

**Meeting:** Children, Education and Skills Sub-Committee

**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**Title:** Signs of Safety Update

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**Service:** Safeguarding & Children's Services

**Wards affected:** All

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## 1. Purpose of Report

To update the Committee on the ongoing implementation of our model of practice – Signs of Safety.

### 1.1. Recommendation(s):

It is recommended that the Sub-committee:

- a) Note the information provided.
- b) Request further information if appropriate.
- c) Make such recommendations as the Sub-committee consider appropriate.

## 2. Introduction

North Tyneside Children's Services adopted the Signs of Safety approach as their agreed model of practice in 2017.

The Signs of Safety approach is a relationship-grounded, safety-organised approach to child protection practice, created by researching what works for professionals and families in building meaningful safety for vulnerable and at-risk children. The purpose of the approach being:

*‘To enable professionals to undertake all child protection practice with a rigorous focus on child safety by equipping agencies to establish their practice, policy, procedures and organisation so that professionals can do everything humanly possible to put the parents, children and everyone naturally connected to the children at the centre of the assessment, decision-making and planning and give them every opportunity to come up with and apply their ideas before the professionals offer or impose theirs.’*

It is an internationally used model and is the model of practice in the majority of local authorities across England and Wales.

The initial implementation of Signs of Safety in North Tyneside was a huge and successful undertaking, delivering training and supporting practice not only for children’s services practitioners but also across the wider, multi-agency partnership. Since that time the implementation has continued at pace. The attached Practice Framework demonstrates how Signs of Safety practice is at the core of our work with Children & Families.

This report gives an overview of the priorities and achievements over the last 12 months in North Tyneside.

### **3. Details: Signs of Safety Progress and Achievements**

#### **3.1 Governance**

The oversight of our Signs of Safety Implementation is via a monthly Steering Group which is chaired by the Senior Manager for Social Work Practice. Representatives from all the service areas and workforce development attend the Steering Group. The Group agrees the priorities for the year ahead, monitors progress against them, agrees the training calendar and is also responsive to emerging practice needs and issues. In the last 12 months the priorities have focused on: -

- Networks
- Supervision
- Early Help
- Harm Risk Matrix in the Front Door

#### **3.2 Progress on the agreed Priorities**

##### **3.2.1 Networks**

Since 2020 we have had a strong focus on the use of networks in our practice. Having a network of people who can help and support a family and in so doing build more safety for the child / children is a real strengthen of the Signs of Safety approach. This is challenging for both parents and practitioners as it requires a family to be open and honest about what the worries are, what the safety goals are and what the bottom lines are. Parents need to use the network not just to help and support but also to demonstrate that the child / children will be and are safe.

During the Covid-19 Pandemic the use of networks has been a key feature in building safety for children when professional oversight was more limited. Practitioners in North Tyneside were both creative and innovative about the use of networks and while there is further work to do, practice with regards to networks, is now very well embedded.

As a consequence of this, North Tyneside Children's Services were approached by the DfE to do some further study and analysis around lessons learnt from working during the pandemic, that could be shared and used across the sector. In partnership with Professor Eileen Munro, Professor Andrew Turnell and Marie Devine, we worked with three other local authorities to explore: -

### **What helps and hinders practitioners build safety through naturally connected networks during a pandemic when professional contact is limited?**

The study was small in size and consequently the findings are tentative but do support the hypothesis that the use of networks makes a worthwhile contribution to improving children's safety and wellbeing.

Following on from the study, some practitioners were asked to present on practice around networks at two separate conferences. They received excellent feedback and also wonderful acknowledgments for their practice. We also formed part of a panel on 'belonging' at the recent International Signs of Safety Gathering.

#### **3.2.2 Supervision**

Supervision is a key task in any social work system. The focus over the last twelve months has been further embedding of the Signs of Safety approach to group supervision. The process involves a worker who brings a child's case to discuss and is designed for a worker to get direction when they are experiencing challenges or barriers. Both managers and practitioners have feedback positively on the use of group supervision and the benefits and impact it has for moving forward positively.

We have delivered training around group supervision and have also had our Practice Development Team deliver and observe group supervision sessions to all the teams.

#### **3.2.3 Early Help**

Our Early Help teams also use the Signs of safety approach and over the last twelve months have also completed work on safety planning and the use of networks. There has been a focus on how practice is supported by the electronic case recording system EHM and how we take forward changes that would better support our practice. Having completed this improvement work we are now involved in leading a group across Early Help Services in other local authorities who also wish to implement these changes.

### **3.2.4 Harm Risk Matrix – Front Door**

The Harm Risk Matrix helps us to gather specific, detailed information about the harm when assessing child abuse and neglect. It clearly identifies the harmful behaviour, its severity, frequency and impact on the child. It is designed to help professionals gather detailed information from referrers.

In March 2021, the Front Door, MASH team took part in a 3-day practice intensive led by Penny Turnell, Executive Director Elia. The 3-day workshop looked at how to effectively use the tool as part of the MASH process as well as helping us with implementation of the tool.

### **3.3 Workforce Development**

The Steering Group also oversees the planning and delivery of training in Signs of Safety. In the last 12 months we have adapted the training to online delivery and delivered both 6-day intensive workshops and 3-day introductory training.

Alongside this we hold Practice Leader events every six to eight weeks. Every service, and in many instances, every team has an identified Practice Leader. Their role is one of dissemination of practice and to provide advice and guidance around the model. In the last 12 months the sessions have looked at themes including Exploitation, Non-Accidental injury, Networks, Safety Planning and working with children with complex needs. This work is then followed up within the teams to provide practical support for application of the learning.

Given some of the demand pressures on the teams during the pandemic we have also delivered 'bite size' sessions. These are short sessions that focus on a different area of the model each day for a two-week period. In total we have delivered four weeks of 'bite size' training.

## **4. Priorities for the next 12 months**

Over the next 12 months the following priorities have been agreed: -

- Systems work around embedding the new Children in Care forms that better support practice.
- Ongoing focus on group supervision
- Safety Planning
- Language
- Timeline and Trajectories – enables planning and progress to stay on track

## **5. Appendices**

5.1 Promise Pledges

5.2 Children's Documents x 2