



Children & Families

Our Flourishing Future Progress Report

Quarter 3 2018/19

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1. Director's Statement

We are committed to a journey of continuous service improvement, with aspirations to be judged as 'good' as an outcome of our next full Ofsted inspection. We have developed our service improvement plan and measure our performance against our key actions and performance indicators.

In November, we refreshed our self-assessment in anticipation of our next annual conversation with Ofsted, which in turn will inform areas for further focussed visits or inspections.

As an active member of the North-East Association of Directors of Childrens Services (ADCS) we have embraced the sector-led programme of improvement and in November we completed and submitted our self-assessment. This culminates in a challenge event with the outcome of identifying areas where we can offer support or receive support from other North East Local Authorities depending on our strengths and areas for development.

We identified concerns in relation to the level of improvement in the consistency and quality of our assessments and plans and delivered workshops covering such themes as what a good case file should look like; good chronologies; quality assessments; what good care plans and reviews look like; and reflective supervision. To assist with quality checking our progress we invited a peer review to take place and via the ADCS sector led programme of improvement North Tyneside Council concluded a peer review audit in November 2018 and they have been able to offer valuable feedback that we have incorporated into our improvement plan. In summary, the peer review headline strengths found that:

- Workers across the system are passionate about achieving better outcomes for children, young people and families

- Workers know their children well (with impressive continuity of case work, in some cases for years)
- Child-centred practice shines through in discussion
- Workers know what needs to happen to improve performance

Headline areas for consideration found that:

- The documented record did not always reflect what was evident from discussions
- The language used was not always as simple as it could be and could be more specific
- Networks were underused or absent from some plans
- There was inconsistency in the quality of plans and assessments

In respect of social work practice, we continue to work hard to listen to our teams and respond proactively. The appointment of deputy team managers is seen as a real strength which we know has improved morale through staff feedback. We want to be the local employer of choice and we have strengthened our offer to recruit and retain social workers. Although we still have some vacancies we are closely monitoring caseloads and impact and at present only employ 5 agency staff. This along with the implementation of Signs of Safety which is growing in pace daily, with many of our managers having already undertaken their 5 days of training, is bringing a welcome change to practice and is actively fostering and encouraging a more family focused approach.

We know that when we talk to staff, they are able to demonstrate that they know their children well; they are using a variety of tools and techniques to engage with them. However, we still need to improve our recording of direct work with children to validate this process; we need to ensure we capture the voice of the child and thus evidence their wishes and feelings within the heart of the assessment and subsequent plan.

The challenges within our Education Service also continue with the ongoing changing landscape. The majority of our schools are now academies under a variety of Multi-Academy Trust arrangements. The idea of the Local Authority remains, however, to champion the needs of vulnerable children and young people and to support school improvement. This is done by working in partnership with sector leaders, the Department of Education, the Regional Schools Commissioner, Ofsted and the Dioceses.

Our capacity in Redcar and Cleveland is extremely limited and resources are not currently sufficient to enable more school improvement activity to take place. The effectiveness of the service is therefore questionable and this provides a significant challenge for the Council with regards to meeting its overall Educational responsibilities.

We continue to work effectively with our key partners and the proposed South Tees multi-agency children's hub continues to develop and the progress in the last quarter has been significant. In addition to this we are developing our plans to replace the Local Safeguarding Children's Board with a single South Tees Multi- Agency Safeguarding Partnership. We aim to publish our new arrangements by June 2019 and to go-live soon after.

The budget continues to be a major cause for concern and with support from our colleagues in finance we closely monitor and project our spend, continuing to explore ways of reducing non-essential spend across the service, whilst trying to plan strategically for future years.

The outcome of a recent benchmarking exercise highlighted that our proportionate spend on early help services is high against that reported by other local authorities and as a result in quarter 3 we undertook a stringent service review of non-statutory early help services. We are aware of the anxieties caused to staff during this review and we are committed to supporting throughout this process. We are balancing the impact of the early help review by diverting some of the funding to the development and investment of a robust edge of care offer. Additional and bespoke services are being designed to support young people who are on the edge of care, with the aim of keeping families together.

In summary, we have experienced a busy year, with ever-increasing workloads, restrictive recruitment challenges and significant budget pressures. However, with a stable senior leadership team in place and an invigorated structure, we have been able to identify and work towards clear goals for service improvement. Against this difficult backdrop, we remain committed to improving the life chances of our children and young people and we always strive to find imaginative and innovative solutions to the challenges we face as a service.

2. Corporate Delivery Plan

A Brighter Future for our Children

We will ensure young people get the most out of life and **access good education** to develop a broad range of skills for adulthood. We will work in partnership with schools and colleges to make secondary and further education in this Borough as good as our high performing primary education.

- Contribute to the merger of Redcar & Cleveland College with Stockton Riverside College, securing for the future, good Further Education provision at the Redcar campus
- Work with the governing bodies of our maintained schools to improve educational achievement

The merger of Redcar & Cleveland College and Stockton Riverside College is complete. Jason Falkner has taken up the post as Principal of the college, from his previous role as Vice Principal at Stockton Riverside; he started in September 2018. He has already worked hard to secure a strong management team, develop new courses and extend provision for children and young people in Redcar and Cleveland. We have strong ongoing relationships with the college through for example the Strategic Education Boards Foundation for Jobs and EIP.

Council School Improvement Strategies - The council has been left, over successive years of funding cuts, with a very small school improvement function. From September 2018, the team that remains is a few advisers, one for secondary education, one for primary education and a teacher for early years managed by an Assistant Director. There is also a Virtual Headteacher with a small team to champion the educational outcomes for children in our care. As a result, the function of school improvement had fallen largely to sector led forums facilitated by the Local Authority. For secondary schools this is the Education Improvement Partnership. The Education Improvement Partnership has identified the following priorities for 2018/2019.

Redcar and Cleveland Secondary Education Improvement: Partnership Key Priorities 2018/2019 - The Redcar and Cleveland Education Improvement Partnership, representing all secondary educational leaders in schools, colleges and Academies has been working together to analyse the performance and ensuring that their priorities are making the difference. The LA is part of this partnership and supports it in identifying, monitoring and assessing the impact of strategies to support the improvement in key priority areas. The key priorities 2018 -2019 agreed by leaders are:

Priority One - Improving outcomes for disadvantaged students

- Reducing absence
- Reducing persistent absence

- Increasing progress
- Improving attainment

Priority Two - Ensuring outcomes for key groups improve

- Special Educational Needs and Disability
- High achieving students
- Improving outcomes for boys

Priority Three – Improving behaviour

- A focus upon managing behaviour
- Reducing exclusions

Strategic Education Board - There is also a Strategic Education Board which is a relatively new board which oversees the strategies in education and is a cross phase partnership involving key partners. This is an opportunity for the Local Authority to bring strategies to the table and gain collective agreement with Headteachers to drive forward improvement strategies.

In the Autumn term 2018, the following new strategies have been agreed through this board:

- An Alternative Provision Strategy

This strategy will improve the range of high quality provision available to schools to enable opportunities for young people to engage with meaningful learning outside of school to help prevent exclusions

- A Transition Strategy

This strategy is working with the leadership of a Task and Finish Scrutiny Committee to ensure there is appropriate, planned transition arrangements for pupils between settings which enable them to be nurtured and their academic progress accelerated.

- Pupil Mobility strategy

This looks at the rates of pupil movement in the system, which can be very challenging for schools to manage, and proposes strategies to help address the issues of in-year transfers and fair access referrals.

Pupil Placement Panel - To reduce the number of exclusions a new Pupil Placement Panel has been convened to focus on:

- agreeing joint and collaborative action on shared priorities to improve behaviour and

attendance in schools and academies. This action will include the identification and allocation of resources for those shared priorities.

- ensuring that unplaced children follow the Fair Access Protocol, and are placed quickly. It is understood that all admissions authorities (namely schools and academies) must participate in the Fair Access Protocol.
- working closely regarding the admission arrangements for young people into to the pupil referral unit where necessary.
- facilitating multi-agency solutions to educational support and provision for young people.

The new panel will meet every fortnight and will examine the provision for any student at risk of exclusion, all Managed Moves and admissions to Archway. It will have a wide representation from school leaders, the Local Authority inclusion and admission services, Early Help and the Pupil Referral Unit.

Exclusions from school will be mapped each week and the Head of Education will ensure suitable and timely challenge and intervention. The focus of the local authority Inclusion Team has been revised to ensure that interventions are triggered in response to incidents of fixed term exclusions. An escalation process for interventions for pupils who are pending permanent exclusion has been developed.

Activity will commence to secure more alternative provision, and more alternative curriculum opportunities for learners at risk of exclusion. This will be in conjunction with Redcar and Cleveland colleges, existing providers and commercial providers. The capital build projects for Archways and Pathways will help secure more places to support students presenting challenge.

Virtual School for Children in Our Care - The Virtual School is currently addressing several key areas to meet the challenges of supporting children in our care in schools in and out of borough:

- supporting the development of an alternative provision strategy in partnership with schools and/or commissioned by the local authority and to include development of strategies to meet yearly increase in number of children in our care issued with an Education Health & Care Plan who need to access out of area provision.
- Development of accountability measures to scrutinise Pupil Premium spend on improving outcomes for children in our care.
- Development of data management systems to monitor progress and attainment of children in our care.
- Develop strategy around widening the performance indicators measures of successful outcomes for children in our care and work strategically with key partners to ensure all children in our care up to 18yrs are supported to fulfil their potential.

- Continue to develop inclusion strategies to reduce rate of fixed term exclusions issued to children in our care.

Tees Valley Combined Authority - An Education and Innovation Strategy exists within the Combined Authority which aims to support school improvement. This has yet to be fully realised or the funding released.

Opportunity North East - In October 2018 ‘Opportunity North East’ has named Redcar and Cleveland as a focus area along with 3 others: Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Northumberland. The focus areas are to enhance social mobility through: Local Enterprise Partnerships, Teacher Training, Recruitment and Retention Strategy, Teacher Development Premium, Good Behaviour Management. Officers are working with the Department for Education to identify local strategies and local schools which may benefit.

The role of the council in education moving forward - There are very few schools in Redcar and Cleveland which are council maintained schools, the majority are now academies under a variety of academy multi-academy trusts. The role of the Local Authority remains, however, to champion the needs of vulnerable learners and to support school improvement. This is done by working in partnership with sector leaders, the Department for Education, the Regional School Commissioner, Ofsted and the Dioceses.

Capacity in Redcar and Cleveland is very limited; resources are not currently sufficient to enable more school improvement activity to take place and the services have lost the ability to trade to draw in income. The effectiveness of the service is therefore questionable and this in turn provides challenge for the Council with regards to its overall Educational responsibilities.

A Brighter Future for our Children
We will ensure children and young people are safe, protected from harm and neglect and can grow up, able to look after themselves, and achieve their full potential. We will tackle the causes of neglect and abuse.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a new policy which sets out clearly defined levels of financial support payable to carers, to enable them to meet the individual needs of the children and young people placed in their care, under the terms of a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order • Establish a multi-agency early help hub to provide coordinated services for children and young people, reducing the need for statutory intervention

Special Guardianship Policy Development

In April 2018, a proposal was agreed by Cabinet to ensure that financial support awarded to carers looking after children in their care under the terms of a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order is based on the child’s needs; that all families, regardless of their

income, receive a contribution towards looking after the child or young person in their care; and that financial support will not end abruptly.

We set ourselves a strategic priority to consider this new approach to financial support as part of an holistic new policy, to include the broader terms of support on offer to carers and their children. We challenged ourselves to develop the new offer and write the revised policy by the end of Quarter 3.

Since this initial proposal was agreed by Cabinet, the national agenda around Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Orders has gained significant momentum. There is an increasing number of local authorities that have been subjected to rigorous Ombudsmen investigations and costly judicial review processes; many resulting in hefty compensation claims against them. The requirement to have robust policy and processes around these Orders is paramount.

Although our proposal was built on a review of policies from other areas; and was backed by legal advice at the time, the changing landscape now means we need to re-think our position.

With support from the local judiciary, the five Tees local authorities have recently agreed to work together to develop a set of shared principles around the use of these Orders and hopefully agree a united approach to the offer for families. The first of a series of cross-local authority meetings has taken place, with an outline plan developed to take this priority forward.

Although we recognise the delay in delivery of the revised policy due to this change of direction, it has not halted our progress to develop services locally. The Assistant Director met with a group of Special Guardians from across the Borough this quarter and although the group did not represent the whole of the special guardianship network, it was a useful opportunity for her to hear about some of the day to day challenges facing these individuals undertaking a full time caring role for some of our most vulnerable children and young people. It was clear that their issues are not just about financial support; carers told the Assistant Director that they would benefit greatly from access to ongoing support to help in times of need or family crisis. They also shared that they would like access to training opportunities around topics such as: attachment; understanding trauma and adverse childhood experiences; general parenting skills; and behaviour management.

In direct response to our consultation with carers, as well as our discussions with other local authorities, we have just introduced a new social work role, specifically to support all SGO and CAO carers. We are also in the process of introducing two specialist Family Support Workers to strengthen the offer available to our carers who need extra support.

Multi-Agency Early Help Hub

The multi-agency early help hub will be integrated with safeguarding in the establishment of the South Tees Multi-Agency Children's Hub (MACH). A South Tees Multi-Agency Children's Hub Project Board was established in June 2018; jointly chaired by both Local Authority Directors of Children's Services. The partnership commissioned a Project Development Lead

to support timely delivery of the new service. A series of work streams have since been established; and discussions in relation to the operational model and staffing have now progressed.

The Strategic Project Board agreed that RCBC will be the lead organisation for the South Tees Multi Agency Children's Hub (MACH) and a 'go live' date of April 2019 was set. The MACH will be led by a new strategic service manager. All staff who are currently part of Redcar and Middlesbrough's 'Front Door' service will transfer into the MACH under a TUPE agreement. Middlesbrough's HR team have commenced the consultation process with those staff who will TUPE into the MACH.

It has been agreed that the MACH will be based in the same building at Daisy Lane, Ormesby that currently accommodates the Adults Single Point of Access (SPA). There are vacant rooms at the rear of the building that should provide adequate space for the staff who will operate the MACH.

Amongst other elements, such as accommodation and IT requirements, the April 'go live' date was subject to the successful appointment of the new service manager. Unfortunately, a recruitment process was undertaken involving all key partners, but resulted in no appointment being made. The recruitment process will recommence in February 2019 and interim arrangements will be considered in the meantime.

It was always accepted that the April launch date was ambitious, but by setting a challenging goal, the momentum was created to drive the project forward. A revised, realistic launch date has been agreed as 1st June 2019. We are therefore confident that this strategic priority will be met within Quarter 2 of the current financial year.

A Brighter Future for our Children
We will support young people to get good quality local jobs through the delivery of Foundation for Jobs, bringing opportunities to get more skills and work experience, and gain the confidence to succeed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deliver the outcomes of the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) project.

Foundation for Jobs is the overarching umbrella of the various cross-cutting services and programmes that exist in Redcar and Cleveland. The Local Authority and Partner Organisations are working together to ensure that all young people access appropriate opportunities in education, training and employment. The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) is one such programme that moves young people into education, employment or training.

YEI is a partnership between the five Tees Valley local authorities and a consortium of 40+ organisations; part funded through the European Social Fund and delivered in Redcar and Cleveland through the local authority and several specialist partners. Tailored interventions, including Key Worker support and bespoke training for young people, aged 16 to 29 years.

YEI is helping to reduce both the number of young people who are not in education, employment and training in the Borough and youth unemployment.

The Council recently received an extension to the contract, taking the programme to May 2021. By the end of the first contract period July 2018, YEI had engaged 540 young people, with 208 moving into a positive outcome (in the main employment), with the conversion rate for those completing their programme and entering employment 76%.

Good Connections

We will **make it easier to get to places** to access learning, social, leisure, and employment opportunities, especially those parts of the Borough where public transport is more limited.

- Promote a learn to drive scheme so that young people in disadvantaged communities can learn to drive and pass their test when they reach age 17.

The Learn to Drive scheme for 17-18 year olds in the borough is being established and will be launched in Spring 2019. The scheme will provide a comprehensive package of training and support that will help move young people who are not in education, employment and training into employment or an apprenticeship. When transport has been assessed as a barrier for young people being employed support will be provided in respect of driving lessons and wider training and to develop their personal, social and employability skills and link them to local vacancies. Progress will be monitored through regular contact with a Careers Adviser.

The scheme will be managed by Redcar and Cleveland Voluntary Development Agency, who also manage the Wheels to Work programme for the Tees Valley and will operate on a borough wide basis with priority given to young people living in the rural areas of East Cleveland.

3. Other Achievements

Breastfeeding Rates

Improving breastfeeding rates in Redcar and Cleveland is a top priority in our Corporate Plan. To support us in achieving this all of our 12 Children's Centres were assessed in November 2017 for the Stage 2 Unicef Infant Feeding Award. Children Centres were approved to progress to full accreditation at Stage 3. The Health Visiting and Early Help Staff are continuing to delivery staff training and quality assurance of services to ensure the Health Visitors and Family Hubs are ready for the Stage 3 Assessment later this year.

Supporting our Children at Risk of Being Exploited, Going Missing or Trafficked

Over the past three months we have been working hard to improve the quality of the information that we capture and to deepen our understanding of children who are identified as 'Vulnerable' and at risk of being 'Exploited', going 'Missing' or being 'Trafficked' (VEMT).

Each child now has a named Lead Professional who is tasked to undertake a 'mapping' exercise to identify the child's primary peer group, any links to other VEMT children, links to perpetrators, locations and cross boundary activity that are, or may be, of concern. Recording the primary area of concern helps us to determine the most appropriate intervention package for the child and assigning a risk level enables us to understand if harm is imminent hence needing a far greater level of support and targeted intervention.

The aim is to raise awareness of children's associations, the extent to which known or potential perpetrators are linked to children, locations of interest and hot spots for young people, including the identification of cross boundary issues that can be shared with our Local Authority neighbours. This is a valuable piece of work which should not only enable us to better identify risk and to target interventions, it is also likely that it will help us to identify children and young people who may not yet be known to us but whom we can see are potentially at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and hence to intervene early to reduce harm.

Education Task and Finish Group of the Scrutiny Committee.

There has been real success in establishing strategies to move forward in improving standards in schools through the Task and Finish Group of the Scrutiny Committee. The working group has focused on delivering an Education Transition Strategy. Much work has already been done and it has been widely supported by schools. The Transition Strategy looks at a comprehensive programme to identify:

- what information about pupils is going to be shared between primary and secondary partner schools. This information will need to include: coverage of the curriculum; academic attainment; special needs and vulnerabilities information; relevant family information including information regarding early help or social care engagement.

- when information is to be shared to enable adequate time for provision to be made and individual pathways to be planned. Children could be ragged for vulnerability and transition activity could start from Year 5 onwards.
- what shared activities will take place to enable classroom practitioners to understand pupil starting points. This could include shared projects or the simple hand over and use of common exercise books.
- when familiarization activities between schools take place to enable joint planning between schools and adequate opportunities for children to be mentored and inducted into their new environments.
- what shared professional development opportunities between primary and secondary partners will be planned such as routine joint moderation activities, scheme of work creation and training events in quality first teaching and meeting specific special educational needs.

By sharing best practice between all schools with a particular focus on transition between Key Stages but also with a general focus on mutual support, outcomes for secondary education will improve.

Annual Looked After Children Awards

The annual Looked After Children Awards were held at ‘Tuned In’ on the 21st November 2018 to recognise the hard work, achievements and personal endeavours of some of Redcar and Cleveland’s most vulnerable children and young people.

The event was attended by over 160 children in our care, care leavers and their families and awards were made in 14 different categories, including academic excellence, sporting excellence and community spirit.

Although not everyone who was nominated could win an award, everyone received a certificate of achievement.

Our Looked After Children’s Council worked collaboratively, helping to design the awards, choosing the decor for the venue and helping on the night to support the smooth running of the event.

Following the presentations, Care Leaver and star of the hit BBC documentary ‘The Mighty Redcar’ Dylan Cartlidge, entertained the audience performing a number of his own songs.

Dylan said: “I think these awards are amazing. It’s a great opportunity for care leavers and young people who have been looked after to be recognised for achievements, big and small”.

“Being fostered was truly life changing for me and I wouldn’t be in the position I am now without my brilliant foster mum.”

The awards were presented by senior officials, including the Mayor, Dennis Teasdale and Cllr Sue Jeffrey, Leader of the Council. Dylan was also delighted to present an award.

Cllr Craig Hannaway, Cabinet Member for Children at Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council said: "This annual event is a wonderful way to recognise the achievements of these inspiring young people who thoroughly deserve their awards.

"It was a great evening and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the carers who play such an invaluable role in these children's lives. Also, my thanks go to all of the staff involved for organising such an inspiring event."

This special occasion was closed by an address from the Chief Executive Amanda Skelton, who praised the young people for their achievements and thanked them for all of their hard work over the last year.



4. Horizon Scanning

Inspection of Local Authority Childrens Services (ILACS)

Whilst we cannot accurately predict the dates in which we will receive an inspection or in some cases the specific area of scrutiny, however we continue to develop our services in order to be in the best possible shape and to ensure we are always inspection ready.

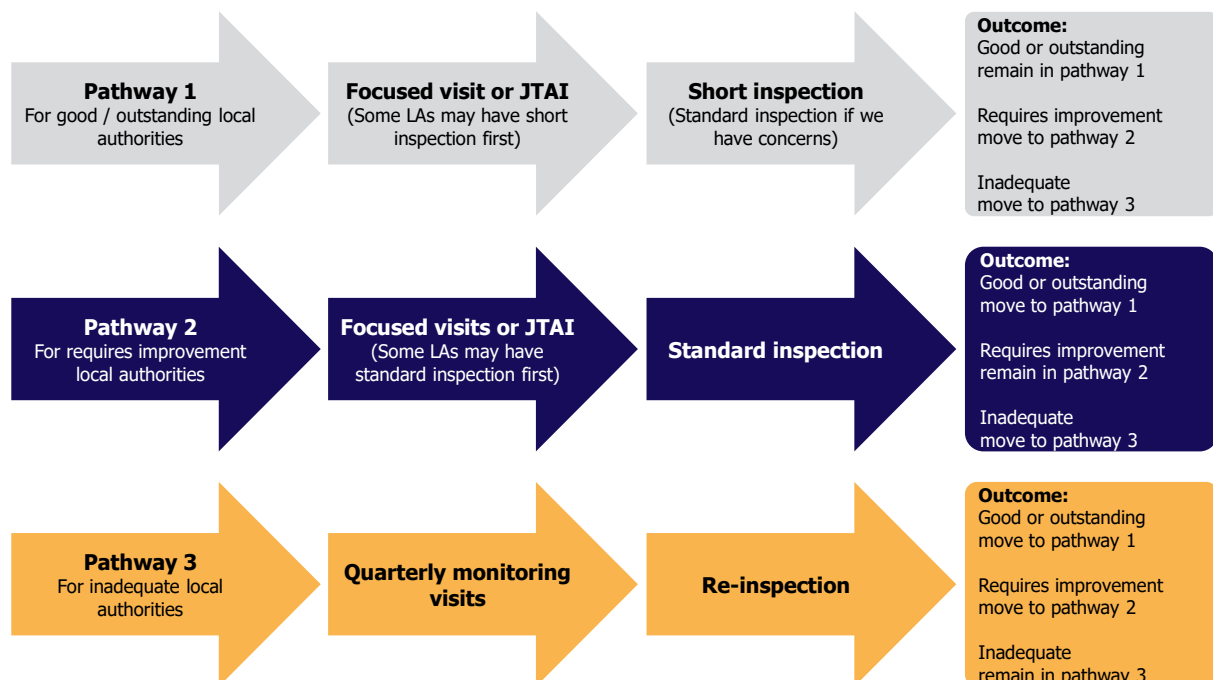
Children's Services are inspected under the ILACS (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services) framework. This is a system of inspection where Ofsted use the intelligence and information they have to form decisions about how best to inspect each local authority.

The system includes:

- Each LA sharing its annual self-evaluation
- An annual engagement meeting between the Senior Leadership Team and Ofsted to review the self-evaluation
- LA intelligence from performance data and statutory returns.

There is no fixed cycle or end date for the programme although we expect our annual engagement meeting for this year to take place in May.

As we were judged 'requires improvement' in Jan 2017 (whilst inspected under the previous framework which was the Single Inspection framework) we follow Pathway 2 below:



Our first focused inspection took place in December 2018 and we can expect a further focused visit or a Joint Area Targeted Inspection (JTAI) (which is a multi-agency inspection)

at some point during 2019. Our next 'standard inspection' will potentially take place no later than Jan 2020, although this could be influenced by our annual conversation with Ofsted.

In relation to the multi-agency JTAI inspections there are currently 4 themes, with a further 3 recently having been announced.

The current 4 JTAI themes are:

- Child exploitation and children missing from home, school or care
- Children living with domestic abuse
- Older children living with neglect
- Child sexual abuse in the family environment.

The 3 new JTAI themes are:

- Children Living with Mental Health
- Prevention and Early Intervention
- Older children in need of help and protection, and contextual safeguarding, including exploitation.

CQC Inspection for health services

Our Health Visiting and School Nursing services are registered as an Independent Provider with Care Quality Commission and therefore are subject to inspections under the CQC regulatory framework. The service had an announced inspection in October 2017. Within the current framework, It is expected that the service will receive an announced inspection every 3 years, however the CQC is currently consulting on this so this may be subject to change. In addition to a planned inspection, the service may also be subject to an unannounced inspection in response to CQC intelligence.

In addition to inspections under the community health services independent provider framework, the service may also be subject to a Children, Looked After and Safeguarded (CLAS) inspection. The CCG is the lead agency for this inspection and Health Visiting and School Nursing would be inspected as part of the wider health economy. Health Visiting and School Nursing will be an integral part of any JTAI inspection where there are specific requirements for providers of health services.

5. Risks, Issues and Solutions

There is a risk that secondary education within Redcar and Cleveland (considering the secondary results this year) continues to perform badly in Ofsted inspection and therefore leads to a continuing weaker offer and choice for our young people. This is supported by data provided both from the Ofsted data view tool and also our local intelligence. There is a picture of decline, falling standards and for a Council to be presiding over a picture of continuing falling standards there is reputational risk. The Corporate Director of Children's Services has been called to attend a meeting to discuss our overall school performance with the Schools Standards Minister Nick Gibb where this will be addressed.

Our budget expenditure remains a risk for us and, along with councils across the country, we continue to face growing demand for children's social care support. Combined with this period of austerity, this increasing demand is putting pressure on Children's Services budgets.

In the last ten years, the number of children subject to child protection plans has increased by 87% and the number of children in care has increased by 24%. The LGA has warned that pressures facing children's services are rapidly becoming unsustainable, with a £2 billion gap expected by 2020, increasing to £3 billion by 2025. The combination of cuts plus rising demand from families is having a major impact on services, with the most deprived local authorities impacted the most.

Locally, Redcar and Cleveland has seen a 65% increase in the rate of children in our care since 2012. 53% of children in our care are placed outside of the borough which can be more expensive; although it is positive that the number of children placed more than 20 miles outside of the borough boundary is lower than the national average. Whilst we work hard to recruit and retain local foster carers, these are not keeping pace with the numbers of children coming into our care.

In addition to these pressures, it is also recognised that the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers to deal with the increasing demands has been challenging, with some reliance on expensive agency workers a necessity to ensure statutory responsibilities are met. However, we have been proactive in our response to this challenge by agreeing an attractive recruitment and retention offer, as well as reviewing the structure to introduce deputy team managers, family support workers and business support roles into the teams.

The general increase in demand has led to the budget pressures faced by the Children and Families Directorate; not just in direct placement costs for children in our care, but also in associated costs like staffing, legal services, and therapeutic interventions.

In response to this, we are aiming to realign the current budget to direct more resource to support the increased number of children requiring statutory social work intervention. This will involve a review of Early Help services that will result in monies being released and redirected to strengthen our edge of care offer. The new offer will include a robust and flexible package of support over extended hours so that families can be offered help at

times when they need it most, including early mornings to encourage good school attendance; and evenings, when bedtime routines might bring added stress to chaotic households. The new service will offer family group mediation and a range of intensive parenting programmes.

As a result, we aim to stem the flow of children and young people entering the care system and keep families together when it is safe and appropriate to do so.

