

2024

The inspection of the Isle of Wight local authority children's services took place between 30 October and 3 November 2023. The outcome was that the Island achieved an overall grading of Good. Leaders and staff in children's services were pleased to note the many positives that were highlighted throughout the inspection. More work is required to demonstrate that the island is providing consistently good services for children who need help and protection.

The inspection was undertaken during a period of transition as the strategic partnership between Hampshire and the Isle of Wight was drawing to close. The conclusion of this successful partnership was 31 January 2024.

There is a recognition that more work needs to be done to improve services for some children. It was recognised that there has been a challenge for the island, in recruiting and retaining social workers. Consequently, there have been periods of higher vacancies which has increased caseloads for some. Leaders know and understand the correlation between higher caseloads and the impact of this on the quality of work with children and families. It was acknowledged during the inspection that leaders understood staffing levels needed to increase and caseloads needed to reduce. A further priority is that managers need to have time and space to provide consistently good standards of supervision and management oversight so that all staff in children's social care, are well supported in their roles to deliver high quality services.

For some families, children are being re-referred and therefore a revolving door situation occurs. There is a need to reduce the number of families who are re-referred, and this is better achieved when there is concerted focus on getting interventions right first time.

The Island is a unique and wonderful place to work. Now in a position of having independent control in how services are shaped and delivered, work has begun to set about establishing refreshed policies and procedures and systems through which social workers will be supported to do their best work and the managers are supported to effectively and consistently provide oversight and scrutiny of practice to ensure all planning for children is of the highest standard and progressed in a timely manner. The infrastructure

supporting the delivery of children's services is being refreshed for example a new electronic recording system has been purchased and the move to this system will take place later this year. This will resolve areas found by inspectors in which the current system is creating problems for staff in being able to record their work easily and effectively.

The priorities for Children's Services are to not only respond to areas highlighted by the inspection but also build on the progress made thus far by aspiring for excellence in the delivery of services. This work is being underpinned by an ethos of "Creating Change Together" which speaks to the determination to ensure that services are built with children and their families and with partner agencies included in the ongoing development of these services. In children's services it is recognised that the journey to an outstanding service, can only be achieved when we continually get the basics right and when each and every person involved in delivering services for children, from members to council leaders to officers, shares the same aspiration for the island's children to have the very best.

Many of the necessary ingredients are in place, for this aspiration to be achieved. For now, and with a new leadership team in place, and an engaged and motivated workforce, the focus is on getting the basics right for all children and building our vision.

The following plan addresses the key areas for improvement highlighted at the outcome of the inspection which were:

- The routine inclusion by the local authority of partner agencies in child protection strategy discussions and assessments.
- The opportunities for the voices of children and care leavers to be heard at a corporate level.
- The quality of oversight and monitoring of:
 - the pre-proceedings process in the Public Law Outline (PLO)
 - permanence for children
 - private fostering.
- Caseloads in the children's assessment and safeguarding teams.

The plan responds to these areas and other themes highlighted within the inspection report and areas for action are group into the following themes.

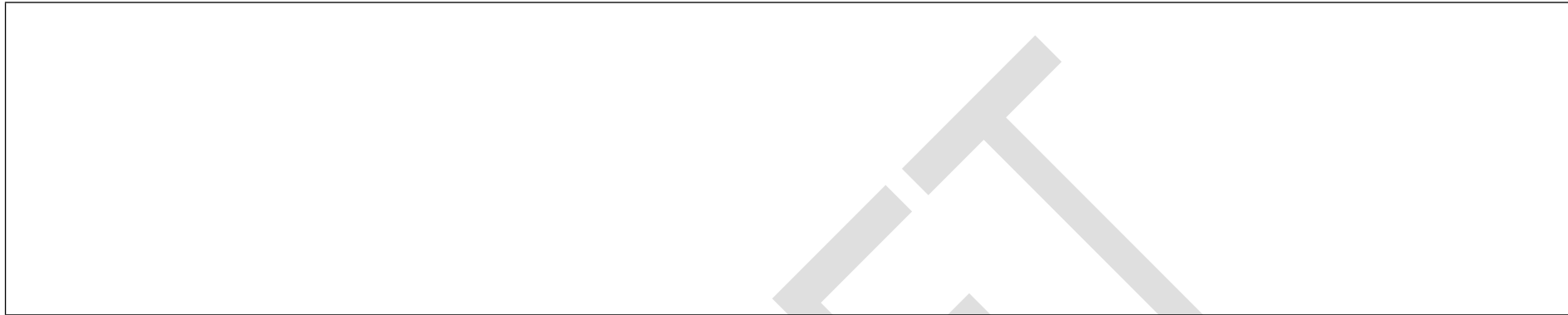
Quality of practice and management oversight including pre-proceedings, private fostering and permanence.

Effective partnership working

Quality assurance systems.

Voice of the child and participation in shaping service delivery.

DRAFT



Quality of practice and management oversight

1. Caseloads and the impact this has on the quality of work and intervention.

What needs to improve?

A reduction of some caseloads in the children’s assessment and safeguarding teams is required.

What inspectors found:

Caseloads in some teams were too high. This has had a negative impact on some areas of practice. There was some variability in children’s assessments. Children’s history and cumulative risk is not always fully considered, and some children subject of multiple re-referrals and numerous assessments because of a repeated pattern of abuse. Thorough analysis of the cumulative impact of neglect needs to be consistently evidenced. Management supervision was not always consistently reflective for teams with higher caseloads had greater challenge in evidencing a consistent approach to supervision. There is consistent management oversight at all stages and decision-making is robust and appropriate, although the detail and quality of management recording are variable.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Commencing	RAG	Progress and Impact to date
1.1	Reduction in caseloads for staff in Child Assessment and Safeguarding Teams. Caseloads should be maintained at an agreed level unless agreed by exception with Service Manager oversight.	Service Director Service Manager Operations	December 2023	A	Several new staff have joined the local authority since December 2023. This has led to a reduction in caseloads. Work is required to continue to reduce caseloads down further, this is an ongoing priority.

	<p>Caseloads to be reviewed weekly by team managers to ensure workflows are correctly followed and case closures/transfers happen in a timely manner.</p> <p>Ensure staffing levels are maintained at a level to support caseloads being maintained at agreed local levels.</p>	Team Managers			
1.2	<p>Ensure children’s assessments are consistently comprehensive and of excellent quality.</p> <p>Assessments will demonstrate well informed analysis of historical and current factors relevant for the family and individual children.</p> <p>Assessments will be prepared to be dynamic and evolving to changing needs for children.</p> <p>Assessments will lead to smart plans for families which are proportionate to identified need.</p> <p>Families will not need to repeat their stories as these will be effectively captured in assessments, case summaries and supervision.</p>	Service Director Service Manager Operations Team Managers	March 2024	A	<p>Workshops are planned for social workers providing a standardised approach for achieving a good standard of assessment and SMART planning.</p> <p>A suite of documents demonstrating “what good looks like” will be made available to staff via the children’s toolkit.</p>
1.3	<p>Ensure all staff consistently complete chronologies on children’s case files which draw both on partners and historical information gathered through</p>	Service Manager Operations &	April 2024	A	<p>Team data days are in the process of being implemented to ensure all staff can have focus on updating chronologies and other aspects of</p>

	MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) processes.	Team Managers			children's files which will support effective analysis of a child's circumstances and inform appropriate planning.
1.4	Undertake collaborative thematic audits to ensure focus with the appropriate manager and allocated practitioner, to drive individual practice and whole service improvement.	Children's Management Team	May 2024	A	Audit timetable has been established. Workshops to focus on the quality of assessments are in development and will be delivered to all case holding teams.
1.5	Effective monitoring of a Service Level Agreement for MASH to ensure work passed to the Child Assessment and Safeguarding Team meets local threshold.	Service Director	April 2024	A	Contract monitoring arrangements will be put in place by the incoming Service Director who joins the service on 18 March.
1.6	Ensure that the escalation policy is consistently applied and in a timely manner, to address any matters arising in disputed application of thresholds.	Service Manager Operations Team Managers	April 2024	A	Incorporating a refresh of the escalation policy within the 'all managers' community of practice.
1.7	Work will be undertaken as part of the contract monitoring process regarding how and when families' consent will be sought to ensure this is as at the earliest possible point of our work with them.	Service Director	April 2024	A	Contract monitoring arrangements will be put in place by the incoming Service Director who joins the service on 18 March.
1.8	Undertake a system review of our work with families where consent has not been obtained.	Children's Management Team	April 2024	A	This would be undertaken in conjunction with the contract monitoring activity.

1.9	Refresh supervision recording protocols to ensure all managers are aware of current expectations for recording supervision and management oversight.	Children's Management Team	April 2024	A	'All managers' community of practice meetings will take place monthly. Quality supervision and consistent recording of supervision session will take place as a priority topic. Lite bite sessions will be based around "best practice recording" and will be a collaborative session led by practitioners.
1.10	Review and update "what good looks like" suite of exemplars contained within the children's toolkit.	Children's Management Team	April 2024	A	Prioritisation of this work has taken place and will feed into 'All managers' community of practice meetings.

2. The pre-proceedings process in the Public Law Outline (PLO)

What needs to improve?

The timeliness of decision making for children subject of a pre-proceedings process and the recording of rationale when timeframes are extended to allow families extra time in which to make necessary changes.

What inspectors found:

There needs to be improvement in the quality of oversight and monitoring of work in the pre-proceedings phase to ensure that there is clear rationale where plans are prolonged to support diversion from court and to ensure families achieve timely change within children's timescales.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Commencing	RAG	Progress and Impact to Date
2.1	Introduction of a revised Pre-Proceedings Framework has been made available to staff and added to the Children's Toolkit.	Service Manager Operations	March 2024	G	A new framework has been introduced and toolkit shared with staff.
2.2	Introduction of a pre-proceedings panel to ensure Service and Team Manger oversight for effective and timely progression of work.	Service Manager Operations	March 2024	G	A process for tracking progress of pre-proceedings activity has been implemented with a tracking panel chaired by the Service Manager.

3. Private Fostering

What needs to improve?

The quality of oversight and monitoring of private fostering.

What inspectors found:

The small number of children known to live in private fostering arrangements are not always identified, assessed, or supported in a timely way. Senior leaders do not have robust oversight of these children's arrangements and support and services are not delivered in line with regulations.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Commencing	RAG	Progress and Impact to date
3.1	Guidance was re-issued regarding Private fostering requirements.	Lead IRO	December 2023	G	Practice and recording guidance have been re-issued to all teams.

3.2	There is a record of senior management oversight of private fostering arrangements to ensure robust assessments are carried out in a timely manner. Where needs are identified through the course of an assessment, these should be responded to in a timely manner which is confirmed at the point of manager's sign off.	Lead IRO and Service Manager Operations	December 2023	G	Reporting by all managers on any new private fostering arrangements is in place via our monthly performance meetings from November 2023.
3.3	Mandatory training is to be completed by all practitioners to ensure they understand and comply with private fostering standards.	Learning and Development Team	March 2024	A	Learning and Development have developed an online training activity which is currently being built; delivery date to enable trial and review of the learning activity is 29/02/2024. Training will be mandatory for all social care practitioners.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Commencing	RAG	Progress and Impact to date
4.1	Implementation of monthly Care Planning Panel meetings will ensure all children will continue to have their permanency progression tracked and progressed in a timely manner.	Service Manager Children in Care Service Manager Operations Legal Services Virtual School Head Permanency Team Lead IRO	March 2024		A regular care planning panel is scheduled to review the plans for all cared for children, whose permanent arrangements have not yet been finalised. This is to provide senior leadership oversight and constructive challenge on each child's permanency plan to ensure this is progressing in a timely way.
4.2	Section 20 reviews by the Lead IRO will provide continued oversight for all children voluntarily accommodated to	Lead IRO	March 2024		A S20 review panel is now organised to take place monthly to ensure review of the appropriateness of such

	ensure they are getting the right level of support to progress permanency at the right time.				arrangements or request escalation in the case of a plan not being deemed to be suitable.
4.3	To ensure that all children who would benefit from life story work are able to access this in a timely way.				<p>Session with managers regarding the range of life story work available will take place through the 'all managers' community of practice.</p> <p>Workshops of practitioner led sessions for social workers working with children who are cared for are planned.</p> <p>Review of life story training offer will take place to ensure this is sufficient to meet practitioners' development needs.</p>

5. Effective Partnership Working

What needs to improve?

The routine inclusion by the local authority of partner agencies in child protection strategy discussions and assessments. All children are supported to access specialist assessments in a timely way including those who do not live on the Isle of Wight.

What inspectors found:

Consultation with partner agencies is not consistently strong. Relevant multi-agency partners are not routinely invited to attend strategy meetings. This means that there is not effective sharing of information at these meetings, where important decisions are being made about action to be taken. For some children, the assessments are being closed too quickly and without relevant input from other agencies.

For some children, there is delay in accessing more specialist assessments to meet their emotional and mental health needs. This is a particular challenge when children live at a distance from the local authority.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Commencing	RAG	Progress and Impact to date
5.1	A process is established for consistent notification of strategy meetings so that partners with relevant information receive an invitation to attend or to share this electronically to aid decision making as part of the Strategy Meeting and/or S47 enquiries.	Service Manager Operations	January 2024	G	<p>A multi-agency meeting was held in December, with an agreed process for implementation which commenced January 2024.</p> <p>All Strategy Discussions on open cases are now being held face to face over Teams with MASH Police, Health and education attending.</p> <p>Regular multi agency operational meetings will take place on a quarterly basis. This will enable opportunity for review of the effectiveness of our safeguarding processes.</p>
5.2	Delivery of multi-agency workshops and/or briefings outlining roles, responsibilities, procedures, and requirements of Working Together 2023.	Service Manager Operations and IOWSCP	January 2024	G	<p>A workshop was held for Childrens Services team managers in January 2024 regarding the implementation of new processes.</p> <p>Multi agency training and workshops are currently under development via the IOWSCP.</p>

5.3	Regular dip sampling and bi-annual thematic audit to be undertaken to ensure all strategy meetings are compliant and that assessments consider partner agency information.	Service Manager Operations and Lead IRO	March 2024		First thematic audit is scheduled to assess impact of practice change in respect of strategy meetings. This audit will also provide a baseline for compliance in ensuring assessments consider partner information and inform work within the service and with partner agencies to ensure effective working together arrangements are in place.
5.4	All children are supported to access specialist assessments. Work with partners to ensure that children are assessed in a timely way. Where this is not possible, particularly for children living off island, ensure managers escalate this in a timely manner to Service Managers for resolution.	Service Manager Children in Care	April 2024	A	<p>'All managers' community in Practice is arranged covering escalation protocols.</p> <p>IRO session is planned to ensure escalation within Children Services and via health is consistently implemented. Work within children services and with LAC Health team is planned to identify how many children are awaiting assessments and the levels of delay experienced to ensure timely resolution?</p>

--	--	--	--	--	--

6. Quality Assurance systems

What needs to improve?
 Consistent, regular, effective, and reflective supervision for all staff throughout the service.

What inspectors found:
 The regularity, quality and impact of staff supervision and management oversight was inconsistent, in teams where caseloads were higher.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Commencing	RAG	Progress and Impact to date
6.1	<p>Ensure supervision frequency occurs in accordance with local policy.</p> <p>For all case holding workers to have access to regular monthly supportive and reflective supervision and for this to be recorded consistently by Team Managers.</p> <p>Workshops will be provided to ensure that managers are supported to</p>	Children's Management Team	April 2024	A	<p>Through our auditing processes we will see an improvement in supervision completion.</p> <p>Auditing workshops have commenced alongside audit the audit work to ensure consistent benchmarking in respect of "good quality" supervision. Feedback to supervisors and auditors of findings is provided to improve consistency and practice.</p>

	achieve consistent standards of supervision with a focus on providing high quality reflection and ensuring progress on plans for children.				
6.2	A review of the audit tools and thematic audit schedule will be completed to ensure discrete areas for practice improvement are effectively covered in our Quality Assurance Framework.	Childrens Management Team	April 2024		Review has commenced to ensure the impact of work on outcomes for children is known and demonstrates practice improvements.
6.3	Introduction of a quarterly child protection practice panel for multi-agency oversight of child protection plans when children have had plans in place for 15 months or more; or for children subject to a CP plan for a second or subsequent time.	Lead IRO	May 2024	A	Lead IRO will attend the Safeguarding Children Partnership subgroup in March to propose the practice panel and confirm membership for roll out in May 2024.
6.5	Strategic performance meetings to be introduced to provide effective senior management oversight and practice challenge on discrete areas identified for improvement.	Childrens Management Team and DaiT Manager	March 2024	G	A mechanism is now provided for performance monitoring, practice development planning and timely response planning to any areas of focus.

--	--	--	--	--	--

7. Voice of the child and participation in shaping service delivery

What needs to improve?
The opportunities for the voices of children and care leavers to be heard at a corporate level.

What inspectors found:
Children’s attendance and influence at the corporate parenting board are very limited. Leaders have recognised this and have appropriate plans in place to address this swiftly. More consideration is required of how to engage and reflect the voice of those children who live at a distance from the island.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Commencing	RAG	Progress and Impact to date
7.1	<p>Children and young people events take place through which they will be supported to express their views, wishes and feelings, and these are considered in the planning and delivery of services.</p> <p>Children placed off-island will be provided with opportunities and support to contribute their views and participate in the Corporate Parenting Board.</p>	Service Manager Children in Care, Service Manager Participation	February 2024	A	<p>Young people are part of childrens Trust event to co-produce 2024 - 2027 Children and Young People Plan.</p> <p>Have your Say events are scheduled to take place throughout the year through school holiday periods which provide mechanisms for feedback into service planning and delivery.</p>

7.2	Preparatory work will be undertaken with care experienced young people so that they are effectively supported to participate in the Corporate Parenting Board.	Service Manager Children in Care Participation leads	February 2024	A	Work is being undertaken in HYPE to encourage and support children and young people's attendance at Corporate Parenting Board.
7.3	Adjustments to Corporate Parenting Board are made with the new chair to make it more accessible for children.	Service Manager Children in Care	January 2024	A	A meeting has taken place with the new chair of the board which looked at the steps required to achieve well-functioning corporate parenting board which fulfils all primary objectives. A review of accessibility of venues has been completed with a plan to move the board to community-based venues which has hybrid facilities.
7.4	There is work being undertaken with councillors to set standards, terms of reference, purpose, and vision for the Corporate Parenting Board.	Service Manager Children in Care, Elected Members	March 2024	A	Meetings have taken place in preparation for the roll out of the revised board.
7.5	A more accessible offer is made available to all care leavers and recorded on their individual "My Life My Future" plan so that children in care and care leavers are helped to understand their rights, entitlements, and responsibilities. Care leavers are well-informed about access to their records, assistance to find	Service Manager Children in Care Team Care Leavers Team	November 2023	A	Accessible versions of the offer are currently being written.

	employment, training, and financial support.				
7.6	Sessions for practitioners on recording the child's voice and reflecting on their experiences to enable workers to understand the impact of children and young people's situations on their lives.	Service Manager Children in Care Care Leavers Team and LIRO	January 2024	A	Sessions have taken place and further sessions are planned throughout the year as part of the Isle of Wight strengths-based approach.

8. Electronic Recording System

What needs to improve?

For Children Services to have a case recording system that supports social work practice and data collection accuracy to enable effective case management, team management oversight and strategic oversight.

What inspectors found:

Workers have been significantly hindered by the inaccurate data produced by the current electronic recording system, which is cumbersome and inefficient and does not support effective social work practice.

Ref	Action What we will do	Action Owner	Due by	RAG	Progress and Impact to date
8.1	Implement a new case electronic management system	Children's Management Team	November 2024	A	The product Mosaic has been procured and a project team has been established to oversee implementation.

9. Workforce and Learning Development

What needs to improve?

Sufficient number of practitioners with the required range of skills and experience to meet children and families needs.

What inspectors found:

At times caseloads were too high. There has been significant pressure on the workforce due to the increase in demand in the MASH, alongside a churn in workers within some teams, but especially in the children's assessment and safeguarding teams. Additional workers and teams are needed to reduce caseloads to the desired level.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Commencing	RAG	Progress and Impact to date
-----	--------	--------------	------------	-----	-----------------------------

9.1	Workforce strategy continues to be delivered to fill vacancies and ensure workforce is at optimum capacity.	Service Director Service Manager Strategic Development	December 2023	A	Increased recruitment of staff in the Child Assessment Safeguarding Teams has been undertaken with a reduction in vacancies.
9.2	A Social Care Academy will be developed this year as an environment through which a framework for ongoing learning and development will be offered for social care practitioners and managers.	Principal Social Worker and Service Director	February 2024	A	Work is underway to prepare for a Social Care Academy on the Isle of Wight in conjunction with Adult Services to be launched in December 2024.
9.3	A service delivery review will take place when the new permanent Service Director has started, to look at the overall service design. Any change to service design will consider service pressure points and staff sufficiency planning.	Service Director	March 2024	A	Interim Service Director will have a full handover with the permanent Service Director to inform the start of the service delivery review. Handover arrangements are in place for March 2024.