

Report of the Corporate Director of Children, Education & Communities

## **Bi-Annual Update On Safeguarding and Looked After Children**

### **Summary**

1. This report is a regular bi-annual update of the Children, Education and Community Scrutiny Committee regarding safeguarding children trends and activity of City of York Council.

### **Background**

2. Safeguarding of children is a highly regulated activity which is subject to statutory guidance and external regulation and inspection. This landscape regularly changes in line with practice developments and research. Since the last report to this Scrutiny Committee CYC have taken part in inspection activity and multi agency safeguarding arrangements. In addition there have been some significant changes in staffing across the service. This paper will update on these developments and also provide a commentary on service performance in the last 6 months and planned development activity.

### **Inspection and regulation activity**

3. The last full inspection of City of York Children's Social Care took place in November 2016. This was undertaken in line with the previous Ofsted Single Inspection Framework and the following judgements were made:

## **Children's services in York are good**

Children who need help and protection	Requires improvement
Children looked after and achieving permanence	Good
Adoption performance	Good
Experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Leadership, Management and Governance	Good

4. Progress since this inspection has been supported and monitored through service development plans in place on an annual basis which are reviewed and updated quarterly and progress monitored by both Directorate and Corporate Management Teams. In addition to an annual conversation with Ofsted which reviews progress and a regional peer challenge process where the Directors of Children's Services Regional Group coordinates a challenge session based on a core data set and a service self assessment .
5. The Ofsted Framework has now changed and the ILACS framework takes a deeper view of the quality and impact of frontline social work practice. The framework has a number of elements and operates as a whole system approach. The inspection handbook states:-
6. ILACS is a system of inspection. Under this system, we use the intelligence and information we have to inform decisions about how best to inspect each local authority. This system includes:
  - Local authorities sharing an annual self-evaluation of the quality and impact of social work practice.
  - An annual engagement meeting between our regional representatives and the local authority to review the self-evaluation and to reflect on what is happening in the local authority and inform how they would engage with each other in future.
  - Our local authority intelligence system (LAIS) (which brings data and information into a single record).
  - Focused visits that look at a specific area of service or cohort of children.

- Standard and short inspections where we make judgements using our four-point scale.
  - Joint targeted area inspection (JTAI).
7. We are currently updating and reviewing our self assessment to answer the 3 core questions in the framework:-
- What do you know about the quality and impact of social work practice in your local authority?
  - How do you know it?
  - What are your plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
8. A Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of the multi agency response to sexual abuse in the family in York took place between 24 September and 28 September 2018. The inspection focussed on the effectiveness of our work as a multi agency partnership and the work we do as single agencies. It included an evaluation of the multi agency front door for referrals about children who maybe at risk of significant harm. This inspection does not provide a graded judgement. The full report can be found on the Ofsted website.
9. Services in York were praised for their work to protect children and young people experiencing sexual abuse within their families, and inspectors particularly highlighted the strength of partnership working. Partners have a strong, shared commitment to working in a child-focused way and listening to the voices of children and young people. Those children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse within their families have access to a good range of services.
10. However, inspectors said more needs to be done to reduce delays for children accessing mental health services and to help young people who display harmful sexual behaviour. Timely access to therapeutic support is increasingly challenging in the face of rising need and a limited resource. Inspectors added that no child was found to be at risk of harm and that when they were in danger action was quickly taken by the council, police or health service to ensure they were safe.
11. Following the inspection we have focussed on analysing and disseminating findings and incorporating areas for development into on going service improvement plans. These plans will be monitored through

the service planning process outlined above and also through the Multi Agency Safeguarding Board and subsequent body.

12. City of York are likely to be subject to a focused visit and / or a short inspection this year and an inspection planning group meets on a fortnightly basis to ensure service readiness.

### **Changes to multi agency safeguarding arrangements**

13. The City of York Children's Safeguarding Board has played a highly effective and pivotal role in the work of the Local Authority, North Yorkshire Police and Health Partners. The strength of the Board was recognised in the JTAI which has referenced the effective leadership and challenge provided by the Board as being "an effective catalyst to the ongoing development of services for children". As a result York is well advanced in the move to the new Safeguarding Partnership arrangements as described in Working Together 2018 and has been successful in its bid to be one of the seventeen early adopter areas. Working Together 2018 set out expectations for the Local Authority, the Clinical Commissioning Groups and Police to act as a strategic leadership group setting out plans for how they plan to work together with others in the future. As an early adopter of the new arrangements there will continue to be a clear focus on identified priorities, appropriate scrutiny of practice and visibility of lessons learned and clarity on the accountability and expected contributions of partners and sub-groups.

### **Staffing changes**

14. Since the last report to Scrutiny there have been some significant changes to the leadership of Children's Service in York. Sophie Wales has taken up post as the Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services from 22nd October 2019 and Amanda Hatton has become Corporate Director of Children, Education and Communities from 3rd December 2018. Jo Gomerson has been acting Head of Service throughout this transition period. Plans are now in place to permanently recruit to the Head of Service and also the Quality Assurance and Principal Social Worker posts which we anticipate will be filled on a temporary basis from the end of January.

## **Service performance since the last Scrutiny Report**

15. The Committee receive a quarterly data dashboard which is directorate wide. This is one of a series of data sets used by the service to monitor and improve performance.

## **Good progress**

16. We continue to make positive improvements in the timelines of single assessments and the percentage of those completed within 45 days continues to increase and is now at 88.56% which is higher than both our statistical neighbours (83.6%) and the England average (82.7%) Going forward this is an area that targets will be set against to sustain and improve this performance even further.

## **Initial Child Protection Case Conferences (ICPC)**

17. 95.8% of ICPCs were within 15 working days, our highest outturn in 6 years. York is consistently above comparator averages and remains so.

## **Numbers of Children in Care**

18. Numbers of children in care remain stable currently at 206 (56 per 10k population against a 2017/2018 national of 64 per 10k). The Local Authority Edge of Care Team and Family Group Conference team work with families from single assessment through to proceedings to help to prevent children becoming looked after wherever possible and where it's safe to do so.

## **Social Worker case loads**

19. CYC remains committed to ensuring low manageable case loads for social workers; as such these continue to be on average around 16 cases per worker. This is variable dependent on length of time qualified and levels of complexity.

## **Voice of the child**

20. The U Matter Survey 2018 has, as yet, not been published. However, the voice of the child in the City of York continues to be notably strong. Participation opportunities for young people in care and care leavers continue to be delivered via the Children in Care Council. This includes monthly Show Me That I Matter panel meetings (13-17 yrs), monthly meetings of the Care Leavers Forum, I Still Matter, (17-21 yrs) and

fortnightly Speak Up Youth sessions (10-16yrs). Activity has included taking part in a consultation conducted by TACT (The Adolescent and Children's Trust) on the language used regarding children in care, meeting with representatives from fostering to look at how to better involve young people in the recruitment and training of foster carers, designing an accommodation leaflet for the Pathway team and attending the Corporate Parenting Board to help present the Local Offer for Care Leavers. The Children in Care Council and Care leavers Forum have also met with the Director, Assistant Director, Service Manager for Pathway Planning and Elected Members to feedback on the work they have been doing.

21. The Children's Rights and Advocacy Service (known as Speak Up) promotes children's rights entitlements and provides advocacy for children and young people who are in care, going through the child protection process or wanting to make a complaint against the council, in line with the Local Authority's statutory duty. Advocacy provision was extended in 2018 to include advocacy for care leavers up to the age of 21, as a result of feedback from young people and in line with the National Standards for the provision of Children's Advocacy Services (2002).

### **Areas which require on going improvement**

22. Achieving timeliness of initial and review health assessments remains variable. This is attributed to multiple factors which include: functionality of the ICS solution, capacity within business support and social workers competing priorities. However, this is being closely monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board and together with health colleagues some progress has been seen. Currently, 79.86% are completed on time.
23. Neglect remains the main reason for children being subject to child protection plans, with 51.29% of children being subject to a plan because of neglect compared with 39.37% with the primary concern of emotional abuse.
24. In the period from 1 April 2018 to date, 810 single assessments were completed with domestic violence factors being the main reason for the assessment, closely followed by 258 mental health factors being the primary reason of mental health for the referral. In light of this the local

authority is working with both the Safer York Partnership and Mental Health Partnership Board to identify key priority areas to address.

25. Placement stability for children that are looked after is variable with 11.17% having three moves or more and 59.49% being in long term stable placements. Placement sufficiency continues to present a challenge to the City of York. Foster carer recruitment and retention remains a key priority and a recently concluded placement review has considered the offer made to our existing foster carers as well as proposing a greater mix of alternative residential care with a focus on step down to fostering as the main driver.
26. The number of children subject to child protection plans has increased however; this is predominantly due to large sibling groups being made subject to plans. This is a complex picture which we are looking at in more detail through our audit process. Children who are on a child protection plan for 2 years or more is improving, however children who are made subject to a child protection plan for the second or subsequent time is increasing. We are working with partners and the Safeguarding Unit through audit activity to understand this picture more.
27. Monthly performance reports on supervision, audit activity and case loads are provided for the Director and the Lead Member.

### **Dissemination of City of York Safeguarding Children Board (CYSCB) messages and guidance**

28. CYSCB messages and guidance are disseminated effectively in a number of ways including:
  - All practitioners receive copies of the CYSCB newsletter.
  - Advanced Practitioners provide capacity to the teams to undertake development sessions for all practitioners and the newly appointed Principal Social Worker (in post from January 2019) will lead on the dissemination of learning from Local and National reviews and statutory guidance.

## **Safeguarding Children Training**

29. The Graded Care Profile 2 (a neglect assessment tool) continues to be used within Children's Social Care and the Healthy Child Service. New staff receive training and refresher training is being developed. Members of the Local Area Team will also be offered training on the use of GCP2 to support Family Early Help Assessments (FEHA's) where there is concern about the impact of neglect and to inform evidenced based referrals to Children's Social Care Front Door.
30. Children's Social Care have had extensive involvement with the development of the second package of online training from Community Care Inform and the training resource for child protection and disabled children will be launched early in 2019.
31. The Senior Social Worker for Child Sexual Abuse, Exploitation and Missing Children and Young People has been in post since September 2018 and is developing training packages with a focus on exploitation, including County Lines and missing episodes.

## **Service Development Priorities for next 6 months**

32. Demand management is key over the next six months; this is to ensure the right child is in the right service at the time and for the right length of time. Working with Partners we will review and refine our Early Help offer to support families to become more resilient, with the aim of preventing unmet needs from escalating.
33. We are also strengthening our approach to Permanence. Permanence helps children achieve a secure base as soon as they can in their lives, whether through adoption, or care by a friend or relative if their parents are unable to care for them. Conversations regarding permanent care arrangements should start as soon as social workers become involved with families; we will be strengthening our Family Group Conferencing Service both in scale and remit. This service supports wider family to identify their own solutions to issues raised and is a proven way of sustaining positive change in families.
34. We will also ensure the right foundations are in place for developing strong and effective social work practice to ensure positive change for



children, from strengthened management oversight to consistent use of chronologies and reflective supervision for all staff.

35. Working with all teams we are focussing on strengthening our identity, values and culture and practice model. This is critical in supporting staff recruitment and retention whilst refocusing on our relationship with our customers.
36. Whilst current audit activity has continued to provide helpful feedback and overview of cases the introduction of a new quality assurance framework will ensure senior managers and Members retain a clear line of sight on practice. This will further help to strengthen practice, support lessons learned and provide a feedback loop to workers. Alongside good quality performance information this will evidence how well we know ourselves and our practice which in turn will support workforce development and partner engagement.

### Recommendations

37. As this report is for information only there are no specific recommendations.

Reason: To update the committee on the latest work relating to Safeguarding and Looked After Children for City of York Council.

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**Report Approved**

**Date**  
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**Wards Affected:** *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

**All**

## **Abbreviations**

CYC- City of York Council

CYSCB- City of York Safeguarding Children Board

FEHA – Family Early Help Assessments

GCP2- Graded Care Profile 2

ICPC - Initial Child Protection Case Conference

ICS - Integrated Children's Services

ILACS – Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services

JTAI - Joint targeted area inspection

TACT- The Adolescent and Children's Trust