

Appendix 3

Inspection of Services for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers – Recommendations 1 September 2015.

Recommendation		Progress
1	Ensure robust management oversight of the single assessment process at both first tier and senior management level, so that children and families are seen and risks evaluated within timescales that meet the child's need.	Significant improvements have been made in some areas. There is a need to continue to focus on management ensuring proper investment in training and supervision, developing their skills and setting clear expectations, enabling them to demonstrate a sound evaluation of risks and robust assessments to be made. Improvements will also be made in ensuring the timeliness, quality and consistency of supervision at all levels of management around the assessment process.
2	Drive improvement through the quality assurance of assessments that ensures that all areas of risk to children are addressed, historical information is considered and analysis is robust, so that children's needs, including the need for protection, are fully addressed.	Although some improvement has been made in seeing children and the timeliness of assessments, further work is now essential to robustly assess risk, ensure clear standards are communicated enabling consistency and embed quality assurance processes to ensure that these standards are met and maintained. Further work is also needed around multi-agency involvement in assessments and recognising the impact of cumulative neglect.
3	Improve the quality and timeliness of social work reports prepared for child protection conferences, ensure that initial child protection conferences are held within timescales that accord with statutory guidance, and ensure core groups are recorded effectively.	Significant improvements have been seen in the timeliness of reports. The focus for improvement activity is now on driving up the quality and consistency of assessments and reports and ensuring that core groups are recorded accurately and in a timely manner.
4	Review the current configuration of social work teams to ensure equity in workload distribution and that the working environment is conducive to good social work practice across the whole of the service.	The area teams have been centralised and transformed into Safeguarding & Assessment Teams. These teams now need to be stabilised, permanent social workers recruited and workloads balanced. Further work is underway to review the structures of other teams, ensure sufficient capacity to meet changing needs of an evolving service and to create more stability within a permanent workforce.

Recommendation		Progress
5	Review processes and resources available for performance monitoring at all levels of the organisation and ensure that robust arrangements are put in place as a matter of urgency.	Significant improvements have been made to performance management and ownership with members and at all tiers of management. The new reporting introduced alongside this Improvement Plan and the implementation of Liquidlogic provides a refined focus for activity.
6	Ensure that elected members are rigorous in their understanding of children's services performance and are enabled to robustly challenge senior managers to improve.	BUSINESS AS USUAL IMPROVEMENT To be monitored through Scrutiny work plans and regular reporting cycles. Work on re-writing the CYPP will continue as business as usual activity, aligned to the transformation work and vision for children (or children's services) within Darlington along with reviewing and implementing revised governance arrangements. The lead member will be acting as a champion to ensure that the profile is retained and members understand their role in ensuring the safeguarding of children.
7	Complete a thorough review of all children subject to section 20 accommodation to ensure that its use is legitimate and appropriate in all cases.	Section 20 has been reviewed and the key messages communicated with actions developed to place greater emphasis on permanency planning. A re-audit is planned and monitoring will demonstrate impacts from clear communication supporting improved practice.
8	Ensure that independent reviewing officers (IRO) demonstrate rigour when overseeing both the quality and progress of plans, and the frequency of social work visits to children who are the subject of child protection plans.	KEY PRIORITY (Ofsted) A recording and monitoring system in place for practice issues raised by IROs and there is evidence that improvements are made as a result of some challenges but a significant amount of work is still required to improve the quality of practice.
9	When IROs challenge poor practice, make sure this is clearly recorded and monitored to ensure improvements are made and where necessary, a lack of progress can be formally escalated to senior leaders.	KEY PRIORITY (Ofsted) Processes have been introduced for raising and escalating concerns from IROs, but this has not been embedded and a lot more work is required in enhancing their challenge of poor practice, following up to ensure that practice improvements have been made and capturing the lessons challenges from these to ensure that we become a learning organisation.
10	Ensure when children are looked after that decisions about their need for permanence are timely with robust oversight, including by IROs.	Policy and procedures have been reviewed and improvements made. Further work is required to ensure that they remain up to date, reflect emerging notable practice and drive improvements in permanency planning at an early opportunity.

Recommendation		Progress
11	Ensure that return interviews are offered for all children who go missing and that the take-up of these interviews is monitored and information is used to inform plans to keep children safe.	Weekly reporting has been introduced and a new contract established providing greater resilience. Further work remains in integrating reporting within the new system, analysing information to inform future work and ensuring linkage with MEG and other processes to keep children safe.
12	Make sure that early help is effectively targeted, coordinated and evaluated so that families receive appropriate support when need is first identified, and the quality of early help assessments is improved by robust quality assurance arrangements.	A review of the CAP and MASH is underway in order to establish the right resources, systems and processes for managing this aspect of the service and develop the correct performance measures to be introduced with implementation of the new case management system.
13	Extend the range of housing provision available to homeless 16 and 17 year-olds and for care leavers so that no young person is placed in bed and breakfast accommodation.	A housing options adviser has been built into the establishment to support this group. Further work is now required to develop pathway plans at a younger age enabling greater availability of the right type of accommodation through effective planning and close working with housing.
14	Ensure that all children looked after can access an independent visitor when necessary, and that the impact of advocacy is subject to evaluation and review.	Independent visitors are offered to all young people and a new contract for providing advocacy has been let. The next steps focus on promoting the value of these services to young people, encouraging take-up and monitoring the impact and benefits for young people engaged with either provider in order to improve the offer to others.
15	Ensure that all children looked after have timely initial health assessments.	KEY PRIORITY (DfE REVIEW / PIs) A new process is now in place and correct forms are being used. This system is not yet embedded and improvement in completion and return of IHAs has not been evidenced through performance reports. The focus is now on providing sound management oversight and accountability for the process, ensuring that improvements are made within the Council enabling timely completion by health and escalating issues arising.
16	Improve the monitoring of educational progress of children looked after so that action is taken to narrow the gap in attainment compared with all children in Darlington.	BUSINESS AS USUAL IMPROVEMENT Now included within the workplan and scope of the Corporate Parenting Panel, with a focus on ensuring that all children have the new EPEP by the end of October and that actions are taken to narrow the gap. This will continue to be

Recommendation		Progress
		championed by the lead member and greater emphasis given to schools having a lead governor for safeguarding.
17	Improve the consistency and quality of personal education plans and ensure that the pupil premium is effectively utilised to improve the educational attainment and achievement of looked after children.	BUSINESS AS USUAL IMPROVEMENT Now included within the workplan and scope of the Corporate Parenting Panel to ensure consistent quality of PEPs through the quality assurance of the Virtual School Head and there will be proposals for a peer review by another local authority developed.
18	Ensure that reports are completed on fostering and adoption services every six months so that elected members, senior leaders and other stakeholders receive information about performance, standards, achievements and service developments in line with national minimum standards.	BUSINESS AS USUAL IMPROVEMENT Now included within the workplan and scope of the Corporate Parenting Panel to continue improvements in the quality of reports.