



Northumberland County Council

# **SENIOR MANAGERS INTERNAL REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL SERVICES IN NORTHUMBERLAND (PRACTICE WEEK JAN 2018) FEEDBACK & ANALYSIS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This document sets out the broad findings of an internal review of Children's Social Care within the county of Northumberland carried out by senior managers between 29<sup>th</sup> January and 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2018. From a timetable of visits over a period of a week, managers observed practice out with their management domain and/or professional specialism. The purpose of the practice week was to provide senior managers with an opportunity to 'walk the floor' with frontline staff from all areas in order to assess the quality of service provision, focus on social work practice and to identify areas of strength where practice has improved as well as to identify further areas for development where appropriate, to steer service improvement for the coming year.

## **PROCESS**

All senior managers (including the Executive Director of Children's Services) were involved from children's social care supported by education managers and the LSCB manager. Representation from other agencies was planned from the start but unfortunately this did not happen due to sickness and leave commitments at the time. In addition, during practice week, Ofsted contacted to advise that they would be undertaking a focussed visit the following week which meant some senior managers had more limited availability.

Services visited included

- 4 locality social work teams: North, West, Central and South East

- Northumberland Adolescent Service
- Family Placement Service
- Front Door
- Children's Centres

The focus of the week was to look at the customer experience and in particular at the voice of the child and what it was like to be a parent using Northumberland services.

The process was supported by the internal audit and governance team who helped to plan and coordinate the week as well as to collate the findings.

## **PRACTICE WEEK PROCESS REFLECTION**

The introduction and process of conducting practice week observations was well received by both the assessors and the staff at a local level. It was clear that the service benefitted from senior managers 'walking the shop floor'. While many elements of service provision that underpins service delivery was observed and recorded, the primary intended focus was to observe social work practice. The senior management peer to peer scrutiny explored areas for improvement as well as elements of outstanding practice which could then be shared across the service.

Practice week overall was a 'big learning curve' and the first of its kind to be completed within Northumberland. The headings included in the evaluation and assessment document were broad, however they were used well by the assessors to produce significant and robust evidence to support findings across the services within Northumberland.

Assessors found that social workers were open and honest and overall knew how to deliver their message 'on point' about their practice. Team managers and senior practitioners in most areas were eager to showcase their work; they presented their work with sincerity and with a genuine passion.

Staff were described as 'tenacious' 'articulate' 'committed' and focussed on their role. Managers were strong overall and 'on top of their cases' for the most part within their own specialism. Without exception staff when asked felt supported by their managers.

There were significant case-studies recorded as exemplar material and demonstrated across all of children's social services i.e. they were not specific to one team or service or locality but were evident in all areas. This reinforced the good and in some cases outstanding social work practice as witnessed by assessors across the county. Clearly there were also areas for future development that would enhance and improve practice and these have been listed below using the headers from the assessment tool.

During the analysis session post practice week, the themes for the practice week were however, felt to be overly broad. This said, the evidence gained from this initial run provided a detailed benchmark for when the process is repeated and for individual teams to use when looking at progress against the actions. Going forward, future practice weeks would benefit from more detailed planning around how to include the actual voice of the child/parents/carers which in some cases was felt not to be sufficiently robust and would have benefitted from speaking directly to more parents, children and carers. This is now included in the case file audit process which provides a richness of information about relationship work.

It was reported that more advanced planning should include information to identify the size of the practicing team, the team context and the team structure. The assessors felt they would benefit from clearer information sent to them in advance and a stronger agreement for the focus of the visits. More structured advanced planning would guarantee a standardised approach for future visits that would help lead to better analysis of social work practice.

It was also identified that despite all senior managers working for the county, that knowledge about different areas/localities and contacts was not always string and therefore the process would benefit from having for example, an office lead or contact person and someone to meet and greet the assessors to assist with local orientation.

It was reported that in some cases (and evidenced across many teams) social workers were not always able to recognise the high quality of their own work even when it was deemed outstanding by the assessors. Their rationale was:

‘This is what we always do....it’s our job’

It was generally felt that social workers could be encouraged to reflect on work that is identified as exceptional to help them recognise the real value of their interventions with the children and families with whom they work. This would also be in recognition of the improved quality of service provision to children across Northumberland. In turn this information could be recorded and shared across the county.

## **THEMES AND TRENDS REPORTED BY ASSESSORS:**

### **CATEGORY 1: LEADERSHIP**

#### **Strengths**

- ASYE programme really well managed in a number of teams
- Leadership was seen as a strength in a high number of teams and positive examples were provided about support, change management, team meetings and new development,

- Systems appeared to be well embedded with staff understanding what was expected of them
- Staff talked about being well supported with regular supervision with visible and accessible managers
- Morale was generally seen to be good with examples where this was reported to be really good. There was evidence seen of a generally good atmosphere in team rooms.
- A number of services reported to be positive about new developments and felt informed about changes
- Evidence in a number of teams of strong leadership was witnessed and reported by staff.
- Strong team working identified in a high number of services.
- Partnership working seen as strong

### **Areas for development**

- Caseloads remain a challenge across many teams, some strategies were already in place to manage this
- Some teams don't appreciate how well they function as a team.
- A small number of teams required more prep with teams prior to the practice week commencing.
- Senior Practitioners were not always fulfilling their management role appropriately due to casework pressures in particular areas.
- Quality of supervision was variable across the localities

## **CATEGORY 2: THE VOICE OF THE CHILD**

### **Strengths**

- In specific teams there was a culture of the child being at the centre and where this worked well, it provided evidence and assurance that the child had input into their plan.
- Social work staff in general are very unaware of the positive impact that they have on children
- Evidence in a number of teams of family focussed care plans all inclusive child and parents / carers
- unborn/newborn baby assessment process clear in most teams which include plans for the child once born
- Evidence of clear child focussed adoption meetings.
- In a number of meetings observed, the focus was clearly on the child and improving the outcomes for the child.
- Child centred practice was seen to be outstanding in some areas.
- Good practice seen when a worker rang a child to introduce self before making initial home visit
- Evidence of innovative direct work with children to ascertain their views

## **Areas for development**

- Office buildings are not generally accessible for children and young people and children and young people are not encouraged to attend offices.
- Social workers were seen to be too modest – this is endemic throughout the service and is evidenced in most teams
- Some social workers identified that they would benefit from some training or development around the use of specific tools
- More preparation is required prior to meetings in some areas
- Lack of challenge in some observations about the need to do things within the child's timescales.'
- Inconsistent recording on ICS was seen however when recording was seen it was excellent in some cases.
- Engaging CYPS workers difficult to access in some more remote areas.
- Parent focussed practice was observed in a small number of teams at times rather than child's voice and issues
- Good interaction was not always recorded in notes across some of the teams

## **CATEGORY 3: THE PARENT / CARER EXPERIENCE**

### **Strengths**

- In some teams there was consistency of workers which lead to effective relationships with parents and sound understand of the history
- Examples were seen of strong partnership working with parents in particular areas.
- Clear and strong plans were seen in a few areas where parental expectations were evident.
- Carer support was very good in specific areas.
- Framing of the full picture for a parent in a positive and solution focused way to ensure shared and achievable goals

### **Areas for improvement**

- In certain service areas, the parents or carers are not really included in any of the plans.
- There has been a historical culture of solely dealing with the young person in certain teams due to their age
- Parenting assessments didn't appear to be consistently completed.
- Practice seen where reports given to parents on day of meeting in 1 area.
- In one meeting observed the language used was quite negative

## **CATEGORY 4: GOOD or INNOVATIVE PRACTICE**

- The Liaison & Diversion process provides a 'store' of information and signposting to help identify gaps
- In one team, it was evident that visits were undertaken to all young people every month wherever they are located in the country to promote and develop

relationships – this is above the statutory minimum and helps to ensure young people feel they can rely on their worker.

- Promotion of relationships within the YOT by allocating ‘older’ young people to the probation worker within the YOT and moving to adult services only when it fits for the child.
- Integration of youth service with NAS, maintained integrity but promoting a shared core purpose.
- Development of early targeted help with youth service representatives attending early help hubs to provide support to young people where most needed.
- Development of case management systems to measure impact of service - focus on ‘softer outcomes’ and not just performance indicators.
- Co-location of teams and agile working combine to have positive impact on casework - swift problem solving, reduce delay in decision making, sharing of information about individual cases.
- One social work team uses “grab and go” packs to ensure they arrive to meet families prepared
- Example of ASYE - confident with parents and family members and evidence of child centred practice.
- Teams seen to be embracing agile working, using diaries and forward planning to be efficient with travel time
- Surveys have been completed to get fathers /males identifying what they can do to help and engage in work and not imposing views of gender stereotype roles when fathers/males wish to engage with traditional male activities
- Good to see evidence of guests at team meetings, although the partnerships are predictable, broader less service driven reach could have better value and more sustainable outcomes for children/ families
- Information is shared by partner agencies involved to inform decision-making. Clear evidence of multi-agency working to meet child’s needs
- Good evidence of multi agency working within the MASH with police information being provided timely and backed up with relevant paperwork.
- Social Work Support Assistants will attend appointments etc. with young person until they feel confident doing so alone
- Use of evidence based tools by some staff is innovative and frames priorities and conversations for the young person to express their own needs at their pace
- Use of MoMo Application on phone allows young people with specific attachment disorders to answer questions on a screen instead of face to face.
- Good example of a sibling assessment by the social worker-reinforced the importance of these to aid decision making
- Developing Fostering to Adopt placements, identifying prospective foster carer / adopters coming through
- Waiting Adopters Group (WAG) set up last year - three meetings have been held - establishing a support group for adopters who are waiting to be matched with children
- A new fostering scheme (24/7) in the process of being set up with the focus on short term for a fixed period of time to focus on returning children to their families.

- Early Permanence Strategy identifying children as soon as possible
- Support group for children whose parents foster, has been established. Recognising the impact and the role they play.

### **Case examples**

- Effective integration of NAS and Youth Service demonstrated when pupils at a High School were involved with the police due to inappropriate behaviour. The NAS sign-posted the secondary school to the Youth Service to work with a group of pupils as an early intervention and preventative approach
- Young person in rural location identified who was living in poverty. Not referred into services by school but picked up through YOT when caught offending (burglaries). Assessment initiated after police concerns about family home. YOT co-ordinated professionals and services on large scale - family now re-housed, less isolated, claiming benefits, school attendance improved. This was an excellent example of integrated working and making a real difference to a family's life
- Direct work with child using different colours to identify significant emotions linked to what they wrote – e.g. red is bad, purple is good and happy and brown is ok .
- Direct work used with drawing which lead to a clear disclosure of abuse from young person
- Newcastle Sixth Form College attending TAF meetings for a 17 year old, and have offered additional support for the parent to access their online pupil performance monitoring system. Senior staff member is available to speak to the parent by phone as a named contact to try and support the 17 year old back into college.

### **IN CONCLUSION**

This was the first Practice week undertaken in Northumberland and it has identified some key themes and evidences good practice and will be used to support actions for future service development plans. There is an extensive list of good or innovative practice across the county, some of which will be shared across all areas.

The review was very useful in that it provided evidence of where practice has improved and also helped to further understand where practice had not yet got to a satisfactory standard. The services have now used the information to inform their specific service plans and the key themes have been incorporated into the overarching improvement plan.

In addition, focussed practice days are taking place monthly to look at the quality of practice within the individual teams and to test how far they have progressed since the practice week.







## CHILDRENS SOCIAL SERVICES PRACTICE WEEK ACTION PLAN

Issue Identified		Action to be taken	Anticipated risk if not completed	Priority	Proposed date for completion	Responsibility for completion
<b>Cat 1</b>	<b>LEADERSHIP</b>					
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
<b>Cat 2</b>	<b>EXPERIENCE OF THE CHILD</b>					
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
<b>Cat 3</b>	<b>PARENT / CARER EXPERIENCE</b>					
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
<b>Cat 4</b>	<b>INNOVATIVE PRACTICE</b>					
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						