

## Staying Safe

This section is all about ensuring that every single child in York grows up in a safe, caring environment, free from harm and neglect. For almost all children that will be with their parents or carers; for a tiny minority we will provide the care directly. The modern world poses many dangers for children but with love and support most will have only happy memories of growing up in York.

### Where are we now?

York remains a safe place in which to grow up. The number of children injured in serious road accidents is thankfully small. They nevertheless still require careful monitoring and we continue to work with schools to develop local travel plans, which include safe walking and cycling routes wherever possible.

There is very good support in place for children and young people to address incidents of bullying, although this is not the sort of issue that we could ever say we had completely 'solved'. More recently we have been turning our attention to possible new forms of bullying using mobile phones or social networking sites on the internet. We are also increasingly sensitive, across the whole YorOK partnership, to the particular needs of children and young people who may witness, or even be subjected to, domestic abuse.

We have done a great deal of work to help prevent more serious problems. We firmly believe that children and young people in York are most likely to remain safe if the various professionals who come into contact with them are clear about their own roles and also about when they might need to seek advice from someone else. All our staff need to be sensitive to the early warning signs that might indicate a problem further down the track. We are continuing to invest in the development of our workforce to achieve this and there is more about this on pages 37-40 of this Plan.

Our staff need to have access to a common set of tools and systems to support them in their work and to help them to get the right help to the right children (and families) at the





right time. We have introduced what we call a 'Common Assessment Framework' to assist this, and a local YorOK 'Child Index', where early concerns can be registered. We have devised local 'thresholds' which help staff to decide what level of help needs to be provided and when problems are starting to get more serious. Guidance about this, and many related matters, is provided on the website of the independent, statutory partnership which has been set up to oversee child protection issues in York. It is known as the City of York Local Safeguarding Children Board, and you can find out more about its work and the services it provides at [www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk](http://www.saferchildrenyork.org.uk). Its responsibilities include ensuring that all of the YorOK partners are operating safe recruitment practices, and that there are strong procedures in place where any allegations are made against a member of staff who works with children and young people.

"I worry about pterodactyls grabbing me. Please don't worry about them, they don't live in York. They live in America."

However good our preventative services are, some children and young people will always need to be 'Looked After' in the care of the Local Authority. In fact the number of Looked After Children in York has been increasing in recent years, in common with many places. The reasons for this are quite complicated and we have been conducting some research to make sure we understand them. The early results of this exercise suggest that we may in fact be able safely to reduce the overall number in care, and we will be looking at this more closely during the lifetime of this Plan.

"A real crack-down on bullies, they can make life a misery for some people."

We continue to ensure that children and young people who do need to be 'Looked After' are safe and protected from abuse and exploitation. All necessary preliminary background checks for foster carers, adopters and residential staff are undertaken in

accordance with national guidance. For children who come into care, there is evidence that the authority is good at ensuring they live stable lives, moving where possible into alternative adoptive homes, or leaving care better equipped to succeed in later life.

As a result our priorities are:

**5. Protect children and young people to the highest possible standards by:**

- ▶ providing easily accessible, high quality and responsive child protection services, delivered by a safe, skilled and valued workforce;
- ▶ demonstrating an openness to fresh ideas and a capacity for self-criticism, eg through our own internal version of the new 'unannounced safeguarding inspection';
- ▶ implementing best practice to recognise and tackle sexual abuse, with special attention to children who harm others;
- ▶ co-ordinating actions to protect those whom we know to be especially vulnerable to harm or neglect, such as young runaways, children with disabilities, and those who have suffered or witnessed domestic abuse;

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All quotations with a yellow border are from children and young people across the City

- ▶ ensuring that instances of 'private fostering' are reported and recorded so that judgements can be reached as to whether the arrangements are safe;
- ▶ further developing and supporting Council Members in relation to their responsibilities for safeguarding and in their role as corporate parents.

## 6. Recognise and address wider safeguarding issues by:

- ▶ reducing accidents through a focus on community safety, road safety and home safety, recognising the connection between poverty and vulnerability to accidents;
- ▶ promoting safe use of the internet by developing a city-wide e-safety strategy and adopting up-to-date security measures;
- ▶ empowering our children and young people to take advantage of all opportunities available to them responsibly and safely;
- ▶ reducing bullying in all its forms, including cyber-bullying and bullying related to sexuality;
- ▶ continuing to promote safe recruitment of staff and volunteers across the YorOK community, including the voluntary sector, through robust accreditation arrangements;
- ▶ continuing to take swift and appropriate action when allegations are made against our staff;
- ▶ ensuring, along with the City of York Local Safeguarding Children Board, that access routes to safeguarding services are clear and well publicised, and that the responses are timely, proportionate and authoritative;
- ▶ working with the Safer York Partnership to ensure that children and young people's concerns, especially about visible policing, are addressed.



## 7. Promote a safer city through the delivery of outstanding, integrated services by:

- ▶ embedding new ways of working, especially the 'Common Assessment Framework', the 'YorOK Child Index' and the national 'ContactPoint', so that they become natural to all our staff;
- ▶ helping schools and other front-line services, including acute services and mental health services, to know where to go to register early concerns about a child, or to access packages of support for vulnerable families;
- ▶ introducing a 'single front door' for accessing central services, and specially trained 'YorOK brokers' working directly with schools;
- ▶ rationalising our forms, processes and panels, particularly where young people are moving from one service to another;
- ▶ ensuring better coordination with colleagues in Adult Social Services so that when a family gets into difficulties the needs of the children are properly and swiftly identified;
- ▶ supporting our workforce to promote safety, including an increase in the number of 'lead practitioners' to provide a single point of contact.



## 8. Provide stable, secure, local placements for our Looked After Children by:

- ▶ ensuring that the right children are identified as needing to be Looked After, and recognising that it is a positive outcome for some;
- ▶ providing an environment that recognises that Looked After Children may need more challenge, encouragement and support than their peers;
- ▶ sending fewer young people to out-of-city placements;
- ▶ continuing to improve the timeliness of their reviews;
- ▶ undertaking targeted research to better understand the causes of the problems that lead young people to be Looked After;
- ▶ continuing to encourage young people to see remaining in foster care as a positive choice as they complete their education or training;
- ▶ providing comprehensive advice and support for foster parents.

"More cycling routes so I can cycle more safely to Yearsley baths and town with my mummy and daddy."

## How will we know we are making a difference?

The YorOK partnership collects a wide range of information about the safeguarding of children and young people. As we make progress against the priorities set out above, we would expect to see improvements in:

- ▶ children killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents,
- ▶ review rates for Looked After Children and child protection cases,
- ▶ long-term stability of Looked After Children,
- ▶ children who have experienced bullying,
- ▶ out of authority placements,
- ▶ effective outcomes from our integrated working procedures.

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