



Buckinghamshire Children's Services Post Ofsted Inspection Action Plan

Our journey of continuous improvement



Introduction

“Children’s services in Buckinghamshire are no longer inadequate, but still require further improvements to be good. Children are identified when they are at immediate risk of serious harm and prompt action is taken to protect them. No widespread or serious failures were identified that left children exposed to serious continuing harm. This is a tangible improvement on the position at the last inspection in 2017. It has been achieved while addressing the considerable additional challenges entailed in safeguarding children during the pandemic. Leaders and senior managers have achieved important improvements in practice for children in most parts of the service following two inadequate inspection judgements in 2014 and 2017. Several strengthened elements of leadership are in place, but much more needs to be done to ensure that children receive consistently positive standards of social work intervention in all parts of the service.” (Ofsted, February 2022)

The recent inspection of Buckinghamshire Children’s Services has recognised that services to children and their families require further improvements to be good. This is, in our view, a very significant achievement particularly given the long history of previously inadequate practice and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are also pleased that the inspection acknowledged our improvement journey. But we are not complacent.

The aim of this Post Ofsted Action Plan is to address the findings made by the Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) re-inspection in December 2021, clearly indicating how we will implement the 7 recommendations. Alongside this plan, we have a clear vision for work with children and families, which is underpinned by our “fundamentals for the future”.

1. **Strengths based** - actively exploring and acknowledging family strengths as well as their difficulties. We will use methods for building hope and motivation of change, reducing resistance or ambivalence to change. Providing families with **consistent, multidisciplinary**, and where appropriate ‘**high challenge, high support**’ to change and become more **resilient**.
2. Children and young people’s wishes, feelings and experiences placed at the centre; a relentless focus on the **timeliness, quality** and **effectiveness** of help given to children, young people and their families.
3. Recognising that **risk and uncertainty** are features of the system where risk can never be eliminated but it can be managed smarter.
4. The development of **professional expertise** to work effectively with children, young people and their families.
5. Truly valuing and acting on **feedback** from children, young people and families; and **continuous learning and improvement**, by reflecting critically on practice to identify problems and opportunities for a more effective and efficient system.

In our drive towards achieving consistently good services, we follow a cycle of improvement, continuously reviewing and testing our practice and oversight to ensure that we are making progress and creating actions to address our priority areas. In addition, a suite of key performance indicators will be used to track and monitor progress against each recommendation and priority area.

Governance and Accountability

As a senior leadership team, we will take responsibility for the delivery of our plan. We will monitor improvements in performance and practice, measuring impact of our plan quarterly. Our independently chaired Board will continue to meet every two months and maintain oversight of the progress being made against the Ofsted recommendations and other improvements required across the service.



Actions in Response to Ofsted Recommendations



Recommendation 1: The understanding, and reduction of, a high rate of re-referrals and assessments that result in no services being provided for children and their families.

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| Outcomes we are seeking to achieve: | Red: Little or no progress/at risk Amber: Progressing with minor delay Green: Good progress / on track Blue: Completed / embedded |
| 1. Greater understanding of the local factors underpinning the high re-referral rate. 2. A reduction in the number of children with a previous referral within 12 months of their latest referral. 3. Audits showing families receiving the right support at the right time. 4. A reduction in the number of families that step back up after being stepped down from requiring statutory social care support. 5. A greater proportion of referrals received seeking statutory intervention meet the threshold for statutory intervention. | |

| Ref | Action | Accountable Lead | Deadline for completion | Progress, impact and what more needs to be done | Progress RAG |
|-----|---|-------------------|-------------------------|---|--------------|
| 1.1 | Review and report on the reasons for re-referral rate. | Amanda Andrews | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 1.2 | In response to the findings from the review above (1.1), develop a specific set of actions that address identified areas for development. | Palvinder Kudhail | 31 July 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |

Recommendation 2: The consideration and cumulative impact of earlier interventions and family histories in children and family assessments.

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| Outcomes we are seeking to achieve: | Red: Little or no progress/at risk Amber: Progressing with minor delay Green: Good progress / on track Blue: Completed / embedded |
| 1. Assessments are timely and proportionate to risk, informed by research and by the historical context and significant events for each child. 2. Assessments are dynamic and change in the light of emerging issues and risks. 3. Assessments lead to direct help for families if needed and are focused on achieving sustainable progress for children. Help given to families is proportionate to the level of need. 4. Families only tell their story once and actions / plans that have not worked in the past are not repeated. | |

| Ref | Action | Accountable Lead | Deadline for completion | Progress, impact and what more needs to be done | Progress RAG |
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| 2.1 | Issue and embed guidance and tools to staff to improve the quality of the consideration of diversity in case work with children. | Amanda Andrews | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 2.2 | Issue guidance and good practice exemplars to staff about assessments and use of research and analysis including historical information. | Errol Albert | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 2.3 | Undertake dip sampling of assessments to ensure that families histories are taken into account and research informs appropriate interventions. | Palvinder Kudhail | 30 September 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 2.4 | Understand and report on the reasons for high numbers of assessments that lead to no further action. | Amanda Andrews | 30 September 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 2.5 | Develop, issue and embed revised guidance on safety plans with a stronger focus on ensuring that they are robust and up to date, and share good practice exemplars with staff. | Amanda Andrews | 30 September 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 2.6 | Evidence better oversight of outcomes and follow up of feedback in return home interviews in plans for children though audit activity. | Ollie Foxell | 30 September 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |

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| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 2.7 | Identify and develop initiatives / interventions that supports mothers who have repeat pregnancies where children are removed. | Errol Albert | 31 March 2023 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |

Recommendation 3: The quality of social workers' direct work with children.

Outcomes we are seeking to achieve:

1. Children and young people benefit from stable and meaningful relationships with social workers.
2. Practice is based on understanding each child's day-to-day lived experience and is informed by the most recent assessment.
3. Plans set out clearly the detail of the direct work required based on the needs of the individual child.
4. Children are seen regularly and seen alone by their social worker and children understand what is happening to them.
5. Children are safer as a result of the help they receive.
6. An increased number of children and young people engage in participation activity including 'We do Care' and routinely share their views, wishes and feelings.

Red: Little or no progress/at risk
Amber: Progressing with minor delay
Green: Good progress / on track
Blue: Completed / embedded

| Ref | Action | Accountable Lead | Deadline for completion | Progress, impact and what more needs to be done | Progress RAG |
|-----|---|------------------|-------------------------|---|--------------|
| 3.1 | Undertake a series of workshops across all teams about effective direct work with children and share tools and techniques that can be used. | Aman Sekhon-Gill | 30 September 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 3.2 | Review and issue guidance and good practice exemplars for plans to be clear and focused, avoiding generic statements. | Aman Sekhon-Gill | 30 September 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |

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| 3.3 | Feedback to be sought from a sample of children and young people in relation to their experience and impact of the work undertaken with them. | Gareth Morgan | 30 November 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |

Recommendation 4: The support provided to children aged 16 and 17 years who present as homeless.

Outcomes we are seeking to achieve:

1. Young people receive timely and effective support that prevents the need for them to become homeless.
2. More young people on the edge of care are presented to the Legal Planning and New Admissions Panel in a timely way increasingly the opportunity for earlier intervention.
3. A reduction in the number of young people living in unsuitable accommodation.
4. Young people identified as requiring joint assessments of need with housing that are compliant with the Southwark Judgment, are carefully monitored to ensure they receive the support they need from all services.

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| Ref | Action | Accountable Lead | Deadline for completion | Progress, impact and what more needs to be done | Progress RAG |
|-----|---|------------------|-------------------------|---|--------------|
| 4.1 | Undertake a dip sample of all young people at risk of or homeless to ensure that practice for 16/17-year-old homeless is in line with the agreed protocol and guidance and Southwark Judgement. | Amanda Andrews | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 4.2 | In response to findings from the review above (4.1), develop a specific set of actions that address identified areas for development. | Amanda Andrews | 31 July 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 4.3 | Complete a further review of children aged 16 and 17 years who have recently presented as homeless. This will include those who present directly to housing and third sector organisations to | Amanda Andrews | 30 September 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |

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| | assess impact of the revised protocol and guidance. | | | | |
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Recommendation 5: The impact of independent reviewing officers (IROs) in decisively escalating children's cases when there is drift and delay in the progress of their care plans

Outcomes we are seeking to achieve:

1. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) offer strong, positive challenge through flexible and supportive actions to drive forward good practice and bring effective, timely support which prevents unnecessary drift and leads to improved outcomes for children and families.
2. IROs apply robust scrutiny which impacts the care planning and review process for each child. IROs are strong advocates for children and young people and work diligently to ensure the child's wishes and feelings are given full consideration and that the care plan fully reflects the child's current needs.
3. Plans to make permanent arrangements for children and young people are effective and regularly reviewed by IROs.
4. IROs challenging any shortfalls in care plan actions and checking the progress of children in between their statutory reviews. They ensure that children are seen and supported to contribute to their review and to influence planning.
5. An increased number of children and young people participate in their review.
6. IRO review outcomes are recorded within 5 days of the child's review and this is closely monitored.

Red: Little or no progress/at risk
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Green: Good progress / on track
Blue: Completed / embedded

| Ref | Action | Accountable Lead | Deadline for completion | Progress, impact and what more needs to be done | Progress RAG |
|-----|--|------------------|-------------------------|---|--------------|
| 5.1 | When IROs escalate cases as a result of drift and delay, the IRO will set specific actions they will take to address the identified problem. These actions are in addition to those set for the allocated social worker. | Aman Sekhon-Gill | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 5.2 | Develop a data set and use this to track and report monthly on the timeliness of resolving IRO resolutions. | Aman Sekhon-Gill | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 5.3 | IRO Practice standards to be shared with social work teams to | Aman Sekhon-Gill | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |

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| | embed the CLA review process within all social work teams. | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 5.4 | Undertake dip sampling of the impact of the IRO footprint on casefiles, consistency of the use of the agreed headings, and compliance with IRO practice standards. | Aman Sekhon-Gill | 30 September 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |

Recommendation 6: Improve the quality of case supervision for social workers in order that it promotes consistently effective work with children

Outcomes we are seeking to achieve:

1. Regular supervision takes place which promotes a reflective and analytical approach to children and families' needs.
2. Supervision is utilised to increase workers' confidence, competence and their ability to think critically leading to improved decision making and effective interventions with children and families.
3. Supervision is held within timescales reducing drift and delay and supporting case progression and this is closely monitored.

Red: Little or no progress/at risk
Amber: Progressing with minor delay
Green: Good progress / on track
Blue: Completed / embedded

| Ref | Action | Accountable Lead | Deadline for completion | Progress, impact and what more needs to be done | Progress RAG |
|-----|--|-------------------|-------------------------|---|--------------|
| 6.1 | Revise case work supervision template so that there is a distinct focus on impact, reflection, and what needs to be done to secure a good outcome for the child. | Palvinder Kudhail | 31 May 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 6.2 | Workshop with managers to consult on the above prior to implementation. | Aman Sekhon-Gill | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 6.3 | Implement and embed the revised supervision guidance and | Aman Sekhon-Gill | 31 August 2022 | Action status: | |

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| | undertake live observations of case work supervision to assess impact. | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 6.4 | Through our quality assurance programme, complete a review to assess the quality and impact of supervision across all teams. | Aman Sekhon-Gill | 30 September 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |

Recommendation 7: The engagement and participation of children in care in the corporate parenting work of the Council

Outcomes we are seeking to achieve:

1. Children and young people are encouraged to express their views, wishes and feelings, and these are considered in the planning and delivery of services.
2. The local authority is a committed corporate parent that recognises and prioritises the needs of children in all aspects, such as housing, career opportunities, education and learning.
3. 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 employment, training and financial support.
4. The local authority celebrates the achievements of children in care and care leavers. It shows it is ambitious for their futures.

Red: Little or no progress/at risk
Amber: Progressing with minor delay
Green: Good progress / on track
Blue: Completed / embedded

| Ref | Action | Accountable Lead | Deadline for completion | Progress, impact and what more needs to be done | Progress RAG |
|-----|---|------------------|-------------------------|---|--------------|
| 7.1 | Launch Buckinghamshire's Participation Strategy 2022-2025. | Gareth Morgan | 31 May 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 7.2 | Embed feedback from participation with children and young people into all reports to the Corporate Parenting Panel. | Alison Munt | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |

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| 7.3 | Undertake periodic checks to evidence that care leavers understand their entitlements and how to access support. | Alison Munt | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |
| 7.4 | Team Managers to ensure Personal Advisors understand the Local Offer and use this knowledge in their work. | Alison Munt | 30 June 2022 | Action status: | |
| | | | | Impact against outcomes set: | |
| | | | | What more needs to be done: | |