

## **Local & National Safeguarding Developments – Bi-annual Update**

### **Introduction**

1. At a meeting of the Committee in June 2012 Members agreed to receive a six monthly update on key children's safeguarding issues. This report updates the Committee on key local and national safeguarding developments since December 2014.
2. The operating environment for Local Authorities continues to change rapidly. Every area of Council business is touched by a national context characterised by huge financial pressures on public spending and significant national policy change. Childrens services are no exception however, in York; we are committed to carefully prioritising and organising our services at a local level to enable us to navigate the changes ahead and in order to maintain safe and effective services.

### **City of York – Children's Safeguarding Developments**

3. Safeguarding Children – A Council Wide Responsibility  
Here in York childrens safeguarding is seen as everyone's responsibility with colleagues from across the Council actively participating in and contributing to this agenda. Children's safeguarding is promoted and prioritised in every aspect of Council business.
4. This review period has seen elected members and the Council Management Team receive and debate presentations on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, a review of the Local Safeguarding Children Board and strategies to identify and address the emotional and mental health needs of children and young people in the City.
5. These debates set the scene for significant subsequent safeguarding initiatives and activity during this period. This includes:

- Further development of cross border collaboration with North Yorkshire County Council and North Yorkshire Police to develop shared approaches to tackling child sexual exploitation.
- launch of a year long campaign in partnership with NSPCC to tackle child sexual abuse<sup>1</sup>
- in partnership with housing and public health colleagues, the development of a local approach Family Drug and Alcohol assessment and court arrangements
- with key partners, a fundamental reshaping of the LSCB operating model, governance arrangements and support structure
- the development of an emotional and mental health strategy for children and young people with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention
- significantly strengthened performance reporting to senior managers and elected members

## **Protecting the Most Vulnerable**

6. In successive annual Council budget plans childrens social work and social care continues to be prioritised. These services are at the heart of the Council's strategy to safeguard some of the most vulnerable children and young people. As in any local authority area childrens social care must stay focussed on a journey of continuous improvement. During this review period and to support our operational staff we have worked together on three key areas over the year to:
  - ensure that supervision is regular and of high quality
  - embed a culture of audit activity at team and service level
  - develop assessment skills and practice
7. A summary of other significant service developments and improvement during the review period includes:
8. Referral and Assessment Service (R&A)  
 There has been significant investment into the 'front door' to Children's Social Care. Three (previously two) dedicated Referral and Assessment Teams now respond to all contacts to Children's Social Care on a rota basis. The service is staffed by qualified social workers who, in addition to receiving referrals, are available to professionals from all agencies to talk through concerns to advise whether they meet thresholds for statutory intervention and / or to signpost to other relevant services.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.yor-ok.org.uk/young-people](http://www.yor-ok.org.uk/young-people)

9. York has a statistically lower rate of referrals 220 per 10,000 children than its Statistical Neighbour and England averages (436 & 573 respectively). This is longstanding. We believe this is due to a combination of factors:
  - Each contact is screened by a dedicated qualified Social Worker,
  - The well-established Early Help offer in York, including the well regarded Advice Service which signposts to a range of services.
  - Agencies do not repeat refer into CSC: 13.7% of referrals in 2014-15 were re-referrals, in comparison with annual England and statistical neighbour averages of above 20%. The re-referral rate is similar to that returned in 2013-14 at 13.4% and lower than in the three preceding years (18.9%, 19.6% and 20.9% respectively).
10. In recognition of the need to improve the quality of referrals to Children's Social Care (in response to an Ofsted Thematic Inspection of Early Help) a revised referral form was introduced in the summer of 2014.
11. Work has also been undertaken with colleagues from health and education to ensure that single assessments fully reflect assessments undertaken by agencies involved with the family (in line with WT 2015). The new agreed way of working will be rolled out across key agencies in 15/16.
12. Child in Need Service  
The dedicated Child in Need service (CIN) has been operational since January 2014, providing a targeted support service for vulnerable children, young people and their families. Providing services under Section 17 of the Children Act it has developed robust processes to ensure that all children and young people known to the service have clear plans which are regularly reviewed.
13. This was further developed in January 2015 with the introduction of a weekly Resource Allocation Panel (RAP) chaired by the Service Manager and attended by CIN Practice Managers. All children referred for a CIN service are presented to RAP. This provides greater consistency and scrutiny of thresholds and further embeds a culture of shared responsibility within the service.
14. RAP also discusses all children and young people who have been subject to a CIN plan (or a CIN service under a CP plan) for one year to prevent drift and delay. This is of particular relevance to children and

young people who have suffered, or likely to suffer significant harm as a result of neglect.

15. The graded care profile (GCP) has been introduced as a tool to be used alongside all assessments where neglect is suspected, and revisited at key points within service delivery to ensure progress is being monitored (LSCB priority area)
16. Child Protection and Court Proceedings  
As of 31st March 2015 there were 125 children subject to Child Protection Plans, almost the same as the previous year (124). This equates to 34 per 10,000, a return below that of statistical neighbours (39) & England (42). From a peak in 2011-12 (162) the number of children on a child protection plan in York is now stable.
17. The majority (46.8%) are listed under the category of neglect, with emotional abuse (34.7%) a close second. Physical Abuse (9.7%) and Sexual Abuse (3.2%) fall well behind these two. These figures are broadly in line with statistical neighbours and England averages, with neglect marginally higher than 42%.
18. Twenty care application proceedings were initiated between April 2014 and March 2015. During the same period 52 cases went to Legal Gateway Meeting or were open as PLO (Public Law Outline).
19. The average court time for York cases is 18 weeks, one of the lowest in the country.
20. A summary of Outcomes for the review period is set out below:

The outcomes for public law cases concluded in the period April 2014 to Mar 2015

Care Orders – 11 children  
Placement Orders - 3 children  
SGO's – 6 children  
Supervision Orders – 12 children  
Child Arrangements Orders – 2 children  
Residence Orders – 1 child  
No order – 1 child

Fig.1

21. Looked After Children

The number of looked after children in the city has seen a continued steady reduction in 2014-15 from 226 to 195. The aspiration to maintain

a reduction in the number of admissions of children into care has been maintained with the number of entrants remaining constant for the past three years (62-65). The reduction in the total numbers has been a reflection of the maintained increase in care leavers (83-94) in the corresponding period. The numbers of care leavers is a reflection of three areas of progress:

- greater numbers of children being adopted
- greater number of children being made subject to special guardianship orders
- the discharge of several care orders after children have successfully returned to the care of their parents under placement with parent regulations.

22. The Multi Agency Looked After Children's partnership and the Corporate Parenting Board continue to oversee the qualitative progress of the Looked After Children's Strategy 2012-15.
23. There is ongoing consultation about the review of the strategy with looked after children, their carers and key agencies working with these children. The strategy, with a theme of '**good enough is not good enough**' will be refreshed during 2015 to reflect the learning from the past three years and the priorities for the future.
24. Missing Children  
For children who go missing from home and care, a revised joint protocol between North Yorkshire Police, North Yorkshire County Council and City of York Council came into effect January 2015. At an operational level there is daily collaboration between Children's Social Care and North Yorkshire Police.
25. In addition a monthly meeting to share information about vulnerable young people (particularly in relation to CSE and missing) is being established. The joint protocol for this meeting is currently being finalised.
26. The coordination of the strategic implications of the incidence and messages about patterns of missing episodes will be via the Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation sub group of the CYSCB.

## Conclusion

27. Perhaps of most significance during this review period has been the significant further elevation of childrens safety in the minds of all Council staff. Regardless of 'role or rank' Council colleagues can speak and act with confidence in relation to their safeguarding responsibilities. This culture is led at the highest level within the Council and there remains a relentless determination to further improve and sustain this picture.

## Recommendations

28. Having considered the information within this report, Members are recommended to:
- i. Note, consider and challenge the detail of this report
  - ii. Visit the Its Not Ok website and review the content
  - iii. Consider convening a *Responding and Managing Risk Challenge* event with officers from Childrens Social Care.
  - iv. Receive an update on the refreshed Looked After Children's strategy in the next update report.

Reason: To allow Members to be fully informed on key childrens safeguarding issues in York and to support Member challenge in this area.

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Report Approved



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Wards Affected:

All



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