

# **Children and Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Panel**

<b>DATE</b>	16/01/2025
<b>REPORT OF</b>	Charlene Sykes - Service Director Safeguarding, Youth Justice and Family Help
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Integrated Front Door (IFD)
<b>STATUS</b>	Open

## **CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS**

The recommendations in the report will contribute to the achievement of the Strategic Aims set out in the Council Plan ensuring children and young people:

- Grow up happy, healthy, safe in their homes with people who love them. Children and families can have their say about things that are important to them and participate fully in their communities.
- Reach their full potential through skills and learning
- Enjoy good health and wellbeing

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The report is to update regarding the positive activity and progress seen overall within the Integrated Front Door (IFD) for children and their families, the impact of this currently and the plans for ongoing development.

## **MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION**

Elected members to be updated on the success and progress of the IFD within North East Lincolnshire and plans for the next 12 months.

### **1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES**

Historically, the needs of children and families have not been met early enough in North East Lincolnshire which has led to disproportionate numbers of children being referred to the Integrated Front Door, leading to statutory intervention for children. This has previously meant that more children were subject to child protection planning and a greater number of children were in care for the size of the local Authority compared to regional and national comparators.

Over the last year there has been a wealth of developments across the workforce and partnership which has led to a continued reduction in contact and referrals for children meaning fewer children require statutory intervention. The reintegration of colocated partners into the IFD has had a positive impact on the timely and holistic information sharing and joint decision making for children. The refresh of the Partner Integrated Triage (PIT Stop) in line with the relaunch of the threshold document and the early help strategy has led to greater partnership responsibility for meeting children's needs early and refocus on the offer of help at the earliest stage by the right person is preventing children's needs from escalating.

## 2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Building on previous progress made, since January 2024, there has been;

A review of practice, systems and workflow within IFD, reintegrated police and health (and plan to include Education to build on the strong relationships already in place)

Two Sector Led Front Door Health checks have been completed as part of the regional sector led improvement arrangements, initially in March and October 2024. These have continued to demonstrate the progress in outcomes for children. This highlighted in summary:

- The positive difference the leadership is making to delivering change at pace and ensuring that the workforce understand the vision and moral is high.
- Manager oversight is a strength and provides clear direction. This has further improved since March 24
- The quality of the partnership is testament to the relationships that have been harnessed and invested in.
- Consistent application of thresholds for children. In all records reviewed the decision was appropriate and proportionate.
- Consent is well understood and appropriately sought or dispensed with

There is regular oversight, quality assurance and dip sampling from senior leaders to understand the quality and impact of practice. A range of forums are in place to invite conversations and reflect on practice and outcomes for children is helping to embed consistent practice. The wide range of quality assurance systems and frameworks driven by leaders and managers continues to ensure practice developments are embedded and a continued learning environment to create the conditions for practice to continually develop.

Partnership working has been transformed. The integrated front door is an integral part of children's service and partnerships across the wider children's service (including Family Help and Youth Justice) alongside statutory partners and the community and voluntary sector have been strengthened to build a seamless offer for children. The refocus on integration, collaboration and relational practice and this has resulted in a joined up offer with greater ownership and clarity of roles and responsibility. Multi agency reflective discussions and audit activity informs practice development. The development of the threshold document and clearer pathways ensures that for most families they receive the right support at the right time.

Quality Assurance processes have been strengthened with a focus on understanding the voice and lived experience of the child and family across the whole of Children's services, recognising that the Front door cannot operate in a vacuum. Quality assurance forums including the Children's Experience and Audit Meeting which brings together children's experiences and audit activity across Children's Services, involving 'leaders at every level' is contributing to a safer system for children. Well established approaches to closing the loop means that practice is consistently being improved. The involvement of senior leaders in QA

systems means that you have a clear line of sight and understanding of the quality of practice. Practitioners benefit from the opportunities to learn and improve their practice.

Plans across the workforce and the partnership continue to strengthen the response to children at risk of significant harm, particularly where child sexual abuse (Intra familial and harm outside the home) is a feature.

### **3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS**

Regular communications activity takes place and is supported by our lead member for Children's Services and Education.

Fourteen elected members visited the Front Door in November 2024, as did Supt Paul French, and Pete Thorpe in December 2024, at which the team shared and showcased the multi-agency arrangements, which has been well received and positively communicated. There are plans for a number of key schools to visit in January 2025

### **4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Work is ongoing in relation to the next phase of the family help reconfiguration to ensure there is a robust and cost effective service available locally that meets need at the lowest level and prevents escalation to high cost statutory services. This will include an offer to children and families at the times they most need this, including evenings and weekends. Where by there is a need identified for statutory intervention and actions, the above progress seen is assuring overall that the right children receive this.

## **5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS**

Manager oversight of referrals has been strengthened with directive initial briefings and reflective authorisation, along with partner, child and family contribution to ensure the holistic understanding of a child's experience and decision making is aligned to the identified risk and needs. There continues to be ongoing development across the partnership to ensure earliest intervention and where possible prevent escalation in need resulting in social work intervention being required.

Re-referrals have reduced over the course of the year and are now similar to that of statistical neighbours and national averages which is positive and means children's needs are mainly being appropriately met at the lowest level, particularly when considering the reduced number of referrals. This is aligned to the sharpening of partnership contribution and the development of the joint ownership of plans. There has been a sharpened focus on the information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners and consent and this remains an area of focus to ensure consistency. There is an ongoing focus on the quality of step out and contingency planning and the bespoke recording of this within outcome letters.

As a result of creating the conditions for enhancing partnership interface, we are better able to jointly explore themes and trends for children, and we are continuing to work with partners to strengthen their consistent understanding of thresholds.

As a result of greater clarity of thresholds, supported via the refresh of the threshold document, this has led to improvements in the quality of contacts and a reduction of referrals, underpinned by holistic decision making.

There are high levels of oversight on the quality of practice and outcomes achieved for children and families. This is evidenced within audit, oversight and independent and external scrutiny which highlight that levels of need and risk are appropriately identified and responded to proportionately.

## **6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no expected financial implications. Budgets within the Integrated Front Door are currently well maintained with minimal overspend.

A reduction of spend has been seen due to the investment in a permanent workforce leading to the removal of agency social workers and managers, leaving only 2 agency workers within the Integrated Front Door at this current time.

## **8. MONITORING COMMENTS**

In the opinion of the author, this report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people, finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

N/A

## **10. CONTACT OFFICER(S)**

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