

**Newham Children’s Services  
Strategic Improvement Plan**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Message from Members**

Following the Inspection in February 2019 we are absolutely determined to improve the experiences of Children and Young People who receive our services. We are ambitious about the future and we are committed to making Newham the best place for Children and Young People.

The Local Authority will work with partners, frontline staff and children and families to provide the very best services. We will support our staff to do the best job they can.

We want every child and young person in Newham to enjoy the best opportunities in life, and to be encouraged and supported to aim high, fulfil their potential and meet their ambitions. That’s why we take our responsibilities as corporate parents so seriously – we are determined that children living in care, and care leavers, in Newham enjoy the same kind of support as many young people get from their families’

This is the first version of the strategic vision for the partnership: Newham Together: The Best Place for Children and Young People. Due to the urgent need to get the improvement work started, we’ve had to create this vision following a brief period of consultation. The aim is for this vision to have longevity, but as a living document it will go through a number of stages of evolution. The aim is to co-produce future versions alongside Children, Young People, families and the wider partnership.

**Lead Members Cllr Sarah Ruiz and Cllr Carleene Lee-Phakoe**

**Newham Together:**

**The best place for Children and Young People**

All children and young people in Newham will:

1. **Grow up happy, healthy, and safe.**

* We will provide help early on and protect those at risk of harm.
* Children and young people have access to enriching activities.
* More young people benefit from support to enhance their emotional well-being.
* Newham is child-friendly and supports healthy living.

1. **Flourish in our schools.**

* All children and young people achieve their potential.
* All children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities thrive in our schools.
* Education Health and Care plans are in place for those who need them.

1. **Benefit from employment, skills and training opportunities.**

* Young people are supported to succeed in apprenticeships and training.
* Children, young people and their families benefit from Community Wealth Building.

1. **Play an active role in the community.**

* All children and young people have the opportunity to volunteer or take part in cultural or sporting activities.
* All children and young people are able to make decisions about their lives.
* All children and young people have choices, influence and help to shape services*.*

**The Newham Obsessions:**

Over the next 12 months we will:

* **Improve the care experience;**
* **Increase support to families.**
* **Invest in the workforce, improving quality and stability;**

**The ‘Newham Together’ Partnership:**

Partners deliver the vision by working together with a shared sense of purpose, an agreed set of values, and a commitment to collaboration.

**The way we work:**

* We invest in relationships;
* We are open and transparent;
* We create a culture of learning and curiosity;
* We are ambitious,
* We support each other and celebrate success;

**Our Practice Framework:**

* Children and Young People are at the centre of all we do;
* We build on strengths to support change;
* We respond to risk with confidence;
* Practice is purposeful, planned and focussed;
* We use a systemic approach to understand complex situations.

**Newham Strategic Improvement Plan**

The plan is organised into seven key themes to ensure we have a strategic focus on all aspects of social care, delivering vital improvements to Children’s and Young People Services. These themes are:

1. Leadership Vision and Culture
2. Model of Practice
3. The Fundamentals
4. Corporate Parenting
5. Partnerships
6. Learning and Transparency
7. Workforce
8. **Leadership, Vision and Culture**

The new Corporate structure has introduced a fresh approach to leadership across the council, including the adoption of the HEART values. The new leadership in Children’s services will model new behaviours, develop a positive culture and set a more productive climate. The new approach is restorative, and relational, founded on strong partnerships. There will be a strong focus on positive engagement with the workforce, and the establishment of a clear communication strategy, setting out the ‘Newham Together’ vision. The aspiration is for Newham to be a ‘Centre of Excellence’ in Children’s Social Care by 2023.

To set out a restorative culture across the service, an explicit effort will be made to improve the working environment. The aim is develop a culture of learning and reflection through engaging staff and responding to their feedback. The values will be based on respect for others, working collaboratively, and recognising strengths. This will create a high support, high challenge environment.

A key element of the new approach to leadership is a review of governance and decision making, to ensure there is effective grip across the service – this may require a level of organisational change. The Leadership team will be outward-looking and engage with other Local Authorities across the region, including through the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance.

The workforce will showcase diversity across Newham, as part of a commitment to provide development opportunities and attract the best talent.

1. **Model of Practice**

The ‘Newham Together’ model of practice will be developed, to provide practitioners with confidence and clarity in their work with children and young people. ‘Newham Together’ is a restorative, relational approach utilising systemic tools. The model will be strength-based and seek to co-produce solutions to difficult problems. This approach will draw on systemic principles, and use a range of tools and techniques to enhance social work practice.

The aim is to minimise the level of statutory intervention with families, with an approach that manages risk through the development of strong and effective relationships. As such, this approach will privilege relationships and the direct work with families.

The practice model will enable practitioners to be clear about the purpose of their interventions, and develop confidence about the tools they use to support families. This will support a curious and creative approach to practice. A programme of training will be delivered to all those in practice and supervisory roles across the organisation. To support this new practice model, a Clinical Director will oversee a team to create the ‘scaffolding’ required for a successful implementation.

1. **Getting the fundamentals right**

A review of caseloads and structures will take place, including a review of throughput, volume and thresholds. These reviews will be supported through quality assurance activities alongside regular performance and challenge meetings.

A review of governance will take place to ensure there is sufficient scrutiny of complex and high-risk cases and care plans.

For each area of the service, a detailed service-level improvement plan (SIP) will be developed to focus on key priorities with clear measures of progress. These SIPs will be aligned with the strategic plan and ensure reporting also aligns with Ofsted monitoring visits. The key areas of focus are; assessments, planning, recording, visits and supervision.

1. **Corporate Parenting**

A key priority is to improve the quality of support for children in care, and care experienced young people. This challenge goes beyond the realm of Children’s Services – it extends to the wider corporate offer and the contribution of the wider partnership.

A revised Corporate Parenting Strategy is being developed to capture the aspirations and ambitions for the children and young people in our care. Effective governance is being developed to ensure there is a shared implementation plan to deliver swift progress against the priority outcomes.

A renewed focus on engaging and supporting children in our care is critical to ensure the effectiveness of our corporate parenting offer. This includes a programme of activities and opportunities for young people to participate in shaping and reviewing services in Newham. The voice of children and young people is central to the scrutiny and understanding of the offer. This new approach to corporate parenting will support young people to engage with Councillors and senior officers and participate in the governance arrangements. Councillors will have new opportunities to engage directly with young people, and hear from them about their experiences in care.

There will be a renewed focus on celebrating achievements of children in care, and a greater variety of positive activities for young people to engage in.

Critical to this new approach to corporate parenting is better engagement with care leavers, and enabling young people to access support and engage in social activities in a space that they have helped shape and develop. This new approach will work with care leavers to co-produce pathway plans and provide support with transitions.

A crucial element of corporate parenting is an improved offer in terms of quality of care and stability of placements. Through work with social care and commissioning teams, the aim is to improve the local sufficiency of care placements, and to strengthen and develop the in-house fostering service. The objective is to ensure more young people are placed closer to home and in family settings, and to reduce the level of placement breakdown. This strategic commissioning approach will deliver better outcomes and improved value for money.

1. **Partnerships**

It may be necessary to reset some of the existing partnership arrangements, and invite a new approach to partnership in Newham, but it is also important to recognise and look at existing forums, where good foundations are in place. The ‘Newham Together’ Partnership aims to develop trust and collaboration, and create a common vision for children and young people in Newham.

The Newham Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) presents a great opportunity to deliver shared outcomes, co-produce solutions and align approaches. This includes identifying a small number of key priorities for development and improvement. It will also provide a clear pathway to escalate issues and develop resolution.

As there is great diversity through the partnership across Newham, with many partners across this spectrum, it is important to engage a broad audience and understand the challenges across all communities. Partners across the borough have a vast array of experience and expertise that can provide a significant contribution to the vision and direction of Children’s Services.

1. **Learning and Transparency**

To create an environment that allows good practice to flourish, we will create a more open culture promoting learning, reflection, innovation and transparency. There is a strong commitment to ensure that feedback becomes central to service design, and the principles of co-production are supported across the department. Through a new quality assurance framework, the aim is to support a thoughtful, curious and analytical approach to practice development. This will ensure managers and senior officers take ownership of a new approach to auditing, reviewing practice alongside practitioners and supporting learning conversations.

The aim is for Children’s Services to become more outward looking and collaborative, working with neighbouring LAs as part of the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA). This will enhance the ability of the organisation to develop critical self-reflection, supporting an awareness of strengths and areas for development.

We need to improve use of data and intelligence in order to understand trends and demand drivers across the system. Enabling operational managers and teams to have access to accessible and up to date performance data is critical in creating a high level of outcomes-based accountability and greater ownership of team performance.

1. **Workforce**

The social care workforce is the greatest asset to Children’s Services. The capacity to make significant strides in the improvement journey is predicated on the quality and resilience of the workforce. Investing in the workforce is critical in order to secure sustainable improvements and deliver better outcomes. A key element of the workforce plan will be to set up a Social Care Academy with a clear offer of training and support to all practitioners.

The Social Care Academy will improve the professional development offer and develop career pathways. Refreshing the brand is critical in attracting the right staff and retaining skilled practitioners. The academy will play a central role in celebrating the achievements of social care staff and holding annual events to promote this, so staff can feel valued and empowered. The academy is a vehicle that can support the investment in leadership across Children’s Services and deliver greater stability and permanency.

Staff will be supported to explore opportunities to be creative, find new solutions to innovate and develop practice. This collaborative approach to practice development supports the sustainability of improvements.

Leaders will also have to show a relentless focus on the recruitment, development and retention of social workers and managers.

**SUCCESS FRAMEWORK**

|  | **Objective** | **Action** | **Outcome** | **Impact for children** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Leadership, Vision and Culture | Develop a vision for social work in Newham that provides a coherent common purpose for all practitioners, setting out the culture, values and behaviours required. | Launch the service vision and engage staff in conversations about how they contribute to the strategic vision for children and young people. | The workforce feel empowered and supported to deliver against a common purpose. | I will receive help when I need it and in a way that works for me. |
| Strengthened stable leadership team, with clear governance over decision-making and strategic direction. | Review the structure of the Children’s Social Care Leadership team to ensure there is sufficient capacity to support the improvement journey. Recruit to the posts. | A stable, permanent senior leadership team provide consistency and support to the workforce throughout the improvement journey. |
| Corporate support which understands the role of social workers and reflects a collective ambition for children in the borough | Engage with the wider CMT to consider how the council as a whole can support the improvement journey. | Creating the right conditions for social work to flourish, with manageable caseloads, a good working environment, and effective tools and equipment. |
| 2. Model of Practice | Develop a new model of practice, supporting practitioners to deliver effective interventions. | Through engagement with the workforce, set out the approach and practice framework to enable different conversations to take place. | A systemic and relational approach that privileges direct work with families, reframes the way we think about families, and enables evidence-based interventions. Improved practitioner satisfaction and better retention rates. | My worker will understand me, look out for my needs; he/she will help me make the best of my situation. My worker will talk to me about all decisions and will take into account what I think and want. |
| Develop a clinical team to support the implementation of this new model of practice. | Develop key roles to lead this new approach to practice, engage the workforce and deliver training to practitioners. | Practitioners are supported to think about how they offer support to families in different ways, encouraging reflective practice and the exploration of different hypotheses. |
| The model of supervision supports an evidence-based approach to practice. | Training and support to supervisors to give them the confidence and the skills to enable a more reflective and purposeful approach to supervision. Recruiting experienced managers with the right skill-set. | A more consistent and informed approach to supervising practice, across a range of supervision; including one-to-one, group and case consultation approaches. This will lead to greater reflection and challenge, and more purposeful and effective practice. |
| 3. Getting the fundamentals right | Thresholds – establishing clear thresholds so that practitioners and partners are clear about the appropriate response relating to different levels of need. | Workshops to explore existing approaches to thresholds with practitioners and partners – using these engagements to re-work and clarify these as required. | A more consistent approach to applying thresholds, and more appropriate interventions offered to families. Opening up a dialogue with partner agencies and a clear approach to resolving different views. | My worker sees me regularly and understands that my needs for help and support change depending on my circumstances. My assessments and plans will reflect my needs and I am clear about what needs to be done. My life chances are improved as a result. |
| Visits – ensuring that children and young people are seen in a timely way and the level of response is proportionate to the level of need. | Devise clear guidelines for each service on the expectations relating to visits to see children and young people. Ensure there is a robust QA approach to monitoring performance. | Children are seen regularly and in accordance with their level of need. Visits are purposeful and effective, and support the overall aim of the plan. |
| Assessments – improve the quality and consistency of assessments, ensuring they are analytical and proportionate. Utilise a systemic framework to enable the exercise of curiosity and consideration of the experience of the child and their family. Consider strengths, risks and areas for further exploration. Ensure there is a clear exploration of difference and barriers to engagement. | Develop a programme of workshops to support reflective practice and build skills in relation to assessments. Utilise the clinical team to support case consultations and the development of hypotheses. Use experienced practitioners to support the assessment of high-risk families. | Practitioners will become more confident, reflective and curious – and assessments will have a greater focus on analysis and inform a proportionate and purposeful intervention. Risks will be managed more effectively, and partners and families will have greater confidence in the quality of the social work intervention. |
| Plans – improve the quality and consistency of planning across the service. | Develop an approach to planning that fits with the systemic model of practice- ensuring that plans are purposeful, focussed and SMART. Roll-out a programme of workshops to engage practitioners in the development of this approach, and develop clear practice standards. Ensure there is an effective quality assurance loop to ensure consistency of quality. | Plans become more focussed on the key priorities for social work intervention – setting out a few clear goals to achieve. Plans also become more relevant to families, and are written in a more accessible way, with clear measures of success. Families are more engaged in the planning process, and interventions are more effective as a result, leading to better outcomes. |
| Case-recording – ensuring written records are analytical, concise, relevant and timely. | Engage with practitioners to identify examples of good practice in relation to case recording – develop a practitioner-led group to devise guidance and deliver training. | Improved quality of case records will support clearer, more proportionate, and more effective interventions. These will make records more accessible and tell a clearer narrative about the intervention. |
| 4. Corporate Parenting | Ensure children and young people feel valued by celebrating their achievements, and enable more consistent contact. | A programme of events and activities will be planned over the year to engage different groups of children and young people, and their carers. An annual celebration event will take place to mark the achievements of children in care and care experienced young people. | These events will ensure that there is greater visibility of the achievements and strengths of children in care and young people. Elected members, practitioners, carers and family members will be able to celebrate this success and develop a positive appreciation of the contribution made by this group. | I feel valued and respected. I feel I will have help to manage life’s challenges. Professionals want the best for me as they would for their own children |
| Ensure there is sufficient care provision to meet the needs of Looked After Children and Care leavers | Review the strategic commissioning plan, and ensure there is a corporate approach to sourcing the right quality of local placements. | A greater proportion of children and young people are placed closer to home and receive more consistent support from social care staff, improving stability and delivering better outcomes. |
| The Corporate Parenting Board has a clear purpose and is focused on key priorities to improve outcomes for Children in Care and Care Experienced young people. | Develop the role of the corporate parenting panel in championing the needs of looked after children and care leavers and scrutinising the quality of practice for these children and young people.  Form a charity for care leavers, enabling them to raise funds for activities and support. | Care leavers feel more empowered to speak directly to councillors and senior officers, to raise concerns and provide feedback. Councillors feel informed and able to discharge their duties as corporate parents. A range of senior council officers and partners are involved in developing the local corporate parenting offer. |
| 5. Partnerships | A strong and aligned local multi-agency partnership is in place | The NSCP will be established with full participation of statutory agencies. The NSCP will have a plan with a clear set of priorities that are aligned with those of the Improvement Board. | The NSCP will lead the discussion in Newham on how partners work together on operational activities as well as planning strategic priorities together. It will support multi-agency, multi-disciplinary work where feasible and in line with evidence. | All professionals work together and understand my needs to deliver the best help I need to be safe, happier and to reach my potential |
| The safeguarding partnership provides effective and meaningful scrutiny. | A key focus on the NSCP will be how agencies can effectively work together, achieving a culture of support and collaboration, whilst enabling effective challenge and high aspirations for improving service quality.  There will be an effective programme of audit and dip-sampling that will be multi-agency within a learning and improvement cycle. | Partners will be able to articulate a shared and cohesive approach to protecting and supporting children and families across Newham.  Partners will provide a robust challenge to each other to ensure a strong focus on monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of frontline practice. |
| Performance and outcomes are regularly monitored, with risks managed and successes recognised | Monitor and challenge an agreed dataset so that Newham Childrens Improvement Board members can actively quality assure, evaluate and challenge the effectiveness of services | All partners will deliver the required data and ensure the analysis and findings is shared and incorporated into feedback and planning processes of their organisations. |
| 6. Learning and Transparency | Develop a robust approach to quality assurance, which clearly demonstrates improvements and supports outcomes based accountability. | Develop a Quality Assurance Framework that pulls together the different strands of quality assurance to ensure that services improve outcomes for children and young people. This will include audits, practice weeks, and engagement with the workforce and with families to gain feedback. | A culture of learning and reflection will be developed, with the aim of improving the effectiveness of practice  Managers will provide effective and respectful challenge to social work practitioners, team managers and partner agencies to ensure risk is identified, responded to and managed  Children and young people, foster carers and colleagues are confident in the use of feedback mechanisms to talk about the services they receive from the Local Authority and partner agencies. Children’s voices are heard and influence decisions being made about them. | I know that my social worker will have time and support training from their manager. I will feel that all services and staff are interested in helping me and will listen to what I want. When I give feedback, I know that this will be heard and acted on. |
| Ensure that data is used intelligently to analyse, understand and challenge performance, and is an effective tool for improving practice. | Develop a proportionate, clear and transparent approach to performance information, ensuring this is shared in a way that is useful to managers and practitioners. Engage in the London Improvement and Innovation Alliance to develop our use of data, and benchmark against other local authorities. | A clearer and more transparent approach to data and performance, with fewer, prioritised measures of quality and improvement. Managers will feel more confident in using data to support service improvement, and as a way of asking relevant questions about performance. |  |
| 7. Workforce | Improve workforce data and intelligence and develop a strategic approach to recruitment, retention, and career pathways. | Review existing workforce analysis and plan for further deep-dive analysis of key areas around the workforce, systems and structures, including benchmarking activity.  Develop an outcomes and evidence focused revised workforce strategy, to fit aims of the strategic improvement plan | Improved productivity and reduced sickness. A greater consistency of support for families, leading to better quality practice, improved decision making and better outcomes. | I have fewer changes in workers who keep me informed on the things I need to know. I can get in contact with them when I need and he/she will respond. |
| Develop a Social Care Academy to co-ordinate professional development activity. | Co-produce Social Care Academy model, ensuring engagement with the workforce and develop a new learning and development offer, encapsulating the new approach to practice. | A clear commitment to workforce development including leadership development and systemic practice training. A clear career progression pathway and a strong brand and marketing approach will be in place. |
| There is a remodelled and more effective approach to recruitment and retention | Develop a new identity for social care, including branding and messaging for both internal and external use.  Develop new recruitment and retention action plan as part of the Workforce Development Strategy, ensuring relevant resources in place. | Improved workforce stability, with greater number of permanent workers. |

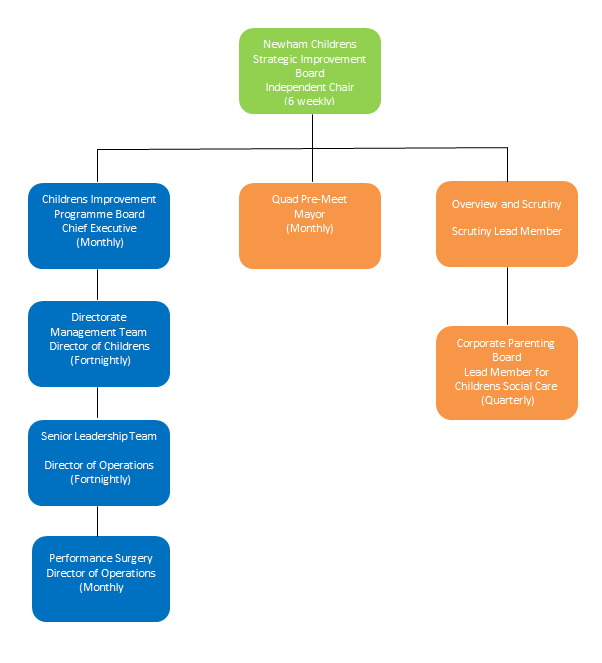
**APPENDIX**

**Governance and Oversight**

The Newham Children’s Strategic Improvement Board will provide effective oversight of the council’s Children’s Improvement Plan. The Board is made up of the senior leaders from the Council – including Members - and its key partners to bring focus and pace to the implementation of the Improvement Plan.

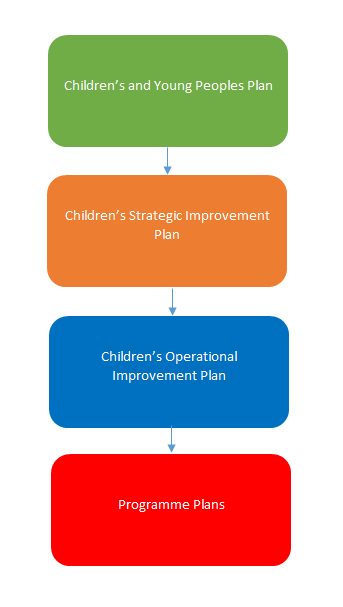
There will be corporate oversight from the Chief Executive and Elected Members who will monitor the detailed programme plan. Elected Members at Overview and Scrutiny will provide external political scrutiny. The revised Corporate Parenting Panel will focus on improving outcomes for our looked after children and care leavers, as set out in this plan.

The following diagram sets out the governance arrangements for the Children’s Improvement Programme to drive and challenge the delivery of actions across the programme.



This improvement plan links to a number of other strategies and plans that are in place within the council and across wider partnerships. This improvement plan is focused specifically on changes and improvements to children’s safeguarding for which Newham Council is responsible.

The delivery of priorities and actions detailed in the Improvement Plan will embed improvements for vulnerable children and this will be underpinned by a more detailed Operational Plan and managed using a robust project management approach.

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