

Report of the Assistant Director – Children’s Specialist Services

## **Overview of Children’s Services**

### **Summary**

1. Considering and understanding the journey and experience of the child from identification of initial concern through to full care of the local authority is an essential starting position when setting out how improvements in practice will deliver better outcomes for children.
2. In light of the children’s services improvement plan developed post LGA Peer Review and Ofsted Focused visit, this paper sets out how services will improve outcomes for children and vicariously future Ofsted inspection judgements.
3. The report will explain how the required improvements in City York Council children’s services will be achieved and what conditions must be put in place to ensure longstanding sustained change.

### **Background**

4. The work of children’s services is underpinned by legislation, in the main:
5. **Principles that underpin the Children Act 1989**
  - the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration
  - wherever possible, children should be brought up and cared for within their own families
6. Key aspects of the legislation:
  - Section 17: places a duty of every local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need; and so far as it is consistent with that

duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families.

- Section 47: where a local authority has reasonable cause to suspect that a child (who lives or is found in their area) is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, it has a duty to make such enquiries as it considers necessary to decide whether to take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare
- Section 20: provides the local authority with the power to provide accommodation for children without a court order when they do not have somewhere suitable to live. It is widely known as voluntary accommodation because the parents must agree to the child being accommodated.
- Section 31: The court can create a care order under Section 31 of the Children Act, placing a child in the care of a designated local authority, with parental responsibility being shared between the parents and the local authority.

### **Children Act 2004**

7. That the interests of children and young people are paramount in all considerations of welfare and safeguarding and that safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility.
8. Places a responsibility on organisations to share information and work together to safeguarding children
9. Was the foundation for reform of children's services by promoting early intervention and prevention leading to strengthened multi-agency working
10. Takes a child-centered approach and includes universal as well as targeted and specialist services. Part of the aim of integration of services, plans and information is to enable young people's needs to be identified early to allow timely and appropriate intervention before needs become more acute.

### **Working Together 2018**

11. Issued by the Department for Education to all practitioners and managers who have particular responsibilities for safeguarding and

promoting the welfare of children, and to senior and operational managers in organizations that are responsible for commissioning or providing services to children, young people and families.

12. The guidance places a requirement on those organisations and agencies, who have functions relating to children, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people under the age of 18 in England.
13. It also places a responsibility on the three safeguarding partners (Local Authority, Health and Police) to agree ways to co-ordinate their safeguarding services, to act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging others and implement local and national learning including from serious child safeguarding incidents.
14. No organisations are exempt from the mandated requirements of WT 2018. City York Council is an early adopter of these new arrangements and has arranged for the delivery of this through the Safeguarding Children Partnership.

## Child's Journey through Children's Social Care

The following table sets out the stages of child's journey through children's services and the possible outcome for children at each stage. The key success indicators are also set out. Current performance is monitored through the Improvement Board Dashboard (Annex A)

Intervention Stage	Outcome	Main key indicators i.e. how we measure success
Early Help and Prevention services	Threshold for children's services <i>not</i> met	<u>Number of Early Help Assessments initiated</u> Number of open Early Help Assessments Number of statutory interventions required per 10k
Needs escalate/unmet need	Threshold for children's services met	
Front Door	Section 17 Assessment Section 47 Enquiry Threshold Children's Social Care not met: step down to Early Help	Referral decision within 24 hours Number referrals per 10k % of re-referrals to CSC within 12 month period % Contact to Referral conversion rate
Needs escalate/unmet need	Threshold met for statutory intervention Permanence options considered	

<p>Assessment Teams</p>	<p>Assessment outcome: Close to CSC</p> <p>Multi-Agency Strategy discussions/meetings</p> <p>Child in Need episode</p> <p>Immediate Safeguarding/Police Protection</p> <p>Initial child protection case conference</p> <p>Child could become looked after</p>	<p><u>% of single assessments completed within 45 working days</u></p> <p><u>No of S47s Enquiries Initiated per 10K</u></p> <p>% of ICPCs held within 15 days of Section 47 Enquiry</p> <p>Child seen within 24 hours</p> <p>Child seen within 5 working days</p>
<p>Needs escalate/unmet need</p>	<p>Threshold met for ongoing statutory intervention</p>	
<p>Safeguarding Intervention Service</p>	<p>Multi-Agency Strategy discussions/meetings</p> <p>Child in Need plan</p> <p>Child Protection Plan</p> <p>Child could become Looked After</p>	<p>Children in Need per 10k</p> <p>Children with a child protection plan per 10K</p> <p>% of children becoming the subject of a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time</p> <p>% of children becoming the subject of a child protection</p>

		<p>plan for a second or subsequent time within a 12 month period of a previous plan</p> <p>Statutory visiting every 20 days</p> <p>Core group held in timescale every four weeks</p> <p>Duration on Plan</p>
Needs escalate/unmet need	Threshold met for ongoing statutory intervention	
Safeguarding Intervention service (Court Team)	<p>Multi-Agency Strategy discussions/meetings</p> <p>Letter before proceedings</p> <p>Legal Gateway meeting</p> <p>Threshold for proceedings is met</p> <p>Child could become Looked After</p>	Permanence Planning meetings (fortnightly tracker)
Needs escalate/unmet need	Threshold met for ongoing statutory intervention	
Achieved Permanence	Multi-Agency Strategy discussions/meetings	<p>Care order granted</p> <p>Children Looked After per 10K</p>

	<p>Shared parental responsibility</p> <p>Child becomes looked after</p>	<p>% of Personal Education Plans completed</p> <p>% of health needs assessments undertaken for children looked after for more than 1 year</p> <p>% of children having 3 or more moves of placement in the last 12 months</p> <p>Statutory visiting timescales</p> <p>Educational Attainment</p>
<p>Leaving Care Pathway Service</p>	<p>Multi-Agency Strategy discussions/meetings</p>	<p>% of care leavers in in employment, education or training</p> <p>% of care leavers aged 17 – 21 in suitable accommodation</p> <p>% of care leavers with a Pathway Plan</p>

## **Consultation**

### **Ofsted Focused Visit July 2019**

15. City York Children's Services were subject to an Ofsted Focused Visit on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019. Inspectors considered the local authority arrangements for children in need of help and protection.
16. Inspectors looked at a range of evidence, including case discussions with social workers and managers. They triangulated this with local authority performance management and quality assurance information and read children's case records.

### **Focused Visit findings**

17. Inspectors found an inconsistent approach to supervision of staff with poor management oversight and a lack of case direction on cases.
18. They identified that the quality of plans needs to be strengthened to ensure they are sufficiently SMART, to ensure a focus on children's needs and to be clear with parents and carers what they need to do to reduce risk. Plans are to be written in a way that is accessible for parents and should also set out contingency arrangements should the plan cease to be effective.
19. Social worker visits should always be purposeful and recorded in a way that is relevant to the plan and that includes the child's voice.
20. An effective quality assurance framework to be implemented that focuses on the experiences of children and which leads to an improvement in the quality of practice.
21. Inspectors identified that children have had too many social workers, these were especially agency workers where turnover has been high.
22. Inspectors also highlighted too much drift and delay for some children in need and some on child protection and that some children have been on plans for too long, some for several years, demonstrating a lack of progress and effective management oversight.
23. Inspectors found that too many cases were allocated to non-social work qualified staff (children in need practitioners) meaning these have been asked to work with, and take responsibility for, complex cases and,



sometimes, inappropriate levels of risk. Newly qualified social work staff have also been expected to carry too much responsibility too early on in their development, including being given sole responsibility for child protection cases.

24. Inspectors noted that the use of public law outline process had recently been strengthened through the introduction of a new fortnightly legal gateway process to help ensure cases are tracked more effectively, however letters before proceedings did not sufficiently set out what parents needed to do to improve to prevent cases moving into legal proceedings.
25. Inspectors noted that case chronologies were not always available and when they were, were not always of a high standard.
26. Inspectors found that visits to children and families were, in most cases, regular and often more frequent than the statutory requirement, however, visits are not always focused on progressing the child's plan.
27. More long-standing social workers know children well but recording of work is not consistently capturing the voice of the child. Where there have been several changes of social worker, this has impacted on the relationship with some children, who are understandably more reluctant to engage with staff.
28. They found that social workers in the health and disability team demonstrate a good knowledge of and focus on needs arising out of disability, however they have less experience of child protection work, as previously this work has been undertaken by social workers in the safeguarding teams.
29. Finally, whilst a new quality assurance framework has been put in place audit activity to establish the quality of practice in individual cases and provide learning for staff has not been robust enough and there has been little difference made to children's experiences following audit.

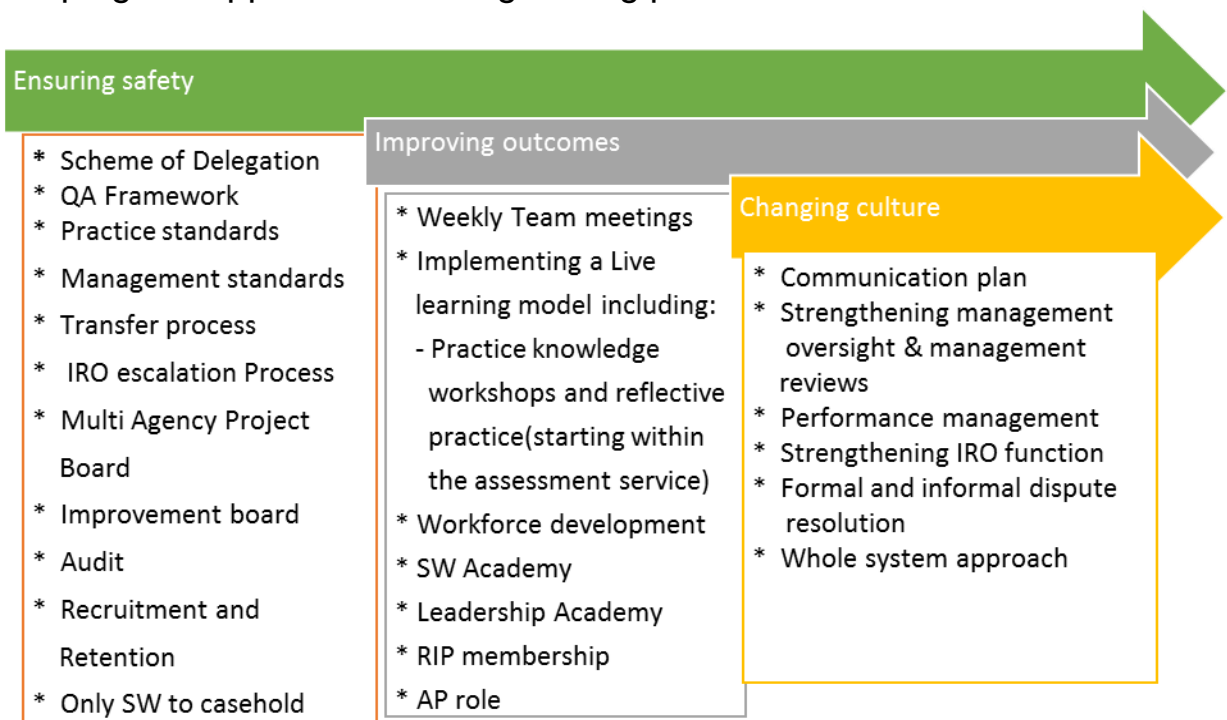
The report can be found here: [Focused Visit Ofsted Report July 2019](#) and at Annex C.

### **Improvement planning**

30. "Action Research into Improvement in Local Children's Services" (Annex B) is a paper commissioned by the LGA in association with

ISOS. This paper has explored key enablers and barriers to improvement and how the system as a whole can facilitate and support improvement in children’s services. This paper has informed our improvement approach.

31. The evidence is clear; having an explicit Vision, set Values and approach to Culture are essential for any improvement journey.
32. Underpinning our Improvement Journey is a change in culture and practice. Building the ethos and culture and engaging the workforce is critical in developing and sustaining improvement work.
33. Our vision for children’s services is “a place where people feel safe, risk is understood and managed well, where we know practice is consistently good and that we make a difference by improving outcomes for children”
34. Six key documents have been launched to staff with a series of workshops, direct support, modelling and coaching in a drive to ensure safety, improve outcomes and change culture.
35. Staff engagement events take place quarterly. At the last events in August over 90 staff were involved in developing our vision, values and shaping our approach to strengthening practice.



36. An Improvement Board, chaired by the Director Children's Services has been established to ensure scrutiny and to bring challenge regarding progress required in children's services.
37. The Improvement plan has six key priorities:
  1. Strengthen the Front Door to ensure the rigorous application of thresholds and timely assessment of the highest standard.
  2. Ensure all children in need, children subject to a child protection plan and children in care have an up to date, outcome focussed plan and that children are visited in accordance with their plan, ensuring, as a minimum, adherence to statutory visit timescales.
  3. Ensure managers at every level understand their roles and responsibilities ensuring scrutiny and oversight of the quality of practice in their teams.
  4. Ensure social work time is used to maximise outcomes for children.
  5. Strengthen our approach to attract, recruit and retain social workers to ensure a stable and confident workforce with a clear focus on reflection, learning and development.
  6. Ensure effective governance, scrutiny and oversight through the Children and Young People's Safeguarding Partnership, the Improvement Board and Senior Managers.

### **Headline Progress To-date**

38. The Improvement board has strong oversight of the improvement journey.
39. The six key documents have been launched, including a Quality assurance Framework.
40. Over 140 audits have taken place of cases held by Child In Need (CIN) practitioners, children subject to child protection plans and children in need. Monthly audit of cases continues.
41. Children in Need Practitioners caseloads have all been reallocated to social work qualified staff.

42. The Improvement Dashboard is live.
43. Project Accuracy is now in place and is chaired by the interim Chief Executive. Annex A data is now run fortnightly and work is being initiated to make better use of management information to improve performance and practice.
44. Monthly performance meetings for Managers have been introduced
45. The initial stages of developing a multi-agency safeguarding hub (new front Door) have been completed.
46. North Yorkshire Police and Health partners are committed to the development of a multi-agency safeguarding hub.
47. 24 hour decision making has improved from 38% to 96%.
48. There are now no cases that come to the attention of children's social care that receive a response of No Further Action. All cases are triaged through to early help arrangements through Local Area Teams.
49. A new "levels of need" document is in development and will replace the existing threshold guidance. This ensures all partners work to a common understanding of need and how best to meet that need.
50. Social work academy established - goes live 14<sup>th</sup> October.
51. 8 new social workers/senior social workers appointed.
52. 2 advanced practitioners appointed.
53. Frontline Social Work recruitment Programme has commenced to support the recruitment and retention of social workers in the referral and assessment teams and safeguarding teams.
54. Weekly reporting to DCS and AD by Senior Managers and managers including key performance indicators, caseloads, vacancies and audit of supervision records.
55. IRO weekly reporting / detailed analysis is sent to AD and Senior Managers for scrutiny

56. Work has commenced to improve the quality of child in need and child protection plans so they are more outcome focused. This involves front line practitioners, IRO's and Managers

### Implications

- **Financial:** None
- **Human Resources (HR)** None
- **Equalities** None
- **Legal** None
- **Crime and Disorder** None
- **Information Technology (IT)** None
- **Property** None
- **Other** None

### Recommendations

57. Members are asked to accept this report and note and comment on the findings.

Reason: To ensure the committee are kept up to date with progress in Children's Specialist Services.

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**Report Approved**



**Date** 10/09/2019

**Wards Affected:**

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

## **Annexes**

Annex A: Improvement Board Dashboard

Annex B: Action Research into Improvement in Local Children's Services

Annex C: Ofsted Letter to Amanda Hatton

## **Abbreviations**

AD- Assistant Director

CIN- Child In Need

CSC – Child Social Care

DCS- Director of Children Services

ICPSCs - Independent Community and Primary Care Services

IRO- Independent Review Officer

LGA - Local Government Association

Ofsted- Office for Standards in Education

SMART- Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely

WT2018- Working Together to keep Children Safe 2018