

Report of the Assistant Director – Children and Young People’s Services

**Head of Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Overview: Improvement
Journey Progress**

Summary

1. This report presents an overview of the development and progress in the improvement journey for York Children’s Social Care (CSC) over the past 12 months.
2. The report is based on a number of audits and reports undertaken during the year, the CSC Improvement Plan, the Improvement Board Scorecard and progress as reported to the regular Improvement Board meetings.
3. An Improvement Board was established by the Director in June 2019. The Board has worked collectively to identify improvement needs and oversee progress. The priorities for improvement have been reviewed and are as follows:
 - a) Strengthen the Front Door to ensure the rigorous application of thresholds and timely assessment of the highest standard
 - b) 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
 - c) Ensure managers at every level understand their role and responsibilities ensuring scrutiny and oversight of the quality of practice in their teams
 - d) Ensure social work time is used to maximise outcomes for children

- e) 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
 - f) Ensure effective governance, scrutiny and oversight through the Children and Young People's Safeguarding Partnership, the Improvement Board and Senior Managers
4. There has been significant changes at a senior leadership level since October 2018. Senior Leaders in York remain committed to rigorous and external review of the service to drive forward continuous improvement. The DCS and AD have commissioned a range of case audits and review activities, the objectives and impact of which are set out in this report.

Background

5. York CSC was last subject to full inspection by the regulator in November 2016. At that time Ofsted graded York 'good' for leadership and management, children looked after and achieving permanence, and 'requires improvement' for children who were in need of help and protection. The overall grading was Good.
6. Following their appointment to York both the Director and Assistant Director recognised that practice was highly variable. There was evidence of drift and delay in some cases, a lack of effective management oversight and a lack of challenge in respect of practice from first line managers and IRO's. Since this time the authority has sought a number of external opportunities to understand practice and has set in place a clear strategy for improvement (see section 3).
7. In September 2018 a Joint Targeted Area Inspection identified '*a strong, shared commitment to working in a child-focused way and listening to the voices of children and young people characterises the work of agencies in York*'. However, the report also identified some areas in which York could improve its services to children including improved coordination between agencies at the front door, addressing the potential for delay in initial decision making, analysis of information pertaining to vulnerable, exploited and missing young people and inconsistency of approach created by turnover of managers.
8. In May 2019 the Local Government Association undertook a children's services peer challenge which provided recognition that '*work has started to move the service in the right direction*'. It identified a number of emerging strengths and a developing learning culture. Recognition that senior management oversight was strong and their awareness of issues was valued by practitioners. That staff felt consulted and heard

and whilst there was a recognition of the variability in the quality of practice there was, alongside this, a growing recognition of the role of managers in addressing this. Areas which were identified as benefitting from further development included the need for 'smarter' planning for children, strengthening of management oversight and IRO challenge.

9. In November 2019 a children's services peer challenge was undertaken by senior manager colleagues from Wakefield and Calderdale, led by a representative from the Association of Directors of Children's Services. The peer reviewers noted the ambition for change and improvement in York was strong and that the increasing clarity regarding roles and responsibilities was providing a framework for improving practice. However, they also noted that issues of stability and capacity in the workforce continue to impact on the ability to consistently embed quality of practice. There continues to be work to address the development of a practice framework and to focus on developing and maintaining good core SW practice.
10. The Quality Assurance team have undertaken a significant piece of work to embed the findings of previous audits, to ensure that actions from audits are completed and that learning is disseminated. They are currently in the initial stage of a range of audits which will look to benchmark against outcomes of previous audits and to identify progress in terms of case files and recording. A second 'live audit' undertaken with the SW will enable a more qualitative understanding of the work and will also allow each SW to experience live debate regarding their work. 54 cases will be live audited. The team have facilitated a number of workshops with practitioners and drop-in sessions. In addition opportunities for group supervision have been put in place to challenge, develop and improve social work practice.
11. A number of multi-agency audits have taken place in the last 12 months including:
 - March 2019 - multiagency engagement in initial and review child protection case conferences
 - May 2019 – multiagency engagement in core groups (tracking cases through from the March audit)
 - November 2019 – effectiveness of the new multiagency child exploitation meetings
12. Learning resulting from these audits is shared in the multi-agency partnership and is disseminated to the CSC workforce.

Consultation

13. During the past 12 months the improvement work in CSC has gained significant traction and is now moving into phase 2 of the improvement journey. This will include consolidating and embedding the work already undertaken and there will be a maintained focus on practice and on learning from audit. An audit framework has been established which will allow managers and staff to have a consistent and working knowledge of the strengths and difficulties in terms of practice and to identify and address any deterioration in practice quickly and effectively, this is further enhanced by the production of a daily report of CSC timeliness. A number of factors have already contributed to improvements in social work practice including;
 - development of the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)
 - a reduction in social workers caseloads to an average of 22
 - the development and implementation of a reflective supervision policy
 - Advanced Practitioner (AP) team facilitating a number of practice improvement workshops based around issues emerging from audit
 - AP 'drop in' sessions for social workers to access information/research/support regarding specific practice issues.
 - Development of an Independent Reviewing officer (IRO) report and challenge log.
 - Dissemination of learning from audits in one minute guides (OMG) for staff to ensure awareness/learning.
 - The development of 6 key documents to support practice
 - Scheme of delegation
 - Quality assurance and audit framework
 - Practice standards
 - Managers standards
 - IRO escalation and resolution process
 - Case transfer between teams
 - All SW staff now have access to up to date social work resources and research via the establishment of a corporate commitment to 'Research in Practice'
 - The development of an approved practitioner team led by the Head of Quality Assurance, Safeguarding Unit and Principal Social worker to support practice learning and development.
 - The development of monthly performance meetings to support increased ownership by managers of performance data and the use of this in their day to day work.
14. We have gained the support of colleagues in Sheffield and Barnsley in relation to our improvement journey and particularly our quality

assurance framework. Colleagues will visit York early 2020 to support our audit work and to audit the audits to ensure consistency and quality of the audits themselves. They will work with the quality assurance team to further develop and enhance the audit activity to ensure continuous improvement.

15. The Director, Assistant Director and 4 of the 6 Senior Managers have remained consistent throughout the past 12 months which this has enabled collaborative working and the establishment of a joint understanding of improvement needs in York leading to improved outcomes for children in York.
16. Data accuracy has been a significant and longstanding concern and therefore in February of this year CYC commissioned a review of data accuracy and Annex A (a collection of child level data which is required by Ofsted prior to inspection) in order to have a well-developed work stream in this area. This includes a development programme for all managers in relation to the use of the MOSAIC system and the use of performance data. In addition there has been significant financial investment in the system.

Options

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

Analysis

18. There is evidence of some improvement in CSC for children in York in the last 12 months although there is still a significant amount of progress needed. The senior management team is now well established and knows the service well. Staff are communicating an improvement in conditions for positive social work and reduced caseloads are allowing for improvements in practice. The development of an audit framework is establishing a better understanding of practice and areas in which improvement is required. Managers need to maintain a high challenge high support approach. Phase two of the improvement journey will ensure a focus continuing to strengthen practice, consolidate progress and bringing clarity to our approach to permanence for children.

Risks and Implications

19. CSC must maintain its positive trajectory and continue to improve services to children in York. Services will be subject to a full inspection in early 2020.

Recommendation

20. The Committee is asked to note the progress in improvement over the past 12 months and continue to support CSC to continue this improving trajectory.

Reason: In order to be updated on the development and progress in the improvement journey for York Children's Social Care (CSC) over the past 12 months.

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Specialist Implications

Officer(s) None

Report Approved Date 16/01/20

Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Abbreviations:

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| DCS | Director of Children's Services |
| AD | Assistant Director |
| CSC | Children's Social Care |
| SMT | Senior Management Team |
| IRO | Independent Reviewing Officer |
| PSW | Principal Social Worker |
| SW | Social Worker |