

Together for Children

Learning and Improvement Plan 2020 – 2021

(Updated October 2020)



PROGRESS TRACKER

All actions in the Learning and Improvement Plan are RAG-rated. A key to the RAG-rating system is below.

RED	Agreed date passed - action not complete.
AMBER	Action not on target for completion by agreed date.
GREEN	Action on target to be completed by the agreed date.
COMPLETED	Action complete.

The RAG system is intended to be used to illustrate our improvement progress against the domains in the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services framework (ref web link), which also provides the structure to our organisational Self-Assessment.

Table 1 shows the current position of all actions broken down into the relevant domains, and table 2 shows the totals of priority actions by RAG status.

Table 1

Current Status	Help and Protection	Children in Care & Care Leavers	Leadership	Totals
Red	0	0	2	2
Amber	2	2	1	5
Green	7	3	7	17
Completed	19	6	9	34
Total	28	11	19	58

Table 2

Priority Actions	Red	Amber	Green	Completed	Total
	1	1	4	7	13

THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN WHO NEED HELP AND PROTECTION

*High Priority Action

**Status: Red, Amber, Green, Completed

NO	*ACTION	LEAD	TIMESCALE/ DEADLINE	**STATUS	PROGRESS UPDATE & ANY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT
1	Implement the FGC and domestic abuse innovations in Early Help whilst ensuring capacity continues to be reviewed in line with need.	Director of Early Help	01/07/2020		Complete.
2	Implement Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub arrangement to strengthen multi -agency information sharing and decision making.	Head of Service – Safeguarding to lead with all 3 Statutory partners	01/05/2021		MASH model is in place and partners continue to refine the processes around urgent decision making. A fuller report on the progress of the MASH and common issues will be reported to a future Board meeting.
3	Northumbria Police to continue to work jointly with us to address high volume of Police contacts that do not meet threshold.	Northumbria Police	01/09/2021		This is ongoing through the MASH partnership work and continues to be an area of focus for joint training and co-work.
4	All current cases in legal proceedings to be reviewed to ensure any critical barriers or obstacles are addressed.	CEx of TfC & Director of Children's Social Care	01/02/2020		Complete. Report provided to RH Judge Hudson. A similar process will be repeated at an appropriate date – at the moment as cases are delayed by Covid the process would not be as effective.
5	Early Permanence Strategy to be updated and workshops to be held to increase staff confidence and competence in early permanence planning.	Head of Service - Safeguarding	14/02/2020		Complete.
6	Undertake further work with schools (particularly nursery and primary) to encourage direct delivery of Early Help and further embed application of the thresholds.	Director of Early Help & SSCP	01/07/2020		Continuous and ongoing. Some very strong examples of Early Help practice in schools has been seen during Covid, which has greatly impacted on school attendance and engagement. These can be reported to a future Board meeting. This will remain an open action as schools continue to respond to Covid.

NO	*ACTION	LEAD	TIMESCALE/ DEADLINE	**STATUS	PROGRESS UPDATE & ANY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT
7	Continue to work with Head Teachers to develop better understanding of front door processes and access to advice and information, in line with 'Keeping Children Safe' (2019).	Director of Education & Director of Children's Social Care	01/07/2021		The joint safeguarding work completed with HTs during Covid to assess and respond to welfare and vulnerability has greatly strengthened understanding of thresholds and the role of ICRT. The Safeguarding Education officer continues to provide training on 'Keeping Children Safe' to all schools. This area of improvement will continue to be monitored given its importance in keeping children safe.
8	Implement and evaluate the Child and Family Support Worker roles which have been piloted as part of the development of a greater skill mix.	Head of Service - Safeguarding	30/04/2021		These roles have been extended for a period of time to respond to the Covid pressures. The benefit and value added of the roles will be considered as part of future skill mix.
9	Develop a performance report for the revised MASH/front door that reports on general data as well as re-referrals, timeliness and NFAs	Head of Service – Safeguarding & Service Manager for IRO and Performance	01/03/2020		Complete. An ICRT scorecard is now in production.
10	Implement Signs of Safety within case management system, Liquidlogic.	Head of Service - Safeguarding	17/10/2019		Completed. TfC is now part of the National Learning Lab with Signs of Safety and Liquid Logic and continued to produce learning material throughout lockdown, despite the challenges.
11	Work with staff in social care and early help, to improve the quality of assessments to ensure there is sufficient information on the presenting risks and strengths in the family and what actions have been taken.	Head of Service – Safeguarding & Director of Early Help	01/06/2020		SOS peripatetic TM in post from February 2020 and will drive this forward as part of the coaching to implement SOS. All assessments are QA'd by a TM before they go to conference, and dip sampled through the normal QA process.
12	Ensure regional child protection procedures remain up to date and are easily accessible and available to all staff.	Business Manager SSCP	01/03/2020		Completed.

NO	*ACTION	LEAD	TIMESCALE/ DEADLINE	**STATUS	PROGRESS UPDATE & ANY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT
13	Initiate Lancaster University project: Improving safe, ethical and effective practice when the State intervenes to protect newborn babies at birth: co-designing and testing an evidence informed guideline (Follow up to the Nuffield Foundation research on newborns entering care proceedings)/	CEx TfC& Service Manager for Localities	01/10/2021		Focus groups and research now underway although significantly delayed by Covid. To be completed by Autumn 2021.
14	Ensure a consistent process for the recording of missing episodes in Liquidlogic from both social care staff and the MFH service provider is in place.	Director of Children's Social Care & Director of Corporate and Commercial	01/04/2021		Complete. See action 16 below – RHI will now be undertaken by Early Help staff and recorded directly onto Liquid Logic.
15	Ensure Missing From Home Return Interviews are offered and progressed with all eligible CYP.	Director of Children's Social Care & Director of Corporate and Commercial	01/04/2020		See action number 16 below.
16	Undertake regular monitoring of quality of return home interviews.	Commissioning Service Manager	01/06/2020		Underway and reported to the SLT and via the SSCP. The return home interview function has now been transferred into the Early Help directorate as the external service has come to an end. RHI will be quality assured by the Early Help management team and reported up accordingly.
17	Work with partners to review the effectiveness of recently implemented Missing, Sexually Exploited and Trafficking pathway.	Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership	01/07/2021		Delayed due to Covid but still planned by the N&ST safeguarding forum.
18	Ensure compliance, on an ongoing basis, with the Social Care Practice Standards that are now launched.	Director of Children's Social Care	Monthly from 01/04/2020		Complete with appropriate performance reporting through to the Director of Children's Social Care and children's social care SMT.

NO	*ACTION	LEAD	TIMESCALE/ DEADLINE	**STATUS	PROGRESS UPDATE & ANY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT
19	Review children subject to a CP plan for a second or subsequent time to identify themes and action accordingly.	Head of Service - Safeguarding	Quarterly from 01/12/2019		In place. A brief audit of repeat plans has also been conducted by the IRO service and future dip sampling built into the QA process.
20	Review CIN, CP and CLA plans to evaluate quality, consistency of practice, management oversight and child centred planning.	Director of Children's Social Care	Bi-monthly from 01/02/2020		This will be part of the new QA framework approach. All managers have now had training and are undertaking audits on the agreed themes. Complete.
21	Implement actions from the review of all S20 arrangements.	Head of Service - Safeguarding	01/04/2020		Complete. Head of Service, Safeguarding regularly reviews sec 20 as part of core practice.
22	Increase the range/use of direct work tools to enhance our ability to hear the child's voice.	Director of Corporate and Commercial	01/05/2020		Workshops and training delivered to IRO service and the service is providing evidence of the range of tools in use.
23	Increase the uptake of Mind of My Own in Early Help and Social Care.	CEx, TfC	01/04/2021		Routine performance reporting on uptake is in place and Mind of My Own champions now identified across the service. Reporting is to the TfC CEx and SLT/SMT. Action complete as this is firmly core business.
24	Combine PLO and Proceedings tracking and update within Gateway/Planning meetings.	Head of Service - Safeguarding	01/01/2020		Completed.
25	Review the quality of letters sent as part of the Public Law Outline process and address any areas for improvement.	Head of Service - Safeguarding	01/04/2021		Reviewed at each panel meeting and as they are despatched. Reviews to continue as part of PLO gateway process. Action complete.
26	Police and Senior Management to review Powers of Police Protection process and to periodically sample cases.	Director of Children's Social Care and Northumbria Police	Quarterly from 10/01/2020		CEx TfC, the Director of Children's Social Care and the Head of Safeguarding in Northumbria Police have discussed and agreed an approach to monitoring PPO activity. An offer of training has been made by TfC to ensure the Police feel well equipped to undertake PPOs. Action completed and ongoing.

NO	*ACTION	LEAD	TIMESCALE/ DEADLINE	**STATUS	PROGRESS UPDATE & ANY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT
27	Capacity and capability of the Legal Service to be monitored and reported to ensure any risks to timeliness and outcomes for CYP are understood.	Director of Corporate and Commercial	Ongoing on a monthly basis from 01/12/2019		Complete. The capacity of the legal team reports routinely through to SLT and the CEx.
28	Develop a Transitions Protocol and way of working with Adult Social Care that transitions YP at an earlier point through good quality, joint assessment activity	CEx, TfC & DAS, SCC	01/06/2021		The transitions working group continues to meet and this work is now sponsored by the CEx TfC and the DAS in SCC. Improving the quality of transitioning to adult SC remains an important area of improvement.

THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

*High Priority Action

**Status: Red, Amber, Green, Completed

NO	*ACTION	LEAD	TIMESCALE/ DEADLINE	**STATUS	PROGRESS UPDATE & ANY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT
1	Develop a new sufficiency strategy that builds on the recommendations from the Placements Review 2018, increasing provision for urgent care, complex care and keeping more children in borough.	Working group in place, composed of Joint Commissioning, social care and education.	01/09/2020		Sufficiency strategy is now complete and in place.
2	Undertake a review of all external placements to consider current position and to determine if children and young people can be placed in internal provision or with family member.	Head of Service for Cared for Children	29/02/2020		As an action this is complete. A process is in place via the external placements panel to continuously review the quality and outcomes of external placements for children.
3	Monitor demand for urgent PACE beds for Sunderland young people open to the YOS, and report accordingly to the YOS Board and commissioning colleagues in order to find an appropriate solution.	Head of Service, YOS	01/09/2020		Issues around access for all LAs raised at N&ST Safeguarding Forum and further work on a collaborative commissioning process to be agreed. National review underway by MOJ and YJB and Sunderland feeding into that fully. This action is delayed overall by Covid. In any event there are no significant issues for Sunderland due to the low numbers of YP requiring overnight provision.
4	Review all CLA processes including those specific to placement types and entry routes into care.	Head of Service for Cared for Children	31/02/2020		Complete. New Permanence Strategy is in place with all appropriate panel and review processes in place.
5	Undertake a review of the Next Steps service offer to ensure the model and service is optimised for all YP.	Head of service for Cared for Children	01/06/2020		Review completed by external consultant. New finance policy agreed and in place.

NO	*ACTION	LEAD	TIMESCALE/ DEADLINE	**STATUS	PROGRESS UPDATE & ANY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT
6	Continue to develop the knowledge base, consistency, quality and timeliness of life story work and later life letters both for children/young people with an adoption plan and for those living with long term with foster carers.	Head of Service for Cared for Children	01/05/2020		A digital Life Story system, called Arc Box, has been procured and is in the process of implementation across the permanence, adoption and fostering teams.
7	Review the impact of the implementation of the new offer and training to foster carers, particularly in terms of placement stability and outcomes for CYP.	Service Manager – Permanence & CLA	01/04/2021		Implementation of new foster carer fees structure is complete. A report regarding the impact of the changes will be brought to a future Board meeting.
8	Deliver a Quality Improvement Project to look at the availability and use of health assessments in looked after review meetings.	Designated Doctor for CLA	01/04/2021		Latest review shows good performance in terms of timeliness and quality of health assessments, but the project will consider if greater impact could be secured in review meetings. Ongoing.
9	Continue to monitor the implementation of the EPEP and the impact of the new Virtual School staffing model on EET outcomes for LAC.	Virtual Head	01/04/2021		EPEPs are now in place and QA activity indicates improved quality of PEPs and improved monitoring of impact on children's learning goals. Given the newness of the EPEPS and the new staffing structure in the Virtual School a further update will be reported to the Board to provide assurance regarding impact.
10	Consider implementing the Care Leaver Covenant in Sunderland with local employers and the Council.	Head of Service for Cared for Children	01/04/2021		Implementation implications to be considered by the Corporate Parenting Board.
11	Extend the CLA/YOS/Police protocol to supported accommodation for under 18's.	Head of Service for Cared for Children	01/01/2021		Partners have been working with the protocol in other settings (hence the Howard League award) but working with external accommodation providers will be a challenge.

LEADERSHIP: AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

*High Priority Action

**Status: Red, Amber, Green, Completed

NO	*ACTION	LEAD	TIMESCALE/ DEADLINE	**STATUS	PROGRESS UPDATE & ANY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT
1	Put in place a quality assurance forward plan for Social Care based on the new QA framework.	Head of Service – Cared for Children	01/03/2020		Complete and reporting of QA outcomes and actions in place.
2	Training plan to be developed for Social Care Team Managers to address identified training needs and consistency of decision making and management oversight.	Director of Corporate and Commercial	01/04/2020		Complete.
3	Review of the Corporate Parenting Board with a view to producing a strengthened partnership, greater membership and a more focused workplan.	CEO of Sunderland City Council	01/06/2020		Underway and due to report back in November. The review was delayed due to Covid.
4	An independent peer challenge process to be commissioned Autumn 2020 to assess improvement progress and quality of practice.	CEx of TfC	31/12/20		To be considered post-regional improvement alliance challenge sessions. *All SLI activity is now delayed and this action will be reviewed after the Focused Visit from Ofsted.
5	Strengthen strategic governance and reporting mechanisms between the Council and TfC Board to ensure Board Members can exercise their accountability accordingly.	CEx of TfC, CEx of SCC and Improvement Advisor	01/09/20		Improvement Board is in place and papers and key actions are reported to the TfC Board.
6	Move to new audit system for recording full case file audits on Liquidlogic.	Head of Service – Cared for Children	30/11/19		Completed and testing has been successful.
7	Improve the quality of recording for all CYP open to early help and social care.	Director of Early Help and Director of Children's Social Care	1/10/2020		This is a wide action that is likely to remain an area of focus for the foreseeable future. The action will be closed and the requirement to assess quality of recording routinely will be an integral part of the QA process.

NO	*ACTION	LEAD	TIMESCALE/ DEADLINE	**STATUS	PROGRESS UPDATE & ANY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT
8	Implement any recommendations from Regional Improvement Alliance Directors challenge and associated processes, taking place in February 2020.	Chief Ex, TfC	09/09/20		All formal SLI activity is delayed due to the impact of Covid but TfC have continued to work with improvement alliance peers to weave in relevant areas to the ongoing improvement activity.
9	Performance and progress reporting to increase focus on outcomes for children and the voice of the child.	Director of Corporate & Commercial	01/04/2020		Significant improvements have been made to the performance reporting of uptake of Mind of My Own which means that uptake and usage can be regularly reviewed. Additionally, all thematic and case level audits assess the voice of the child and report on how well that has been heard. There is greatly increased visibility therefore on the voice of the child. It will always be imperative to monitor this aspect of practice and this action will remain open in order to do that.
10	Implement recommendations from the Peer Review of the IRO service.	Director of Corporate & Commercial	01/07/2020		Completed.
11	Implement supervision tracker and data report within Liquidlogic and monitor effectively.	Director of Children's Social Care	01/02/2020		Rolled out and in use. Complete.
12	Create a plan/process to track the implementation of Signs of Safety, Success and Wellbeing, including meaningful measures of success.	Head of Service, Cared for Service	01/06/2020		SOS peripatetic TM due is in post and driving Signs of Safety implementation although a business case is in development as more coaching resource is required. Continuing to monitor progress.
13	Continue to actively participate and drive the North and South of the Tyne Safeguarding Partnership arrangements as part of new Working Together arrangements.	CEx of TfC	01/04/2021		Ongoing, new Chair and project support arrangements agreed. SSCP and CEx TfC to continue to report back.

NO	*ACTION	LEAD	TIMESCALE/ DEADLINE	**STATUS	PROGRESS UPDATE & ANY EVIDENCE OF IMPACT
14	Develop and support the transitional plan for the Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Partnership to ensure that TfC safeguarding priorities and activities get appropriate support and profile.	CEx of TfC	01/04/2020		Complete. Independent Scrutineer has been recruited and will be managed by CEx of TfC. Interim SSCP business unit posts also being managed by TfC on a matrix managed basis.
15	Complete urgent estate options appraisal for Next Steps, IRO service and YOS, as well as a completed conditions survey for existing estate for all of the estate in use.	Director of Finance & SCC Property Services	01/04/2020		Search for urgent alternative accommodation for Next Steps is underway and progressing. Full conditions survey completed on all other buildings occupied.
16	Council to rapidly progress the recommendations from its review of its Apprenticeship activity and align with the ELEET/NEET project team activity.	CEO of Sunderland City Council	Complete		The Council has agreed its Apprenticeship pay policy to be implemented in 2021. NEET project has now concluded and transferred into core business for Early Help.
17	Continue to progress integrated children's commissioning activity through the Children's Integrated Commissioning Service, located with TfC.	Director of Corporate and Commercial & CCG Accountable Officer	2020		A co-located commissioning team is in place in TfC with governance back to the CCG and TfC Board and H&WB. CYP Joint Commissioning Strategy has been signed off and work plans underway. Full engagement in place with CCG and Council on ICS/ICP developments.
18	Council to strengthen visibility of contract monitoring reporting for children's services commissioned by Public Health.	Director of Public Health	01/01/2021		Prevention project underway and led by TfC. Future oversight of services to be negotiated when the Council appoints a new Director of Commissioning.
19	A clear understanding of the resources required to sustain the improving operating model to be developed as part of the future negotiations around the contract.	Director of Finance, TfC & Director of Resources, SCC	01/02/2021		Although future focused, complex scenario planning and exit planning is underway as part of the transformation programme.