



For the Citizens'
Rights Agreements

Assurance Review (Looked after Children and Care Leavers) Annex 3a: North West Final regional report September 2024

**Local authority responses on support for Looked after Children
and Care Leavers in making applications to the EU Settlement
Scheme**

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Introduction

The Independent Monitoring Authority for the Citizens' Rights Agreements (IMA) has completed individual assurance reviews with 24 local authorities in the North West of England.

Individual assurance reviews were conducted with local authorities who had not, during a previous information gathering exercise conducted in November 2022, provided sufficient information to demonstrate that they were discharging their responsibility to support eligible looked after children and care leavers to make an application to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). The methodology and rationale for this work has been outlined in our main report.

To deliver these reviews, the IMA sought assurance in the following three areas:

1. robustness of the identification processes
2. accurate record keeping; and
3. completion of retrospective checks

This updated regional report will reflect the findings of these reviews.

Assurance Review findings

1. The IMA is assured that all local authorities in the North West of England had (or have now implemented) robust processes in place to identify eligible looked after children, care leavers and their family members. Local authorities demonstrated they were recording the nationalities and place of birth of children and young people who entered their care, assisting with the identification of potentially eligible applicants to the EUSS. This includes strategies for the identification and support of non-EU/EEA EFTA family members.
2. The IMA is assured that appropriate record keeping procedures are in place as set out in the guidance issued by the Home Office along with confirmation that retrospective checks of all eligible children and care leavers in their remit have been completed and remain ongoing.
3. Many local authorities had clear processes in place to identify and support eligible cohorts, evidenced during the individual assurance review. Many took proactive measures to review their current processes and implement changes as a result of this review and were keen to share these enhancements with the IMA. These are further outlined on page four and five of this report.
4. Initially, the majority of local authorities did not provide details of an identification and record keeping processes. However, after further engagement, all local authorities evidenced this and many took steps to review their current processes and implement changes as a result of IMA engagement.
5. During the initial information gathering stage, the IMA noted that two local authorities were disbanded and merged to create one new local authority. The IMA did not make an initial request for information with the new local authority. However, an individual assurance review was completed once the initial report was published.
6. Six local authorities did not respond to the IMA's initial request for information. The IMA notes that it also experienced difficulty engaging with five local authorities in this region to gather additional information. The IMA took additional steps to support local authorities with these reviews, which subsequently resulted in all local authorities engaging fully.
7. Where required, the IMA shared best practice principles and further guidance with local authorities and assisted local authorities to undertake proactive reviews of their processes. As a result, some were able to identify and implement improvements before meeting with the IMA.

Improvements by local authorities

System Improvements

1. One local authority reported introducing reportable fields in the case management system to help improve tracking and monitoring of relevant citizens.
2. Three local authorities reported implementing a change to their systems, to ensure that nationality, ethnicity and immigration status are recorded in line with the Home Office guidance.
3. Further to the IMA's engagement, one local authority reported implementing a recovery plan which included improved data reporting to ensure that nationality was captured and further retrospective checks were completed. As a result of this, the local authority reported the identification of one further eligible care leaver.

Policy Improvements

4. Four local authorities reported specifically using the 'Best Practice' guidance that was shared with them by the IMA to either implement their own written guidance, implement improvements, and/or enhance their guidance further.
5. Three local authorities reported that they had identified further eligible children and care leavers as a result of staff upskilling. In total, this resulted in a further 11 children and one eligible care leaver supported.
6. As a result of further checks being completed after the IMA's engagement, one local authority reported identifying 33 parents of eligible children who were considered eligible to apply for EUSS, who were signposted. Whilst these numbers identified do not fall under the remit of the local authorities' obligations, the IMA welcome the additional signposting.
7. One local authority reported creating and implementing staff training materials utilising materials from the [Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit \(GMIAU\)](#).

Improvements by local authorities

Process Improvements

8. Several local authorities reported undertaking further, manual and extensive checks of all their records to assist with the identification of eligible cohorts and dedicated resources to complete this work.

9. One local authority reported making significant changes to its processes following the IMA's engagement. This assisted in ensuring that manual retrospective checks would not be required again in the future.

10. One local authority reported that staff would receive further training on EUSS in Spring 2024 as a result of the IMA's engagement, and one further local authority reported that it would roll out further refresher training to all relevant staff, assisting to maintain knowledge and processes.

11. The IMA has welcomed the positive engagement with each local authority in the North-West region, noting the collaboration with the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and their Regional Leads in encouraging local authority engagement with this work. The IMA are aware of the operational pressure local authorities are under and are grateful for their assistance with this assurance review.

RAG Grading: Local authority previous and revised gradings

Initial Local Authority Response (2023)

Local Authority	Identification	Record keeping	Retrospective checks
Blackburn with Darwen			
Blackpool			
Bolton			
Bury			
Cheshire East			
Cheshire West and Chester			
Cumberland			
Halton			
Knowsley			
Lancashire			
Liverpool			
Manchester			
Oldham			
Rochdale			
Salford			
Sefton			
St Helens			
Stockport			
Tameside			
Trafford			
Warrington			
Westmoreland and Furness			
Wigan			
Wirral			

RAG Grading: Local authority previous and revised gradings

Individual Assurance Review Outcome (2024)

Local Authority	Identification	Record keeping	Retrospective checks
Blackburn with Darwen			
Blackpool			
Bolton			
Bury			
Cheshire East			
Cheshire West and Chester			
Cumberland			
Halton			
Knowsley			
Lancashire			
Liverpool			
Manchester			
Oldham			
Rochdale			
Salford			
Sefton			
St Helens			
Stockport			
Tameside			
Trafford			
Warrington			
Westmoreland and Furness			
Wigan			
Wirral			

Next Steps

12. Each local authority in the North West region has been notified of their re-grading following the conclusion of all individual assurance reviews along with a copy of their revised assessment.

13. Based on the information provided, the IMA does not at this stage consider that further compliance action is required by any local authority in the North West in relation to this assurance review. The IMA will share our findings with key stakeholders for the purpose of knowledge sharing.

14. The IMA may contact any local authority in the future should we require further information if any subsequent issues arise regarding this review.