

REPORT TITLE: PROGRESS OF THE OFSTED IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Meeting:	Children’s Scrutiny Panel
Date:	19th March 2026
Cabinet Member (if applicable)	Cllr Viv Kendrick
Key Decision Eligible for Call In	No No Planned report to Children’s Scrutiny
Purpose of Report To support Children’s Scrutiny Panel oversight on the progress of the Ofsted Improvement plan.	
Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The scrutiny panel note the report and raise any questions arising from the report. Reasons for Recommendations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure transparency and accountability 	
Resource Implications: There is no resource implications associated with this report.	
Date signed off by <u>Executive Director</u> & name	Tom Brailsford 4.3.26
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance?	N/A
Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning (Monitoring Officer)?	N/A

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: n/a

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes - no risk associated

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update to Scrutiny Panel members on the progress of the improvement activity within Children’s Social Care following our most recent inspection in 2024. The inspection identified that there had been significant improvement, and the overall judgement found Children’s Services in Kirklees as being ‘good’.

1.2 Variability was identified in the experience and progress of care leavers, that there are challenges regarding the sufficiency of homes for children in care and care leavers to live

in, and with the consistency and quality of written records for children in care and care leavers.

- 1.3 The inspection team identified that leaders were fully aware of their challenges and had clear action plans in place to address them.
- 1.4 The areas of improvement identified by Ofsted during the inspection were:
 - The effectiveness of practice with every child who is experiencing harm from neglect and / or domestic abuse.
 - The quality of written plans, records and meeting minutes for the minority of children in care and care leavers where these documents are weak.
 - The availability and choice of homes for children in care and care leavers.
- 1.5 We are making positive progress in the areas that were identified in our inspection and well beyond. We have a rigorous improvement plan that ensures our services enhance opportunities and experiences for families in Kirklees. Our plan is overseen by elected members and our Executive Leadership Team.
- 1.6 Improvement activity is also supported by the Kirklees Safeguarding Partnership which identified four strategic priorities for 2025–2027. Two of these are specifically related to Neglect and Domestic abuse. This approach means that strategic leaders are supporting improvements to children.
- 1.7 Through our ambitious expectations we have seen significant improvements to our practice. Leaders have an accurate understanding of our strengths and the areas of practice we need to further develop. Our self-evaluation is updated annually and is built on feedback from audits of practice, thematic focused deep dives and practice learning days across the service supported by an annual calendar of planned activity. This highlights progress against a range of areas of practice as well as identifying the steps we need to take to make improvements.
- 1.8 This report below provides an overview of the progress we have made in addressing these improvement areas as well as identifying where we have more to do.

2. The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection – Good

The effectiveness of practice with every child who is experiencing harm from neglect and / or domestic abuse.

- 2.1 We have taken pro-active steps to strengthen our practice so that it more effectively addresses risk for children who are experiencing harm from neglect and domestic abuse. This includes the development of a regular check in with colleagues in the police so that we understand the circumstances as to why the police use their powers of protection.
- 2.2 We have embedded a mutually owned protocol with the police to support improved experiences for our children and families and have undertaken significant work with practitioners to strengthen practice around domestic abuse. We provide the Safer and Together training to enable our practitioners to hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour and work alongside victims to implement robust plans that increase safety for children, support their recovery from trauma and promote longer term wellbeing.

- 2.3 Despite this progress, we are concerned that domestic abuse continues to be a significant issue that our families experience and is the primary reason for repeat child protection plans and repeat referrals. Following the tragic murder of one of our parents we will use the Child Safeguarding Practice Review to support multi agency practice.
- 2.4 We have established a task and finish group which oversees our approach to how we can strengthen practice where domestic abuse is a driving factor, mindful that many of our notifications to the national panel are also associated to domestic violence. This includes enhancing management oversight, strengthening perpetrator interventions, ensuring our practitioners utilise their training and improving analytical chronologies to better inform decision making. The primary focus of this group will be to review and strengthen the support available for victims, children, and perpetrators of domestic abuse particularly those open to our service. A key priority is to address the identified gap in perpetrator-focused work.
- 2.5 To further ensure progress in this area, we have introduced reflective forums across all teams, providing opportunities to support enhanced practitioner reflection and peer review. Through regular reflective forums either as standalone meetings or as part of existing team meetings, practitioners have the opportunity to learn from each other and hear a different perspective on their work. Practitioners report that they find this approach supportive to their practice.
- 2.6 We have integrated our Family Support Workers within the Family Help, Safeguarding and Permanence directorate as we develop our Family Help Service. This approach promotes consistent practice and enables practitioners to develop long lasting relationships with families irrespective of their needs. We have embedded performance expectations in the service and have spent significant time working alongside practitioners supporting a smooth transition.
- 2.7 We have introduced Daily Risk Assessment Management Meeting (DRAMM) which enables agencies to share information about victims, perpetrators, and children, conduct a risk assessment and implement a safety plan which provide effective services for victims, perpetrators and children affected by the abuse. This detailed oversight and collective review of agencies' information means that we have joint decision making and assessment of risk. Alongside the DRAMM, we also convene a daily screening meeting to review incidents of domestic abuse assessed as low risk. These meetings involve both a Police Officer and a Social Worker, facilitating collaborative decision making on the appropriate next steps for each case. This practice has been applauded in our front door health checks.
- 2.8 We have secured additional investment to develop and enhance the offer from our Domestic Abuse Consultants, and the ambition is to extend access to reach to a broader cohort of families impacted and affected by domestic abuse. The Domestic Abuse Consultants work with families who are either fleeing domestic abuse or where there are support needs for the family who wish to remain in a relationship. The consultants work with children and families and provide early intervention work. This ensures that we provide preventive work to reduce escalation of concerns. Family feedback reinforces the impact of this support. To support best practice, a key element of our revised domestic abuse strategy is workforce development of which there is a package of Safe and Together training for social work staff and other practitioners. We know from feedback that this is supporting their work with families, but domestic abuse remains a key concern for the partnership.

- 2.9 We are aware that neglect remains a significant area of need for families in Kirklees and to address this have re-launched the neglect toolkit through providing training to all family facing staff in children's services. The effectiveness of the toolkit is overseen through the Kirklees Safeguarding Children's Partnership which sees neglect as one of its key strategic priorities.
- 2.10 Our strategic governance and oversight arrangements of domestic abuse have also been strengthened so that we are confident that the partnership has oversight of the work and the priorities which improve outcomes for children.

The quality of written plans, records and meeting minutes for the minority of children in care and care leavers where these documents are weak.

- 2.11 Improving our use of language in children's records has been our priority during 2025. We have made significant progress in the way we write on children's files and our most recent practice week, which focused on language, was overwhelmingly positive. Practitioners are universally in support of this approach, and we welcomed external support to implement this practice with Dr Lisa Cherry, Director of the Trauma Informed Consultancy and her team, which provided high quality training to support this transformation. The fundamental shift we have taken is writing directly to the child in our case notes, plans and analysis of our assessments. This transformation has taken place across all teams including our Independent Reviewing Officers, Family Help workers and Social Workers. Our case notes following a visit and all management oversight is now written in the form of a letter to the child as are the minutes from our Looked After Children reviews. This means that we not only have the child at the forefront of our mind when writing about children, but it also means that when children read their files as adults, they have a clear sense of what was done to help keep them safe and why.
- 2.12 We have driven the expectation that where children are assessed to be in need that children should have an outcome focused child in need plan. This is now more embedded into practice, and our performance is evidencing this. However, there is still more work to be undertaken to ensure that the actions are linked to plans and that they could be smarter, but we have seen an improvement in the numbers of children having meaningful and understandable plans.
- 2.13 We have developed clear practice guidance and training for social workers around what makes a good contingency plan. In keeping with our commitment to using plain English, we call these back up plans. There has been an increase in children having an established family-owned plan, and this is a continued priority for us to improve.

3. The experiences and progress of children in care – Good

The availability and choice of homes for children in care and care leavers

- 3.1 We have driven a proactive, targeted approach to the recruitment of Foster Carers in our efforts to provide more local homes for our children including Supported Lodgings Carers for specific cohorts of children. Our vision to provide children with long term stability and permanence is overseen through greatly improved oversight and individual tracking of children.

3.2 We are seeing more of our children experiencing continuity of care and permanence through our commitment to Special Guardianship Order (SGO) arrangements. This is due to our innovative approach in disregarding means testing to former Foster Carers including IFA carers ensuring consistent financial support. We have also invested in a Connected Persons Support Service who support children and their carers.

3.3 Despite seeing an increase in new Foster Carers, we continue to experience challenges with finding timely homes for a small minority of our Looked After Children and are working creatively, including with the private and independent sector to make improvements in this area. We recognise where our area of need is and in response are developing a dedicated cohort of emergency carers available at short notice and introducing enhanced fee structures for carers supporting children with complex needs.

3.4 We are taking ambitious steps to strengthen the service so that our children can be cared for locally and in loving homes. These include:

- **Expanding and improving internal residential provision**

Increasing internal capacity and undertaking a recruitment campaign to support being able to look after more children in our own internal provision.

Refurbishment, registration, recruitment and embedding therapeutic models (DBT, PACE) across all internal homes.

- **Strengthening our Fostering Service**

Delivering an improved fostering marketing strategy to increase the number of Foster Carers.

Launching enhanced Foster Carer schemes through developing enhanced carers aimed at meeting higher need cohorts.

- **Developing more housing options for care leavers**

Increasing local semi-independent options and reducing the need for temporary B&B accommodation.

- **Refreshing the Sufficiency Strategy and Needs Assessment**

Updating our provider facing strategy and forecasting future demand to drive appropriate commissioning.

- **Strengthening governance and market engagement**

Running provider forums, visiting local homes, and refreshing governance to ensure we have local homes who will meet our children's needs

4. **The experiences and progress of care leavers – Requires improvement to be good The availability and choice of homes for children in care and care leavers.**

4.1. Ofsted assessed the experiences and progress of care leavers to require improvement to be good. At the time of the inspection, it was noted that the service had already made significant progress and held a clear plan for further embedding and extending the improvements already acknowledged by the inspectors.

- 4.2. There has been extensive efforts and achievements since 2024 in building a collaboration with a range of partners to enhance our care leaver offer and the support and experiences available to care leavers in our authority.
- 4.3. Working collaboratively with housing colleagues and the wider council, we have seen an end to the use of temporary accommodation for care leavers other than in exceptional situations for short periods of time. For the minority of care leavers who experience these unforeseen arrangements, robust risk assessment processes ensure young people are safe.
- 4.4. We have established specialist accommodation provision providing four independent flats for young people, developed an increased number of homes and improved the quality of the accommodation for our care leavers which is driven by our Kirklees Parenting Board.
- 4.5. Our strategic finance panel chaired by the DCS and our quarterly check and challenge events with the Chief Executive scrutinise accommodation arrangements for our care leavers and have seen considerable progress in this area.
- 4.6. Given the increase in support being provided by the service, together with an increase in the number for young people entitled to statutory support, Children's Services approved increasing the numbers of Personal Advisors to support care leavers, as well as a review and regrade of the job roles within the service and an increase in management and supervisory capacity to support risk and vulnerability management.
- 4.7. The service has also worked together with the Local Authority's Homes and Neighbourhood teams to reduce the risks of care experienced young adults requiring temporary accommodation and to increase the experiences for care leavers moving into their own homes. This work has been overseen and supported through the Kirklees Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027, which sets out a number of linked priorities including our priority to 'Develop our Care Leavers Partnership to deliver success for life'.
- 4.8. Through our priority group we have ensured that we have the right accommodation arrangements for care leavers, including those in housing crisis. We have undertaken focussed work to reduce the risk of use of temporary accommodation for young adult care leavers.
- 4.9. We have established joint tracking of crisis accommodation arrangements on a weekly basis and have seen a significant reduction in care leavers experiencing temporary accommodation. We only use temporary accommodation in a crisis and emergency.
- 4.10. A significant factor in our success in reducing the use of temporary accommodation has been our joint project. We have developed shared accommodation provision which provides short term supported self-contained flats for young adults.

5. Concluding comments

- 5.1. We have continued to make significant progress to the quality of our practice, and our mature and embedded quality assurance arrangements provide senior leaders with a line of sight to children and their families experiences. Our self-evaluation provides our service with an assurance that we know what our strengths are and where we need to focus our efforts. As a leadership team we are clear about our priorities, and we have well established plans which drive progress at pace.

- 5.2. Our workforce is the most stable it has been for the last three years. We continue to ensure that practitioners feel valued by the leadership team. We are delighted that we have significantly improved the quality of their supervision and consistent management oversight. Where we have vacancies, we have plans to fill these through our apprenticeships and student social workers. We will be further strengthened when our current newly qualified social workers move to become our experienced workers.
- 5.3. Services and support to our Care Leavers have been transformed since the inspection in 2024. Our Kirklees Parenting Board is well embedded, and we have enhanced and broadened the ownership of corporate parenting duties. This is exemplified by the council's commitment to recognise care experience as a protected characteristic which is now making a difference to the experiences of our Care Leavers.
- 5.4. Our ambition to embed across the service, records which are sensitive and written to children has been a huge success. Our practitioners are motivated and inspired in their practice as a result of the high-quality training and our vision to lead this approach which is role modelled through opportunities such as our practice week.
- 5.5. Our ambitious plans to embed the Family Help Service has been a huge success. We anticipate a significant service redesign during 2026 and will continue to work collaboratively with our partners as we jointly work together to deliver a service that meets the needs of the children and families in Kirklees.
- 5.6. As with most local authorities in England, two of our key priorities and areas for development are addressing the risks posed by neglect and domestic abuse. Using the neglect tool kit in a consistent way, both in Children's services and with our wider partners will really help our practitioners understand and address these risks. Our domestic abuse board will further strengthen our response to this area of risk and will identify ways to better equip our practitioners to help keep children safe.
- 5.7. Sufficiency of homes for our children remains a key challenge and focus but collectively we are determined to establish increased suitable homes for children when they come into our care. Strategic, creative plans and an investment in an Edge of Care Service will support us in this area of practice.

6. Information required to take a decision

Not applicable

7. Implications for the Council

Not applicable

7.1 Council Plan

Not applicable

7.2 Financial Implications

Not applicable

7.3 Legal Implications

Not applicable

- 7.4 **Climate Change and Air Quality**
Not applicable
8. **Risk, Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) or Human Resources**
Not applicable
9. **Consultation**
Not applicable
10. **Engagement**
Not applicable
11. **Options**
Not applicable
12. **Next steps and timelines**
Updated plan will be developed in line with the priorities identified in the revised self-evaluation.
13. **Contact officer**
Rob Fordyce
Head of QA & Practice Development/Principal Social Worker
Robert.fordyce@kirklees.gov.uk
14. **Background Papers and History of Decisions**
n/a
15. **Appendices**
n/a
16. **Service Director responsible**
Vicky Metherringham
Family Help, Safeguarding & Permanence
Vicky.metherringham@kirklees.gov.uk