

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PEOPLE TO CABINET ON 19th SEPTEMBER 2018

OUTCOME OF THE PEER CHALLENGE OF THE INTEGRATED 'FRONT DOOR' TO CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IN BARNSELY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the findings from a recent sector-led, Peer Challenge of the 'Front Door' to services for children in need of help or protection in the Borough.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That Cabinet notes the findings and recommendations of the Peer Challenge as part of preparations for an inspection through the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Framework.**

3.0 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The Council's Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Services, together with partners within the Barnsley Children and Young People's Trust and the Barnsley Safeguarding Children Board have continued to drive continuous improvement in services since the last Ofsted inspection in 2014. All partners continue to be signed up to the Continuous Service Improvement Framework and Plan which is reviewed at least annually. The Framework sets out our shared commitment to provide services that are judged in Ofsted's terms to be at least 'good' and commits Barnsley to an external challenge of a specified service area each year.
- 3.2 Within the regional Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) sector led improvement alliance all authorities in Yorkshire and the Humber complete a self-assessment that is subject to a challenge process. On completion of this, Barnsley's self-assessment of contact, referral and assessment services (the 'front door') was RAG rated green across the board and was one of a small number of authorities to achieve this. As Barnsley is now due for a standard inspection under the new Ofsted framework for inspecting children's services it was decided with partners to test this assessment in depth utilising capacity within the regional improvement alliance.
- 3.3 Peer Challenge Of The 'Front Door' To Children's Social Care In Barnsley
- 3.4 The Council with the agreement of partners engaged East Riding of Yorkshire Council to conduct a peer challenge of the 'Front Door' in Barnsley.

- 3.5 At its most recent inspection, in February 2017, East Riding of Yorkshire Council was judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted for its overall effectiveness in the provision of children's services. As a result, it has been designated as a 'Partner in Practice' (PiP) by the Department for Education (DfE), Association of Directors' of Children's Services (ADCS) and the Local Government Association in promoting sector-led improvement in children's services within this Region. East Riding of Yorkshire Council, therefore, receives funding from the DfE to carry out its work as a PiP.
- 3.6 The Peer Challenge was undertaken between 26th – 28th June this year and was led by Pete Dwyer CBE, a former Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services at North Yorkshire County Council who had previously conducted a 'Test of Assurance' of our Borough's compliance with the statutory duties of the Director of Children's Services as defined in the Children Act (2004).
- 3.7 Scope And Methodology
- 3.8 The scope of the Peer Challenge was to critically appraise the efficiency and effectiveness of Barnsley's children's social care 'front door' arrangements, leading to the identification of any strengths and areas for consideration.
- 3.9 The new Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) Framework (introduced in January 2018) focuses on the quality, experience and impact of practice on outcomes for children. The inspection framework also looks closely at the experience of front-line professionals. The methodology for the Peer Challenge was shaped to reflect this and the Peer Challenge Team spent a maximum amount of time with local Integrated Front Door Teams, observing decision making, assessments and scrutinising case files. An in depth audit of 20 cases was also completed.
- 3.10 Further, the Peer Challenge Team observed live practice by visiting children and families, with social workers whilst further on-site activity included discussions with managers, practitioners and partners.
- 3.11 The Peer Challenge Team's observations were evaluated against the ADCS's Regional self-assessment tool which Barnsley had self-assessed against and took into account the following:
- Thresholds for intervention and policies (including the use of early help and the consistent application of processes and procedures).
 - Effectiveness of partnerships (including levels of engagement, understanding of thresholds and quality of information sharing)
 - Putting the needs of the child at the centre of decision-making.
 - Quality of practice (including quality of referrals, timeliness, managing risks, the role of the Barnsley Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub or MASH and appropriate levels of decision making).
 - Workforce and resources (skills, supervision and opportunities for development)

- Leadership and decision-making (including management of workflow, application of thresholds and monitoring)
- Outcomes for children and young people (what difference is being made, how is data and insight used to improve performance)

3.12 Summary Of Key Outcomes Emerging Through The Peer Challenge

3.13 The Peer Challenge Team's findings include the following:

1. Thresholds for intervention are fully understood by staff across sectors.
2. Early help is having a significant and positive impact in preventing children from needing to be referred to social care.
3. Decision making at the 'Front Door' is strong and consistent.
4. Assessments were of an extremely high quality, demonstrating effective partnership working and information sharing as well as a focus upon the experience of the child.
5. Barnsley's children's social care workforce is experienced, confident and consider themselves to be well supported in their work.
6. There is strong, visible and supportive leadership
7. There is a well embedded performance and quality assurance framework.
8. The Local Authority's self-assessment of front-door activity was perceived to be accurate and well informed with all areas rated to be 'Green' or 'Good'.

3.14 In addition, the Peer Challenge identified the following areas for further consideration:

1. A need to review the 'Request for Service' form, the role of business support and ensure easy access to a social worker is available.
2. Ensure appropriate use of strategy discussions/meetings to support efficiency improvements in practice.
3. The potential for more genuinely joint 'Achieving Best Evidence In Criminal Proceedings' or ABE interviews with the Police.
4. To consider how the views of young, pre-verbal children can better be captured.
5. To explore the potential for further maximising the significant experience of social workers in screening.
6. The need to review the availability of local pre-birth assessment guidance.
7. Ensure that immediate safety plans are written and shared with families rather than verbally agreed.

4.0 PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

- 4.1 In conjunction with the Local Authority's performance with the Regional ADCS's self- assessment of children's services together with our recent self-evaluation of the quality of child and family social work practice, the findings of the Peer Challenge form part of a useful triangulation in evaluating the effectiveness of the 'Front Door' to children's social care in the Borough.
- 4.2 The Peer Challenge has provided assurance that vulnerable children in need of help or protection are being provided with an effective service which places their wellbeing at the centre of decision-making and is capable of improving the range of outcomes.

5.0 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- 5.1 Such consideration is not applicable as the only purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the positive outcomes which have emerged through this Peer Challenge. Those areas of provision which have been identified as in need of development will form part of the Trust's Children's Services Continuous Improvement Plan.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE/SERVICE USERS

- 6.1 Please see Paragraphs 4.2.and 5.1.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The costs of the Peer Challenge were entirely met by the Partners In Practice Programme which draws upon funding provided by the DfE to help support sector-led improvement in children's services.

8.0 EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Peer Reviewers commented favourably on the skills and stability of the child and family social care workforce, together with the calibre of leadership and the quality of supervision. Peer Reviewers considered that these factors contributed significantly to the improvement of outcomes for vulnerable children in the Borough.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no legal implications to consider through this report.

10.0 CUSTOMER AND DIGITAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no implications for accessing service channels, including digital transactions, arising through the report.

11.0 COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The outcomes of the Peer Challenge will form part of Ofsted's pre-inspection information and intelligence on the Local Authority and will be taken into account in our own briefings to managers and practitioners as part of preparations for the standard inspection and any focused inspection.

12.0 CONSULTATIONS

12.1 The Council's Senior Management Team has been consulted on the outcomes of the Peer Challenge.

13.0 THE CORPORATE PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

13.1 As a form of external assessment, the Peer Challenge of the integrated 'Front Door' for children's social care has provided good evidence on how we use thresholds, policies and procedures to effectively help and protect children for whom there is a concern. Safeguarding children from harm is a Corporate Plan priority and our performance against the local indicator for the percentage of completed assessments within 45 days of a child's referral continues to significantly exceed the target (at the end of Quarter 4, 2017-18, this was 99.4% against a target of 90%)

14.0 PROMOTING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

14.1 Whilst the outcomes of the Peer Review made no comment on this issue, our assessment and quality assurance activity includes standard consideration of the specific needs of vulnerable children and young people with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act (2010) in order to ensure the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion.

15.0 TACKLING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY

15.1 A key thread in the Trust's '365' commitment to making every day count for every child in the Borough is that by ensuring each child attends a good school and, in particular, disadvantaged children obtain the support needed to enable them to achieve their potential, this will improve their life chances, wellbeing and social mobility, thereby shielding them from the impact of poverty and other forms of deprivation, later in life.

16.0 TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

16.1 Please also see Paragraph 15.1.

17.0 REDUCTION OF CRIME AND DISORDER

17.1 One of the areas identified for development by Peer Reviewers is the potential for more genuinely joint 'Achieving Best Evidence In Criminal Proceedings' or ABE interviews with the Police. This will be progressed through the Trust's Children's Services Continuous Improvement Plan.

18.0 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

18.1 No additional or unanticipated risks have emerged as a result of the Peer Challenge.

19.0 HEALTH, SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESILIENCE ISSUES

19.1 There are no implications for the public, Council workforce or the resilience of the Borough emerging through this report.

20.0 COMPATIBILITY WITH THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

20.1 The Peer Challenge of the integrated 'Front Door' provides assurance that our thresholds for intervention, quality of practice and policies and procedures remain compatible with the Convention, particularly the right of a child to be safeguarded from serious harm.

21.0 CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

21.1 There are no implications for the local environment or the conservation of biodiversity through this report.

22.0 GLOSSARY

22.1 Not applicable.

23.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

23.1 Appendix 1: Peer Challenge of the Front Door to Children's Social Care in Barnsley

24.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

24.1 If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

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