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Dear Amanda

Children's Services Front Door Health Check – 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Thank you for being the fourth local authority in the region, to invite a Children's Services Front Door Health Check (FDHC), and the second to engage in a 'virtual' FDHC.

As you are aware, FDHCs have been designed by the Yorkshire & Humberside Safeguarding Assistant Directors, at the request of the DCS group, as part of our sector led improvement and learning programme.

The model of the front door health check aims to contribute, through direct observation, dip sampling, auditing and reviewing of performance data to the self-assessment in relation to:

- Effectiveness of Thresholds, Consent, Step Up/Down
- Effectiveness of decision making and management oversight
- The quality of assessments
- Strength of partnership contribution
- Effectiveness of QA (through audit analysis)

A team led by myself alongside three colleagues, Laura Burrows Team Manager Rotherham Children's Services Victoria Horsefield Assistant Director Sheffield Children's Services and Theresa Racz, Service Manager from Kirklees Children's Services, provided the Front Door Health Check.

The team of four reviewers spent one and a half days working virtually with York City Council collecting evidence with which to frame our findings and then on day 2 in the afternoon, together with Rob Mayall, (SLI Coordinator), drew together and presented our conclusions of the health check. Prior to the on-site activity, colleagues in York shared a wide range of information to support our preparation.

Our key headlines are:

### **Strengths**

- There is a shared, system-wide ambition to continuously improve across the system at all levels and a genuine passion, ambition and motivation
- New processes and systems provide a foundation for increased consistency, effectiveness and efficiency across the MASH
- There is a genuine commitment and enthusiasm across the partnership

### **Areas for consideration:**

- Continue to review, refine, develop and embed systems.
- Increase your focus on the development of relationships based practice

### **Strengths**

- The threshold document is consistently used in decision making
- Partners understand how decisions are made
- Consent is consistently referenced
- Following the LGA peer review which identified the need to achieve a common understanding of thresholds across the service, we found that there was a common understanding..
- Partners have welcomed the threshold document and over 600 people were involved in developing this approach. This is co-owned at a strategic and operational level in the MASH
- Management oversight is evident on all cases
- Decision making is timely
- There is guidance and direction in the management oversight and workers have the confidence to seek guidance when it is needed
- Assessments are of good quality and timely
- Where requested, partners contribute well to the assessments
- The voice of the child and lived experience could be seen in some cases using a strength based practice model
- The MASH process has contributed to the 45-day assessments performance improvement.
- Partners refer in a timely way
- The threshold document is used to inform decision making to refer.
- Partners own the threshold document
- There is a strategic commitment to ensure children in York are safe and protected from harm.
- There is newly established MASH scorecard to drive performance.
- Good governance arrangements are in place with oversight from the safeguarding partnerships and the improvement board.
- Area team managers support decision making in the MASH and have daily meetings which helps to support timely interventions
- There is evidence in most cases that assessment tools are used and the child's lived experience is captured.
- The analysis of the history is consistently gathered.
- Multi-agency audits are now taking place
- We saw evidence of a commitment to continuously improving QA processes.
- The use of live audits and feeding back to the social workers is strong.
- There has been a culture shift in the approach to QA.

- There is evidence of a stronger performance management system, which is informing practice compliance alongside an emerging QA process.

### **Areas for consideration**


- Consider whether the use of the threshold document is sometimes leading to interventions that could be managed at a lower level
- Consider whether the strength of your processes is stifling relationship based practice
- Consider making the step up process clearer so that families can experience seamless provision.
- Consider how multi-agency screening can be strengthened which includes ensuring that preformed decision-making is not just taken into a meeting.
- Consider whether strategy meetings are always required which is already underway as part of re-aligning thresholds and strengths based practice.
- Consider whether the multi-agency screening process can be articulated on the contact record to better record the multi-agency decision making
- Consider whether there is enough challenge from the worker and to the worker
- Consider strengthening partners challenge to the decision making to convene strategy meeting and within a strategy meeting
- Consider how all contacts including direct contacts to early help can be screened within 24 hours.
- Consider whether some of the assessment work being done in the MASH might sit elsewhere in the system
- Ensure that Fathers are consistently included in the information gathering stage
- Consider seeking more information to inform decision making about a strategy meeting or could a single assessment including multi-agency information be more appropriate. The local authority had already identified this as a matter that needed to be addressed.
- Consider how a consistent approach at an early help level is taken where exploitation is an issue.
- Consider how assessments analyse risk versus unmet need.
- Consider what information is used to inform decision-making and articulate that within the child's record.
- Ensure that, where appropriate, agencies outside of the MASH are contacted to inform decision-making.
- Consider how to better record the multi-agency decision-making within the MASH so that it is clear that all partners are involved in owning the outcome.
- We couldn't evidence a high level of engagement from education (this may be Covid related). It is however noted that education has recently joined and social workers are now making attempts to contact individual schools.
- Consider how more consistency can be achieved in the audit process in terms of the quality of recording and a clearer rationale to be developed as to why they have graded them in this way.
- Consider how the MASH audits challenge decision making appropriately.
- Consider the inclusion of how to address diversity within your QA processes.
- The acceleration of the recent implementation of the moderation process will ensure greater consistency across the service.

In coming to these findings, we also reviewed approximately 30 cases and had sight of a number of audits from the MASH team. It is important to say that the front door health check is a very short, 1.5 days of quality assuring activity. Our observations and conclusions, whilst hopefully of value in confirming your own self-assessment, need to be seen within this narrow context; whilst we covered a lot of ground in 1.5

days, proportionally we saw very few cases in the context of the hundreds that your service will be responding to.

Finally, I would like to thank you and all your staff, for their openness and engagement in this process. In addition, to your managers and your staff, who looked after us and ensured that we had everything that we needed. We all left York feeling that you are an authority that is driving improvement and striving to do even better.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vicky Metheringham', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Vicky Metheringham  
Head of Service, North Yorkshire County Council and FDHC Lead