

A photograph showing the back view of a family of four walking away on a path in a park. The family consists of a woman in a red top and blue jeans, a young boy in a blue t-shirt and blue jeans, a young girl in a pink and white striped shirt and blue jeans, and a man in a grey t-shirt and blue jeans. They are all holding hands. The path is covered in fallen leaves, and the background is a lush green park with trees.

Action Plan to address findings from the Sunderland Joint Targeted Area Inspection on multi-agency response to children and families who need help

June 2023 – May 2024



SSCP
SUNDERLAND
SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
PARTNERSHIP

Introduction to this action plan

In January 2023 Ofsted, CQC and HMICFRS undertook a Joint Targeted Area Inspection of multi-agency responses to families who need help (referred to as Early Help in this plan). The letter of inspection findings can be found [here](#).

Overall Inspectors were positive about how effective partners are in providing early help to families:

‘Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSP) arrangements are well established and effective. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the needs of vulnerable children in their local area. They are fully cognisant of the importance of addressing children’s needs early. LSP strategic arrangements are closely aligned with local universal and voluntary organisations, ensuring a clear understanding and shared approach to prioritising and meeting children’s needs. Partners work persistently and creatively together in an environment of significant and extensive local deprivation to coordinate and deliver an array of multi-agency early help services that are successfully reducing harm and preventing risks to most children receiving services from escalating’.

Inspectors talk more in the letter about the extensive range of single and multi-agency early help services that are making a difference to children and could see evidence that those services were helping families to solve their difficulties. As a result, very few come back into the statutory system which is a good measure of success.

As well as explaining what they saw as was working well, Inspectors thought there were five key areas that we needed to improve on which we fully agreed and accepted:

- Communication with and involvement of all partners in meetings and in decisions about next steps to help children.
- Increased staffing capacity to allow the consistent involvement of health practitioners across the spectrum of early help services.
- Consideration and analysis of children’s ethnic identity, cultural heritage and diverse needs in referrals, assessments and plans.
- Timeliness of early help assessments and plans.
- The quality and effectiveness of the LSP’s multi-agency audits

This plan, which we submitted to Ofsted on 23 June 2023, will be monitored by the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership who will ensure that relevant aspects of the plan are reported into other committees as relevant, including the Health and Wellbeing Board and ICB Board.

Importantly we will use our existing Practitioners’ Forum (Diagram 1 shows how this works) to do a deep dive into how well we identify and understand children’s ethnic, cultural and heritage needs. We will include children and young people in this exercise. We will also reach out to other SCP who have strong practice in this area to learn from them.

By June 2024 we will have fully reviewed all the actions in this plan and be able to demonstrate progress in every area.

Diagram 1: Practitioner Forum Process



Phase 1 is to establish and define areas of change through facilitated discussion. Everything is up for debate! Here we create Communities of Practice, ‘groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as the interact’. Wenger 2007

Phase 2 is an investigation to dig further on what was raised. This phase will take roughly three months with the aim of creating clear, achievable actions from the ideas brought out of the discussions in phase 1.

Phase 3 we will meet and create an action plan based on the findings. This is then presented to our Strategic Leaders to agree and decide finer detail.

JTAI Action Plan

RAG-Rating Key

RED	Action not complete and delayed.
AMBER	Action at risk of not being completed within timescale.
GREEN	Action on target to be completed within timescale.
COMPLETED	Action completed.

Summary of RAG Status as at June 2023

Red	Amber	Green	Completed	Total
0	4	21	1	26

1. COMMUNICATION

What needs to improve?

Communication with and involvement of all partners in meetings and in decisions about next steps to help children.

What did inspector find?

More work is needed to ensure that all partners are routinely informed and included when social work managers take decisions to close referrals about children, and that they are consulted when decisions are made to step children down from statutory services to early help.

In cases where parents are resistant to engage and withhold consent, multi-agency meetings are not being routinely convened, limiting opportunities to share information. While individual practitioners may be working with these families, insufficient communication between agencies is causing delay in progressing assessment and planning for a small number of children.

There is a lack of understanding within the early help teams of health roles and responsibilities. Consequently, relevant health practitioners are not consistently invited to early help meetings or to contribute to assessments for a family.

***RAG: Red, Amber, Green, Completed**

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
1.1	Early Help Managers to be briefed on the need to consider midwifery as a partner when pulling together the team around the family.	Information sought from midwifery to inform level 2 targeted early help assessments. Midwives form part of teams around the family where appropriate.	TfC Early Help	Immediate	Dip sampling will start in July to provide assurance on the progress and impact of the briefings (action 1.3).	Green
1.2	Early Help Managers to be briefed to resume inviting health visitors and school nurses to all team around the family meetings (age appropriate).	Information sought from 0-19 service to inform level 2 targeted early help assessments. Health visitors and school nurses will form part of team around the family where appropriate.	TfC Early Help and 0-19 service	Immediate	Dip sampling will start in July to provide assurance on the progress and impact of the briefings (action 1.3).	Green

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
1.3	Early Help Quality Assurance Team to undertake dip sampling to seek assurances that health practitioners are invited to Early Help meetings and contribute to assessments.	We will know if Early Help teams have a good understanding of health roles and responsibilities, resulting in relevant health practitioners being invited to early help meetings or contributing to assessments for a family.	TfC Early Help	From August 2023	Dip sampling to commence after the implementation of Action 1.2 On track.	Green
1.4	<p>Decisions to close or step-down families from CP, CiN or Early Help to be communicated routinely:</p> <p>a) Following a MASH assessment, if there is a dispute around the decision a multi-agency discussion to be held to discuss the information and agree an outcome.</p> <p>b) Consent form to be updated so parents can consent to information being shared. If parents don't an agreed email will be shared with professionals outlining the relevant worries and safety plan.</p> <p>c) All assessments to be shared with partner agencies when families are in statutory procedures.</p>	Partners will be better informed as to the reasons for closure or step-down and will have a further opportunity to contribute to discussions around safety for the children.	TfC Early Help and Children's Social Care	June 2023	<p>MASH partner agencies updated and multi- agency discussions taking place.</p> <p>Consent form updated and will be shared with all staff within two weeks.</p> <p>Briefing held with all Team Managers to advise that all assessments completed within statutory procedures should be shared with parents and then with partner agencies.</p> <p>Dip sampling will start in July to provide assurance on the progress and impact of decisions and assessments being shared. This will also include a review of any information governance risks if they emerge.</p>	Green
1.5	Undertake a multi-agency audit to evaluate the communication and involvements of partners in	We will know if all partners are routinely informed and included when social work managers take decisions to close referrals about children, and that they are consulted	Head of Service SSCP and partners	October 2023	A % will be identified to review against compliance with the action and the PI from Action 1.6 will contribute to this work.	Green

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
	meetings and in decisions about next steps to help children, particularly referral and step-down decisions.	when decisions are made to step children down from statutory services to early help. We will know if this is making a difference for children in terms of improved outcomes.			On track.	
1.6	Strengthen the monitoring and reporting of agency attendance at key meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy • ICPC & RCPC • Audit • Front Door Operational group 	Improved attendance at key meetings thereby ensuring more holistic approach to the multi-agency work with all agencies contributing and making more informed decisions. Attendance at meetings to be part of Performance Information available to partners which is considered in the relevant SSCP sub-meetings.	Head of Service SSCP and partners	November 2023	This action is related to Action 1.5.	Green
1.7	Increase and monitor agency attendance at Signs of Safety Training to ensure all staff involved with children are using common language, a common way of working and building a shared understanding of strength-based work with children.	All staff in all agencies to fully understand the Signs of Safety model which is key to partnership working in Sunderland.	TfC Director of Social Care & Head of Service SSCP	Ongoing.	Ongoing. The % of staff in each agency trained in Signs of Safety.	Green

2. INCREASING CAPACITY

What needs to improve?

Increased staffing capacity to allow the consistent involvement of health practitioners across the spectrum of early help services.

What did inspector find?

Services across the Sunderland health economy are facing significant challenges with staff vacancies and difficulties with recruitment and retention of frontline practitioners. The partnership is aware of these challenges and leaders have worked creatively together to reduce gaps in provision. There is still more to be done as this has a significant impact on the level of contribution that health practitioners can make to multi-agency work in early help. Consequently, joint working between health services and multi-agency partners is inconsistent and requires strengthening.

*RAG: Red, Amber, Green, Completed

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
2.1	Development and implementation of a skill mix model of delivery, led by an experienced Health Visitor with additional capacity to support appropriate supervision.	<p>Earlier provision of interventions (e.g. parent-infant relationship support, perinatal mental health support, infant feeding support)</p> <p>Increased universal service use by underrepresented demographic groups</p> <p>Improved staff experience (job satisfaction, reduced staff absence, reduced staff turnover)</p> <p>Improved family experience of services</p> <p>Increased quality of the Start for Life service (as perceived by staff & service users)</p>	Health Transformation Lead	<p>Development by December 2023</p> <p>Implementation by June 2025</p>	<p>Proposal submitted to the DHSC Start for Life Workforce Pilot with the outcome expected Summer 2023. Appetite locally to consider how we implement the proposal if unsuccessful with DHSC (although not to the extent of funding requested).</p> <p>December is allocated for the development of the model, with implementation being aligned to the current healthy child programme contract by the end of June 2025.</p>	Green
2.2	Develop and implement a multi-disciplinary workforce development strategy for early help	<p>Training will be coordinated across the system to understand and identify need early, and work in a whole-family way.</p> <p>It will be widely understood locally what workforce diversity, capacity, skills and knowledge is required to impact on the outcomes for children and young people and family</p>	Health Transformation Lead	By June 2025	Detailed plan is in development and relates to Action 2.1	Green

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
		<p>There will be an agreed, high-quality training and supervision offer which supports the family hub network's workforce to apply the latest evidence to their practice</p> <p>There will be a learning culture, feedback to inform future training and practice across agencies.</p> <p>There will be career development pathways for existing and new staff, to support retention and ensure areas are growing the staff they will need in the future.</p>				
2.3	Recruit five Family Peer supporters as part of the Family Hubs (one in each Family Hub). These will be managed by the 0-19 Service.	<p>Easier access to information on infant feeding, parenting and peri natal mental health</p> <p>Increased support to parents on parent/infant relationships and promotion of sensitive and attuned parenting</p> <p>Normalising a breastfeeding culture in communities</p> <p>Increased access to low level breastfeeding support (1:1 and groups)</p> <p>Co delivery of Sunderland Parenting Programmes</p>	Health Transformation Lead/Family Hub Managers	By July/August 2023	All five Peer Supporters have been recruited, awaiting recruitment checks to be finalised.	Green
2.4	STSFT Midwifery STSFT recognise the gaps they have had within their midwifery structure and have been working to address – national shortage has been an influential factor. Their recruitment and retention midwife has	<p>Recruited 3 international midwives. Over recruited to establishment WTE (whole time equivalents), with 18 newly qualified midwives.</p> <p>Improvement in face-to-face patient care.</p>	NENCICB (Central) contracting team / quality team	Completed	<p>Assurance around the workforce is monitored and received at the STSFT QRG with (NHSE and CQC in attendance).</p> <p>There is a good focus on retention levels and supporting the development and health and</p>	Completed

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
	been working alongside the Head of Midwifery to address vacancies.				wellbeing of existing staff to further support this. Trust have also recently advertised for an Assistant Director of Midwifery and recruitment process is ongoing.	
2.5	<p>0-19 and ICRT (front door) team.</p> <p>There are national recruitment issues in relation to both qualified Health Visitors and School nurses.</p> <p>Work is ongoing between the commissioned service provider for 01-19, Harrogate District Foundation Trust (HDFT), HDFT, Sunderland City Council Public Health team, NENC ICB contracting and Integrated Children's Commissioner, to address the capacity issues and challenges.</p>	<p>A review of current contracting and funding arrangement is underway. Potentially the ICRT funding will be separated from main 0-19 contract. However, contracting and governance arrangements will need to be reviewed and contract variations will be required.</p> <p>Increased capacity will significantly improve access to good quality assessment information and outcomes for parents and families.</p>	Sunderland City Council (Public Health) NENCICB (Central) Integrated Children's Commissioner (NENC& TfC)	Work has commenced W/C 12/06/23	<p>Initial meetings have now commenced with the three commissioners.</p> <p>HDFT are recruiting in innovative ways, and have introduced a transformation team which deal specifically with safeguarding processes, freeing up time of mainstream Health visitor and School Nurses. Activity is monitored through the public health team, and NENC ICB attend governance meetings with the Trust.</p>	Amber
2.6	Agencies to monitor workloads to ensure resources match demand	Single agencies know what the average number of families/children individuals are supporting but that information isn't considered collectively. The relevant SSCP will gather relevant workload data and report on any themes, risks and opportunities for more joined up working.	SSCP Head of Service and Independent Scrutineer	To commence Autumn 2023	Reporting tool to be built and agreed by agencies.	Green

3. ANALYSIS OF CHILDREN'S ETHNICITY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

What needs to improve?

Consideration and analysis of children's ethnic identity, cultural heritage and diverse needs in referrals, assessments, and plans

What did inspector find?

In most children's cases sampled, the importance and impact of individual children's ethnicity and cultural heritage are not consistently considered by all professionals in contacts and referrals and case analysis and case planning. This limits the opportunity for professionals to fully understand a child's background and identity, including opportunities in direct work to address strengths of cultural heritage and the impact of racism they may have experienced. Senior LSP leaders recognise that this is a significant gap and have plans in place to improve managers' and practitioners' understanding of, and consistent reporting on, the impact of children's unique and diverse needs.

*RAG: Red, Amber, Green, Completed

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
3.1	Multi-agency training offer to be devised and offered to all partners.	Children will be asked sensitively about their ethnic heritage, their culture and lived experience which in turn will inform suitable interventions.	SSCP Training lead	October 2023	Some additional single agency training has already been procured, which will be evaluated before the SSCP purchase a full training package.	Green
3.2	TfC EDI network to share good practice and work with partners to showcase sensitive ways of engaging and working with global majority families.	Clear evidence in contacts, referrals, and assessments of a child's ethnic identity.	Equality, diversity & inclusion policy lead.	From June 2023	The TfC EDI network has already showcased appreciative inquiries that evidence ethnically and culturally sensitive work, creating an environment for shared learning across all practitioners, including multidisciplinary partners based in TfC.	Green
3.3	Practitioners Deep Dive into how well children's ethnicity, culture and identity is understood and responded to.	Multi-agency audits will evidence a strong understanding of ethnic identity.	SSCP Head of Service and partners	December 2023	The process and approach to Deep Dives is well-established and service changes can be seen from previous interrogations of what works.	Green
3.4	A specific collaborative piece of work between Health (NENCICB & STSFT) and Sunderland University to develop a suite of podcasts that will address the culture and heritage of ethnic groups within Sunderland. This will be made available	To generate professional curiosity about culture and heritage which can then be seen in referrals, assessments and safety planning for children.	NENCICB (Central)	Completion of phase 1 by August 2023	Initial meeting held and planning is now in place. Future meetings in place.	Amber

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
	for all agencies internal IT systems for staff to access. A questionnaire is currently being developed to get a better understanding of what front line practitioner would like to know and work is also underway to recruit participants for the pod casts.					
3.5	Better data recording and data capture within all agencies ICT systems of children's self-reported identity.	Audit shows that some children don't have their ethnicity, chosen gender and sexual identity recorded. To allow agencies to understand children, their relationships and lived experience, professional curiosity, accompanied by good recording, is essential. Better overall data will help us to understand emerging communities in Sunderland which will lead to better interaction with families as we understand cultural issues and challenges individual and families encounter.	All agencies. Digital Policing D/Supt Lisa Laverick	December 2023	Audit of cases to ensure information is captured. Northumbria Police were due to move to a new records management system, but this has not been possible, and the force is now engaged in procurement processes for an alternative product. At present, Northumbria Police cannot capture data round ethnic identity, cultural heritage and diversity on current operational systems. The importance of the action is acknowledged so interim options are being explored.	Amber

4. QUALITY AND TIMELINESS OF ASSESSMENTS

What needs to improve?

Timeliness of early help assessments and plans.

What did inspector find?

The quality and timeliness of early help assessments and plans can vary. In a small number, the practice is too focused on the needs of the adult; the voice of the child and their individual diverse needs are not identified or assessed by partners.

*RAG: Red, Amber, Green, Completed

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
4.1	Revise the pathway for Early Help Assessments, Plans and Reviews.	Drift and delay will be reduced to within a 10% tolerance. Disengagement by families will reduce.	TfC Early Help Service	From June 2023	Pathway has been revised (April 2023). Dip sampling will start from June to provide assurance on the progress and impact of the revised pathway.	Green
4.2	Increase management oversight of the progress of Early Help family plans.	Decision making and clearly recorded analysis by managers will be visible in case recording.	TfC Early Help Service	From June 2023	Early Help Practice Week (termly) held w/c 12 June 2023. Workshop to review outcomes and add to Early Help Improvement Plan Monday 19 June 2023.	Green
4.3	Increase spot-checks and dip-sampling of the progress of family plans.	Families will receive a timelier service and family feedback (after step-down or closure) will reflect this.	TfC Early Help Service	August 2023	First dip-sample to take place July/August 2023.	Green
4.4	Ensure case-notes detail any reasons for drift and delay and explanations are clearly visible on the file history.	Justification for any drift and delay (e.g., attempts to engage resistant families) will be clearly visible in case recording.	TfC Early Help Service	From June 2023	Workshop held with Early Help Team and Assistant Team Managers 9 May 2023. Instructions re-issued in respect of expectations, existing practice guidance and timelines. Dip-samples to assess timeliness continue. Follow up workshop to review progress scheduled for 7 July 2023.	Green

5. MULTI-AGENCY AUDITS

What needs to improve?

The quality and effectiveness of the LSP's multi-agency audits.

What did inspector find?

Leaders accept that more work is required to develop the quality and effectiveness of early help multi-agency audits to ensure that auditors consistently provide evidence that the help provided is making a positive and sustained difference to children.

*RAG: Red, Amber, Green, Completed

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
5.1	Appoint a Head of Service to manage the SSCP Business Unit and oversee partnership QA activity.	Greater strategic oversight of the multi-agency audit process which will be reviewed and revised.	SSCP and all statutory partners	From June 2023.	Recruitment is underway - start date circa Sept 2023	Green
5.2	Revise the role of the 'performance & quality assurance sub-committee' to incorporate multi-agency audits (including prevention and early help activity).	Improved multi-agency audit process, which feeds into service delivery, identifies gaps in provision, areas of good practice and areas of weakness, and informs commissioning intentions as a result. Importantly it also shines a light on what has made a difference for children.	Head of Service SSCP and partners	Autumn 2023.	Full audit plan to be in place for 2024.	Green
5.3	Review these improvements (Action 5.2) and the impact upon service delivery and commissioning intentions.	Further improvement in understanding what works for children and how effective interventions are, which in turn informs what is delivered and procured by partners.	Head of Service SSCP and partners	End 2024	The JTAI has already led to improvement activity that is referenced in other parts of this action plan, that contribute to this action.	Green
5.4	Audits need to be prioritised around the areas of improvement in our work identified in the JTAI. Need to be multi-agency and link to the performance framework to evidence partner attendance.	Continual improvement in front line practice across all agencies and a better understanding of what makes a difference for children and families.	D/Supt Lisa Laverick & MASH Manager Paul Goundry	October 2023	Every audit should be revisited after a set period to ensure learning and key messages have landed with front line practitioners.	Amber

No	How will we do it?	What will change as a result?	Lead	Timescale	Progress & Impact to date	*RAG
	<p>There needs to be clear governance for the audits via the most appropriate board. This will link to the findings/recommendations to further improve training and awareness to ensure it is embedded across all agency front line practitioners.</p> <p>Every audit should have a second review audit to ensure the improvements identified have been embedded with front line practitioners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes • Embedded business process • Range of staff and agencies • Data • Outcomes? How do we know? (Framework – agreed with partners) • Voice of the child • Examples of work with children • Recommendations • Are there any service provision gaps? 					