

North Yorkshire County Council

Inspection of children's social care services

Inspection dates: 2 July 2018 to 6 July 2018

Lead inspector: Matt Reed, Her Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding

Children and families in North Yorkshire receive a consistent, high-quality service. There is outstanding practice within all teams, which has a demonstrably positive impact on effecting change for children and families. There are well-established multi-agency partnerships that understand thresholds, ensuring that families receive the right help in a timely way. Work is child-centred and there is a long-standing, clearly embedded model of practice, based on building effective relationships with children and families. The local authority is a committed and effective corporate parent that enables children and young people to remain close to their home and local community.

The leadership team is ambitious and forward thinking. Over a sustained period of time, it has built on an established philosophy of practice, which is clearly understood across the service and by partners. The leadership team has a clear oversight of practice and knows the services well, which is reflected in an accurate self-assessment. North Yorkshire is a learning organisation which has responded effectively to areas for development with a number of innovative projects that are having a tangible, positive impact on the lives of young people.

A stable workforce has been maintained, and an environment and culture established in which staff at all levels are confident in their practice and ability to meet the needs of children and families. There are plans in place for further developments to ensure that improvements are maintained, and that the service remains responsive to change.

What needs to improve

- Assessments need to reflect consistently that wider issues of identity and culture have been explored.
- All plans should focus on specific actions with clear timescales and be accessible to all parents and carers.
- The consistent recording of formal supervision on individual cases should demonstrate how reflective discussions have influenced care planning.
- The effective recording of all audit outcomes should inform the quality of practice and service development.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: Outstanding

1. Children and families receive a timely and proportionate response to contacts made to the Multi-Agency Screening Team (MAST). All contacts are red, amber, green (RAG) rated by a manager, who ensures that they are progressed in a timely way and signposted to the correct service. Referrals are received from a wide range of professionals, who provide good information that minimises the potential for delay. Multi-agency mapping meetings within MAST enhance the screening process, facilitating multi-agency analysis and resulting in a proportionate response to the presenting needs and concerns.
2. Management decision-making is effective, timely and child-centred, with clear rationale that identifies next steps and with seamless transfer into locality services. Referral information provided is appropriately streamlined and identifies key issues that formulate a danger statement and provide a clear analysis. This enables the receiving team to have a good, early understanding of risks, needs and packages of services that are necessary to help the child. As a result, assessments focus on presenting issues and help to ensure that plans are effective in order to meet a child's needs without delay.
3. A range of daily exploitation meetings within MAST review all children at risk of exploitation, including criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation and gang-related activity. Workers in prevention teams and social workers effectively

and consistently complete assessment tools to facilitate multi-agency discussion and contribute further to the meetings. Information-sharing between partners is highly effective and is focused on the presenting need. This provides consistency in identifying risk and a collaborative approach with the allocated worker to identify appropriate recommendations and actions based on their in-depth knowledge of the child and what approach will be most effective. Partner agencies update their databases to highlight the potential for further incidents and the need to take action. The resulting plans ensure a coherent, effective, child-centred response to the most vulnerable children. There are clear structures and mechanisms in place in order to review the level of risk, including actions and recommendations from previous reviews. The MAST team are ensuring that young people continue to receive a high level of support while they seek electronic solutions to enable more effective reviews of the plans.

4. Children not known but linked to alleged perpetrators or victims are appropriately signposted to the Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked group (VEMT), which considers risks and provides additional safeguards to those who are not actively involved with children's services. In addition, perpetrators and locations are shared with VEMT 2, thus contributing to the gathering of intelligence and knowledge of perpetrators, people and locations and the targeting of disruption activity if required.
5. The MAST manager and the police meet to consider children exposed to domestic abuse and whether a referral is required, thus providing an additional safety net to those who may not yet be known to services. The use of Operation Encompass, which alerts schools to domestic abuse incidents, has been extended to nurseries and child minders. This ensures that all children in this situation are effectively monitored and supported.
6. The Prevention teams include skilled and experienced workers, who are providing highly effective support to families. A wide range of interventions are used to ensure that families receive appropriate support that is proportionate to the level of concern. This is adeptly managed and supports positive relationships between workers and families in order to facilitate change and prevent escalation to statutory services. The processes to 'step up' to statutory services are clear and well understood and all requests are screened via MAST to ensure that this is appropriate, and families are not subject to statutory interventions and transferred to a new social worker unnecessarily. This allows families to remain with workers who know them well and who are best placed to facilitate sustainable, positive change in the family circumstances.
7. Thresholds for intervention are thoroughly understood throughout the multi-agency partnership, ensuring appropriate responses for both support and statutory intervention. Children are safeguarded, and risk is managed and responded to with purpose. Strategy meetings are very well attended by

appropriate professionals, and this facilitates the exchange of all relevant information. The recording of meetings is detailed, and there is a clear rationale for actions provided by managers. Subsequent S47s are thorough, well recorded, and contribute to the assessment of a child's needs and a balanced response to child protection concerns. Children are escalated to child protection processes without delay to ensure that risk is monitored at the right level and correct plan.

8. The public law outline (PLO) is used effectively. The letters to families are clear regarding concerns and potential outcomes if the matters cannot be resolved. The PLO plans are used to manage risk and, in the cases seen by inspectors, the process has been used to significantly reduce concerns and prevent the need to escalate concerns to court proceedings wherever possible.
9. The vast majority of assessments are of a high quality, and a well-embedded model of practice is used to facilitate a clear exploration of strengths and areas of concern within a family situation. In a very small number of assessments, issues of diversity and identity could have been explored further to enhance the understanding of the child and family circumstances, but this was not widespread and was not impacting significantly on children and the support that they receive. There is clear and evident management oversight and review of assessment progress to ensure that assessments are completed within a timescale that meets the needs of the family, thus reducing the potential for delay in services being provided. Information gathered in assessments is analysed clearly. This leads to a definitive rationale for further actions and well-informed plans, focusing resources to meet the identified needs of children.
10. The vast majority of plans seen, from those for early help to those for children looked after, are detailed, and clearly identify strengths and needs, with clear outcomes, actions and timescales. In a small number, further improvement could be made by ensuring that they are concise and include a sharper focus on timescales to meet the child's needs. However, in no instance was this seen to have an impact on the interventions provided. Plans are reviewed regularly and there is excellent multi-agency cooperation, reducing drift, and ensuring that the needs of children and families are met in a timely way.
11. There is clear management oversight throughout the local authority on the progress of plans. This ensures that identified needs are met and that families are not subject to services unnecessarily. The oversight is in different formats and, in some instances, formal supervision recording did not demonstrate the high-quality practice and reflective discussions that informed the agreed actions. This did not have a detrimental impact and, in a number of cases, the use of group supervision and discussion led to enriched interventions and increased confidence and resilience in practitioners.

12. At the heart of the North Yorkshire approach is a belief that stable relationships with workers who know their children and families extremely well is the key to creating and sustaining positive change. This was seen to be highly effective in a number of cases seen by inspectors. Children are at the centre of this and their experiences are clearly influencing the plans that are developed. Purposeful, sensitive and imaginative direct work is completed in order to gather the wishes and feelings of children and young people and understand their needs. There is a clear and well-embedded practice methodology that is well understood and that guides the work of all practitioners within children's social care and the wider multi-agency partnership. Workers know their children well and manageable caseloads provide them with the conditions to maintain relationships. Children and families do not change worker without good reason, thus facilitating longer-term, meaningful relationships. This approach was seen throughout the inspection to be having a significant and positive impact on a number of children and their families.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: Outstanding

13. High-quality edge of care services are contributing to children remaining in the family home wherever possible and whenever it is in the child's best interests. This is preventing children from entering care unnecessarily and maintains a level of stability in their living arrangements. Children are not left in situations of unmanageable risk, and decisions for children to become looked after are based on clear assessments of their needs and are appropriate and timely.
14. Wherever it is safe and in their best interests, children return to live with parents and are supported to do so in order to prevent the need for further periods of care. When rehabilitation cannot be achieved, permanence in all forms is considered promptly, thus enabling children to be placed with long-term carers at the earliest opportunity. Extended family members are assessed so that, whenever possible, children can remain in their extended birth family. Applications to court, supported by high-quality statements, are accepted and made in a timely way. The front-loading of assessments ensures that matters progress swiftly and delays in determining permanence for children are minimised. Adoption is appropriately considered, and inspectors saw good concurrent planning and effective early permanence planning facilitating matches with adoptive carers at the earliest opportunity.
15. Children in care have comprehensive care plans that cover all aspects of their needs, including contact with significant people. The majority of plans are reviewed within timescales, offering further oversight of the care that children receive. Children are at the centre of these plans and their needs clearly drive the focus of the work.

16. Children's health needs are assessed and monitored on a regular basis, with positive impact, although some children and young people do not receive their initial health assessments within timescales. Care leavers have access to their health histories. The local authority has developed a service where psychologists are available to all fieldwork teams, including the looked after children and permanence teams, via the psychologically informed partnership approach (PIPA). The psychologists primarily offer consultation to workers. The ready access to psychologists via PIPA ensures that workers receive advice on meeting the emotional needs of children looked after and care leavers. This facilitates a more attuned response to children's behaviours. When necessary, the psychologists can provide a direct service, reducing potential delays in accessing short-term, focused support in relation to the mental and emotional health of the children.
17. Education is promoted for children in care and they are well supported by the virtual school, which is committed to the best possible educational outcomes for North Yorkshire children. Inclusion and attendance is monitored well via collaborative arrangements with schools, thus ensuring that where attendance drops, action can be taken promptly. Pupil premium funding is well targeted to meet children's needs. Children can access enhancement activities to support their learning and develop further. Children are achieving, and the outcomes for most children looked after are improving, ensuring that they are not disadvantaged by being looked after. The local authority is aspirational as a corporate parent and the achievements of children in care are celebrated, as was witnessed in the virtual school graduation.
18. The No Wrong Door project is a service for young people aged 12 to 25 who are either in care or on the edge of care, or who are moving towards independence. The aim is to provide an integrated multi-agency service that provides dedicated support. This promotes stability and positive achievement with young people who have more complex needs. Inspectors saw the impact of this work with a number of children, and there is evidence of some very strong practice producing tangible change for some of the children who have more complex needs. Inspectors saw authoritative, evidence-based practice that is effecting real change and reducing risks associated with exploitation, offending and substance misuse. Workers are persistent in their interventions, which proceed at a pace that is right for the child, building on their self-esteem and areas in which they can achieve. The use of specialist foster carers is assisting some young people to move out of residential care and back into a family environment. This is also developing the foster carers' skillsets in dealing with the more challenging young people. The project has been independently evaluated and has demonstrated that it is highly effective in diverting children from care and promoting placement stability for children already looked after.

19. The local authority is committed to ensuring that children remain close to families and within North Yorkshire. There are highly effective recruitment strategies, which ensures sufficient placements and enables them to maintain links with their local communities. The majority are placed in foster care, most with in-house carers, enabling children to be cared for in a family environment. Long-term placement stability is promoted, and foster carers are well supported in order to facilitate stability and prevent children from having to move placements unnecessarily.
20. Children are assisted to understand their life history through the completion of life-story work. The completion of this work is tracked effectively, with the emphasis on using the work therapeutically and building resilience in children, done at a time that is right for the child and at their own pace, rather than meeting set timescales. Examples seen were of a high quality and will prove to be useful tools in assisting young people to understand their background and the reasons why they do not live with birth family.
21. Young people leaving care and moving towards independence are well supported and given opportunities to succeed. Staying put is promoted and a lot of effort is placed on ensuring that care leavers have access to an appropriate range of accommodation that meets their needs and helps them move towards independence safely. A variety of communication methods are used to encourage young people to think ahead, develop effective safety plans and consider the long-term impact of decisions. This gives them every opportunity to succeed in the future. Care leavers spoken to were positive about the support that they had received and the influence that their workers had on helping them to maintain stable accommodation, pursue interests and gain employment. They believed that the support was right for them, individual to their needs and tailored to their circumstances.
22. Opportunity brokers, employed as part of the 'No Wrong Door' initiative, ensure that care leavers are encouraged and supported to achieve and maximise educational and employment opportunities. Inspectors saw highly effective work, ensuring that care leavers were assisted to realise their potential at a pace that was right for them, and enabling them to access positive opportunities. Pathway plans are completed with the young people, and detail their needs and the support provided to meet those needs. The plans are reviewed regularly with the young person to ensure that they remain valid and focused on current need. The service is aware that it could be improved further by making the plans more dynamic documents that reflect the young person's situation and it is taking steps to alter this process. These plans did not detract from the care leavers' service being responsive to the young people and ensuring that their needs are being met.
23. The local authority is seeking to provide opportunities for care leavers, while utilising their experiences to support other young people. A restorative academy has recently been developed that offers training, employment and

career development for care leavers, while providing support to young people on the edge of care. This is a creative approach to maintaining change, while giving young people a platform from which to develop a career. Positive examples were seen of the work that was helping to prevent family breakdown for some children. This model is to be expanded further to offer opportunities to more young people.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: Outstanding

24. The senior leadership team has for some time had a clear vision of the direction in which it wishes to travel and the standards of service it wishes to deliver. It is a strong, forward thinking and progressive leadership team that is clearly focused on the needs and issues that affect North Yorkshire children. The leaders are ambitious and aspirational for children, and know the service well. An accurate evaluation of practice clearly identified areas of strength and areas in which further development is required. Senior managers and the lead member have a good understanding and knowledge of issues that are affecting children and families and have invested in services, with the explicit aim of meeting needs at the earliest opportunity. The lead member and chief executive and council have agreed to this investment, demonstrating that there is a clear understanding, as well as corporate aims and objectives for children. There is an unquestionable sense of a shared philosophy, in which the needs of children are prioritised, and this is reflected in corporate decision-making and throughout the organisation.
25. North Yorkshire children's services is a learning organisation that is continually seeking to develop and improve. Feedback is actively sought from a variety of sources, including children and families. The local authority is considering new ways of gathering feedback through an app to improve the rate of responses and widen the knowledge gained from children and families in order to support the continual high ambition for ongoing development and improvement.
26. Audits are carried out, but the local authority is moving away from considering them as 'audits' and towards a system of considering them as 'learning spaces', which are completed between the social workers and managers. This collaborative approach, including feedback from families, is aimed at developing a culture in which learning can be taken from work completed. The level of detail in audits is not yet consistent across the service and, for some, there needs to be a sharper focus on the quality of the work rather than compliance, if they are to contribute effectively to service development.
27. North Yorkshire is a committed and effective corporate parent that is actively seeking to keep children within its boundaries to facilitate targeted support with local services. The local authority works hard to ensure that there is

capacity to meet the needs of children and young people and to support the relationship model of practice that has been established and is well embedded within the organisation. North Yorkshire local authority has been responsive to new challenges and is aware of pressures placed on the service due to increased demand.

28. Leaders' innovation and creativity drive strong engagement with children and families. With a clear vision, leaders target resources to those areas where impact is needed most. Independent evaluations of 'No Wrong Door' have demonstrated the positive impact that it is having, and this was also seen by inspectors. PIPA, although a relatively new service, has received positive initial feedback from workers on the beneficial impact that it has had on their work, upskilling them to improve the support that they can provide to children. The restorative academy is a creative approach to providing opportunities to care leavers while using their experiences to support others. Despite the positive impact of these innovations, the leadership team is aware that ever-changing demands mean that further developments will be required if progress is to be maintained.
29. North Yorkshire, as part of Partners in Practice, is outward looking, supporting a number of other local authorities and promoting good practice and service developments. This further demonstrates the local authority's ambition to be at the forefront of service development for children and families.
30. Relationships with key partners are well developed and they have contributed towards the development of innovations. This enhances the ability to effect real change in the lives of families. Partners understand the model of practice, and responsibilities are shared, thus facilitating a collaborative approach to ensuring that children's needs are met and risks are managed effectively.
31. Leaders and managers at all levels have good knowledge and a clear understanding of performance issues, and they receive data that enables them to keep an oversight of demands on the service. The lead member and chief executive have agreed investment when required in order to ensure that the drive for continual high standards can be maintained. There is a clear understanding of frontline practice through multi-agency and individual audit activity. Information is used effectively to drive improvement in the services to children and families. Managers have a good oversight of individual cases, and, while reflective supervision records could improve, plans are progressed and decisions are clear.
32. There are clear expectations regarding the highest standards that North Yorkshire local authority aims to achieve and does achieve. This aspiration is clearly articulated and understood by all in the organisation and by partners. A stable workforce has enabled a culture to be developed in which social workers and managers feel confident and safe to manage risk appropriately,

and this is positively influencing the approach to working with children and families.

33. North Yorkshire local authority monitors workloads and has invested in the recruitment of social workers so that effective relationship work with children and families can be maintained. There is investment in the development of workers and managers, who are able to access opportunities to further enhance their practice. Staff report being well supported and there is a clear model of practice that is well embedded, allowing practice to flourish. This is having demonstrable impact on the work with families.



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