

**Children and Families Directorate
Children's Safeguarding Self-Evaluation****Introduction**

1. Herefordshire is a rural, unitary authority with a population dispersed between the city, five market towns and a large number of villages. Children form 20% of the population, numbering 36,000. As at 30 June 2019, 1288 children and young people were benefitting from an early help assessment, 208 were supported by a child in need plan, 109 subject to child protection plans and 334 were looked after. 886 children have statements of special educational needs (SEN) or education, health and care (EHC) plans maintained by Herefordshire Council.
2. There are 78 primary schools, 16 secondary schools, 4 special schools and one PRU with 33 academies including 2 free schools. There are 9 children's centres, 86 Ofsted registered childminders and 123 early years settings.
3. Herefordshire Council was judged as requires improvement overall in June 2018 for its Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS). Within this the sub judgements were inadequate for leadership and management; requiring improvement for the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection and for the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers. The council were judged as requires improvement by Ofsted in 2014 for its single inspection of local authority children's services and review of the HSCB. This followed a judgement of inadequate in 2012 for its arrangements for protection of children. Herefordshire had a positive Ofsted and CQC local area SEND inspection in 2016.
4. The director for children and families was appointed in November 2017. The local elections in May 2019 means that we have recently has a change in lead member for children and families. The assistant director for safeguarding and family support started on 4 June 2018.
5. Children's Social Care is predominantly part of the Safeguarding and Family Support Division. It includes a MASH, two assessment teams that also hold S17 cases, three child protection and court teams, 2 looked after children teams, one 16+ team, 1 safeguarding and review team, and 2 fostering teams. The adoption service moves into a regional adoption agency in 1st July 2019. 2 teams of family support workers support children known to these services; one of these teams works alongside the court /CP service, with the other team providing early help and family support team working with children who do not meet a level of need requiring social care intervention. A central business support team and social work academy supports the whole service. The children with a disability team is part of the 0-25 SEND service which is managed by the Head of Additional Needs within the Education, Development and Skills Division.
6. Herefordshire's early help approach and offer is overseen by an early help manager within Education, Development and Skills. This includes the council's own direct work early help team. Education, Development and Skills is also responsible for fulfilling local authority duties regarding promoting safeguarding and the welfare of all children

in early years settings, schools and colleges, school improvement including safeguarding, joint commissioning, early years sufficiency, children centre services and targeted early help services. Additional resources has been given to Early Help to manage and co-ordinate the early help assessments and increase the number of family support workers to work with vulnerable families to meet identified needs.

7. The council has established its long-term strategy to secure good child protection services within an environment of reducing resources. The priorities for changes are to build independence and self-support within families and communities; to target support services proactively in areas of need; and to change the models of delivery.
8. Our Children and Young People's Plan 2019 – 2024 has four priority areas: to keep children and young people safe from harm, to be healthy, to be amazing and to feel part of the community. The new plan was approved by full council in July 2019.

Data up to end of June 2019	
Early Help	1288 Early help assessments
Contact and referrals	1553 contacts – YTD June 2019 381 referrals 381 88.1% managed in timescale 88.1% 23% re-referrals 53% of contacts where no further action taken
Assessments	280 single assessments completed 91 % within timescale
Child in need	208 child in need plans
Child protection	135 s47 investigations initiated 46 Initial Child Protections Conferences convened. 109 children subject to Child Protection Plans 18 on CPP for second time 18 1 on CPP for more than two years
Looked after children	334 LAC 22 LAC had three or more placements. 97 u16 in same placement for more than 2.5 years 71% in internal foster placement 71%
Visits (in timescale)	CP 84% LAC 82% CIN 72%
Supervision	Case Supervision CP 67% LAC 55% CIN 66%

Summary

Areas of strength

- strong staff knowledge of children and their families
- committed and dedicated staff who feel supported by their managers

- ability to follow through on action plans eg decrease in children on CP plans, response to children accommodated under Section 20.
- gaps in attainment closing for LAC in the virtual school; KS4 attainment in 2017 in the virtual school better than for LAC national
- high performance in timeliness of care proceedings.
- strong performance for children placed for adoption
- use of new technology to increase children’s participation
- leaders are open to external scrutiny and act on it including LGA peer reviews and recent additional investment of £1.m in social care by council leaders

Areas for improvement

- The sufficiency of social workers (including permanent staff) and managers with capacity to cope with the need for services and the volume of social worker caseloads;
- The pace of progressing child protection and child in need plans and the quality of practice with children in need;
- The regularity and quality of social work supervision;
- The quality and purposefulness of management oversight and decision making and the existing quality assurance and performance management system;
- The quality of life-story work for all children.
- Consistent application of thresholds within children’s services and across the partnership
- quality and timeliness of assessments, plans and case recording,
- development of edge of care services
- the quality of our performance data and management reports
- permanency arrangements for LAC

What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your area?

9. Ofsted inspected Herefordshire’s local authority children’s services in June 2018. The judgements were as follows:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Requires Improvement
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires Improvement
Overall effectiveness	Requires Improvement

10. . There was a strong match between our self-evaluation and the Ofsted inspection report, focused visit letter and also what PiP authorities have found in their work with us, indicating that we are consistently aware of our strengths and weaknesses. This was reflected in staff feedback on the self-evaluation as well.

11. Some comments we have received from children through MOMO in answer to the question “what’s good in my life right now” told us:

“where I live – because I feel safe and comfortable”

“I have a lot of friends – not falling out as much...”

“can talk to XXX – feel safe”

“to help me have confidence to say the truth because if I don’t there won’t be any proof that my mum and dad argue”

12. Care leavers told us:

“I would like to thank you XXX my social worker for helping me to get where I am now, I am so happy that she came into my life”

“without your help I would probably be dead or in prison”

“Yes I’m not going to lie I had really bad depression but because of everyone’s help and support I got through it. I wanna say a massive thankyou to everyone who has worked with me and made me a better person and all the teams to I would not have made it in life if it wasn’t for the people working with me thanks”.

13. Our early help offer has a positive impact in supporting children and families. The early help family support service have worked with 1505 families and have engaged and supported them in phase 2 of the troubled families programme; with 504 payment by results claims being made.
14. As at February 2018, 100% of families who had attended a parenting programme in autumn 2016, including those with a child in need or child protection plan, were accessing only universal services.
15. The early help service works directly with step down cases and family network meetings work on a locality basis and achieve some positive outcomes for children and families through effective partnership working.
16. The practice in the MASH received positive evaluation from the Ofsted ILACS, the focused visit and the previous peer review and evidenced that children are not left at risk of harm while their referral is considered. Review work highlighted the need to clarify the approach for contact and referrals and revised arrangements have been put in place from October 2018. A high percentage of referrals do not meet the threshold for a social work assessment.
17. The quality and timeliness of assessments is inconsistent and significant improvement to achieve the standard consistently is an area of focus. Some assessments include good descriptions of children’s wishes and feelings and some children benefit from thoughtful and considered assessments with strong multi agency involvement. Not all assessments take sufficient account of previous incidents in children’s chronology. We are now ensuring that work takes place during assessments that has a positive effect.
18. Some children benefit from outcome-focussed plans and this was recognised by the peer review team, who also commented that they could see good examples of direct work by social workers having a positive impact on outcomes. However the quality of

plans is still inconsistent and we recognise that management engagement and evidence of thoughtful decision making is not consistently evident.

19. Within Herefordshire there is not a consistent understanding and approach to childhood neglect because we have not had a structured approach to identifying and assessing the impact of neglect. We have been implementing our HSCB strategy, including adopting the Graded Care Profile 2 across the professional system, but the evidence of its use is too infrequent.
20. Disabled children have their needs assessed and met through an integrated additional needs service which includes both SEN and social work teams. The practice of the social workers in this service has reflected the variability outlined above. An Ofsted Inspection in 2016 commended the outcomes for young people with SEND within the county. This area was recognised as an area of strength in our 2018 ILACS, which noted the improvement since the last inspection in 2014.
21. The number of S47 investigations and the number of referrals that have an outcome of no further action has been disproportionately high. The impact for children and families of unnecessary child protection investigations is of concern and indicates inconsistent application of thresholds.
22. Having maintained a broadly stable number of children on child protection plans in 2016/2017, since July 2017 we have seen a rise in child protection activity from a low of 108 in December 2016 to 236 in January 2018. This has then reduced to 105 as at June 2019. The appropriate application of thresholds is a continued area of focus for the service, and for partners and has been too inconsistent over a long period of time.
23. Herefordshire children do not remain subject to child protection plans for more than two years and there are comparatively low numbers of children with repeat child protection plans. In quarter 1 2019/2020, 16.51% of children made subject to a child protection plan had previously been subject to a child protection plan in the last 2 years. This indicates that children are benefitting from appropriate management and are stepped down at the right time.
24. Approaches to tracking public law outline (PLO) cases to prevent drift have had limited impact, and we are aware of delay particularly between the decision to initiate and issuing proceedings. This means that some children experience delays in decisions being made regarding their future.
25. However, upon initiating proceedings children in Herefordshire are benefitting from timely conclusions of care proceedings, evidenced as being the best performing care centre in the West Midlands and amongst the best in the country. During 2017/18 we achieved 73% of cases completed within 26 weeks with the average being 22.2 weeks. This achievement was praised by the judge and illustrates the strong practice and commitment by social workers.
26. Social work practice has benefited from our recent investment in strengthening our legal services dedicated to children's safeguarding. New appointments have brought significant expertise to the local authority and a close and more energetic working relationship which is being recognised in court.
27. Our number of looked after children is too high for our population, both in comparison with the English average and that of our statistical neighbours. We have put revised panel arrangements in place to provide more robust challenge to requests for children

to enter the looked after system and looks at appropriate solutions for cases. We are aware of challenges in the consistent application of our procedures which has been rectified.

28. As a result of recent criticism by the Courts regarding our approach to children looked after under S20 an extensive review of all such arrangements was undertaken. We have a robust system in place to review these cases within 28 days, including seeking legal advice in all cases.
29. Whilst in our care, most children benefit from stable placements. The number of children in the same placement for over 2 ½ years has increased in the last year. The numbers experiencing 3 or more moves in 12 months is comparatively low.
30. However this is balanced by our recognition that we have not had sufficient focus on achieving permanency for those children in long term care. A LAC reduction strategy has been implemented and children are starting to benefit from a change in culture within our LAC team that recognises the benefits for children of achieving permanency outside the looked after system.
31. Looked after children are supported by our work with colleagues in the health service to increase the quality of health assessments and improve their emotional wellbeing. Looked after children and care leavers are enabled to access HALO leisure vouchers for activities including swimming and gym sessions.
32. Looked after children have benefited from improvements in narrowing the gap between Herefordshire LAC and all pupils nationally in 2017 for key stage 4. At key stage 4 Herefordshire LAC achieved better than national LAC. Looked after children are supported by a strong approach by the Virtual School which was recognised by the peer review.
33. Looked after children benefit from a fostering team that has been successful at recruiting foster carers, outperforming most other fostering services. This enables children to benefit from continuity of education and relationships with family and friends. We continue our marketing and recruitment of foster carers to enable us to meet the needs of children and young people where this is the option identified.
34. The 16+ team build good relationships with young people and are in touch with 83% of our 19-21 year old care leavers at the end of March 2019; this has dropped to 73% at the end of quarter 1 2019/2020. This team has been fragile following a series of internal challenges. Managerial oversight has been in place and recruitment has recently been completed for the management position. Staff have been offered a range of support over this period. There are issues of timely recording of practice that are being addressed which contribute to the performance figures.
35. Care leavers are supported and encouraged to remain with their foster carers under staying put arrangements and to move on to independence when they are ready. We negotiated a new arrangement with SHYPP, young people's foyers, so that the 16+ team can have direct access to 15 units of accommodation.
36. Children are enabled to achieve permanence through adoption and our service performs well. Up to June 2019/ 2020, 27 placement orders were granted and 15 children were adopted. Our adoption team is tenacious in family finding and has been

able to find families for “hard to place” children. 10 families and their children have benefited from additional therapy through the adoption support fund. Herefordshire council has joined Adoption Central England (ACE) regional adoption agency (RAA) jointly with Warwickshire, Solihull, Coventry and Worcestershire local authorities in accordance with central government expectation that all local authorities are part of a RAA by 2020.

37. We have a small population of 5 unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Many of these young people have found it isolating to be placed in Herefordshire and have moved to other areas of the country where they have expressed a preference to live, whilst continuing to be supported by Herefordshire.
38. Tackling child exploitation (CE) is a priority for HSCB. We have increased resource to lead on this and missing interventions. Most young people at risk of CE are identified consistently and receive effective support. We are working with multi-agency partners to identify and respond to emerging risks such as County lines. A small number of young people go missing from home or care and they are all offered a return home interview.
39. We offer a service to interview externally placed looked after children within the county. This supports our wider CE intelligence gathering as well as ensuring that the young people are safe and were not harmed whilst missing. The process for recording and monitoring missing episodes for our looked after children placed out of County has recently been strengthened.
40. The Ofsted inspection and peer review found that case recording can be accurate, factual and concise. However, this is inconsistent and particularly in assessment and CP/Court teams there has been a significant period of time where case recording that is out of date and does not reflect the engaged account of work which staff have provided to external auditors and inspectors.
41. The recording of management decisions and supervision is inconsistent. The frequency of supervision is also inconsistent and not of the required standard or recorded frequency in some teams. This is an area of particular focus. Social workers have reported through peer reviews and to managers that they feel supported by front line managers; they feel that they are available and guide them in decision making. This is supported by having an almost permanent management frontline tier. We need to ensure that the support social workers feel is balanced by appropriate challenge.
42. In 2016 the majority of our social work staff were co-located in a modern building close to the city centre. Staff have commented about the positive difference this has made to coordinated work for children.
43. Over the past two years we have reduced our reliance on agency social workers in a number of areas but remain reliant on their work in some of our teams and challenges remain in some parts of our service. We are focussing on retaining our existing staff and have recently improved remuneration and our training offer (informed by suggestions from staff themselves. We now have a permanent management team at head of services and team manager level. This is the first time for a number of years that we have achieved this and should enable a consistent focus on practice and decision making.

44. Following the publication of Herefordshire's serious case review in 2017, alongside informing the HSCB neglect strategy, we developed culturally competent practice which includes consideration of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) community. Staff attended awareness raising sessions organised by our GRT Liaison lead. We participated in research led by the University of Salford to support a common understanding and practice.

How do you know it?

45. We are determined to improve and the views of children and young people and our staff are vital. Examples of the impact of our consultation with children and young people includes: introduction of MOMO; review of short breaks; development of corporate parenting strategy; Herefordshire's Children and Young People's Plan, permanent appointments overseen by Your Voice Matters (our children in care council); development of practice of 16+ team; development of a clear finance policy for care leavers.
46. We were inspected by Ofsted in June 2018 and had a focused visit in January 2019. The findings reflected Herefordshire's self-assessment produced for the inspection and the visit and have been accepted in full by the Council, including cabinet and chief executive.
47. The focused visit in January 2019 reported that since the ILACS inspection in June 2018 that there has been increased stability in the management and functioning of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and assessment service. They also identified that the approach of leaders has resolved a backlog of assessments; has reduced the caseloads and is allowing the teams to focus on the timeliness and quality of assessments. Where children are at risk of significant harm, there is a timely and effective response to help and protect them.
48. Ofsted also highlighted that performance management information was beginning to support some key areas of improvement in key areas of practice; and acknowledge that whilst further work is required to improve the accuracy of performance information, that management grip and understanding of the service has significantly improved.
49. A number of key operational indicators have improved; these include the reduction in social worker caseloads, and increase in the timeliness of visits to children who have a child protection plan and an increase in levels of supervision taking place.
50. There has been a number of key achievements across the service; there has been a reduction in the number of children referred inappropriately into Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) as a result of the reintroduction of the MASH Partnership forum and multi-agency audit activity in MASH.
51. There has been an improvement in the completion of assessments within timescales; as at the end of June 2019, 90% of assessments were carried out within timescale, an improvement from 39% in September 2018.
52. The director has regular meetings with each operational team. The assistant director holds regular drop-in sessions for staff to raise any issues. Heads of service work regularly in team areas to provide a more informal way for enabling staff to raise their perspectives on their work.
53. Senior manager's interaction with staff has improved; the assistant director and director regularly work in different social care offices and hold regular drop in

sessions for staff. We have taken action to support the retention of staff, which was informed by staff feedback.

54. This is evidenced from feedback provided by our staff to Doncaster Children's Trust who worked with us in January 2019 to assist us in our improvement work.
55. Team managers were asked what one thing would help create the right environment for children's social work to flourish. Answers were:
 - a) Continue to listen more and more of 'you said, we did' – there have been recent encouraging signs of this
 - b) Help to raise morale, particularly through continued involvements – again this was reported to be happening more
 - c) Clarity of the training and development offer to practitioners, to ensure access is fair and equitable.
56. Team managers reported to Doncaster Children's Trust a "considerable improvement in the quality of performance information, it is more accurate than it has been and that they can start to properly performance manage." Furthermore, they stated, "it is our problem to fix" and that it has helped that action has been taken that has "moved cases into the right place." This evidences the beginnings of a change in management culture and management grip since the ILAC in June 2018.
57. The quality and purposefulness of management oversight and decision making has improved with revised panel arrangements being established and embedded. This provides a robust challenge to requests for children to enter the looked after system, and looks at appropriate solutions and alternatives.
58. Operational managers receive weekly activity reports and a monthly information booklet that contains significant amounts of data that enable the HOS and their managers to track performance of their teams. These reports have been developed and put in place since September 2018, giving a range of detailed weekly reports and monthly scorecards. These are being continually reviewed and reflected upon to improve the accuracy and usefulness of reports to aid improvement in social work practice and outcomes for children and young people. This is also reviewed at the AD/HOS meeting so that senior leaders are able to challenge each other. This information is then used to inform their service improvement plans
59. Because of our improved approach to performance, children are receiving more timely visits. Child Protection visits are at 74% in time in June 2019, compared to 69% in September. Looked after Children visits are 83% compared to 65%. Child in Need visits are recorded as 74% compared to 41%. Our timeliness of visits is still not as good as it should be, despite an improving picture. An aspirational target of 95% from 2019/20 has been set and teams are working towards meeting this.
60. Monthly performance challenge sessions which include the chief executive, leader of the council, lead member, group leaders and the chair and vice chair of children's wellbeing scrutiny committee consider both quantitative and qualitative information. This provides a challenging dialogue to inform priorities and drive improvement.
61. We engage with West Midlands Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) annual self-evaluation challenge sessions and benchmark ourselves against regional and national data. Our reflections inform our development plan.

62. We have developed and maintained a range of tracking mechanisms to maintain focus and prevent drift in priority areas including children accommodated under S20, permanence planning and the dispute resolution process. Emerging trends from these trackers have also informed our improvement work, staff training and development.
63. We have a significant role in the HSCB quality assurance and performance sub group which undertakes multi-agency, practitioner led thematic audits on a quarterly basis. This group has a consistent and mutually challenging multi-agency representation. Recent audits have included looked after children, and the MASH. The learning from these audits inform ongoing improvement planning for the Board as well as our self-evaluation and continuous professional development (CPD) programme.
64. We welcomed the visit of the DfE National Advisor who gave positive feedback on Herefordshire's approach as well as providing valuable comment on what we could improve. The areas for improvement have been reviewed by a senior management group, chaired by the Chief Executive and by the council's management board and an action plan has been endorsed, which is incorporated into our improvement work. Within this our Corporate parenting board will be strengthened. It currently meets bi-monthly to understand the experience of our looked after children and care leavers, to scrutinise performance data and to oversee the implementation of our corporate parenting strategy. The council has introduced revised decision making in all council reports, requiring the impact of corporate parenting to be considered as a result and is also in the process of agreeing council tax support for care leavers. Training for members to reflect on their corporate parenting role is ongoing.
65. Annual evaluations of our service are contained within the HSCB Report, the independent reviewing officer report, the local authority designated officer report, private fostering, and children's representation and complaints report. These are considered in detail within the directorate and local authority. A number of these reports are considered by the HSCB to provide scrutiny and challenge.
66. Herefordshire Council commissioned three Local Government Association peer reviews for the Children's Wellbeing Directorate in 2017/18. Two of these reviews were designed to explore elements of current practice and a third considered the directorate's improvement and compliance culture. Their findings are informing our Development Plan. The reviews reflected a strong understanding of individual children and their needs, a clear understanding of what outcomes were being aimed for, evidence of strong support from team managers and social workers valuing this, and positive examples of effective social work practice. The reviews also found that practice was variable and that this included recording. The review confirmed our own assessment of the work that needs to be done.
67. In 2016 Ofsted undertook a review of our Special Educational Needs and Disability Service. The experience was a positive one, and staff were able to demonstrate how they worked together, across sectors, to improve the outcomes for these young people. Children fed back that they are happy, safe and well supported and that they have high aspirations for themselves.
68. Every social work service area has a clear action plan to drive forward improvement and this is monitored on a monthly basis by the directorate leadership team. The council has been clear that its ambition and expectation is for safeguarding services to be good. The Ofsted report and these action plans are important staging posts in monitoring progress to achieve this expectation and ensure that where safeguarding services are needed, they are of high quality.

69. We have established a new approach within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to address how contacts and referrals are being processed has been put in place from the beginning of October 2018;
70. We now have an Early Help Coordinator in MASH to ensure that children are managed in the correct part of the system and stepped up and down appropriately according to their identified needs;
71. We have systematically reviewed all Section 20 cases and taken the relevant action required on all of them, and have put in a system to stop this reoccurring which was acknowledged as good by Ofsted;
72. We identified that some cases were in the wrong teams, we have updated our transfer process and increased our management capacity in our assessment and CP/Court services as well as recruiting social workers to fill vacant posts. This has enabled us to have the right cases in the right team from October 2018.
73. We successfully recruited 20 staff, a combination of permanent and agency staff; and have in place a long term strategy for permanent recruitment, growing and keeping our own; as well as pursuing an urban to rural recruitment and an international recruitment approach during 2019.
74. We have also updated our transfer process to ensure that the cases are in the correct teams and increased our management capacity in our CP/Court services. Case transfers are now being reviewed on a regular basis and the assistant director follows up case transfers with heads of service and team managers to ensure that the cases are in the correct teams. Our caseloads are now of a range of 17 to 25; compared to having caseloads of high 20's to 30s in June 2018.
75. We have not been consistently completing supervision for workers and have implemented a supervision tracker from week commencing 30th July 2018. This is monitored weekly by heads of service and fortnightly by the assistant director; We recognise that the current recorded levels in Assessment and CP/Court teams in particular are not up to our expected standards and have targets and a review approach to drive improvement. We are also reviewing how we record supervision through our MOSAIC system.
76. We are improving our performance data for managers to use. A data book has been circulated from the 1 October 2018 to enable managers to more effectively manage their service areas and be able to plan work. This has been developed with managers and workers to ensure it is owned throughout the service. Heads of service review data weekly with team managers to change our culture of performance.
77. We have increased management capacity and have an additional Head of Service to concentrate on MASH/Assessment. We have increased team manager capacity and have an additional team manager in both the assessment and children protection court teams.
78. We have recruited additional family support workers to provide capacity and take some tasks from social workers. We are actively recruiting social workers and are part of a regional approach;
79. We have increased business support capacity to increase the availability of business support for convening and minuting of meetings therefore releasing social work time from these tasks;

80. We have recruited additional contact workers to clear the back log of life story book work and maintain completion of life story book work, particularly for children who are going to be adopted; the quality of life story work has improved following the recruitment of additional contact workers to clear the backlog and to maintain the completion of the life story book work. We have also appointed a case progression officer to add additional capacity to ensuring improvement in care planning, timeliness and outcomes for children.
81. We have run a 3 month assessment improvement project in the assessment team to improve the quality of children and family assessments. We are not delivering high quality assessments consistently and to timescale and have continued to provide additional support to the assessment teams to support improvement;
82. We have revised panel arrangements and a new panel commenced on the 25th September 2018 which provides a much more robust challenge to requests for children to enter the looked after system and looks at appropriate solutions for cases. These are chaired by the Assistant Director, with Heads of Service also being directly involved in individual case discussions and decisions. Legal services also attend our panel to enable clear, consistent approaches;
83. We have revised our quality assurance approach to enable greater learning and improvement in practice, focusing on specific audit work. We have revised our audit tool, established a framework which will close the loop of learning and will be reviewing its implementation on a monthly basis.
84. We undertake a monthly programme of case file audits. On a quarterly basis we analyse findings to identify themes and priorities for learning and improvement. In addition we regularly undertake a range of thematic audit work informed by agreed priorities and findings are considered by our senior management team to inform our development plan. These have included an audit of practice of cases in PLO, supervision, effectiveness of our audit programme, and admissions to care.

What are your plans to maintain or improve service?

85. We have run a comprehensive assessment improvement project in the assessment teams to improve the quality of children and family assessments. We are not delivering high quality assessments consistently and this is a continued area of focus. We are now reporting improvements in assessment completion timescales, and have continued to provide a focus on the quality of assessments, including the voice of the child and direct work with children. We have agreed to implement Signs of Safety and will be implementing this commencing in the Autumn of 2019
86. We have revised our quality assurance approach to enable greater learning and improvement in practice, focusing on specific audit work. We have revised our audit tool, established a framework, which will close the loop of learning by holding bi-monthly practice learning sessions.
87. Our overall goal is to improve the quality of the service we offer to children, young people and families so that they receive a consistently high quality service that would be judged as good by Ofsted.
88. We have established our Service Improvement plans for Safeguarding and Family Support Services which set out our key actions for improvement. They are focused on the areas that Ofsted summarised as requiring improvement:

- Senior leadership urgency in implementing a robust and timely action plan to deliver improvements and to address deficits in social work practice;
- The sufficiency of social workers and managers with capacity to cope with the need for services and the volume of social worker caseloads;
- Senior managers' interaction with social workers to enable staff to feel listened to;
- The pace of progressing child protection and child in need plans and the quality of practice with children in need;
- The regularity and quality of social work supervision;
- The quality and purposefulness of management oversight and decision making and the existing quality assurance and performance management system;
- The quality of life-story work for all children;
- We are continuing to focus on the other areas for improvement set out in the body of the Ofsted report from ILACS and the suggested areas for improvement from our Focused Visit. Our improvement plans capture the actions required to continue to drive improvement forward

89. The improvement plans will continue to be refreshed and updated on a monthly basis. The initial focus was on short term actions to address key areas for improvement; the improvement plans that have now been developed for safeguarding and family support will be refreshed and renewed. The plans are led by heads of service and are reviewed monthly by the assistant director with a highlight report being considered by the senior management team. Cabinet is kept informed of progress against the action plan as part of the Council's performance reporting process. The plan includes clear responsibilities and a process for monitoring. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee will review the progress on the action plans regularly.
90. Herefordshire is working closely with the Department for Education's (DfE) regional improvement and support lead for the West Midlands and has made specific links with Staffordshire LA to develop our approach to edge of care and with Doncaster LA to implement Signs of Safety; to develop our performance management culture, including management grip, performance and quality assurance, including the IRO service. We will also involve Doncaster in our edge of care work.
91. We have significant workload pressures due to social worker vacancies and the impact of high LAC numbers, historic high numbers of CP cases, an inconsistent approach to children in need and poor management oversight and decision making in some areas. Cabinet and management board agreed additional funding of £1.6 million to address this. This funding is being used to recruit to practitioner and manager levels, business support, performance management, a case progression officer and increase investment in preventative services. This recruitment activity is overseen by a weekly project board, including the council's head of human resources and chief finance officer.
92. Agree and implement the multi-agency domestic abuse risk and referral pathway that is currently under development. Work is also commencing on a new domestic abuse strategy to inform the recommissioning of domestic abuse services for 2019.
93. We will train social workers on working effectively using the PLO in recognition of quality improvements required in this area. We have established a task and finish group to implement recommendations from thematic audits which have highlighted the need for practice improvements in PLO and permanence planning.

94. A detailed plan to achieve permanency arrangements for up to 80 looked after children and young people has been agreed within the local authority and progress is being made. This is being reported bi-monthly to the chief executive, cabinet members and the children's scrutiny committee.
95. A care leaver's offer is being developed in consultation with care leavers; this will include strengthening our approach to ensure that more care leavers are engaged in education, employment or training.
96. We have awarded our contract to deliver more specialist support for our unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and we will expand our English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision and hope that this will encourage UASC's to choose to stay in Herefordshire.
97. We aim to develop our approach to prevention and edge of care on a multi-agency basis to fundamentally change the profile in Herefordshire and reduce the number of children and young people who need to be looked after or supported through child protection plans in line with the new council's aspirations.