

## Monitoring Visit of Blackpool Children's Services - August 2019

The visit took place over 2 days, starting on 14 August. Prior to the visit, the service provided OFSTED with a long list of documents and data and shared with them our current view of performance and progress against our planned improvements. During this visit, Inspectors reviewed the progress made for front door arrangements, which includes the MASH and assessment and support teams.

The first monitoring visit OFSTED make after an inadequate judgement of Children's Social Care is followed by a letter which summarises their view of what they saw. This is never published, though all the visits we have from now on will be followed by a published letter.

The key messages that they have shared with us are detailed below. **There are lots of positives about the change that they saw when they visited and huge thanks and congratulations go to the many staff who sat with and were interviewed by the Inspectors during their visit. Your professionalism and positive presentation is appreciated.**

As you would expect, alongside the good feedback suggesting that the change that is happening is moving us in the right direction, there were areas that OFSTED told us that in the short time they were with us, they felt needed further attention.

### Positives

- The Inspectors noted that progress was evident at the front door of services and that the service children and families receive from the "front door" of Children's Social Care is consistent and addresses the shortfalls identified in the inspection associated with this area.
- There is evidence of increasing strategic engagement with a range of partners to understand how practice can be improved – the Inspectors talked positively about the role of the Getting To Good board and how the partnership is receiving information that is helping to develop an understanding of the pattern of demand across Blackpool.
- Positive investment from the Local Authority was seen in evidence and the commitment to embedding and sustaining these resources was noted.
- A single point of entry for all contacts to Children's Services has been developed in the MASH since inspection. Systems and processes for all contacts and referrals have been reviewed and enhanced to ensure that there is now appropriate consideration of children's histories. Thresholds are applied consistently, reviewed by managers at key decision-making points and the rationale for next steps is evidenced clearly. Children are signposted promptly to appropriate levels of help and support, including those children who require an early help service.
- Information-gathering and decision-making are well recorded on children's files during the MASH triage process, enabling a clear understanding of the actions taken.
- Audit activity has increased and is sufficiently critical of the quality of social work practice.

- The quality of referrals is improving and some demonstrate appropriate consideration of the child's views and the impact of parental behaviour on children.
- Experienced and knowledgeable social workers and managers respond to contacts in a timely way. Management oversight is more organised and timely and ensures that thresholds for initial decision-making are much clearer and more proportionate than was the case at the time of the inspection.
- Immediate risk is recognised and responded to promptly and families are signposted by a manager to the right service to meet their needs. There is appropriate consideration of the child's history and lived experience rather than a focus on the presenting issue; this is an improvement since the inspection.
- A new anonymised telephone advice line is regarded as a useful asset to partners who may wish to speak to a social worker prior to making a referral.
- Missing from home notifications are overseen promptly by MASH managers and there is a much clearer rationale for next steps in line with revised child exploitation pathways.
- Out-of-hours work is timely, safeguarding action is taken when needed and the interface with daytime services ensures an effective transition of information.
- Children who are at risk of harm are identified promptly. Strategy meetings held by the ASTs are recorded clearly and most have representation from relevant agencies. Actions from strategy discussions are followed through and ensure a mostly prompt response to concerns.
- Social workers know their cases well and visits to children are timely and explore their views.
- Supervision of social workers provides more case direction and reflection on the case than was previously the position and a rationale for actions is clearly provided. Caseloads are mostly manageable due to the additional capacity in response to increased demand. Social workers also report positively on the support they receive from managers and the increasing time they can now spend with families. Training needs of social workers have been reviewed and the core offer has been revised, including the development of learning circles open to both agency and permanent staff. This demonstrates that the local authority has prioritised the recruitment, retention and development of its workforce since inspection.

### **Areas for Improvement/ Further Attention**

- This has been in the context of a rise in demand for services, as the volume of contacts and referrals increased significantly post-inspection. Inspectors said that **"Further work is required to develop a more strategic response from across the partnership."**
- Further improvement is required to ensure that both teams at the front door (MASH and AST) work more effectively together to understand thresholds, reduce delay and progress assessments in a timely way.
- Careful consideration is given to obtaining parental consent, but there is still more to do to ensure that **partners are challenged to seek consent from families prior to contacting MASH.**
- Police notifications relating to domestic abuse are now overseen by social work managers, but there is **sometimes a delay in police officers reporting notifications**

**to the MASH.** This leads to some children not receiving the support they need quickly enough.

- Learning from audit work is not yet fully embedded into practice. The quality of assessments is too variable; this is confirmed by the local authority's own audits. There is more work to do to secure further improvement in the quality of assessments, so that they fully reflect the development of a clear model of practice.
- **The multi-agency referral form is used, although learning from audits has indicated that this requires further review.**
- **More work is needed to ensure that partner agencies seek consent more proactively prior to contacting the MASH.**