

Department for Education Six Month Review Lancashire County Council Self-Assessment Report

1. Purpose of the report

In May 2016 the Department for Education (DfE) issued Lancashire County Council with an Improvement Notice to address all areas for improvement identified in the [Ofsted inspection report](#) that was published in November 2015.

The Improvement Notice indicated that the DfE would review progress against the improvement agenda every six months and that for each of these reviews the Council should produce a self-assessment. This report is the Council's first self-assessment and describes the progress that has been made to improve the services that protect and support vulnerable children. It will also outline the future plans and priorities for the Council and identify any potential risks in the delivery of these plans.

2. Context

There are four key documents that provide a significant evidence base and identify the areas to be addressed as part of the improvement agenda in Lancashire. The first is the Ofsted Inspection Report (November 2016) and this has been followed by the Lancashire Diagnostic Report (March 2016) produced by the DfE Advisor, the DfE Improvement Notice (May 2016) and the Ofsted Monitoring Inspection Report (October 2016).

The Ofsted Inspection Report detailed 17 recommendations, which are as follows:

Recommendation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure robust performance information is available to support effective management scrutiny and challenge to poor performance at all levels of the organization. 2. Review the way in which audit work is undertaken and evaluated to ensure it is used effectively to drive improvement in the quality of front-line social work practice. 3. Ensure elected members have an accurate understanding of the quality of service provided to children to enable rigorous challenge to senior managers to make improvements. 4. Develop and implement a strategy that addresses the specific needs of the current workforce including ensuring the required levels of support and supervision for newly qualified staff. 5. Ensure that all child protection investigations are conducted by suitably skilled, knowledgeable and experienced social workers. 6. Ensure that strategy discussions are held when the threshold is reached, are clearly recorded, and that they always include the police and health professionals in planning and considering the outcome of child protection investigations. 7. Ensure that assessments and plans are informed by historical information and diversity factors and that they focus on the experience of the child and accurately assess risk.

Recommendation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Provide all children in need with sufficient oversight from qualified social workers and managers to ensure robust care planning and on-going effective analysis of risk. 9. Monitor and review the use of written agreements with parents to ensure they are not relied on to manage risk when a child in need plan, child protection plan or legal action is required instead. Ensure that managers' decisions recorded on cases files explain what evidence they have considered and on what basis their decision has been reached. 10. In cases with an additional focus, such as forced marriage or honour-based violence, ensure that social workers understand the importance of also initiating child protection procedures when the victim is a child. 11. Ensure that children who are privately fostered and their carers are assessed and visited within required timescales. 12. Ensure that the need for permanence for all looked after children is considered at an early stage and is regularly reviewed. 13. Ensure that all looked after children have regularly updated personal education plans that are effective in supporting their educational progress and attainment throughout their childhood. 14. Ensure that the independent reviewing service undertakes consistent regular oversight of practice and care planning in children's cases in line with the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010. 15. Ensure that managers of the service maintain a strategic overview of the experience of children from the point they enter care to adoption or permanency that is sufficiently rigorous to prevent drift and delay and assist with identifying and predicting future placement needs. 16. Ensure that all looked after children who need it receive timely life story work so they understand their history and what has happened in their lives. 17. Ensure that care leavers receive the level of support and information they require to successfully make a transition to independence, including accurate information about their entitlements; effective support in engaging or re- engaging with education, employment or training; and that pathway plans effectively address the key needs of care leavers.

In March 2016, Tony Crane in his capacity as the DfE Advisor, produced a diagnostic report. This built on the findings of the Ofsted inspection report and provided further analysis and assessment of Lancashire's capacity and capability to make the expected improvements to services for children.

This diagnostic also made a series of recommendations that can be summarised as follows:

- To redesign the 'front door' and bring together the Contact and Referral Team (CART) and Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) through the implementation of recommendations from the MASH diagnostic.
- To remodel social work casework through the implementation of a more specialist social work model
- To make specific provision for the 'child in need' cohort.
- To build on the engagement in the New Belongings programme and make specific provision for care leavers.

- To ensure that standards and entitlements that have been agreed, are in place for newly qualified social workers, including caseloads, training and support.
- To ensure that all social workers have manageable workloads and that by October 2016 these are within the 'good' threshold on the Improvement Board Performance Dashboard.
- To provide assurance that there is sufficient resource to secure effective management oversight.
- To formalise reporting mechanisms between the Principal Social Worker and senior leaders in the Council.
- To ensure that audit actions improve practice and partnership working and are delivered within a framework of external challenge and support.
- To restate the vision and ambition with frontline staff and managers and ensure they are active participants in service improvements.

[View the Lancashire Diagnostic Report](#)

This diagnostic report informed the decision by the DfE to issue the Council with an Improvement Notice. This Notice identified the delivery of the improvement plan to address the recommendations made by Ofsted but also specifically referenced the following areas of focus:

- The need for robust performance management and audit information, which is used effectively to support scrutiny and challenge and to drive service improvement
- Management oversight, particularly for children in need cases
- Services for care leavers
- Issues which may hinder efficient processes for case management, including management structure and structure of social work teams.

[View the Improvement Notice](#)

In September 2016, Lancashire had its first Ofsted Monitoring Inspection under the new framework that has been introduced for how they will monitor children's services that have an inadequate judgement. The overarching assessment was that 'expected progress' was being made and the following narrative taken from the report provides some context for this view:

"The local authority is now showing some signs of making positive changes, as seen by inspectors on this visit, with evidence of change having accelerated since May 2016. Prior to this, it was too slow in improving its services for children and young people in need of help and protection and for care leavers. The local authority acknowledges that there is more work to do to ensure that services for all children are good. It has a comprehensive action plan in place that is being implemented across the service to achieve this.

The local authority recognises that while positive progress has been made against its action plan, this has not yet resulted in sufficiently improved outcomes for children, and that the current pace of change, combined with rigorous engagement by partners, must be maintained for children to receive a consistently good safe service."

[View the monitoring inspection letter](#)

3. What have we done?

Since the inadequate judgement by Ofsted in autumn 2015, there has been a strong commitment to improve services quickly and to ensure that children are safe, protected and supported.

A significant range of activity has been implemented and will continue to be built upon until practice is consistently good and outcomes for children are improved. Below is a high level summary of some of the work that has been undertaken to improve services for vulnerable children in Lancashire:

Strategic direction, leadership, governance and oversight

- **Director of Children's Services** – Linda Clegg has been appointed as an Interim Director of Children's Services (DCS) and provides additional capacity and significant expertise with a focus on children's social care. The process to recruit a permanent DCS has now begun with interviews taking place in November.
- **Improvement Board** – A strong, dynamic and effective forum to drive change and scrutinise improvement activity, plans and priorities. The Board has good engagement from partners and includes young people and social workers as well as the Leader, Lead Member and Chief Executive.
- **Improvement Plan** – Agreed by the Improvement Board in March 2016 and submitted to the DfE, the Improvement Plan has been recognised by Ofsted as a concise yet robust plan. It outlines what, how and when actions will be delivered to secure sustainable change to the way vulnerable children are protected and supported. The Plan responds to all concerns identified by Ofsted and good progress is being made and delivery is on track. View the [Improvement Plan](#).
- **12 week improvement plan** – The 12 Week Improvement Plan was developed to ensure a short term focus on key priorities and to ensure that actions and activity were being delivered at pace. The initial 12 week plan was completed on 31 August 2016 and given the success of this approach a further 12 week plan is being agreed by the Improvement Board. View the [12 Week Improvement Plan](#).
- **Children's Services Scrutiny Committee** – This committee was established in March 2016 with the purpose of ensuring effective political scrutiny of children's services. Because the Improvement Board includes elected members an early focus of the Committee has been those children's services that sit outside of social care and in particular Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Youth Offending.
- **0-25 Programme Board** – This Board was established in June 2016 to provide internal co-ordination of children's services change programmes within Lancashire County Council. The Board is chaired by the Chief Executive and is attended by the Lead Member and provides regular updates to the Improvement Board.

Remodelling

- **Three locality model** – The Council has moved to a three locality model in children's social care (north, central and east) and additional capacity has been agreed so that there is a Head of Service for each locality, providing strong visible leadership.
- **From generic to more specialist functions** – Each team within children's social care now has four discreet functions: child in need; assessment and safeguarding; children in our care; and care leavers. This minimises the number of different social workers a child may have but also maintains a focus on different cohorts of vulnerable children.

- **Practice Improvement Model** – To provide intensive support, challenge and direction in a geographical patch to improve the quality of practice. The model has started in the districts of Fylde and Wyre and significant resources have been agreed by the Council. It is intended that the model is rolled out across Lancashire with the programme delivered by October 2017 before Ofsted re-inspection occurs.

Better understanding of ourselves

- **New audit framework implemented** – The audit framework was revised in line with Ofsted feedback using an adapted version that is well established in Blackburn with Darwen. 10% of cases are audited on a monthly basis and this is a mandatory role for all team managers, advanced practitioners, senior managers and independent reviewing officers. In addition, tier 3 audits are also undertaken by the DCS and Heads of Service. To support the implementation of the new framework a toolkit has been produced and training delivered to all staff involved. A key focus for the new framework will be to establish the discipline of systematically addressing all actions that are identified through the audit process and a tracker has been developed to monitor this. As the new audit framework starts to be embedded in every day practice further validation and external scrutiny is provided through an independent auditor. View the [Audit Framework](#).
- **Project Accuracy** – This project was developed to increase the accuracy of the data held on the Lancashire Children's System (LCS). A project board is chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive and has been key in changing behaviour and culture for how LCS is used by taking a small number of measures and through a weekly improvement cycle addressing practice and systems issues to improve the quality and accuracy of data. Newton Europe were initially commissioned to develop this project and now this has been handed back to the Council.
- **Improvement Board Performance Dashboard** – A set of key measures that have been established and agreed by the Improvement Board as one way of understanding the progress and impact from delivering the Improvement Plan. Data is produced monthly and rated against the agreed thresholds which have been determined through comparison with regional, statistical neighbour and national averages. The Dashboard is a standing item at the monthly improvement board with robust challenge and scrutiny through this forum. View the [August Improvement Board Performance Dashboard](#).
- **Improvement Performance sub group** – This group meets monthly with the purpose of scrutinising, analysing and better understanding the information presented through the dashboard and feeding this into the Improvement Board. The group is regularly attended by one of the three social care Heads of Service who describe how social work practice looks and feels in their locality and thereby bringing the data to life. The group is multi agency with representation from police, health, voluntary sector, safeguarding board, the regional social care information expert and is chaired by Tony Crane (DfE Advisor)
- **Practice Improvement Meetings** – These meetings take place each month in each locality to enable managers to better understand local performance data and agree a response to identified issues. Each meeting is informed by a monthly data report and a Head of Service leads the discussion, challenging managers where there is underperformance and highlighting areas of good performance.
- **Principal Social Worker** – The role of the Principal Social Worker (PSW) has been strengthened and is now far more visible with regular meetings established with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive. The PSW also chairs the Operational Improvement Group, sits on the Improvement Board and 0-25 Board, manages the newly established team of advanced practitioners and facilitates a range of forums and communication mechanisms, including a monthly blog to all social care staff.

- **Partner survey** – This survey was introduced to provide an insight into the relationship partners have with children's social care. The online survey received feedback from a diverse range of sectors and organisations involved in delivering services to children's with 126 responses in total. The survey was broadly very positive and highlighted some opportunities to strengthen collaborative working and also areas that already work well. View a [summary of the feedback from partners](#).

Child in Need

- **Review of all cases** – An urgent action following the outcome of the Ofsted inspection was to review all Child in Need (CiN) cases to ensure that children were safe and receiving the right level of support. In total 2,345 cases were reviewed, with 16% of these being escalated into child protection and 26% of cases closed.
- **External validation** – Given the large number of cases that were closed as part of the CiN case review an external auditor further reviewed a sample of these cases to ensure that cases were being closed appropriately.
- **CiN Hubs established** – The CiN hubs started to be established in each locality from June 2016 and when fully staffed will ensure qualified social worker oversight of all CiN cases. All CiN cases have now been handed over to staff in the CiN hubs.

Additional Capacity

- **Investment** – The Council has agreed that the improvement of children's services is a corporate priority and already over £7 million additional funds have been committed and allocated to support improvement activity.
- **Front door** – In June 2016 additional capacity was procured through a social work agency with the purpose of picking up a proportion of all new work and completing initial assessments. This capacity is still in place and has just been extended to January 2017 and is allowing staff to focus on existing work and reduce the backlogs of work.
- **Recruitment** – A high profile recruitment campaign that has been successfully promoted through social media and resulted in a total of 133 additional, permanent posts being filled. These posts include social workers; team managers; independent reviewing officers; Child Sexual Exploitation team; Contact and Referral Team; and business support.
- **Recruitment and Retention Strategy** – This strategy has been refreshed and implemented following agreement by the Improvement Board. The strategy includes learning and best practice from other authorities and has driven an improving position regarding staff turnover and sickness and a strong response to advertised posts.
- **Caseloads** – All parts of the social care workforce have shown reducing caseloads over the last few months. And these caseloads are now within the agreed thresholds that have been set by the Improvement Board as 'good' or 'outstanding'.

Practice

- **Advanced practitioners** – 12 new advanced practitioner posts have been created with a role to drive improved quality of practice across the workforce. The types of activity the advanced practitioners will undertake and lead will include: reflective supervision; deliver training and individual support to staff; undertake audits; and provide support to newly qualified social workers - ASYE's. All 12 posts have now been appointed to, with some already having started, and the remainder will have started by December 2016.

- **Back to basics training** – All social workers have now engaged in the Back to Basics training. This training has established a clear and consistent understanding of 'what good practice looks like', and in particular the right balance between compliance and quality.

Managing Demand

- **Risk sensible model** – The implementation of the risk sensible model has been led by Mick Muir (independent consultant) and the model is strongly based on the Professor Munro principles. Implementation has included the production of a toolkit, champions identified in teams, the model has been launched to staff and partners and training for staff has begun and will include early help. Plans are now being developed and have been supported by the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to roll out the model to partners to ensure a common understanding of risk.
- **Continuum of Need refresh** – Refreshed and launched in June 2016, the Continuum of Need has been updated by the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board to ensure the language mirrors that used in the risk sensible model. The model also been simplified and the threshold document has also been refreshed. The new [Continuum of Need](#) is now operational and over 760 people from all agencies attended the launch events.
- **Case allocation** – Weekly meetings have been established across the three localities between senior social care and early help managers to effectively manage step up and step down arrangements and to allocate cases.
- **MASH diagnostic** – The Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board led a review of MASH arrangements in Lancashire and presented its findings to the Improvement Board. Whilst practice was considered safe the diagnostic questioned the existing MASH model and suggested that effectiveness could be improved significantly. The LSCB is now leading a multi-agency response to the diagnostic, redesigning MASH to help to manage demand better through more effective engagement with partners. An assistant director from another authority has also been commissioned to provide additional capacity and expertise to support the development of this work.

Staff/Partner engagement and communication

- **Monthly letter from the DCS** – A letter from the DCS is cascaded across all parts of children's services on a monthly basis and is used to update staff on all the key priorities and messages relating to the improvement journey. See [example letter to staff](#).
- **Improvement Board webpage** – A webpage has been established to provide a single place where staff and partners can access improvement information including regular updates from the [Improvement Board](#), monthly key messages from the chair and the improvement plan.
- **DCS staff briefings** – On a termly basis, the DCS hosts a staff briefing in each of the three localities to share key messages and engage with staff. A significant proportion of the time within the staff briefings is set aside for a question and answer session providing staff the opportunity to engage directly with the DCS.
- **Operational Improvement Group** – This is a multi-agency group of frontline practitioners who meet monthly and provide feedback and challenge to the Improvement Board. The Group, which is chaired by the Principal Social Worker, have ensured that decisions and plans for improvement activity are supported by frontline staff and also produced the [practitioners guide to the improvement plan](#). The practitioners guide has been recognised as good practice by Ofsted and has also been shared across the region.
- **Staff Forums** – Heads of Service regularly facilitate a range of staff forums i.e. with support workers, social workers, business support. These forums provide the opportunity for senior

managers to better understand the challenges faced by different groups of staff and work through some of the solutions and opportunities.

- **Team visits** – The DCS, Chief Executive and the Lead Member have undertaken regular visits with frontline teams and services. They have spent time with staff to understand the pressures they are working within and also to see how change activity delivered through the improvement plan is affecting frontline practice.
- **Multi agency focus groups** – These groups have been led by the health, police and education members of the improvement board. The purpose of the groups has been for improvement board members to better understand the barriers and potential solutions for better practice and then feed these discussions into the improvement board and plan. View [focus group summary](#).

Young People

- **Improvement Board** – A key feature of the improvement board has been the involvement of young people and has included two care leavers sitting on the Board and regularly providing their views and perspective on Board discussion and agenda items.
- **Young people's improvement group** – This group provides a forum for young people from a range of vulnerable backgrounds to share their experiences and challenge the thinking of the improvement board. Specific activity that the group has developed has included supporting the young people that sit on the Board, delivering a session with Board members so that they could better understand the barriers facing care leavers and they are now planning a question and answer session with senior leaders, using social media to ensure widespread engagement from young people.
- **Professional Personal Advisor (PPA) training** – Care leavers has been actively involved in informing how the support they receive is shaped to their needs through the PPA hubs. Care leavers have also developed and led parts of the training for social workers and support workers through the formation of the PPA teams. Care leavers were also involved in the interviews to appoint staff into the PPA teams.
- **Care Leaver Apprenticeship** – A care leaver has been appointed by the Council as an apprentice to support the Improvement Board and is being supported to undertake professional qualifications in business administration. Following the completion of the 18 month apprenticeship, Natasha will be offered a permanent role with the Council.
- **Director of Children's Services appointment** – A group of young people will form an interview panel as part of the process to appoint a new, permanent DCS.

Technology

- **IT Equipment** – A significant investment has been agreed to ensure that all social workers have a new SMART phone and upgraded IT equipment. Feedback from the Operational Improvement Group has indicated that this has been welcomed by social workers and there is evidence of how this technology is enabling creative approaches to working with families and capturing the voice of a child
- **Strategy discussions** – All social care offices have upgraded IT equipment so that where a face to face strategy discussion is not possible, partners are able to simultaneously dial into strategy discussions.

4. How do we know we are making a difference?

The information below provides a snapshot of evidence that demonstrates that the work and activity being driven through the improvement plan is making a difference.

Performance Information

A key area of improvement that provides a critical building block to better quality practice is for social workers to have caseloads that are manageable. The average caseloads for social workers have been steadily reducing for the last six months and are now consistently within the thresholds for 'good' and 'outstanding' that have been set by the improvement board. However, there are still some pockets within these numbers which are higher than the average and need to be addressed.

Caseloads

Sep-16

Measure	Thresholds				Actual		
	Inadequate	RI	Good	Outstanding	Jul-16	Aug-16	Sep-16
Average caseload per ASYE (newly qual)	>25	20-24	16-19	<16	18.4	14.3	17.8
Average caseload per SW (1-3 years)	>30	26-30	20-25	<20	22.3	19.1	22
Average caseload per SW (3-5 years)	>30	27-30	23-26	<23	24.6	19.3	21.9
Average caseload per SW (5 years+)	>30	27-30	23-26	<23	23.4	19.5	25.4
Average caseload per FSW & PA	>30	29-30	28	<28	20.9	22.3	23.1

The establishment of PPA teams has provided a focus of support for care leavers that is also showing good performance in the last three months.

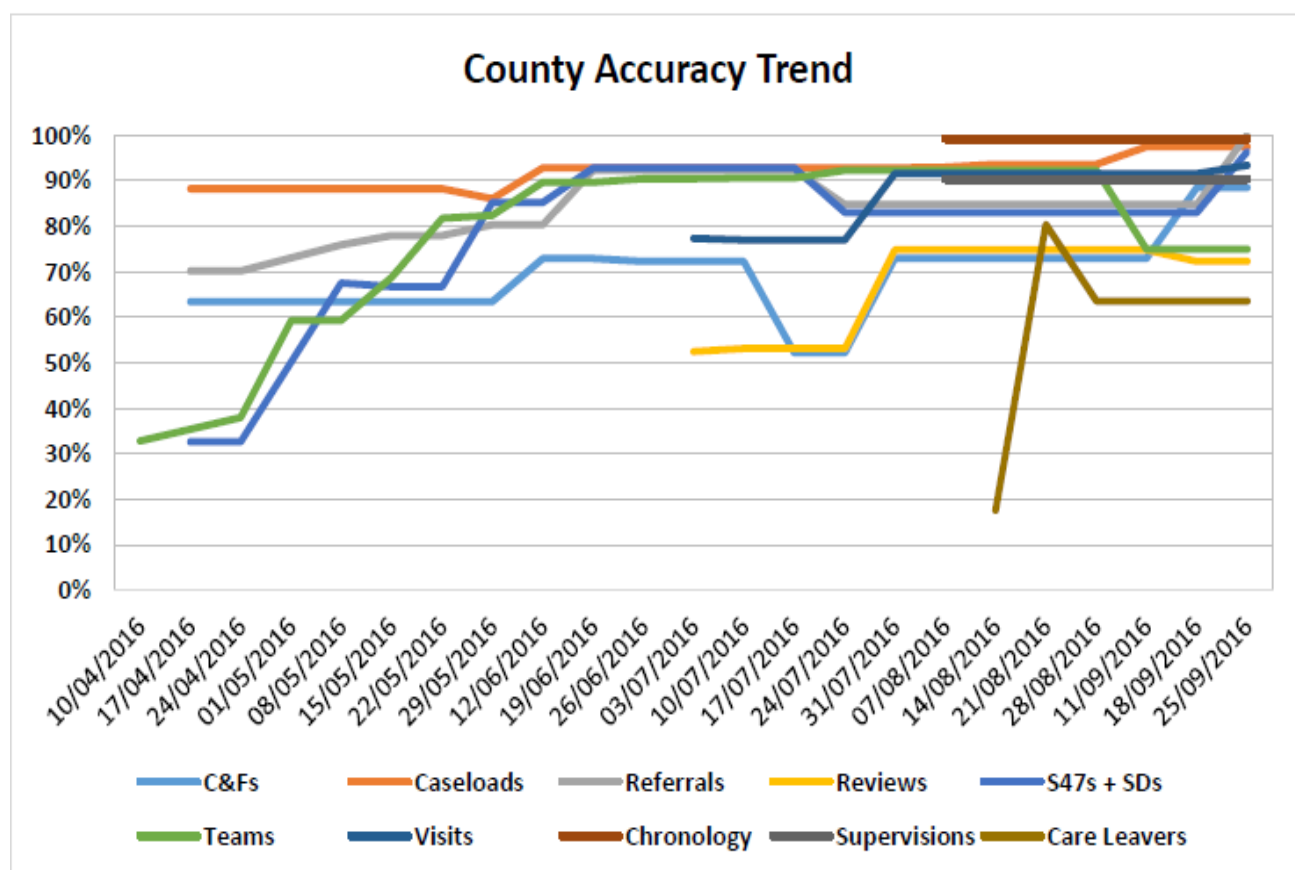
Care Leavers

Sep-16

Measure	Thresholds				Actual		
	Inadequate	RI	Good	Outstanding	Jul-16	Aug-16	Sep-16
% of care leavers in suitable accommodation	<70%	70%-80%	80-95%	>95%	83.6%	90.0%	87.3%
% of care leavers who are in EET	<40%	40-45%	45-55%	>55%	41.2%	48.3%	48.2%
% of CLA who have Care or Pathway Plan	<50%	50-70%	70-90%	>90%	88.1%	95.4%	90.5%
% of care leavers with a Personal Advisor	<85%	85-90%	95-99%	100%	100%	100%	98.6%
% of care leavers that LA has had contact with in the last 3 months	<80%	80-90%	90-99%	100%	85.6%	95.2%	91.7%
% of care leavers who have been given an entitlements leaflet/booklet	<85%	85-90%	95-99%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The table below shows the week by week progress made in improving the accuracy of a key number of indicators through Project Accuracy.

A significant early measure that was identified for improvement was team hierarchies, which have now improved from being 30% accurate to being consistently over 90% accurate.



This graph shows the average accuracy % each week for the whole county for the different types of information.

The Lancashire Improvement Performance Sub Group and the Regional Information Group (RIG - part of the north west children's services sector led improvement approach) have both stated recently a satisfaction and confidence that performance information is increasingly accurate and providing a platform for more robust decision making and resource allocation at all levels.

The 2015/16 year end RIG report stated that 'the quality of data in Lancashire has demonstrably improved during the year'.

Ofsted – September 2016 Monitoring Inspection

The report from the September 2016 monitoring inspection provided an overall assessment that the Council is making the expected progress and the Council felt that this report represented a fair and balanced view of the progress that had been made. Some areas that the report highlighted as positive included:

"Management oversight of casework through supervision is regular, but remains variable in quality."

"The quality of performance data has improved and is increasingly used by managers at all levels to improve practice."

"The local authority recognises that while positive progress has been made against its action plan, this has not yet resulted in sufficiently improved outcomes for children."

"There has been improvement in the involvement of key partner agencies in strategy discussions."

"Recent structural changes have strengthened arrangements for the oversight of practice for children in need."

"The quality of case recording, while variable, is improving overall in relation to the cases seen."

Partner Questionnaire

Despite the challenging context in which children's social care are working and the significant change activity that is taking place the majority of responses from 126 partners (see below) are positive about the relationship they have with children's social care and how they work together. Responses were received from a wide range of sectors and organisations including health, police, schools, voluntary sector, residential homes and district councils.

Survey question	Strongly agree (%)	Tend to agree (%)	Neither agree or disagree (%)	Tend to disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
Children's social care is committed to making a positive difference to the families they work with	17	63	11	8	1
My organisation has a good working relationship with children's social care	20	48	17	12	3
There is good communication between children's social care and my organisation	10	25	24	26	15
Children's social care work well with other partners to ensure the needs of a child are met	6	50	22	15	7

Staff Briefings

The DCS delivered three staff briefings in the summer term 2016 which were attended by 350 staff. Evaluations of these briefings have been very positive with 98% saying they left with a better understanding of the improvement process and 98% saying they left with a better understanding of service priorities. Other comments from staff included:

"First time feeling positive in a long time. Fantastic briefing - feel listened to. I now understand more fully why we do things and the reason for things happening."

"The future looks positive."

"I now understand more fully why we do things and the reason for things happening."

Operational Improvement Group

The group, made up of multi-agency frontline practitioners, deliver a regular update at every Improvement Board and provide a test for how improvement activity is impacting on staff. The below are the headlines from the August 2016 meeting of the Group to the Improvement Board.

- Caseloads are coming down across county but there is still some pockets of high caseloads
- In the main ASYE have protected caseloads, however this could be improved
- Some practice may be risk averse and staff feel that too many care proceedings are initiated and legal advice is risk averse
- Morale in places is good but still patchy, the North, Fylde and Wyre faces particular problems hence the decision was made to pilot the single operating model there.
- Relationships with IROs are improving due to their increased number and therefore expansion of the role.
- Do we need a selection of respite foster carers attached to Edge of Care teams to prevent full admissions to care for older CYP?
- Caseload data may need altering to give a more accurate picture
- Health and wellbeing groups and initiatives are taking place but need expanding and embedding across the County

Audit findings

The new audit framework has now been in place since June 2016 and whilst it is difficult to evidence consistent trends in performance over this relatively brief period, there are some areas where improvements have been made:

- There has been an improvement in the quality and consistency of audits completed, giving an assurance that we have a good understanding of the quality of practice, where we have made improvements and where further work is required.
- The majority of cases fall within the 'requires improvement' grade. This is consistent with external validation of practice including the Ofsted monitoring visit in September and the recent Peer Challenge (Sector Led) in October.
- Increased number of cases with a chronology.
- Incremental improvement in management oversight and timely decision making. This is consistent with the last Ofsted monitoring visit which highlighted that management was present and regular.
- Improved recording of supervision and case management decisions on case files, although there is still further work to do in this area.
- Increase in compliance in respect of statutory visits in CIN cases.

[View August 2016 Audit Report](#)

5. Key challenges/risks

There are some key and significant risks that will need to be managed effectively to ensure that improvement activity is not undermined and the pace of improvement is sustained.

- **Rising and more complex demand** – demand for services that protect and support vulnerable children continue to rise and in many instances the complexity of these cases is also increasing.
- **Quality of practice** – the initial focus for Lancashire's improvement journey has been around compliance. This has now progressed so that the priority is how we build on this compliance through the delivery of quality practice and that this quality practice is consistent across all work.
- **Outcomes for children** – the significant investment of resource and activity that is taking place in Lancashire needs to be measured in terms of improved outcomes for children.
- **Partners stepping up** – the local authority will not be able to continue to sustain the levels of improvement necessary in children's social care unless there is appropriate ownership and action from key partners in managing lower level risk.
- **Pace of change** – Lancashire needs to maintain and further increase the current pace of change to ensure improvements are embedded consistently and deliver quality practice and outcomes.
- **Management oversight** - further work needs to be embedded to ensure that there is strong and effective management oversight and grip, consistently across the County.
- **Front door** – Lancashire's front door, whilst considered safe, is not as effective and efficient as it should be. The local authority spends far too much time assessing new work that is then judged not to meet statutory thresholds.
- **Additional capacity** – one of the reasons that caseloads are now manageable for social workers is because a social work agency has been in place since June 2016, managing a proportion of all new cases. This additional capacity will end in January 2017.
- **Children in Need Hubs** – whilst arrangements have been put in place to improve the qualified social worker oversight of CiN cases this model will need to evolve further to ensure a robust and effective approach to working with this cohort of children.

6. Future Priorities

Whilst the focus for all improvement activity will be through the delivery of the improvement plan, there are a number of specific and critical priorities within this that will shape Lancashire's improvement journey in the next few months. In summary, these are as follows:

- **Front Door** – review, redesign and implementation of new arrangements that bring together the Contact and Referral Team/Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. To ensure a more effective front door, with strong multi agency participation ensuring robust and efficient information sharing and decision making, that leads to the right response for children and families.
- **Practice Improvement Model** – the roll out of an intensive programme of support, training, quality assurance and resources that will focus on three key themes: quality of practice; management oversight; and outcomes for children. Driven and supported through the establishment of a programme team, governance arrangements through the Improvement Board and measurement

against clearly defined metrics. A key feature of the model will be the significant engagement with staff and partners to establish new and improved ways of working and the measurement of the impact of these on children and families.

- ***Demand Management*** - to develop a detailed understanding of the demand across key parts of children's services that are working with vulnerable children. To take this learning and agree and implement new approaches and ways of working that form a coherent strategy for how we better manage demand coming into and across residential, fostering and adoption services.
- ***Child in Need Hubs*** – to review the newly established Child in Need hubs, building and refining our approach to ensure vulnerable children are effectively supported and strong management oversight is evident.
- ***Risk Sensible Model*** – continue the roll out, implementation and embedding of the risk sensible model across all parts of the children's services to ensure a clear and consistent approach to identifying risk and then managing that risk through appropriate and robust decision making. Then further extending this model, through the support of the Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board, to partner agencies and organisations that enables a common understanding and language across the partnership in relation to risk.
- ***Early Help*** – to continue to build the working relationship between early help and social care and trial the new early help operating model in the Lancaster district. Working with children with complex needs on level 2 of the Continuum of Need, the trial will be used to evidence the impact of the delivery of early help services and specifically to measure how this reduces the escalation of cases in to social care.
- ***12 week improvement plan*** – continue to focus the pace of improvement through new iterations of the 12 week improvement plan that provide a focus on a small number of priorities being delivered within a challenging, short-term timeframe.

Links to key documents

Item	Title
1.	Ofsted Inspection Report – November 2015
2.	DfE Diagnostic Report – March 2016
3.	DfE Improvement Notice
4.	Ofsted Monitoring Inspection Letter – Oct 2016
5.	Lancashire Children's Services Improvement Plan – March 2016
6.	12 Week Improvement Plan – June 2016
7.	LCC Audit Framework – May 2016
8.	Improvement Board Performance Dashboard – August 2016
9.	Children's Social Care Partner Survey – June 2016
10.	Lancashire Continuum of Need
11.	Linda Clegg – monthly staff letter – October 2016
12.	Improvement Board webpage
13.	Practitioners Guide to the Improvement Plan
14.	Multi Agency Focus Groups: key themes – August 2016
15.	Audit Report – August 2016