



## **End of calendar year report from Independent Scrutineer to**

## **City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership (CYSCP)**

## **from start of Scrutiny contract to December 2020**

## **Professor Maggie Atkinson, Independent Scrutineer**

### **SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT**

This report covers work done on the independent scrutiny of the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership (CYSCP) in the period since the start of my contract in this role in September 2020. Inevitably it is brief, and its contents are heavily influenced by the work that has continued across York to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the city's children and young people during the difficult months of 2020, starting from the first CV19 "lockdown." It concerns itself with reflections couched in Partnership terms rather than focusing on single services or agencies, and that work being done largely by people working remotely and virtually, not face to face.

The report concludes that broadly, the City Council, CCG, Police, their many partners and York's relevant agencies, have done far more than simply to stand by their children and young people, and that they have worked ever more closely together to keep those children and young people as safe as possible. The report captures gains as well as pointing out challenges, and singles out emerging areas for continued development as 2020 ends and the Partnership works on a longer term programme that accepts that structures and ways of working need to go on changing, and that CV19 may be with us for a long time to come; but that work with children and young people must carry on regardless.

### **A reminder: The policy context in which this report is presented**

Under the Children Act 2004, from 2005 localities disbanded Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) and set up and ran Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs): centrally designated, locally run statutory bodies. For the following fifteen years and across two very different governments, many LSCBs were effective. However, some became over-bureaucratic, and could not prove they improved outcomes for children and young people, or held every organisation working with them to account for safeguarding their welfare and ensuring their wellbeing. The Wood Review in 2016 therefore led to reforms in the 2017 Children and Social Work Act, leading to revised statutory Working Together guidance in 2018.

Under these reforms, LSCBs were replaced by locally designed and driven Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASAs) of which the City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership (CYSCP) is one. CYSCP has an Executive led by three statutory partners (Local Authority, CCG, Police) the chairing of which moves around this "triumvirate" on an annual basis. The current Chair is the Assistant Chief Constable of North Yorkshire Police. The

Executive in turn holds to account the agencies that sit on it, the work of themed subgroups, and all Relevant Agencies working with children and young people.

The CYSCP's model, terms of reference for and meetings schedules of the Executive and subcommittees are all available on the Partnership's website at [www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk](http://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk)

In early 2020, government asked Sir Alan Wood, whose 2016 report led to the changes contained in the 2017 Act, to launch a review of how well the new arrangements were working, albeit that review was launched less than a year after most Partnerships launched and is now underway in the midst of a pandemic that has created disruption. Seeking to ask what lessons are emerging, this review remains ongoing as this end of 2020 report is presented.

### **National requirements**

MASAs like the CYSCP are bound by statutory guidance that applies to, and must be complied with by, all partners outlined in Working Together 2018 (WT2018.) This guidance has been further refined as this report is issued, leading to the issue of a 2020 updated version. This update is not considered in this report, as it is literally hot off the press and all the work reflected on in this report has been undertaken under the guidance provided by WT2018.

WT2018 is clear that the MASA does not work in isolation but is part of any locality's broader, all-agency means of ensuring citizens' wellbeing (Adult Safeguarding board, Health and Wellbeing Boards, Community Safety Partnerships, the work of the OFPCC, and others.)

The central tenets of what a MASA is and must do are summarised below.

### **From "Working Together" 2018 (WT2018) Chapter 3:**

The purpose of local arrangements is to support and enable local organisations and agencies to work together in a system where:

- children are safeguarded and their welfare is promoted
- partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children
- organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively
- there is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats
- learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice
- information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families

In order to work together effectively, the safeguarding statutory partners, with other local organisations and agencies, should develop processes that:

- facilitate and drive action beyond usual institutional and agency constraints and boundaries
- ensure the effective protection of children is founded on practitioners developing lasting and trusting relationships with children and their families

Effective arrangements should link to other strategic partnership work locally that supports children and families. This will include other public boards including Health and Wellbeing Boards, PCCs' boards and panels, Adult Safeguarding Boards, Channel Panels, Improvement Boards, Community Safety Partnerships, the Local Family Justice Board and MAPPAs. This list is not exhaustive.

Strong leadership is critical for arrangements to be effective in bringing together organisations and agencies. It is important that the lead representative from each of the three safeguarding partners plays an active role. The lead representatives for safeguarding partners are: the local authority chief executive, the accountable officer of a clinical commissioning group, and a chief officer of police.

All three safeguarding partners have equal and joint responsibility for local safeguarding arrangements. In situations that require a clear, single point of leadership, all three safeguarding partners should decide who would take the lead on issues that arise.

Should the lead representatives delegate their functions they remain accountable for any actions or decisions taken on behalf of their agency. If delegated, it is the responsibility of the lead representative to identify and nominate a senior officer in their agency to have responsibility and authority for ensuring full participation with these arrangements.

The representatives, or those they delegate authority to, should be able to:

- speak with authority for the safeguarding partner they represent
- take decisions on behalf of their organisation or agency and commit them on policy, resourcing and practice matters
- hold their own organisation or agency to account on how effectively they participate and implement the local arrangements

### **Independent scrutiny in WT2018**

Independent scrutiny provides assurance in judging the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children, including arrangements to identify and review serious child safeguarding cases. Independent scrutiny is part of a wider system which includes independent inspectorates' single assessment of individual safeguarding partners, and the programme of Joint Targeted Area Inspections. Safeguarding partners should ensure scrutiny is objective, acts as a constructive critical friend and promotes reflection to drive continuous improvement. The independent scrutineer considers how effectively arrangements are working for children and families as well as for practitioners, and how well safeguarding partners provide strong leadership and agree with the safeguarding partners how this will be reported.

Acknowledging the statutory nature of independent scrutiny, the WSCP agreed with the outgoing Chair of the previous LSCB that having expressed an interest and being the incumbent in that former role, she would be appointed Independent Scrutineer. It was acknowledged at that point that the independent scrutineer will never be the sole provider of feedback or reflection. Working Together 2018 is clear that mutual holding to account, support and challenge are part of how statutory partners and relevant agencies must operate to ensure the partnership and its impacts are clear, co-owned, and contribute to progressively improving children and young people's lives. The scrutiny is a key part of judging the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children.

The Independent Scrutineer provides critical challenge and appraisal of safeguarding arrangements, providing that challenge to and ongoing clear and evidenced appraisal of the partnership in York, by attending key meetings and meeting vital groups and leaders across the borough, including children and young people, and feeding back. She also chairs bi-annual safeguarding partnership meetings, part of which include the scrutineer's feedback to partners

and agencies on her findings, guidance and advice. At present all of this work is done through virtual means.

The CYSCP's Independent Scrutineer was appointed to:

- Assess how well organisations work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and to hold each other to account for effective safeguarding
- Contribute to the content of the partnership's annual report on the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, their performance and the effectiveness of local services
- Assess the effectiveness of the help being provided to children and families including through universal and early help services
- Assess whether the three statutory safeguarding partners are fulfilling their statutory obligations
- Scrutinise the quality assurance activity (including reviewing statutory and local reviews, the results and findings of multi-agency case file auditing, and North Yorkshire's processes for identifying lessons to be learned from tragedy and crises in children's lives)
- Scrutinise the effectiveness of training, including multi-agency training, whose aim is to equip staff to safeguard and promote the wellbeing and welfare of children
- Assess the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in North Yorkshire
- Provide a rigorous, evidence based and transparent assessment of the extent to which partners and relevant agencies are fulfilling their statutory duties to keep children safe
- Evaluate arrangements for the operation of the safeguarding partnership and attend a range of meetings and activities including visits to partner and relevant agencies
- Support the implementation of findings and outcomes from safeguarding reviews
- Assess whether effective performance management, audit and quality assurance mechanisms are in place within partner organisations which will support the three safeguarding partners to fulfil their statutory objectives, and which will enable the partnership to identify and measure its success and impact
- Ensure that the voices of children, young people and their families are appropriately represented and heard in the work of the partnership.

This end of year reflection constitutes the first formal report by the Scrutineer in this role, though before she won the contract to be Scrutineer she was an external independent consultant advising on how CYSCP might seek to improve its ways of working, concluding the field work for that assignment just before the first national lockdown in March 2020.

This report is focused on how, and how well, the work of the CYSCP is developing and being undertaken, and what the quality of the Executive's and the subgroups' activities is. This report reflects on the following broad themes.

1. How the partnership has developed: CYSCP having been an Early Adopter of a new MASA model, the partnership should by now, and at all times, rely on a strong, all-agency consensus that "blank sheet of paper" thinking is not necessary in moving from a LSCB to a Partnership. It has already been concluded, before the CYSCP went into its current period of development and change, that both the LSCB and a period of CYSCP activity in that early adopter space, together provided a foundation for strong future practice of organisations working together as partners and co-owners of the safeguarding agenda.
2. The 3 statutory partners have created, and agencies' governance and scrutiny bodies have agreed a MASA model to serve the city, its more varied communities than outsiders might

imagine exist in this beautiful heritage city, and organisations that work with children and young people. An emerging, rationalised model following the March 2020 consultancy is a model that will, when finalised and operating well, reflect a strong shared commitment to the partnership as the key statutory body holding all others to account for children's safeguarding and wellbeing.

3. Given early adopter funding was strongly connected to facilitating working with schools on their safeguarding practice, the partnership is minded to look again at how that connectivity works, in the interests of all children and young people.
4. The configuration, terms of reference, membership and attendance of subgroups and the greater amount of work undertaken in them than was always evident under the LSCB, are all beginning to pay dividends. This move of business into more frontline partnership bodies is a reflection of the fact that without a Board on which to lean, both the locus of control and the ownership of safeguarding activity have all moved closer to where services are delivered. Services are represented on and report to the Partnership's subgroups, and also contribute to themed and/or project-based working or task and finish groups. That the Executive's member bodies also account to each other, and hold themselves to account for their safeguarding work, is equally central to CYSCP's development and success.
5. The pledges made across the partnership and by a group of over 40 professionals from a wide range of organisations, at a lively and stimulating partnership development half day session held "virtually" on 27/11/2020, looked ahead with both commitment and optimism to 2021-22 and the work the Partnership will seek to do in that year. This was a very positive event and the enthusiasm and willingness of partners' representatives both to contribute to discussions and to lead on pieces of work bodes well for both the creation of the next Annual Report, and the construction of a new and future-facing strategic plan for the Partnership.

The new way of working allows leaders at service delivery levels to take greater ownership for getting safeguarding right at every level. Examples of work undertaken in the field and reflected on regularly by the Executive and the subgroups, show up in the CYSCP's existing strengths, and its recognised, co-owned areas for continued development. As incoming Independent Scrutineer, I have been pleased to see the commitment of all concerned to getting things right for children and young people in York, which bodes well for continued development and strength in the future. No member of the Partnership encountered so far has been in any way complacent, however. It remains clear that there is still work to be done to ensure all York's children and young people are as safe as service leaders and staff would like them to be.

This end of year report is inevitably very centrally informed by, and relies on, a reflection on the city's responses to the Covid 19 pandemic as its effects on joint and single service working, the potential for threats to stability and the work done to ameliorate those threats, and the potential for positive developments in partnership working to continue even when the pandemic passes, all continue to emerge.

## **The pressing issue of the moment for the Partnership, and the Independent Scrutineer**

### **What has happened since the Covid 19 pandemic started to affect CYSCP business?**

The intervention of the Covid 19 virus in everybody's lives, and the work of all services, cannot be over-stated. The need to respond to an extraordinary and unprecedented crisis and all its attendant demands have included at least the following effects on the work of the partnership:

- The CYSCP team are working from home, the use of office accommodation being reserved for those who either cannot do so, or who strictly need occasional office time. The team holds regular online team meetings and continues to work in a facilitative role in support of the Partnership's activity.
- CYSCP leaders also contribute to multi-agency, citywide and all-services discussions regarding how the response to the pandemic should be both coordinated and assured for the city's citizens, including its children and young people.
- The CYSCP Business Manager and a very small team of administrators keep the Executive, subgroup chairs and the Independent Scrutineer apprised of developments and any issues for discussion or concern, facilitating the presence of the Scrutineer at both Executive and subgroup meetings as a participant observer so that assurance can be stated clearly as her role requires.
- CYSCP staff have changed some of their ways of working, not least because they are not traversing the city to meet colleagues in dispersed offices. The manager is clear that though very busy and pulled in many directions at once, they are rising to a now nine-month period of new challenges. The support they give to each other, and to safeguarding work in agencies throughout York, should not be taken lightly, particularly as there is unlikely to be an end to the adaptations people are being asked to make until at least the end of this financial year, if not during summer 2021. As far as possible the team is abiding by a need to ensure that business as usual continues. The Partnership website reflects this approach and has been successfully updated and refreshed in the last six months.
- The three Statutory Partners meet regularly and the Executive meets at least quarterly, enabling it to hold all others to account and to direct the Partnership's work both in reaction to the pandemic, and so that safeguarding work does not lose its vital focus or its energy which will need to be applied once we are in the post-pandemic period. The Executive calls on the expertise of senior staff across partner bodies and relevant agencies for these meetings, so that the Partnership can take forward what is decided and direct what will be required of those partners and agencies. Frequent "keep in touch" meetings enable safeguarding to go on moving forward, and remain a vital way to keep the work moving as circumstances go on changing.
- A whole-partnership Development half-day was held in late November, at the height of the second wave of the pandemic. It was undertaken virtually but gave all concerned the opportunity to reflect on progress to date, what challenges Covid 19 has presented and how they have been dealt with, what children and young people are concerned about and continue to seek in terms of support and help across the piece, and what might happen next in development, planning, and ways of working. Whilst the virtual environment and technology created some challenges, the attendance was good and colleagues clearly valued the opportunity, if for nothing else, then to reconnect with and support each other and

therefore York's children, young people, families and communities. The hope for an ability to meet face to face once a "new normal" can be established was palpable, and remains a driver of the partnership's thinking about the future.

- The Partnership's themed subgroups continue to meet virtually to an agreed schedule, having decided, as Covid 19 developed a longer life than might at first have been predicted, that suspending subgroup business could never be defended. All work done in these groups centres on what can and should be learned, across the Partnership, about how well safeguarding is proceeding and what needs to go on being developed so that all areas of practice and partnership can match the best. Each subgroup reports to the Executive as part of an arranged schedule, and follows up on action plans and lessons learned. Their work is becoming ever more focused and effective in highlighting both good practice, and pointing out where improvements to inter-agency partnership working are still needed.
- At the same time, and also on a regular and cyclical reporting schedule, individual agencies which are partners on the CYSCP also report their progress, and their challenges, to the Executive, so that awareness is raised across all parts of the Partnership and safeguarding agendas become ever more jointly owned and driven. Similarly, there is vital interaction between the Partnership and Improvement Boards (SEN/D and Children's Social Care) and working groups such as those that developed the Systemic Practice model now being rolled out across agencies citywide with training to support it, and Early Help, MASH and Threshold approaches developed and launched over the past year.
- The Independent Scrutineer is only just beginning on a programme where she will attend an observe at, and present feedback and assurance on, meetings of all subgroups across the CYSCP. Papers seen on how the groups already operate illustrate that partners remain committed, attending them virtually so that business continues during the pandemic. Colleagues are finding work-arounds for technology challenges, agreeing and following agendas, ensuring meetings are recorded appropriately, sending out actions for completion, and ensuring the Executive is kept informed. It is clearly recognised that the business the subgroups do continues, and that the Partnership needs to go on developing and holding all concerned to account. It is equally recognised that the Business Support team has increased both its ability to offer that support, and improved its own ways of working, across the second half of 2020.
- The Partnership continues its audit, learning and development activity, albeit again all being done online. This year's Section 11 multi-agency services and Section 175 schools' safeguarding audit cycle have been agreed with, and are done across boundaries into, the county of North Yorkshire, as well as within the city. They provide assurance and keep all concerned aware that the Partnership's work continues, simply in different ways from its established pre-pandemic pattern of face to face meetings and events. The business support team sends out updates and newsletters both on Covid 19 related issues, and safeguarding more generally. Partners and relevant agencies value these as they mean that all concerned can access useful information and guidance, news and up to date information. Examples are on the CYSCP website, [www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk](http://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk)
- The Partnership remains keen to ensure support is given to schools, and that where necessary challenges and suggestions for improvement are provided. Throughout the early days of the pandemic and school closures or part closures that obtained in many places, an adequate

number of schools remained open, at the very least to provide “hub” services, particularly for vulnerable children and children of keyworkers, of whom there are substantial numbers in some communities; and when fuller opening took place, to support families and ensure their children were safe to return. Schools have thereby been supported in their safeguarding work, despite the additional workload experienced by school staff as the pandemic has continued. Support has been valued by schools, which have, like schools across the country, been less well and less clearly supported by central government than they have locally. It remains clear that though committed to safeguarding, schools and particularly their leaders are struggling with tiredness, a degree of staff absence, and the responses of a minority of families who will not, or consider they cannot, send their children back to the classroom. Schools will go on needing support and their issues are regularly discussed and decisions are made regarding how well that support and challenge can continue to be provided.

- Face-to-face safeguarding training was suspended as the pandemic started to bite, though bespoke offers, delivered virtually, have continued. The Partnership’s “lessons learned from Case Reviews” materials continues to be updated and highlighted, as do valued and much-used 1-minute guides, master class materials and 7-Minute Briefings on key subjects. The rejuvenation of the CYSCP website has been welcomed for the increasingly high quality of support and advice it provides, and for the ease of accessing its content by professionals, parents, children and young people alike.
- Early Help services including the MASH continue to target work across the city, and to respond to requests for early intervention and lower-level social care interventions in line with an agreed and relatively recently launched Strategy. Rates of referral are closely monitored, especially where they may be concentrated in less affluent communities and neighbourhoods where families and their children can sometimes live very challenged lives. Early Help reaches out to families in the relevant Wards, making it clear that even in the pandemic period, services remain available that can help families to avoid or avert crises. The intention is that Early Help, early intervention and prevention, will go on “keeping the heat out of the top of the system,” and there is system-wide recognition that this will rely on families attracting, and receiving, support that keeps them together. Intervening early will continue to be a theme of work done for children and young people, once the pandemic’s restrictions are finally lifted. That early Help is not solely the province of social care but relies on schools, early years, youth, health and other services, is and will remain a vital part of that continuity of York’s offer.
- The CYSCP team is also involved in work on Domestic Abuse/Domestic Violence as it affects children and young people who may witness or be victims of it, work which includes many Relevant Agencies which are voluntary, community, and survivor-focused bodies. This focus on a vital issue for some children and young people is a marker of agencies’ and partners’ insistence that vital work must go on, and it is hoped that its positive effects will be felt by children and their families who may be at risk. Such inter-agency work is vital, and the willingness of all agencies to be involved despite the huge demands placed on many of them by Covid 19 is to be commended.
- Staff in children and young people’s services have kept up contacts face to face or, in extremis, by virtual means. Schools remaining open either as hubs, or now more fully reopened, remains a key part of supporting this effort. Working with early help and social care teams, together these services’ continuity offerings will mean that, as society “re-sets”



hopefully during the Spring of 2021, there is a sound spring board to a return to normality for all services and all children.

The Partnership is, in broad terms and despite challenges, functioning very well during this now-nine-month old rearrangement of what it does. Part of this comes from the fact that many of the people leading on key safeguarding matters, including in the executive and the subgroups of the Partnership itself, did not move on as the LSCB stood down and the CYSCP took on the mantle of holding all safeguarding work for children and young people to account across York. Knowing the “patch” and each other has mattered enormously during the pandemic, and will go on mattering as life returns to some degree of normality. Services which account to the Partnership are, and therefore the Partnership as a whole remains, active in advising services, agencies, and the city’s wider public, on safeguarding. It continues presenting, and actively responding to, the need for all who work with children young people to remain engaged in key safeguarding and wellbeing activity, despite the disruptions brought by the pandemic.

The circumstances in which York, as other localities, finds itself at the end of 2020 mean there is a mixture of work still to do in the Covid 19 arena. Many issues that faced some families in need or in crisis before Covid 19 remain the same today. For others, and for some services, we are in the midst of patterns of safeguarding concerns which are novel, because they have arisen during the pandemic. Many services are being delivered differently in comparison to the period before March 2020. There will undoubtedly also be different patterns of familial or community behaviour, not least because movement is restricted, work and family lives have changed, and it may be difficult to understand a child’s life as a result – both for them, and those who work with them.

### **What next for the Partnership ?**

Yorks has achievements that should be more determinedly noted and more publicly and loudly celebrated, as the Partnership session on 27 November 2020 noted. The Executive and subgroups try to foreground and highlight these, and to send and note congratulations to those involved when work has gone particularly well and a child’s, young person’s or family’s life has changed for the better. It is pleasing to note, notwithstanding the demands of dealing with the ramifications of Covid 19, that the pace of development has not slowed down.

### **Post-pandemic**

New issues may surface once Covid 19 restrictions are lifted. These may last for the longer term, even once future planning gets into its stride. The Partnership needs the energy, time and resources to think as far ahead as possible. Current circumstances, though they are teaching services and their leaders a great deal about working together and facing contingencies undreamed of before March 2020, are extraordinary, and do not always permit the expenditure of such time or energy. Current circumstances under Covid 19 are extraordinary. Once no longer in place we may see either a return to old patterns of separate services working in partnership only where they can; or preferably, all agencies deliberately, as a first choice, working as closely together outside a crisis situation as that situation made them commit to and see through.

Post-pandemic times might also give rise to different demands, needs, challenges and opportunities, not least if the economy, as experts predict, struggles to revive and takes a long time to recover, with all the ramifications on families' incomes, and for the poorest in communities, safety and resilience. The issues discussed below, starting with the immediate concerns over Covid 19, will undoubtedly present challenges to every agency and statutory partner.

Once the pandemic subsides and aided by a hoped-for game changing vaccination programme, the period perhaps best summed up as "Afterwards" is likely to present issues and circumstances that will not be what we remember as "normal" from pre-Covid 19 days. It is likely that deciding what to do to make the most of the new "normal" will not be simple, quick, or cheap.

- Schools will, it is clear from central government, be pushed to remain open no matter what the pattern of the pandemic may be. Exams will go ahead in Spring and Summer 2021, despite the fact that some candidates will have missed a great deal more school time than others and the system is unlikely to compensate for the differences entailed in children's and young people's lives. Some schools are acutely aware that children from some vulnerable families are still not attending, and that both sporadic attendance and elective home education are on the rise whether done suitably by families who do well for their children, or otherwise. This is an ongoing issue that partners are aware will need to be addressed, potentially for the long haul. The issue is national as well as local, but the colour given to the picture by some attendance and absence patterns is likely to add urgency.
- In schools, there is also already a tension, much of it driven by national policy makers seemingly unaware of the complexities involved, between "catching up on lost learning" and "re-orienting, supporting returns, dealing with staff and student anxieties and uncertainties." There will be children and young people who craved coming back to school, matched by those who would rather not have returned, or who did not and may never return. There will, as national analyses indicate, be children and young people with special educational needs with or without disabilities, who will need support beyond the resources available, whose situation may have been exacerbated by the restrictions created during the Covid 19 pandemic. There may also be some whose planned appointments with medical staff have been stood down whilst health services have dealt with the pandemic, who will not recover as they might had services been as they were before the crisis.
- Rates of referrals into some higher level services across agencies have been lower than in pre-pandemic times. These manifest themselves in lower than pre-Covid 19 levels of children seen or reported as caught up in County Lines activity, lower referral and self referral in mental health services, and lower reported domestic abuse and violence. However, all are beginning, nine months into the pandemic's ongoing effects, to rise again. Partners are preparing for an expected further rise, potentially involving higher end safeguarding activity once restrictions lift. The expectation is that there could be a rise in the need for intervention in a minority of families which have struggled behind closed doors and not asked for help, or turned that help away using Covid 19 as an excuse.
- If referrals discussed above rise as predicted, but financial resources paid by central government to fund responses to them stay at pre-pandemic levels, there will be ever harder decisions to make, and potentially a growing lack of ability to meet demand. There

may be a rise in unmet, and unmeetable, needs – a key predictor of safeguarding difficulties for some children and young people.

- Decision makers, policy and service shapers, workers in agencies and the wider public will all need to be kept aware of these externally driven but locally felt circumstances, and the need to continue to shape services so that inter-agency and multi-disciplinary learning is retained and built on. This will require sustained commitment from all involved and may not be easy to maintain once the crisis has passed and preoccupations could all too easily return to what they were pre-pandemic.
- Many agencies' financial, HR, human and social capital and energy resources will have been depleted during 2020. This includes voluntary sector bodies whose precarious funding may mean their ability to be delivery partners is even more heavily curtailed. Repercussions of what Covid 19 brings in its wake could mean services are put under long-lasting pressure even after the pandemic. Covid 19's economic effects could also be long lasting and negative, particularly if families cannot meet their financial responsibilities and seek recourse to ever more scarce and tightly regulated public funds.
- Resilience plans are needed during the current second wave, in readiness for changes that could occur once all "tiers" of Covid 19 lockdown stand down, though this is probably some months away as things stand in mid December 2020. Reductions in some areas of work for services and agencies are likely to be matched by rises in others. The increase in family poverty likely to be caused by adults' ongoing job loss or uncertainty, added to some families dealing with state benefits difficulties, and the likely or already manifest poorer prospects within a recovering economy and whatever follows Brexit on December 31<sup>st</sup> 2020, are all likely to affect some children's lives, and services are acutely aware they need to be as ready as possible for any eventuality. They are also struggling for financial and human resources however, and squaring that circle will not be easy to achieve.
- What will need to happen to address these many issues could be very complex, and will certainly require the input of leaders, staff and citizens across the piece. It is clear that detailed planning, and a readiness to act as swiftly and in as close and willing a partnership as has been the hallmark of Covid 19's ways of working, will be needed once the picture is clearer, anticipated in the first half or the middle of 2021. All agencies are aware the reduction in "usual" activity and referrals patterns is likely to be temporary. The currently-less-than-clear issues that may arise, which can only be acted on as restrictions lift and society begins to return to "normal," may resemble what has always happened, or on the other hand may be unexpected and new.

### **Longer term developments and issues**

**The Executive being small and subgroups producing and leading on a great deal of work, an intermediate layer in the partnership's structure needs to have its impact maximised.** The layer concerned is the one in which the Chairs of each subgroup, plus an identified number of leaders from relevant agencies, come together to enable "cross-fertilisation" of themes and information sharing as a matter of routine. All are represented on the Partnership's subgroups. This interconnecting layer will come into its own if it also ensures that work that reaches across the partnership, making links between the different subgroups, is of high quality. Care is always needed to ensure this group's existence does not lead to the re-creation of a large and

unwieldy LSCB in all but name. its purpose is to enable and clarify relationships between the Partnership and members' own organisations' governance and scrutiny bodies. The Scrutineer should whenever possible attend, so that its work is open to scrutiny.

Ensuring the strength of this group will also help to address the issue of the partnership's need to harness energies from beyond the Executive and subgroups, with clear routes for relevant agencies and different layers of managers and staff to have greater involvement and engagement in CYSCP decision making and influence. Tasking those in that "sub-Executive" Chair's group with ensuring their agencies and services are fed back to so that CYSCP decision making and expected actions service by service are clear, and communications and information sharing continue to improve.

### **The Scrutineer's work in coming months:**

A pattern of meetings is gradually being established in diaries. The Scrutineer will attend, observe at, and note decisions or recommendations made at meetings of the subgroups and the Executive, on a cycle that fits her own and others' diaries. For as long as work goes on being done on a virtual basis, there will inevitably be limits on what else could be done with the remainder of and diared dates on which subgroups meet. Were visits and scrutineer days working on a face to face basis, there is potential to undertake valuable meetings in the other halves of days if the scrutineer were physically present. Such meetings would usefully take place with:

- Relevant Agencies' leaders, governance, and "delivery" staff: for example, head teachers, governors, leaders in community or faith organisations, etc.
- Representatives of children and young people, particularly when they are involved in decision making
- Others as partners and agencies deem fit

The Scrutineer will continue to facilitate full CYSCP Partnership Days. These will be virtual events for the duration of the Covid 19 regulations, and consist of appraisals of the Partnership's progress, and members' reflections on that progress, plus opportunities for all attendees to be part of learning and information exchanges and to cast their thinking forward into planning for the future.

The Partnership must publish an Annual Report each year under WT2018. The Scrutineer will write scrutiny copy as appropriate, and the Partnership will publish her reflections which will be aimed at giving independent, evidenced opinions on the Partnership's progress, reasons to celebrate and communicate success, and items for ongoing attention and development expressed as recommendations for action.

### **Concluding remarks and assurance statement**

**As Independent Scrutineer, I present this brief and initial end of year report as a snapshot in time, not as a definitive document. I have attended, virtually through Microsoft Teams, both the Executive, and a growing number of subgroups, as an active observer and independent scrutineer. All are running well. The commitment to ensure they continue to do so has not broken stride despite the pressures under which every service and staff team are working. I**

have also kept track of the CYSCP's website materials and its upgraded and updated presentations, and its offer of support and guidance to all who may need it.

I conclude by being able to give my strong assurance that the Partnership is running as it should, that people remain committed to making it work and to do so successfully. I look forward to continuing to work with and scrutinise the Partnership, and express my hope that at some point in 2021, on whatever limited a basis, at least some of the work both the Partnership and I do can take place face to face, given the limitations of the virtual environment that have been clearly expressed throughout my time with CYSCP to date.

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

**Professor Maggie Atkinson**

**Independent Scrutineer,  
City of York Safeguarding Children Partnership (CYSCP)  
Monday 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020**