

Report of the Assistant Director Children's Services

**Regional Peer Review of our Children and Young People in Care
(CYPIC)**

Summary

1. This report provides a summary of feedback of the recent children in care regional peer review. This was undertaken in November 2019.

Background

2. To inform our self-assessment and future plans, CYC commissioned a Regional Peer Review of our children and young people in care (CYPIC). This review was led by an experienced regional Director of Children's Services and peer team, supported by a Sector Led Improvement Advisor. The review took place in November 2019. Staff were advised that a peer challenge is not an inspection of service, but an opportunity to receive peer support and reflections from regional colleagues.
3. The Peer Team were asked to consider 5 key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) and to complete an audit of a selection of case files. The Key Lines of Enquiry were drafted by the service as were as follows:
 - a. To test out the decision making process by officers for children becoming looked after and remaining in care, especially given a recent rise in CYPIC
 - b. To confirm the quality and timeliness of care planning including effective challenge from the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)
 - c. To confirm the City of York response to Safeguarding including Vulnerable groups and overall Risk Management of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing
 - d. Consider responses to Children and Young people in Care with an Education and Care Plan (EHCP) and consideration in of Special Educational Needs (SEN) in care planning and outcomes

- e. Is the LA sufficiently ambitious for CYPIC?
- f. To audit a selection of case files and feedback on the quality of work undertaken

Methodology

- 4. The team spent two days working in CYC collecting evidence with which to frame their findings and then drew together and presented their conclusions on day three of the Peer Challenge. Prior to the on-site activity CYC shared a range of information with the team to support its preparations.
- 5. As well as a desk-based analysis of documentation, the Peer Challenge process involved a wide range of on-site activities, including discussions with over 45 people. These discussions were with leaders, managers, practitioners, partners, foster carers and young people. The peer team also looked at a selection of case files, working alongside practitioners to do so.
- 6. As a result of this activity the team identified over 120 strengths and areas for consideration. They also gave headline strengths and areas for consideration. These form the basis of this report and form the Peer Teams “Top Tips” for the local authority and partners to consider.

Key findings

- 7. The ambition for change and improvement is welcomed across the organisation. There is increasing clarity about roles and responsibilities and this is providing a framework for improving practice.
- 8. There is a “competent and determined senior leadership team” with a clear understanding of the strengths and challenges in the system. Managers and staff are reflecting on the pace of change and are rightly deferring some aspirations (i.e. restructuring), conscious of the system’s capacity to manage such major turbulence.
- 9. Managers reported that the new Senior Leadership team are starting to break down hierarchies, creating a more open structure and culture, ‘Managers are more empowered’...hierarchies have been broken down’
- 10. Staff feel more engaged and support the changes we are seeking to achieve and report that 'we are being listened to' (Service Managers and IROs)
- 11. The Peer Team noted some strong staff development practice, such as

- a. Staff engagement events led by the Assistant Director, which have been highly valued and enabled greater visibility of leaders and managers
 - b. New processes to identify staff development needs by team, which enable more customised and targeted workforce development
12. This was seen as strength, but also noted is the importance of a continued investment in the development of an even more open, transparent culture in which staff are empowered.
13. Reassuringly from audits the Peer Team found the right children are coming into care - including a number of teenagers who have experienced long term neglect. This supports the recalibration story across our system where much has been done to address the drift and delay for children that informs our improvement journey. The Peer team believed we have the right plans in place to develop a comprehensive understanding of the needs of our children in care and where they are on the journey through the system.
14. Key systems and processes are starting to bring greater clarity and accountability. Examples of these included: recently published practice standards; trackers being developed (I.e. the Public Law Outline tracker) more regular performance and team meetings; QA of Health Assessments; regular meetings with the legal team; weekly reports from IROs for senior manager.
15. There is a better understanding in the organisation of what good looks like and a commitment to improve. This starts at the top, with senior managers having a clear and well-articulated view about how their services need to develop. The team also heard from service managers that staff recognise the need for change and are viewing improvement initiatives positively.
16. Despite the changes CYC continue to benefit from a strong commitment and underpinning values to support relationship based practice at practitioner level.
17. The voice of the child is strong and evident in case files and care leavers were able to describe the ways in which they are engaged and listened to. The team identified that the young person's advocacy service is undertaking some innovative and creative work.
18. Of note some excellent practice was seen in audits of direct work with children.

19. Issues of stability and capacity in the workforce continue to have a significant impact on CYC ability to consistently embed quality of practice. The Peer Team noted that a number of gaps in key management posts, vacancies and turnover of social workers all make embedding sustainable change a more challenging task.
20. CYC ability to implement and sustainably embed our new processes and systems may be adversely impacted by the pace of change within the organisation. They noted CYC are already reflecting on the pace of change but recognised CYC may want to balance change with implementation.
21. The lack of a robust infrastructure to support the emerging performance culture was seen as posing a significant risk. The team recognised the new and comprehensive QA framework, but also saw little understanding in the system about how and when performance will be scrutinised and who will be engaged in the process. The team noted however some improvements in this area with performance discussions now in place.
22. The team noted the drive for permanence is not well established but recognised plans to address this.
23. The team saw drift and delay in most parts of the system, but could also see that CYC are starting to address them, again noting a secure, stable and competent workforce is key to achieving this.
24. Neglect in teenagers was noted; the team identified better engagement of health partners would help provide an enhanced understanding of the impact of neglect on the physical and emotional wellbeing of children and would provide a baseline from which to measure impact and improved outcomes.
25. The Peer Review identified that MASH has already strengthened the arrangements for agencies working together and for Section 47 investigation arrangements, bringing confidence that strategy discussions happen in a timely way.
26. The Peer Team noted high ambitions for our care leavers and a good offer already in place on which you want to continue to build.
27. Placement Sufficiency plans were seen as a strength, with "ambitious plans for developing placement choice which build on some of the high quality local foster placements you already have in place"
28. The Peer Team noted the pace of change has been considerable and consideration has to be now given to allowing changes to embed.

Recognising Senior Leaders have had to implement change quickly and across many areas of your service the feeling now is that this pace of change and the extent of external scrutiny invited in could start to get in the way of sustainable implementation.

29. Of note, whilst care leavers receive a good service from the Pathway Team the Council has more work to do to fully embed its commitment to corporate parenting and to becoming the 'family firm' for children in care.
30. The permanence team know their children very well, with strong supportive relationships between the team and the wider partnership and positively, there is a robust and confident system of oversight of unregulated placements

Top Tips as recommended by the Peer team

31. Following an intensive two days activity in York, and in consideration of the 120 strengths and areas for consideration identified the team identified 6 top tips for further consideration.
 - a. Find ways of keeping things as simple as possible - focus now on core practice alongside compliance to give time to develop your practice model.
 - b. Continue to communicate and embed what good looks like - we have seen evidence that people are starting to 'get it'.
 - c. Focus on the deal breakers- case supervision is a powerful tool to improve practice.
 - d. Develop an effective, joined up response to meet the needs of teenagers, including key partner agencies (housing, health, and police). Partners appeared keen to consider a standalone Adolescent strategy that could map the needs of this cohort through Early Help to becoming a child in care
 - e. Tell your story using evidence of distance travelled
 - f. Don't underestimate the importance of your partners' and staff's pride in the City - inspire assertiveness and confidence in what is good and help your partners unite behind your ambitions for your children and young people.

Analysis

32. It was felt that the key lines of enquiry were sufficiently robust and would test threshold for care, timeliness and robustness of decision making,

specific consideration to be given to vulnerable groups and aspirations for children in care, recognising that these are the most vulnerable group of children in the city.

33. The methodology employed in a peer review process is well tested and robust, and as such the findings can be assumed to be reliable; that being said it should be noted that the sampled cohort is relatively small and as such the positive messages in their findings should be acknowledged with some caution.
34. The LA Improvement Journey is predicated on a combination of three main components – Vision, Culture and Practice. The focus of work over the last 15 months has focused in these areas and information brought previously to Scrutiny has highlighted the work undertaken by ISOS in ensuring these three areas are equally addressed in any improvement work.
35. It is encouraging that staff are reporting feeling engaged and motivated by the changes in place. The pace is recognised as relentless with a sharpened focus on children's experiences, strengthening quality of practice and getting the basics right.
36. Phase two of the improvement journey is focussing now on audit and quality of practice, embedding the basics and being clear on non-negotiables.
37. As a result of this review an Adolescent Strategy is being developed with partners, with a focus on Neglect, CSE, CCE and Transitional Safeguarding.

Actions following the review

38. A Task and Finish group has been set up to write an Adolescent Strategy. This will be finalised by April 2020 and will focus on teenagers to include those at risk of neglect and child sexual and criminal exploitation.
39. Managers are now "Live Auditing" two cases with staff on a monthly basis
40. A Children's Vision is being developed with support from Corporate
41. A Practice Model has now been agreed and will be rolled out to staff over the next few months
42. A Task and Finish group is in place to finalise a Permanence Strategy. This will be followed by training and development sessions for all staff

43. Work continues to recruit and retain staff; the social work academy will run three times a year, open days for new applicants are planned and a further commitment Front Line has been given.

Recommendations

44. This report is for discussion and comment, there are no options put forward for consideration. However, support from the Scrutiny committee is sought in the ongoing improvement journey for Children's Social Care.

Reason: To ensure the Committee are kept up to date with progress in the ongoing improvement journey for Children's Social Care.

Council Plan

45. Children and young people in care services relates to the Council Plan 2019-2023 priorities:

- a. good health and wellbeing
- b. well paid jobs and an inclusive economy
- c. a better start for children and young people
- d. creating homes and world-class infrastructure
- e. safe communities and culture for all
- f. an open and effective council

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Specialist Implications Officer(s) N/A

All



Wards Affected:

For further information please contact the author of the report