 35.6% of pupils who were persistently absent.

Furthermore, the table below details the days of lost learning when children/young people do not attend school regularly.

<b>Attendance Rate</b>	<b>Lost Learning Time</b>
100% attendance	0 weeks
95% attendance	1 week & 4 days
90% attendance	3 weeks & 4 days
85% attendance	5 weeks & 3 days
80% attendance	At least 7 weeks & 3 days
<b>80% attendance over 5 years = 1 whole year of education lost.</b>	
Research suggests that pupils who have an average of 20 days absent per school year see negative effects throughout their educational journey, resulting in a whole GCSE grade deficit by the time they leave secondary education.	

There are certain circumstances for which absence can be permitted:

- The child is too ill to attend that day.
- The parent has requested absence in advance, and has been given permission due to exceptional circumstances.
- The child cannot attend school on that day because they are taking part in religious observance
- The local authority is responsible for arranging your child's transport to school and it is not available on that day or has not been provided yet; or
- A gypsy/traveller family with no fixed abode, who is required to travel for work that day meaning the child cannot attend their usual school.

Parents should plan their holidays around school breaks and avoid requesting leaves of absence for holidays unless it is unavoidable.

As leave of absence is only granted in exceptional circumstances, it is unlikely that the headteacher will agree a leave of absence for a family holiday.

#### **4. Persistent Absence**

If a pupil's overall absence rate is 10% or higher of their possible sessions, they're classified as a persistent absentee and we know that one in nine pupils are persistently absent.

Clearly, the pandemic has made things worse. More children than ever have missed school due to isolation or illness, and existing risk factors driving absence have been exacerbated, with additional ones, too, coming to the fore.

This is particularly the case for vulnerable children or those in more deprived areas where persistent absence is most common. In fact, nearly half of persistent absentees live in the 30 per cent highest areas of child poverty.

The Big Ask survey from the Children's Commissioner in 2021 included 1,900 children who were not permanently in school. It highlighted that attendance has an important role to play in children's life chances and reiterated the importance of understanding individual children's experiences.

Disappointingly, children cited unhappiness at school as their biggest barrier to attendance. This was particularly apparent among pupils with special educational needs or disabilities and those with poor physical health, who felt that they did not receive the adequate level of support at school for their needs, and who also experienced bullying. It was also similar for children who suffered with mental health issues, who said that support was not accessible enough to support their attendance.

The following data reflects the Trafford position over the last 3 years.

Persistent Absence %		2019	2020	2021
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>7.90</b>	-	<b>9.80</b>
	National	10.90	-	12.10
	SN	9.71	-	10.50
<b>PRIMARY</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>5.50</b>	-	<b>5.60</b>
	National	8.20	-	8.80
	SN	7.07	-	7.57
<b>SECONDARY</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>10.00</b>	-	<b>13.50</b>
	National	13.70	-	14.80
	SN	12.53	-	12.91
<b>LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>13.80</b>	-	<b>35.60</b>
	National	12.10	-	30.40
	SN	11.91	-	28.97
<b>CHILD IN NEED</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>29.60</b>	-	<b>44.20</b>
	National	33.50	-	42.20
	SN	34.43	-	42.23
<b>CHILD PROTECTION</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>40.40</b>	-	<b>53.30</b>
	National	39.50	-	52.80
	SN	41.39	-	51.68
<b>SEND</b>	<b>Trafford</b>	<b>20.80</b>	-	<b>40.10</b>
	National	25.5	-	44.20

\*Data source: Local Authority Interactive Tool: An interactive spreadsheet for comparing data about children and young people across all local authorities in England

## 5. Support for school attendance

Children may struggle to attend school for a wide range of reasons. The DfE has recently published guidance on improving school attendance ([Improving school attendance: support for schools and local authorities - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92442/improving-school-attendance-support-for-schools-and-local-authorities.pdf))

This sets out the principles underpinning an effective whole school strategy for attendance and outlines actions that school staff and local authorities may consider taking to improve attendance for all pupils, pupils at risk of persistent absence and pupils who are persistently absent.

In addition, Trafford's attendance officers offer a service level agreement aimed at supporting Headteachers, staff and attendance leads, to achieve better



outcomes for children, comply with current legislation, raise standards and close the gap by improving engagement and attendance in school.

The team deliver tailored packages of support which include advice, guidance, training, attendance reviews and action planning and updates on changing duties and current issues pertaining to all aspects of attendance in school.

### **Trafford Team Together (TTT)**

TTT is a co-ordinated partnership approach between family services, education, health and community services and organisations, to help families find the right support at the right time.

One of their intended outcomes is to improve school attendance and reduce levels of persistent absence. 42 schools are now working with their TTT co-ordinator, with 42 children/young people receiving support around school attendance.

### **Emotionally-based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)**

Some of our children and young people who live and go to school in the Trafford area are struggling with high levels of anxiety related to attending school.

The need for parent carers, school staff and specialist services to work together has become even more important as children, young people and families try to adapt to the short and long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

Trafford schools and services have developed a pilot Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) Early Identification Tool (EIT) which aims to be a user-friendly but comprehensive progress document.

It is hoped that this tool will help prevent families, children and young people reaching crisis point.

The tool is based on EBSNA research evidence and similar tools that have been shown to be successful in other communities and can be very effective in helping families and schools to quickly identify what risk factors and triggers might be contributing to a child or young person's anxiety and feeling unable to attend school.

The aim is to empower staff and parent carers to have conversations together that are structured, and solution focused. This awareness can then lead to possible adjustments and available support being offered to the child, young person and families through a joint support plan.

### **Multi-disciplinary Groups**

Attendance officers hold monthly meetings where complex cases are discussed with a range of agencies, including Children's Social Care. This is aimed at providing an integrated response to support the child and family, to return to education ahead of any punitive actions being taken.

Training and support is to be rolled out to Social Workers around the importance of school attendance to.

### **The Virtual School**

The new responsibilities for Virtual School Heads (VSH) were introduced in September 2021 – giving them a strategic leadership role to champion the educational attendance, attainment, and progress of children with a social worker. This is because children with a social worker are around 3 times more

likely to be persistently absent from school and between 2 to 4 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than their peers. This group are also over ten times more likely to attend state-funded alternative provision settings than all other pupils. For children with a social worker, attending school is also a protective factor, offering a safe space when home is not.

As strategic leaders for children with a social worker VSHs should work to create a culture of high aspirations across both education and social care that helps to ensure children with a social worker make educational progress and reach their potential no matter their starting point.

The Virtual School Governing Body hold the VSH to account and addressing attendance is a priority. Key improvement actions include:

- A Learning Mentor has been appointed to monitor electronic registers, contact schools and families where children are not in school and offer enhanced support to pupils who are persistently absent.
- Daily reports are uploaded to LCS (Social Care Database) regarding any school absence to ensure social workers are informed.
- Tuition, mentoring, and counselling are available to all children and 166 children have accessed additional support commissioned by Virtual School this year – more than half of our Virtual School roll.

## 6. Legal Action

Local councils and schools can use various legal powers if a child is missing school without a good reason. They can issue:

- an Education Supervision Order
- a School Attendance Order
- a fine (sometimes known as a 'penalty notice')

### Education Supervision Order (ESO)

Where a voluntary early help plan, or formal parenting contract has not been successful, an Education Supervision Order (ESO) can be a useful alternative to provide formal legal intervention without criminal prosecution. In deciding whether to progress to an ESO, the school and local authority should have exhausted voluntary support and be clear that making the order would be beneficial for the pupil and parent.

Where safeguarding concerns exist, the lead practitioner should also discuss with the school's designated safeguarding lead and children's social care services and agree an ESO would be a more suitable option than a s.17 (Children in Need) or s.47 (Child Protection) plan. In all cases, local authorities must fully consider using an ESO before moving forward to prosecution.

ESOs are made through the Family or High Court, rather than Magistrates Court. They give the local authority a formal role in advising, helping and directing the pupil and parent(s) to ensure the pupil receives an efficient, full-time, suitable education.

Where parents persistently fail to comply with the directions given under the ESO, they may be guilty of an offence. Local authorities can prosecute in the Magistrates Court for persistent non-compliance with the Order and parents (upon conviction) will be liable to a fine of up to £1,000.

### School Attendance Order

A School Attendance Order is issued, if the local authority believes the child is not getting an education. The parent/s have 15 days to provide evidence that they have registered their child with the school listed in the order or that they are giving them home education.

No School Attendance Orders have been issued this year.

#### Fixed Penalty Notice

Fixed penalty notices are served on parents as an alternative to prosecution where they have failed to ensure that their child of compulsory school age regularly attends the school where they are registered or at a place where alternative provision is provided. Fixed penalty notices can be used by all schools (with the exception of independent schools) where the pupil's absence has not been authorised by the school and the absence constitutes an offence. The penalty is £60 if paid within 21 days of receipt, rising to £120 if paid after 21 days but within 28 days. The payment must be paid direct to the local authority regardless of who issued the penalty notice.

If the penalty is not paid by the end of the 28 day period, the local authority must decide either to prosecute for the original offence to which the notice applies, or withdraw the notice. Parent(s) can only be prosecuted if 28 days have expired, and full payment has not been made. There is no right of appeal by parents against a fixed penalty notice.

#### Trafford Parental Responsibility Measures 2021/22

- Penalty Notices issued : 663 (58 irregular attendance and 605 holiday)
- Income from Penalty Notices: £27,600
- Prosecutions Completed: 2
- Prosecutions Pending: 77

There has been a substantial increase in Penalty Notices this year. (92 in 2020/21)

The back log for court hearings has meant that only been 2 prosecutions have been concluded and there are currently 77 cases pending.

The DfE has indicated that Parental Responsibility measures should now only be used as a last resort after all supportive measures have been exhausted.

## **7. Attendance Reform**

The new DfE Attendance Strategy ([Working together to improve school attendance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk)) sets out new attendance responsibilities for schools/governing bodies, parents and local authorities. This guidance is non-statutory, and has been produced to help schools, trusts, governing bodies, and local authorities maintain high levels of school attendance. Following public consultation earlier this year, and subject to Parliament, the Secretary of State has committed to this guidance becoming statutory when parliamentary time allows (this will be no sooner than September 2023).

The reforms are clear that it is the local authority, statutory safeguarding partners and other local partners who have a crucial role in supporting pupils to overcome barriers to attendance and ensure all children can access the full-time education to which they are entitled.

As local authorities vary significantly in size, organisational approach and demographics, the DfE recognise that it is right that the specifics of attendance service delivery and how those roles are discharged should be determined locally to meet local needs of pupils, parents, and schools. As a minimum, however, all local authorities are expected to:

- Rigorously track local attendance data to devise a strategic approach to
- attendance that prioritises the pupils, pupil cohorts and schools on which to provide support and focus its efforts on to unblock area wide barriers to attendance.
- Have a School Attendance Support Team which provides the following core functions free of charge to all schools (regardless of type):
- Communication and advice: regularly bring schools together to communicate messages, provide advice and share best practice between schools and trusts within the area.
- Targeting Support Meetings: hold termly conversations with schools, using their attendance data to identify pupils and cohorts at risk of poor attendance and agree targeted actions and access to services for those pupils.
- Multi-disciplinary support for families: provide access to early help support workers to work intensively with families to provide practical whole-family support where needed to tackle the causes of absenteeism and unblock the barriers to attendance.
- Legal intervention: take forward attendance legal intervention (using the full range of parental responsibility measures) where voluntary support has not been successful or engaged with.
- Monitor and improve the attendance of children with a social worker through their Virtual School

The service is working together with members from across the local authority, to establish an implementation plan in readiness for September 2023.



# Ofsted Monitoring Visit July 2022 Update to Overview & Scrutiny September 2022

Jill McGregor, Corporate Director Children's Service





# Our Ofsted Journey So Far

**March 2019** – Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) - Inadequate Judgement. AS our 20115 inspection graded us as ‘GOOD’ the ILACS inspection in 2019 was a short inspection.

**October 2019** – First monitoring visit (with a focus on the Front Door)

**March 2020** – What was planned to be the 2nd monitoring visit was cancelled due to the pandemic

**February 2021** – Covid Assurance Focussed Visit that considered all aspects of CSC delivery and included an Her Majesty’s Inspector (HMI) for Education – Local Authorities would usually have between 4 and 6 visits before reinspection, at least 6 monthly. We went over a year without any monitoring activity.

**September 2021** – Second monitoring visit. Inspectors reviewed the progress made in all areas of concern identified at the last inspection including the quality of social work assessment and plans

**March 2022** – Third monitoring visit. Inspectors were focused on children in care and ensuring that effective support was being provided to enable them to achieve better outcomes.

**July 2022** – Fourth monitoring visit. The focus of this visit was Children in Need, considering specifically assessments, plans, consistency, and the impact of CIN journey for children and young people.



# Purpose of Monitoring Visits

- Monitoring visits focus on where improvement is needed the most.
- Inspectors monitor and report on the local authority's progress since the inspection.
- Inspectors also check that performance in other areas has not declined since the inspection.
- If new concerns emerge, inspectors are likely to look at these on the monitoring visits.
- Ultimately, they are to support, challenge and assess whether progress is being made



# Focus of this Monitoring Visit

The focus for this visit was **children in need and within this there was consideration of the effectiveness of assessment and planning and with the golden thread of the impact of managers and leaders.**

The specific areas the lead inspector identified were:

- The quality of social work assessment and plans to ensure that they are effective in meeting children's needs.
- The way in which all staff and managers listen to the voice of children to inform individual work and wider service development.
- Management oversight at all levels of social work practice with children, to ensure that work is effective and is helping them to achieve better outcomes.
- Senior leaders' understanding of the quality of social work practice, through accurate evaluation of performance information and implementation of an effective quality assurance framework.
- General experiences and progress for children in need

The additional areas the lead inspector identified were: Performance management, Management oversight, Supervision, Continuous professional development - Ultimately they were looking to know if what we do is making a difference to Children and Families

Throughout the visit they looked at some key areas of the records: Decision making, Thresholds, Assessments, Plans, Child in Need meetings, Visits & Supervision.

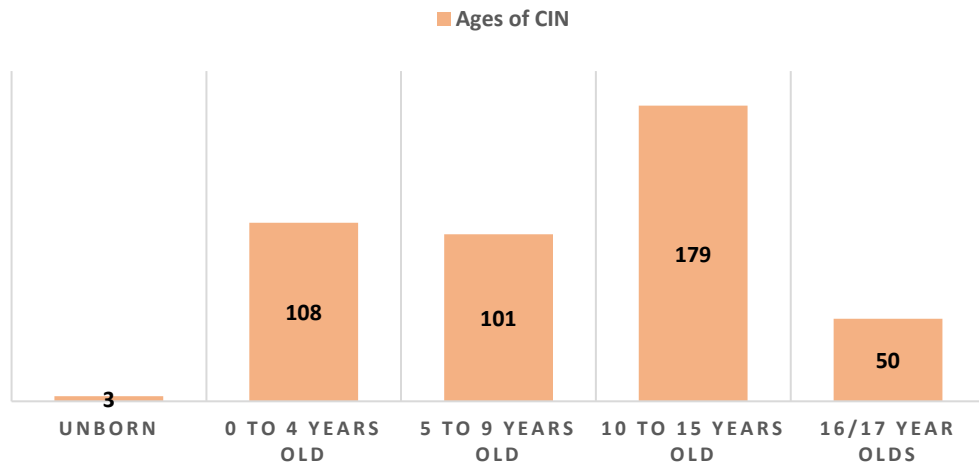




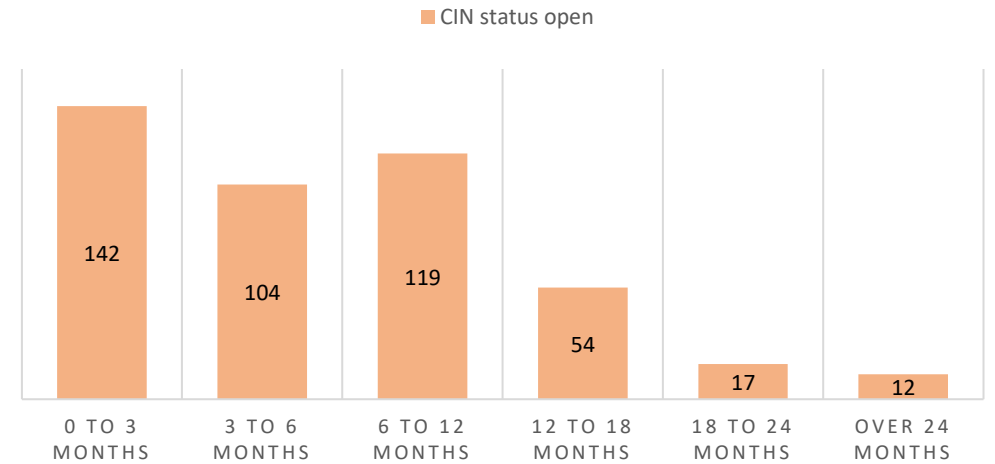
# Our Children In Need

Our Child in Need cohort of children and young people is our largest – 453 children & young people have CIN plans

### AGES OF OUR CHILDREN IN NEED



### LENGTH OF TIME AS A CHILD IN NEED



- 179 of our children being supported at Child In Need are 10 -15 yrs. 50 of these are 16 & 17 years old.
- 43 young people (9%) of our children that have a child in need plan have exploitation as a feature
- 9% of our children in need have a disability and are open to the CAN team
- 113 of our CIN are sitting within Support & Protection (54 of these have been stepped down from a Child Protection Plan)



# Key Areas of Improvement Activity in Relation to CIN

Held Neglect Conference and launched refreshed Neglect Strategy

Rolled out Child Impact Chronology Training

Reviewed all of our CIN children in case progression clinics to establish the right decision for the child & family in terms of ongoing support

Launched newly structured service with a dedicated service for supporting Child In Need, with its own Head of Service. Internally recruited to the Permanent Head of Service Post

New service supported with dedicated Implementation Plan, and safe & efficient transfer of case responsibility enabled through daily Resource and Allocation meetings.

**Recruitment activity – Engaged with external recruitment Agency. IIP Steering Group**

Held our first Practice Fortnight.

2<sup>nd</sup> Live Multi Agency Audit at the front door considering quality of referrals and applications of thresholds.

Refreshed exploitation strategy involving our young people

Strengthening Practice Care & Confidence Sessions

**Recruitment activity – Recruitment campaign went live**

Nov  
Dec 21

Apr –  
July 22

Jan –  
Mar 22

Launched Participation & Engagement Strategy

Consultation with partnership re Step-up step-down refresh

Agreed extension of DSL Supervisor Pilot

Repeat survey with our Schools and update Action Plan

Refreshed SHINE processes and launched.

Strengthening Practice Core Skills commenced Assessments Module

**Recruitment activity – Recruited 14 permanent social workers**

**Permanently recruited to Head of Service for Vulnerable Adolescents**

Developed a CIN tracker and used it to become more data intelligent.

Carried out targeted work in respect of the themes coming out of the tracker (meaningful visits)

TSSP hosted 4 locality-based workshops on Trafford Levels of Need

External review of our Liquid Logic Systems with practitioners.


Revised Proactive Pick-Up Policy

**Recruitment activity – 4 perm SWs & 1 AP recruited**



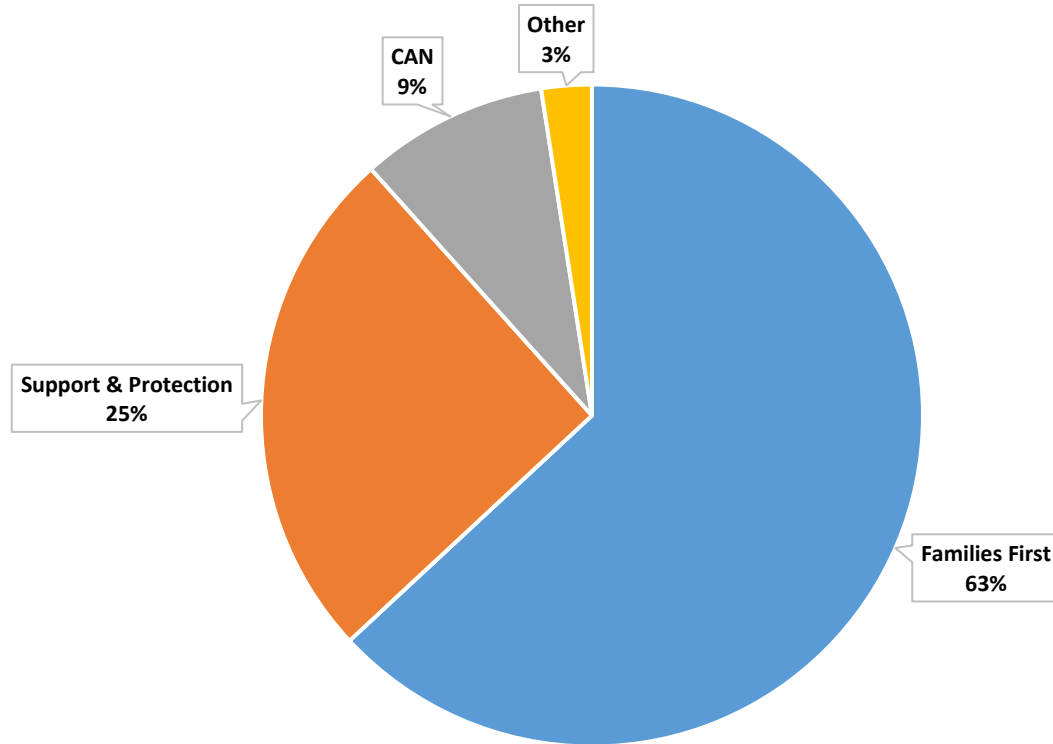
# What We Told Them (1)

In our context setting meeting with Ofsted we were honest about what we knew they would see within the CIN arena. Amongst other things, we told them:

- We have revised and refreshed systems and processes following Family First Service being established – dedicated service implementation plan.
  - Families First initially experienced the most amount instability once we moved into our new service arrangements. They had the most amount of churn across ALL layers – social worker and managers
  - A CIN tracker has been developed & implemented as a management tool to understand our cohort of Children in Need and the actions we need to take e.g. timeliness and quality of assessments
  - There has been a continued focus on Child impact Chronologies but we know we have more to do to embed consistently. Recent dip sampling showed that there was a meaningful chronology in 76% of cases reviewed, but that this was not consistently being recording in the dedicated CIMC space
  - The Missing from Care & Home services, Exploitation Team and Youth Justice Service have been brought together to form our 'Vulnerable Adolescents Service' under a single Head of Service. We had a bit of rocky start but our Head of Service recruited on a permanent basis started 11<sup>th</sup> July 22.
  - There are a number of our CIN children sitting within Support & Protection (see over) but we know why and have a dedicated action plan in place.
- 

# Child In Need – Support & Protection

Numbers of our CIN within each service area



Background to those children in need being supported within Support & Protection service:

- 113 of our CIN are sitting within Support & Protection
- 54 children have been stepped down from a Child Protection plan
- 27 children are being supported through supervision order
- 33 children have not had a CP plan or been in care proceeding prior to this CIN period.
- This is as a result of the majority of those children being allocated to workers who moved to Support and Protect during the re-design in October 2022 to maintain consistency of relationships.



## What We Told Them (2)

- The targeted recruitment approach has continued – 16.7% turnover, exit interviews in the second half of the reporting year significantly reduced, and rate of agency staff is 39%. 63% of agency staff however have been with us 6 months or longer and some are wanting to join us permanently.
- We have started to look at improved quality assurance systems. We have undertaken an audit of Return Home Interviews with a multi-agency agency perspective & are seeing some creative ways of undertaking RHI
- 12 cases referred for RR in last 2 years, 6 progressed to CSPR with 4 of those being completed, 6 did not progress but 4 resulted in local lesson learning review
- We have progressed our Neglect Strategy – call to action holding each agency to account; starting to develop our approach to CimC across the partnership; working with neglect a key element of the SP programme; task and finish work in respect of GCP2 as well as use of other tools
- The quality of assessment & planning is improving but we know we have more to do. We still have some variability.
- Overall audit judgements in terms of quality of practice indicate that 73% are requires improvement or better.



# What Ofsted Saw....

- The key headline was **variability** of practice. Whilst they saw lots of examples of good practice, it is not yet consistent across the service. There is too much variability in practice for children in need in Trafford, compared to other cohorts of children.
- **Visits to children:** *“Children in need (CIN) are regularly visited by social workers, and some assessments and plans are effective at identifying needs and achieving change in children’s lives.”*
- **Direct Work:** Children and young people are seen regularly by social workers who know them well. Social workers spend time developing relationships...leads to some purposeful wishes and feelings work with children, which then informs future plans. These conversations are highlighted clearly on the child’s record, although this work is not always supported by a range of tools... that could engage children in a more meaningful way. Senior leaders understand that this is an area for development and are seeking to promote greater use of direct work tools to skill up social workers as part of delivering their chosen social work model..
- **Assessments:** That assessments for children continue to be of variable quality and are not always completed in timescale, or updated, when children’s circumstances change. They agreed there was still more work to do to strengthen this area of practice and build on recent improvement.
- **Workforce:** They acknowledged that we recognised the importance of creating a more stable workforce, and have invested in training to ensure that staff receive appropriate input to strengthen their practice with children and their families. Practitioners reported liking working in Trafford.
- **QA Activity:** They felt our thematic audits were strong and linked to performance information; Moderations were positive but there were some missed opportunities e.g. could be improved if we involved families. Actions often focused on compliance and didn’t include how to further improve.



# What Ofsted Saw....

- **Supervision:** Supervision of social workers is mostly regular, although there have been some gaps in frequency across the service. Supervision records contain appropriate detail about the current situation and risks to children. Supervision sessions are not always sufficiently reflective to help social workers to explore what strategies might work.
- **Partnership Working:** They saw examples of co-working being used effectively to make a difference for children and families, and quoted an excellent example of working with probation.
- **Cultural Diversity:** They saw that children's views and cultural factors are mostly taken into account appropriately when understanding family circumstances in the context of domestic abuse or neglect. This informs a broader understanding of children's lived experience.
- **Plans:** They said that sometimes, plans for children are not updated regularly or in line with children's circumstances. Management oversight does not always have sufficient impact on the quality of planning to avoid drift.
- **Thresholds:** They saw evidence that thresholds for children in need are appropriately applied and social workers escalate cases when risk of harm increases.
- **Step Down** – For some, CIN planning following step-down decision-making is not always sufficiently focused,.





# CIN - Children with Complex Needs

## What We Told Them

40 of our Children in Need also have a disability and sit within our Complex Needs Service so we knew this was an area that Ofsted would consider.

- We have continued to use a project team approach within Children with Additional Needs – some success with this approach e.g. completed and updated assessments but has created some fragmentation in the service
- There is an interim DSCO / Head of Service in place
- Moving to progression of plans for the CIN in Complex Needs Service but there is some drift
- Produced a dedicated plan to address all aspects of practice as well as strategic transformation and direction for this service area
- Implemented changes to system & processes – starting with the co-working of s47s and increasing the skill base for CP within the team
- Undertaken a review of short break offer which has included Lived Experience Advisory Panel and starting to progress the recommendations
- Working hard to develop single service approach to children with additional needs – e.g. have a dedicated workstream to raise the status and quality of EHCPs – one child, one plan; same QA approach





# CIN - Children with Complex Needs

## What They Saw

- They observed the challenges that we had told them about.
- They saw the additional Project Team and Advanced Practitioner that had been put in place to improve practice & capacity.
- They felt that we needed to develop the skill set in this area.
- They saw lots of variability & noted that some children's experience has not been improved despite our involvement.
- There were some examples where assessments were not completed in a timely way and/or were out of date.
- Some plans were up to date and had been reviewed recently, but some were not.
- Some children are not being seen regularly, and the records don't explain this rationale.
- Some children's records are focused on adults.
- They saw occasions where there was good engagement with partners.





# Comparing 2019 ILACS Findings in relation to CIN

- “The quality of social work assessment and plans to ensure that they are effective in meeting children’s needs needs to improve.” 2019

In July they observed that “for the majority of children, the quality of the assessment and the plan to support them is not good”

This is being further addressed through the next phase of our Strengthening Practice programme.

- “More positively, children do have their needs assessed in a timely way, and for many this results in effective support being provided” 2019

The timeliness of the completion of assessments has declined but this was part of a conscious effort to improve the quality of the assessment – Practitioners were given permission to delay completion if it was in the best interest of the child and family (e.g. waiting on further information, to make an assessment more meaningful and helpful to the family)

- “Chronologies are not routinely used to understand the impact of past events. There is insufficient analysis of the impact of children’s experiences” 2019

During the MV, they observed that Impact Chronologies are not consistently used or kept up to date. They reported that they did see impact considered and recorded in different parts of the system but the issue was consistency. This is an area of priority focus for leaders.

- “A minority of children spend too long subject to child in need or child protection plans, and others experience repeated periods of child protection planning with little improvement in their lives”

# Priorities Moving Forward

## Workforce

- Continue with our Investing in our People strategy, understanding that our people will make a difference to children & families. Our priority now as we progress must be on developing our workforce to get us to the point where GOOD practice is the norm
- Progress our Strengthening Practice Core skills programme
- Accelerate the implementation of the management programme that is in place, ensuring it includes those new to post. Support our managers developing further to maximise their impact on practice improvement & workforce stability.
- Progress with bespoke development plans for all service areas, with Complex Needs Team as a priority– External support will be required to support us overcoming the ongoing issues within this service.

## Quality Assurance

- Continue to strengthen our QA processes to influence practice – progress Live Audit & Closing the Loop in real time
- Embed multi-agency audit & learning across all service areas including our children who are missing
- Embed bespoke quality assurance in certain areas.
- Develop the approach to understanding the lived experience of children and families in quality assurance
- Audits and moderations to be dip sampled by DCS and Director and feedback given via reflective conversation
- Target setting against the performance of audit judgements

## Quality of Practice / Management Grip

- Managers that influence practice
- Continue to strengthen reflective supervision within all teams and audit to understand impact
- Have a forensic focus on strengthening the quality of practice for children where risk is reducing (step down) - especially in Support and Protect teams
- Embed our multi-agency planning processes as the norm, regardless of case status.
- Progress with the agreed changes to system to support practice improvement
- Continue to develop & use our data intelligently to influence practice.

## Communication & Engagement

- Co-produce our vulnerable adolescent strategy and approach – more than missing and exploitation
- Continue to progress a partnership approach to our work e.g. progressing whole system approach to tackling Neglect and DA under Ambitions plan & TSSP work programmes
- Listen to and act upon the voice of our children and families & look to include this in our routine audit processes.
- Work with our partnership and stakeholders regarding their role in supporting further improvements to the quality of assessments and planning to ensure that their plans are helpful and support positive impact on our children & families.



Questions

[Link to Ofsted Published MV Letter](#)

**TRAFFORD COUNCIL**

**Report to:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** September 2022  
**Report of:** Jill McGregor – Corporate Director Children’s Services

**Report Title**

Children’s Services’ Improvement Activity

**Summary**

A report to provide the committee with an overview of the Children’s Services’ Improvement Journey to date, and of the actions taken to address the findings of the 2019 inspection and response to the recommendations

**Recommendation(s)**

- To note the contents of this report and the work that has been progressed to date.
- To agree to receive further updates
- To offer scrutiny and challenge to the service.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

**Name:** Jill McGregor  
**Extension:** 2365

**Background Papers:**

Corporate Priorities	N/A
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	N/A
Finance	N/A
Legal	N/A
Equality/Diversity	N/A
Sustainability	N/A
Carbon Reduction	N/A
Staffing/E-Government/Asset Management	N/A
Risk Management	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A

## 1. 2019 Inspection – Summary

1.1 In March 2019, Trafford Children’s Services was subject to an unannounced inspection under the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) framework. The inspection judgements sit under three headings:

- The experiences and progress of children in need of help and protection
- The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers
- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families

Trafford were last subject to a full Ofsted inspection in January 2015 ([Trafford 2015 Inspection Report](#)). The overall judgement at that time was ‘Good’ and for that reason the ILACS inspection in 2019 was a short inspection, in line with the Inspection Framework at that time.

1.2 The inspectors made the following judgement:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

The Ofsted report was published 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019 and can be found online at: [Trafford 2019 ILACS Inspection Report](#)

1.3 The key things that Ofsted identified as needing to improve were:

- Senior leaders’ understanding of the quality of social work practice, through accurate evaluation of performance information, and implementation of an effective quality assurance framework.
- Management oversight at all levels of social work practice with children in order to ensure that work is good and is helping them to achieve better outcomes.

- The response to all children referred to [Front Door] to ensure timely review and effective decision-making about the help that children require.
- The quality of social work assessment and plans to ensure that they are effective in meeting children's needs.
- The response to children who go missing to ensure that return home interviews are completed and records of these contain information that will help reduce risk in future.
- The way in which all staff and managers listen to the voice of children to inform individual work and wider service development.

The gap in leaders' understanding regarding what the quality of practice was hugely significant and set the tone for the whole findings. *"At the start of this inspection, the self-assessment and the presentation from senior leaders made clear that they believed services remained good or outstanding. They had no awareness of the decline in services and no accurate understanding of the current quality of practice"*  
Ofsted 2019

1.4 An Improvement Plan was produced in May 2019 and the Council responded with investment and realignment of corporate support and ownership. The Improvement Plan was an immediate response to the ILACS findings, and the Plan focused on the inspection findings, and not necessarily Trafford's longer-term vision and aspirations.

1.5 Following a change in leadership, the Improvement Plan was refreshed, progressing from traditional improvement plans to one of ambitions. It was a signal of the intent, commitment to continuous improvement and culture change. The refreshed plan incorporated learning from the response from the Covid-19 pandemic and allowed the service to take stock of their journey and achievements so far. The approach became more outcome based with a relentless focus on impact. Leaders really started to ask 'so what?' and 'what does this mean for children and families?' and started to drive forward a much-needed culture change. Governance arrangements were strengthened to provide greater scrutiny, accountability, and risk management for all of the improvement work

Each of the 8 Ambitions has its own workstream and action plan, with a member of the senior leadership team as the ambition lead. There is representation from across the partnership within the membership of these workstreams. Qualitative and quantitative measures of success, aligned to priorities, were agreed – answering the 'so what?' question – and a dedicated scorecard was developed to sit alongside the plan.

## **2. Monitoring Visit Activity**

2.1 Since Trafford Children's Services Full Inspection under the *Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services Framework* (ILACS) in 2019, there have been 4

Monitoring Visits as well as a Focus Visit, that specifically considered the authority's response to the pandemic:

**Summary of the monitoring activity is as follows:**

**October 2019** – First monitoring visit (with a focus on the Front Door)

**March 2020** – What was planned to be the 2nd monitoring visit was cancelled due to the pandemic

**February 2021** – Covid Assurance Focussed Visit that considered all aspects of CSC delivery and included an Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) for Education

**September 2021** – Second monitoring visit. Inspectors reviewed the progress made in all areas of concern identified at the last inspection including the quality of social work assessment and plans

**March 2022** – Third monitoring visit. Inspectors were focused on children in care and ensuring that effective support was being provided to enable them to achieve better outcomes.

**July 2022** – Fourth monitoring visit. The focus of this visit was Children in Need, considering specifically: assessments, plans, consistency, and the impact of CIN journey for children and young people.

All of the formal assurance activity has included consideration of the quality of leadership and management across the service and corporately. Findings and the ongoing improvement work has been reported regularly to Scrutiny.

2.2 In addition, the service has benefited from the continual oversight from the DfE and through formal DfE reviews of progress. There has been a flexible approach to the organisation of these reviews, and they have always involved practitioners.

2.3 Following the last Monitoring Visit a meeting was held between the DCS and the Regional lead HMI to determine the next period of oversight and scrutiny from Ofsted. At this meeting it was determined that the next inspection activity would be a full reinspection, under the ILACS Framework. This is line with Ofsted's assessment of where Trafford are on the improvement journey

Key considerations in reaching this determination included:

- Staff having been hugely positive about working for Trafford and they are Trafford's greatest asset
- Ofsted having not found systemic failings or children left unsafe whilst carrying out monitoring activity



- The service knowing themselves well. Inspectors have not seen or told leaders anything, during monitoring activity, that was not already known and indeed had not been reported to Ofsted by those leaders in meetings and context setting

The inspection will likely take place between December 2022 and March 2023.

The sections below will outline key improvement activity that has taken place and in doing so will consider our own self-assessment

### **3. Summary of Improvement Activity**

3.1 In order to address all the recommendations made by Ofsted, a principle of being ambitious for children and families was adopted. It was imperative that the right people were in place who had the right skills and values. The whole service redesign had to take place as it was essential that the service was organised in a way that made sense to the workforce but more importantly to children and families.

3.2 Initially the redesign had an impact of the stability of the workforce but reassuringly this has stabilised. There is also a regional and national context around the recruitment and retention of social workers.

3.3 Workforce stability was and continues to be an ongoing priority for the service, and is routed through Ambition 3 of the improvement plan under the action; 'Creating the Conditions for Practice to Flourish'. An 'Investing in our People' Strategy has been developed which includes a dynamic plan, concentrating on Recruiting, Retaining, Growing & Sustaining. The plan is regularly updated and was part of the evidence submitted to Ofsted as part of most recent monitoring visit, who noted that the right action was being taken. This is a view supported by the DfE

3.4 There has been investment in a 3-year bespoke programme with Strengthening Practice. This commenced with a Care and Confidence module that recognised that having worked in pandemic and gone through a redesign, whilst simultaneously being on an improvement journey, practitioners and managers needed to be given space to reconnect with the values and vision of both self and organisation. This was a 6-month programme that completed in April 2022. This supported developing the right culture, being clear that it was the service's job to be helpful to children and families. There was clarity that only in seeing children and having purposeful time with them could there be a real understanding of what was happening in their lives, even during the height of the pandemic.

3.5 In that time, the service have worked closely alongside Strengthening Practice to develop the bespoke Core Skills Programme which is a critical element underpinning the improvement plan.

3.6 In addition, there has been a relentless focus on using data intelligently and trackers have been developed for each service that are being used routinely by managers to understand what is happening within their services.

3.7 Through the whole service redesign, a service has been created where leaders have manageable spans of control and clear lines of sight to practice. A systematic layer on layer approach to the recruitment was implemented in the newly designed service from Head of Service to social workers and this was successful; 95% of practitioners and managers were given their first preference & 65% of or new Practice Manager posts were recruited to from internal permanent candidates or agency workers who wanted to become permanent.

3.8 The newly established leadership team were supported with the implementation of a bespoke management development programme and through a fortnightly leadership forum Leadership Forum which has seen leaders come together as a cohesive team with shared visions.

3.9 A dedicated Practice Improvement and Learning Service are driving improvements in the quality of practice through the learning from quality assurance. The approach taken has been that practice improvement is led *by practitioners for practitioners* wherever it is possible. The development and roll out of a new Quality Assurance Framework meant that solid performance and quality assurance arrangements were created that ensured there was a strong understanding of the quality of service being provided to families. This framework outlines that quality assurance is not just about audit but it is about the wider parameters of how leaders and managers can be assured that quality of practice is improving and that children are safe. This is through audit, performance management and supervision

3.10 Quality assurance activity is now embedded, and the service is systematically achieving a high number of audits quarter on quarter.

3.11 Work still needs to take place to further improve the quality of assessments and plans to understand what life is like for children and ensure that workers are updating assessments and plans when children's circumstances change. There is still a lack of consistency with recording. Whilst Ofsted feedback has consistently said that social workers know their children and know them well, too often this is not reflected adequately in the written record, and internal auditing activity has highlighted this. 42% of audited assessment were graded 'Requires Improvement', indicating there is more to do. The area of focus now for the service is shifting this activity to achievement of outcomes for children. A session has been undertaken with managers around their role as the quality assurers of practice for the children they are responsible for. This is not to be seen as separate to audit. This is the day-to-day oversight and approval of assessment, plans and how they make decisions every day. Alongside this is the leadership master classes from Strengthening Practice and the internal offer of coaching sessions around having reflective conversations.

3.12 An annual overview report considered in detail the quality of audits over the last year and the subsequent moderations, in order to continue to strengthen the practice around quality assurance. The review found that are some examples of reflective conversations happening with practitioners with their manager to support ensuring quality assurance is about learning and is a live activity serving to improve practice for children and families. It also concluded however that these reflective conversations are not yet embedded across all service areas and manager in the way intended.

Really strong examples were highlighted, in terms of the information contained in the audits and also the level of analysis in terms of what was happening meant for the child, but some audits were found to still lack adequate analysis and be too task orientated.

The service is also aware that the practice of moderation is not yet consistent. Whilst there are some examples of clear and concise moderations that demonstrate analysis and reflection, there are some examples where there is a need for improvement.

Heads of Service now provide an overview report of the audits in their area, and this is demonstrating that themes and trends are being identified These are then becoming actions that the service takes across the teams.

3.13 Improving the quality of both auditing and moderations is a priority in order to achieve consistency. A clear action plan has been developed that addresses how these further improvements in quality assurance activity will be made.

3.14 The approach to multi-agency audit activity has been extended and is now having an impact and influencing changes in practice e.g., improvement in quality or referrals; audit of referrals aligning with agreed pathway; the quality of and consistency of recording visits to children - this is helping leaders understand children's lived experience and enhance the quality of assessment

3.15 As well as monthly Performance Clinics for each team and service and quarterly across the directorate, Quarterly Chief Executive and Lead Member Assurance Meetings are well established, that are chaired by Cllr Hynes, Lead Member for Children's Services. They hold the service to account on a number of areas and enable senior leaders to scrutinise data and performance and seek assurance about the quality of provision.

3.16 Throughout the whole of the improvement journey to date, there has been a focus on partnerships, both strategically and operationally. A Safeguarding Effectiveness Board was established to challenge and oversee partnership activity. Children's Governance across the whole system was strengthened including TSSP & Early Help arrangements

3.17 The Front Door was redesigned based on a reach out model, increasing the partnership presence. The number of social workers at this critical decision-making point was increased, to further strengthen screening and referral processes in line with the relational practice model. Social workers are actively involved in talking to referrers to improve the quality of information and build confidence and capacity across the partnership. This is ensuring children's needs and the worries referrers have been understood and that collective next steps are agreed in a timely way

The integrated front door is making a difference and timeliness of decision making remains strong. There has been a reduction in re-referral rates which means that fewer children and families are having avoidable repeat interventions

3.18 The partnership roles within the front door have been further strengthened by integration with GMP, enabling police and social workers to make joint decisions and

through dedicated specialist posts, including a dedicated schools' advisor & the mainstreaming of a Domestic Abuse advisor, who assists in the screening of Domestic Abuse referrals alongside the police, promoting preventative practice across early help and support as well as the integration of the Reducing Parental Conflict model.

3.19 The whole service redesign brought services such as Missing from Home Team, Youth Justice, and the exploitation team, together to support young people at risk of exploitation or missing under a single service which has resulted in a more coordinated response to adolescents who have vulnerabilities.

3.20 The resource within the specialist exploitation team (Shine) has been increased and expertise from across the partnership has been brought together to share worries and intelligence about young people where there are concerns and focus on early identification - Daily Risk Management Meetings. The work of this team is making a difference to young people through the building of trusted relationships and interventions. There is now further co-location with partners – Shine located within the Police and third sector colleagues sitting within Talk Shop.

3.21 Missing from Home processes have been thoroughly strengthened. Creative ways of undertaking Return Home Interviews have been adopted such as dedicated sessions being offered to young people in children's homes including activity-based session to support the development & engagement with workers and reduce missing episodes. A multi-agency audit took place in respect of the response to our young people who go 'missing from home' and the themes highlighted by the these audits used to inform how the response can be improved and how the service can work to further prevent and reduce identified risk for the cohort of children and young people who go missing from their home.

#### **4. What Inspection Will Look Like**

4.1 The ILACS approach is a whole system of inspection which aims to apply a proportionate and risk-based approach. The inspection team for will usually be 4 social care inspectors, a social care regulatory inspector and an education inspector (usually a schools HMI) will carry out 2 days of fieldwork. Looks at the whole service. A full inspection will be a 3-week process, with the final two weeks involving on-site fieldwork.

4.2 The HMIs will judge the effectiveness of partnership working through looking and children's records and considering whether what do together is making a difference to children. It will involve assessing impact of our audit activity and approach through the lens of 6 to 12 cases we have already audited and testing out whether we know what good looks like and how we use Quality Assurance to improve outcomes for children. It may also involve speaking to some of the children and families selected.

The framework tests the effectiveness of practice in respect of:

- The help and protection of children
- The experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those children who return home
- The arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption
- The experiences and progress of care leavers

Running throughout the whole process is a focus on assessing the effectiveness of leadership and management and the impact this has on the lives of children and the quality of practice.

4.3 Inspectors will determine the overall effectiveness graded judgement by taking account of the grading of the other judgements that have been agreed and by looking at:

- The extent of good practice across the service
- The extent and impact of any areas for improvement

They will also consider whether there any other identified areas for improvement have been identified and the extent to which leaders and managers have a 'grip' on the issues

4.4 The culture of inspection readiness is being developed across the whole of the service and the frequency of Improvement Board Steering Group has been increased (monthly) with a focus on Inspection Readiness and an associated action plan.

4.5 Evidence is being prepared in advance of any inspection notification and staff are being encouraged to celebrate good practice and to being proud of the good work that they are doing to improve the lives of children and young people.

4.6 There are some common themes throughout the feedback that leaders at all levels, through the Leadership Forum, are focusing on. This is through the development of service specific plans regarding what needs to improve and how these themes are addressed in practice. There is assurance that the right plans are in place at a strategic level to make the necessary improvements to begin to consistently evidence the impact of intervention for children and families.

----- Jill McGregor September 2022 -----

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