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Cath McEvoy-Carr,  
Executive Director of Adult Social Care  
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**Cathryn Kirby**, Regional Director  
North East Yorkshire and Humber  
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Sent via email - [cath.mcevoy-carr@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:cath.mcevoy-carr@northumberland.gov.uk)

Dear Cath

Thank you for meeting with me, Tracey Metcalfe, Senior HMI and Jan Edwards HMI on 6 February 2019. You provided a helpful update on progress from our last annual conversation on both current performance and progress in Northumberland children's services.

The information in your self-evaluation and performance information provided a clear picture of your strengths and areas for improvement. We discussed how the self-evaluation could be further strengthened through examples of impact on children's experiences.

You told us you have identified four priorities to improve services with an overarching aim of continuous improvement. You also told us that you benefit from very engaged elected members and a cross party commitment to children's services. This has ensured continued financial investment at a time when other services have been impacted by budget cuts.

We discussed how the findings from last judgement inspection in 2016 shows the extent of the changes that have been required. Two of the challenges you described were in making sustained improvement from this low base and in changing the practice culture in Northumberland. You have identified that now you have established workforce stability there are further areas you need to focus on including embedding consistency of practice.

You told us that you have achieved some key successes in stabilising social work caseloads and establishing a more intuitive approach to caseload management through a system of caseload weighting. At the 2018 annual engagement meeting recruitment of experienced social workers was described as a challenge, as it is

currently. However, the investment in the ASYE academy has been successful in growing your own cohort of social workers.

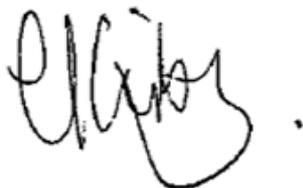
You described how Northumberland's participation in a regional challenge process has facilitated a healthy scrutiny and challenge of your service delivery and in producing an accurate self-evaluation. You highlighted an improved quality assurance process which you consider is starting to impact on positively, for example, in one geographical location where a new manager has been located and staff have been supported to develop resilience.

Your self-evaluation demonstrates how regular performance clinics and performance days are ensuring a more robust understanding of the qualitative data. You told us that children in care are benefiting from living in local foster placements and good quality children's homes, and that you are reviewing your sufficiency strategy. We can see that your fostering marketing strategy is targeting areas of greatest need and that you are developing residential provision with cabinet investment for two further children's homes.

We discussed the emphasis of a possible focussed visit by Ofsted this year under the Integrated Local Authority Children's Services inspection framework. You told us that it would be beneficial for the service to have a 'sense check' of planning for children in need and child protection. This also fits with Ofsted's understanding of where our focus would be of most use in your continued improvement of the service.

Thank you again for meeting with us. Tracey or Jan will keep in touch to maintain an ongoing dialogue with the local authority.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C Kirby", followed by a period.

Cathryn Kirby  
**Regional Director**  
**North East, Yorkshire and Humber**