

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)

TITLE: OUTCOMES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION'S PEER REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE IN THE BOROUGH

REPORT TO:	CABINET
Date of Meeting	18 MAY 2022
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Children's Services
Key Decision	No
Public or Private	Public

Purpose of report

To inform Cabinet of the findings which have emerged through the Local Government Association's recent Peer Review of Children's Social Care in the Borough, together with the next steps.

Council Plan priority

The outcomes of the Peer Review will support our objectives for a **Healthy Barnsley** and a **Sustainable Barnsley** by helping ensure *People are Safe and Feel Safe* and *People live in great places and feel connected and valued in their communities*

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet notes the LGA Outcome Letter for the Peer Review.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Local government performs an integral role in providing modern, quality and responsive public services which meet the needs of a diverse range of communities', which provide value for money and the effective use of available resources, particularly through the ongoing Best Value Duty and the Community Right to Challenge under the Localism Act (2011).
- 1.2 As a member of the Local Government Association (LGA) Barnsley MBC is among a significant majority of local authorities who can help foster

improvements in local services as well as help tackle thorny issues currently facing local government, through the sector's peer led improvement programme, led by the LGA.

- 1.3 In view of Barnsley Council's ambition to deliver better than good and outstanding services, Children's Services commit to having an annual sector-based, peer led external assessment, to provide objective challenge of the quality of practice and provision, as well as giving independent assurance over the overall effectiveness of services.
- 1.4 Following the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge which took place in 2019 and in preparation for a follow-up Corporate Peer Challenge by mid-2024, Cabinet recently considered a report and endorsed a programme of individual peer reviews across the Council, commencing in February 2022. A copy of this report can be viewed via the link below

<https://barnsleymbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s92470/Review%20of%20Peer%20Challenge%20Activity%20Across%20the%20Council.pdf>

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 As part of this Programme an LGA Peer Review of Children's Social Care was undertaken during the period 29th February to 4th March. The Peer Review Team comprised of the following members:

- Sally Robinson (Director, Children and Joint Commissioning Services) Hartlepool Borough Council
- Anna Gianfrancesco (Assistant Director, Safeguarding & Care) Brighton and Hove City Council
- Cliff James (Head of Safeguarding, Children and Families) Suffolk County Council
- Tom Savory (LGA Associate: Children's Social Care)
- Catherine Lomas (Programme Support Officer, Improvement – Children's Services, LGA)
- Jonathan Trubshaw (LGA Manager)

- 2.2 The LGA Peer Review Team focused upon the following:

- The appropriateness of local thresholds to children's social care – could more children be supported with an Early Help Assessment and early help or intervention?
- The proportion of child protection S47 enquiries proceeding to an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPCC) is very low in Barnsley. Are S47 investigations being initiated appropriately?
- Are Child in Need and Child Protection Plans SMART; do they evidence timely progress for children, with the right support and the right decision made, to meet children's needs in a timely way, at the right level?
- The quality of early permanence planning and stability for children in care.
- the role and effectiveness of leadership and management in Barnsley children's services in ensuring the systems used are operated effectively.

2.3 The scope and methodology for the Peer Review was as follows:

- Obtaining the perspective of over 100 people, including: children and families, Cabinet Spokesperson (Children's Services) Local Authority Chief Executive and Senior Management Team, together with front-line practitioners, managers and representatives from local partner agencies
- Direct and live observation of front-line practice and intervention
- Analysis and evaluation of background documentation
- Visits to families and settings involved in Children's Social Care
- Case file audit and consideration of at least 40 live children's social care records.

2.4 The outcome of the Peer Challenge provides both confidence and assurance in respect of the leadership and quality of services and outcomes for vulnerable children in the borough. The Review's findings are set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

2.5 No recommendations for improvement were made by the LGA Peer Review Team. Instead, questions and areas for consideration were offered to further improve the quality of practice and provision; *Please see Appendix 1 (LGA Peer Challenge Outcome Letter).*

2.6 Next Steps

2.7 The areas for consideration will be progressed as part of the Children's Services Continuous Improvement Plan which drives our continuous improvement and underpins the Barnsley Children and Young People's Plan.

3.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

3.1 Financial and Risk

3.2 There are no financial implications for the Authority emerging through this report. Minor administrative costs were incurred in hosting the Peer Review and no risks, particularly to the reputation of the Council, have been anticipated through the Review.

3.3 Legal

3.4 There are no legal implications arising through the outcomes of the Peer Review. The Authority continues to be fully compliant with its statutory responsibilities in relation to children's social care.

3.5 Equality

3.6 The outcomes of the Peer Review made no reference to our duty to promote equality and to eliminate unlawful discrimination within the quality of practice and provision. Arrangements for the assessment and review of children and young people in need of help or protection consider and meet the specific needs of individuals with protected characteristics.

3.7 Sustainability

3.8 There are no implications for sustainability emerging through the outcomes of the Peer Review.

3.9 Employee

3.10 The Peer Review acknowledges the steps being taken by the Local Authority to reduce average caseloads among children's social workers within the context of the resilience, commitment and motivation among the children's social care workforce for children in need of help or protection in the Borough and towards continuous professional development.

3.11 Communications

3.12 The outcomes of the Peer Review will be widely disseminated through the Council's communication channels, networks and partnerships.

4.0 CONSULTATION

4.1 The local statutory partners for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare have been consulted on the outcomes, together with the Council's Senior Management Team all of whom have endorsed the outcomes of the Peer Review and to progress these outcomes through the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

5.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

5.1 Please see Paragraph 6.1.

6.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It should be noted that the findings and recommendations of the LGA's Peer Challenge are not binding on the Local Authority, nor do they provide any unanticipated outcomes or risks not previously envisaged. However, the findings provide welcome validation for the progress made in the quality of practice and provision in children's social care since the previous full inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in the Borough and accord with our perception of this quality, reflected within our own self-evaluation activity as we prepare for the next inspection of local authority children's services in the Borough.

7.0 GLOSSARY

7.1 None, applicable.

8.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1: LGA Peer Challenge Outcome Letter (Barnsley)

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

10.0 REPORT SIGN OFF

Financial consultation & sign off	Senior Financial Services officer consulted and date <i>Joshua Amahwe (07/04/2022)</i>
Legal consultation & sign off	Legal Services officer consulted and date <i>Jason Field 11/04/22</i>

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