

**Manchester City Council
Report for Information**

Report to: Ofsted Subgroup – 2 March 2022

Subject: LGA Permanence Peer Challenge

Report of: Deputy Director of Children's Services

Summary

As part of the overall approach to enhance outcomes for children requiring a social work service, children services commissioned the LGA to undertake a peer review with a specific focus on the effectiveness of our planning for permanence, underpinned by our "Permanence from Day One Strategy". The review took place between the 18th and 22nd of October 2021.

Recommendations

To note the report.

Wards Affected: All

Contact Officers:

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Background documents (available for public inspection): None

1.0 Process

1.1 The service identified key lines of enquiry that we wanted reviewers to consider, these were - ambition for children and young people, permanence from day one, voice of children and young people, practice issues and conditions for social work to thrive. The review was very comprehensive, the team were very experienced and multi-agency, the reviewers undertook –

- Interviews with 58 people from across the local authority including the Executive Member for Children's services, the Chief Executive and partners.
- Gathered information and views from 28 interviews and focus group meetings.
- Spoke to 8 social workers as part of their case review process.
- The team spoke to seven care experienced young adults and four foster households and
- Spent 270 hours undertaking fieldwork and determining their findings.

2.0 Key messages from the Review

2.1 The reviewers noted –

“There is a strong ambition and commitment from senior leaders and politicians to children and young people in Manchester, this is reflected in strategy and the intention to make “2022 Our Year”.

“Strong commitment from leaders to develop commissioning based on outcomes for children and young people in care and those leaving care.”

“A strong sense of professionals working together through the edge of care work, youth justice, and the child exploitation arrangements with professionals working together around the most vulnerable young people”.

“All staff who met with the peer team demonstrated a passion for Manchester's children and communicated a strong commitment to *our children*.”

“Practice takes place in a reflective and learning culture, social workers can describe the practice model in Manchester.”

“Social worker caseloads are manageable; the peer team met a committed and child focused workforce who can clearly articulate the need to get it right for children at the earliest opportunity.”

3.0 Recommendations

The LGA review process is an opportunity to reflect on the critique provided by experienced colleagues. All recommendations for action have been considered by the Children's extended leadership team and a 'cluster' of

activities agreed and to be prioritised. These are outlined below with a brief commentary on our approach /impact to date on these priorities.

- **IT and phone availability**

Corporate parenting members will note the international and national issues associated with the deliverability of this equipment for children's and other directorates. Building on the engagement with staff during the pandemic to adopt an agile way of working and to be supported with the 'right tools', the service has been prioritised in the rollout of equipment, this rollout commenced on the 3rd of February and ends the 18th of March 2022.

It should be noted that arrangements have been in place to ensure recycling, maintenance and upgrading of equipment to mitigate the transitional period and any adversity associated with the limited supplies.

In addition, the service is piloting the use of AV equipment to enable a more agile and child/family focused approach to child protection conferences/looked after reviews.

- **Low levels of business support**

In a task and finish approach, Abu Siddique Head of South locality is undertaking a review, alongside other stakeholders, of the business support arrangements to support social workers, this is scheduled to complete this by the of March 2022. There are pre-existing challenges ahead of the review which have been identified and are significant, these are vacancies, lack of career progression for staff in some roles and budget considerations, the recommendations of this report will be presented to a forthcoming Senior Management Team session.

- **Data presented to staff and its analytics does not appear to be consistently providing evidence of or driving improved outcomes**

The service has spent some considerable time developing a performance culture and making available performance information to first line managers, our self-assessment of this is that first line managers regularly utilise the performance management information and to good effect.

The service recognises the absence of a regular 'external' analytical depth to the range of performance information available, most analysis is periodic and is requested from the service.

It has been agreed with the Head of PRI the unit will provide a quarterly analysis of key metrics to further strengthen the existing arrangements; supporting our ambitions to continually improve and where necessary redesign services.

- **Limited evidence that the voice of the child is heard as loudly and consistently as it needs to be**

We recognise this as an area of improvement and have significantly revamped our approach to corporate parenting and the impact this has on *our children*, this innovative approach is still building with early signs of success.

The LGA review also pointed to the requirement to improve the engagement and participation of young people in the planning of their day-to-day care and called for improvements in the frequency of face-to-face meetings and in the frequency of Independent Reviewing Officer (IROs) preparing children for the review of their care arrangements. Ensuring that children feel well equipped to attend and participate in their reviews ahead of their review meeting is a critical part of the IRO role. This meeting allows for the IRO to gain their views and wishes around their Care Plan, the intended impact is that plans are driven by children and allow children to be central to the planning process for improving their outcomes and enabling all to be ambitious for their future.

Since the review, the service has ensured more reviews have been face to face, where they can be. Additionally, there has been an increased focus on the services' performance in relation to IROs meeting and preparing children and young people, this push has been facilitated by a clear and child focused approach to performance management of this.

- **Some indicators of our performance required immediate attention**

As a service our dataset is assessed as generally strong against a range of indicators, the report highlights two areas that require further attention. These are dental checks and strengths and difficulties questionnaires. The dental check data has been adversely impacted by COVID but requires focus as community dentistry opens back up for business, our health colleagues are currently considering a revised model for dental checks. The service is ensuring that our approach to annual health checks including dentistry is better understood by all staff. In addition to this we have had lengthy discussions with our health colleagues about the data quality as well as ongoing internal discussions regarding our liquid logic processes, a change to our system ensuring reminders were introduced for requesting these assessments in October. There is health data on the agenda for discussion at the forthcoming corporate parenting panel in February 2022.

- **The requirement to “turn up” the volume on re-unification**

We recognise the need to move from an implicit recognition of the ongoing role many parents play in the lives of their children whilst the local authority cares for their child to making this explicit. We also recognise that for some young people they will make decisions to gravitate to parental homes where risks remain, we require an approach where it is appropriate to do so, to respect this decision and embrace a risk management approach that enables and respects the views and wishes of young people and their parents. As a result, we are refreshing our permanence policy. The refreshed policy is expected to be considered by the children's leadership by the end of February 2022.

4.0 Summary and conclusion

- 4.1 The LGA provided a robust challenge during their peer review of the effectiveness of the strategy “Permanence from Day One” the review provided further confirmation of some strengths of the service our practice and approach to permanence. The review also provided professional opinions to sponsor further change some of these were already in hand, a minority of proposals were considered and discounted for professional reasons and/or activity in hand; the remainder are noted above as recommendations.