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**UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD'S JOURNEY**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an overview of the child's journey to Elected Members allowing for a broader understanding of the intervention points throughout Children's Social Care.

**Summary**

2. As part of The Munro Review, Professor Eileen Munro in her Review of Child Protection in England (2011) "The Child's Journey", emphasised the importance of early intervention, of getting help early, understanding need and receiving effective protection from abuse and neglect. The child's journey formed an integral aspect of the Single Inspection Framework effective from November 2013. The framework for the inspection was explicit that local authorities should ensure the voice of the child is clear and that their feedback is used to systematically improve services.

**Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that:
  - (a) The committee note the contents of this report
  - (b) Future learning and improvements reflecting the child's journey are presented for Scrutiny to note.

**Suzanne Joyner  
Director of Children and Adults Services**

**Background Papers**

This report should be read in conjunction with the attachment "A Journey through Darlington Children's Services – Case Study, Daniel and Cathy" that was submitted to the Improvement Board in December 2015, highlighting the journey of the child through Darlington Children's Services from the point of first contact.

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| S17 Crime and Disorder           |  |
| Health and Well Being            |  |
| Carbon Impact                    |  |
| Diversity                        |  |
| Wards Affected                   |  |
| Groups Affected                  |  |
| Budget and Policy Framework      |  |
| Key Decision                     |  |
| Urgent Decision                  |  |
| One Darlington: Perfectly Placed |  |
| Efficiency                       |  |

## MAIN REPORT

### Background

4. Darlington Borough Council was inspected by Ofsted in June 2015. The inspection was conducted under the Single Inspection Framework (SIF).
5. The SIF focuses on the journey of the child, and of the experiences and responses at each intervention through the system, from the identification of vulnerability through to intervention, assessment and care planning.
6. The points at which the inspectors track the child's journey are the following:
  - (a) Early help – including early help assessments
  - (b) Referral and assessment
  - (c) Children in need
  - (d) Child protection
  - (e) Continuing help and support for families
  - (f) The decision to accommodate
  - (g) The decision to remove
  - (h) Permanence planning
  - (i) Placement decisions, including work to support return home
  - (j) Leaving care
7. The inspectors will have supported their findings through a range of observations, direct interviews with children, young people and with practitioners, also through a range of inspection based activity such as case tracking and case file auditing.
8. At each point questions will have been targeted around the quality and impact of the work and whether changes to the life of the child can be measured.
9. At any point within the system, a child may be subject to a range of interventions and assessments that will include a network of professionals who have significant contact and involvement with the child and their family.

10. Examples as follows:

(a) **For early help and the front door**

Are thresholds sufficiently understood across partnerships? Are vulnerable children receiving the right levels of support through universal and targeted services?

(b) **For children in care**

Are we reassured we have the right children in care? Is there supporting evidence of Family Group Conferences? Have all legal routes to permanency been fully explored? Have all extended family members been fully explored? Does the child fully understand their plan? Can the Independent Reviewing Officers demonstrate challenge and scrutiny to the care planning where drift and delay is evident?

(c) **If a child in care is frequently missing**

Is there evidence to support return home interviews are being carried out? Has the Independent Reviewing Officer been informed? Do we collate information on children missing from school, care and home that provides broader messages on emerging themes?

(d) **When children move across differing service areas**

Do their case records reflect they have been informed? Do they know who their main contacts are?

(e) **For those children subject to a Child Protection plan (and where age appropriate)**

Does the young person understand the levels of concern regarding significant harm? Have they been given access to an advocate? Do they understand what needs to change within the family network and environment before they can no longer be subject to a plan?

(f) **For those young people believed to be at risk of child sexual exploitation**

Do we have in place a comprehensive approach to tackling and responding to those young people? Are we able to evidence compliance with the Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) process? Is there engagement and oversight from relevant partners: Police, Health, designated safeguarding leads across health?

(g) **For those transitioning to adult services**

Are referral pathways to adult services clearly understood? Do care leavers have an understanding of their full financial entitlement? Are they equipped with the requisite skills to transition to adulthood? Have all education and employment opportunities been fully explored?

11. Whilst the above example summarise some of the key questions to be asked, it is to be acknowledged the significance of the voice of the child throughout and whether the involvement and views of the child and their family have been included in planning for the child. Regularly updated chronologies of significant events

undertaken by practitioners should be reflected on all open cases.

12. In January 2016, Ofsted published the latest framework for Joint Targeted Area Inspections. The Framework will commence from February 2016.
13. Future inspections will be conducted with involvement from Care Quality Commission, HMIC, and HM Inspectorate of Probation.
14. Part of the inspection will focus on the evaluation of children's experiences, looking within the joint partnership arrangements in keeping children safe. An additional "deep dive" will focus on a particular theme to allow for additional scrutiny on a specific type of harm. The first of such "deep dives" will focus on child sexual exploitation and children missing from home, care or education.

### **Next Steps**

15. To agree specific areas for further scrutiny, taking into account the agreed role of the Improvement Board and note impact of improvements made to date
16. The published Ofsted report and subsequent Improvement Plan have provided focus and clarity on the way forward, and each part of the organisation will be clear in their role in embedding the journey of the child in their visions and aspirations.