



## **Children and Families Social Work Strategy**

### **Foreword**

The current economic climate, with the introduction of welfare reform and increasing unemployment, poses many challenges for Gateshead families. It is vital we provide children and family services which can respond effectively to the ever-increasing demand from families living in increasing poverty. In order to do so we need a skilled, confident and compassionate workforce which can thrive in a culture of continuous learning and support.

We want to make sure the most vulnerable children and young people are enabled to live a safe, happy and healthy life and access to a good education.

We are listening to children, families, carers, partner organisations, councillors and leaders to build a better future for families in Gateshead.

### **Introduction**

Gateshead Council Children and Families Social Work Service is on a continuous improvement journey which reflects our values and learning culture focussing on delivering high quality frontline practice with a skilled compassionate and stable workforce embedding well managed mutual support and effective practice challenge.

The Children and Families Strategy describes our ambition to provide the most effective approach informed by our joint work with children and their families ensuring their involvement is meaningful shaping practice, intervention and service delivery.

This strategic plan sets out our vision and direction demonstrating what we aim to achieve and the ways we are striving to transform how we work. The future development of the service plan is based on an ongoing conversation with young people and their families, frontline professionals and partners embracing new research, best practice and learning within our performance and quality assurance. This approach supports our understanding of what is working and having positive impact and gives the service focus on further areas of development.

In collaboration with partners we are developing innovative ways of working to meet the complex needs of children and their families who have experienced significant disadvantage and trauma through adverse childhood experiences.

Social work is about the relationships we build, the conversations we have, the direct work we do with the children and families who need our services. Gateshead

Children and Families puts an emphasis on reclaiming *practice* as the central tenet of social work. We are investing in learning and developing systemic and strengths-based practice skills to enable our social workers to support real change in the lives of vulnerable children.

Our approach to Social Work practice is not limited to one model or 'way to do it'. **Gateshead CAN** is an overarching systemic and strengths-based approach which recognises the interrelationships between **C**ontext, **A**ction and **N**arrative. Some of the methods and models our social workers use are Relational Genograms, Ecomaps, Solution-focused and motivational interviewing, Signs of Safety, Narrative techniques and tools from positive psychology.

Our Social work practice is driven by our aspirant vision that *“Children and families are at the **heart of everything** we do, ensuring all children can **thrive** and reach their **full potential**”*. Our ethical driver is rooted in the belief that our responsibility to children and families in need of help should start from the position that families are empowered and supported to make positive changes, enabled to make self-determined choices and seek their own solutions that build on existing strengths and resilience within the family network. Our firm resolve is to work relentlessly in supporting families to remain together and where a child's needs demand alternative living arrangements these will firstly be sought from within the child's own family network.

### **Aim of our Strategic Plan**

The business plan sets out our ambition and priorities and details how we will deliver positive outcomes for children and their families demonstrating our commitment to work collaboratively with partners and users of our services.

Outlining:

- Our Vision and Values
- Strategic priorities
- Statutory duties
- Governance
- Service structure
- Workforce Development and Support
- Key innovation and research that influences our practice

### **Our Vision**

Thrive agenda:

**Our Vision for all children and families in Gateshead regardless of their background are at the heart of everything we do ensuring all children can thrive and meet their full potential.** *It is informed by the children and young people's plan and the overarching Council 'Thrive Agenda.'*

The overarching pledges from Gateshead Council have been developed as a policy direction to inform how we deliver services and places children and their families at the heart of everything we do.

The leaders of the Council are clear Gateshead will be a place where everyone thrives. If we are to achieve this a radical rethink is needed about the way we work as a Council, the way we spend the money, the way we work with partner organisations and how we work with our local people and communities. We want everyone in Gateshead to be involved in this transformation.

The Council has Five pledges to help guide us when we make decisions. This is the start of a new era for Gateshead we have made our pledges for a fairer Gateshead.

1. Put people and families at the heart of everything we do
2. Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance
3. Support our communities to support themselves and each other
4. Invest in our economy to provide sustainable opportunities for employment, innovation and growth across the borough
5. Work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead

<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/iplodge/Home.aspx>

## **Our Values**

Our service strives to empower children and families, sustaining them within their own communities by promoting resilience and building upon their strengths. Gateshead recognises the importance of supporting secure attachments which is a catalyst for change for families and which enables children to be healthy and happy in life and achieve their full potential.

Children and Families Services work collaboratively with partners in a transparent and accountable way consolidating a shared Gateshead '**CAN**' approach which is ambitious and aspirational, and which demonstrates meaningful positive impact for children and families.

We are strongly committed to continuously building a supportive learning culture which means embracing evidence-based research and learning from the national practice through sector-led improvement. We make sound decisions which keep children safe and are based upon evidenced professional judgement and place the child at the centre of all decision making.

We are building upon our relational approach with children and families using knowledge and skills through systemic, strength-based and solution focussed practice underpinned by research including the impact of adverse childhood experience which are the golden threads through our practice development. We maintain a professional curiosity determining the causes and impact of harm for children and families.

We are committed to using our skills and resources with purpose, efficiency and flexibility, ensuring that we are targeting those most in need.

## Strategic Objectives

- Continue to build on our systemic and strength-based approaches and safely reduce the number of children looked after and on Child Protection plans.
- Strengthen our Child in Need service delivery offer through restructuring resources to strengthen practice and approaches to achieve the best outcomes for children in need of help, building on our edge of care team.
- Continue to improve the quality of our plans. As a mature learning organisation, we are working with other local authorities as part of our improvement journey to assess and develop our practice in this area. We will continue to listen to children and young people using their voice to improve and impact on the focus of plans.
- Improve the impact of feedback from children and young people and maximise the evidence of the voice of the child to build upon the quality of all elements of frontline social work.
- Strengthen our permanence planning monitoring through the Early Permanence Group (EPG) reviewing and overseeing admissions into care, long term matches and all children with exit order plans. We anticipate arrangements for children going through the adoption process will be enhanced with a regional approach with the establishment of the Regional Adoption Agency which went live in December.
- Continue to increase the percentage of children who are looked after placed with 'in house' foster carers in the local area through placement choice and commissioned residential and fostering provision.
- Strengthen performance management by developing data and performance tools that continue to build on the progress already made to provide accurate real time information to support manager's oversight of frontline practice, enable robust self-challenge and target quality assurance work.
- Improve the quality of frontline supervision predicated on well-embedded and understood expectations and practices which have been clarified through the revision of our core practice standards.
- Improve the progress of children at Key Stage 4

## **Statutory Functions**

Gateshead delivers its statutory duties for children at universal, targeted and specialist service levels.

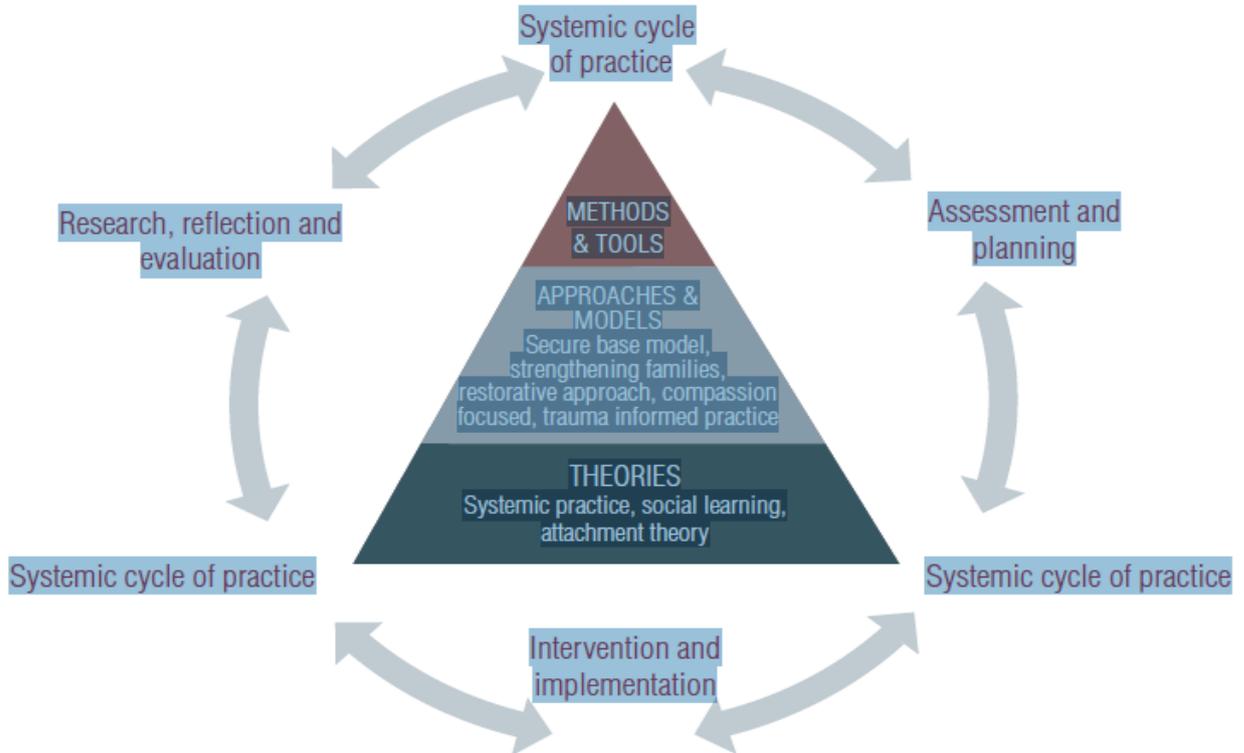
In conjunction with partner agencies we have a wide range of statutory functions under the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, Children and Social Work Act 2017, Working Together 2018 statutory guidance and our child protection procedures which make clear our duties in relation to children in need and children suffering or likely to suffer significant harm regardless of where the risk is identified under sections 17 and 47 of the Children Act 1989.

Local agencies including the police and health services also have a duty under section 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004 to co-operate with the local authority to promote the wellbeing of children in each local authority area and ensure they consider the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children when they are carrying out their functions. The 2017 Children and Social Work Act sets out how agencies locally must work together placing new duties on police, clinical commissioning team and local authority.

## **Quality of Practice**

- We understand what works, promote effective practice and learn from others
- Delivery achieves impact, is outcome focused and is evaluated
- Practice is based on what we know works with our children and the latest research

## Our Practice Model



### Key Elements of Practice

- Trauma informed practice
- Attachment narrative approaches
- Solution focussed practice
- Family Group Conferencing
- Motivational interviewing
- Signs of Safety practice

### Governance

The overarching accountability for Children's Services is the responsibility of Gateshead Council's Cabinet and we are also held to account by the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Children and Families and Corporate Parenting. At a partnership level the Health and Wellbeing Board provides challenge direction and interface across professional, partner organisations.

Decision making is the responsibility of the Corporate Management Team (CMT). In Children's Services it sits within the Group Management Team (GMT) as well as the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Decisions are also made with partners as part of Gateshead Safeguarding Children's Board (SCB) and the health and social care Strategic Partnership meetings. There are also further local decision-making panels for the consideration of individual children's needs and the multi-agency sexual exploitation and trafficking group (MSET, AMSET).

A number of sub-groups of the LSCB feed into the work of the full board.

## **Service Structure and Systems**

We will undertake workflow analysis and consolidate knowledge and information to facilitate our learning.

We strive to promote flexible systems and processes to strengthen clear communication and take a 'whole system' approach.

The service is currently developing a future specification for a new data system and is working upon the workflow pathways in preparation for the new system which will be procured over the next 18 months. The service user outcomes and best practice pathways will inform and shape the future system.

## **Workforce Development and Support**

Gateshead has a stable workforce through strong strategic planning to retain our experienced social workers. We have developed a dynamic partnership with 'Frontline' enhancing our ability to 'grow our own' social workforce and establishing a supportive and nurturing environment for newly qualified social work staff ensuring high quality social work practice. There is a strong focus on investing in the workforce, recruiting and retaining high calibre, confident and skilled social workers and managers.

Building skills and talents of social workers through systemic and relational practice frameworks is the key to a strength-based culture being established in Gateshead. Our employee feedback, from the recent survey, highlighted high levels of job satisfaction and demonstrates social workers feel they are supported to make a positive difference to lives of vulnerable children in Gateshead.

Our service structure is designed to support Gateshead Social Work practice as a continuous learning organisation.

We value the diversity, skills and experiences all staff bring to their practice. We promote a compassionate and respectful workforce and take the time to listen to, and communicate with, each other. We work in partnership with partner agencies to ensure there is collective response to determining priorities and delivering quality services.

Children's Social Workers require considerable resilience, a strong professional skill and knowledge base and confidence to manage the complexities and rigours of their work. Social Workers support those in the greatest need, who are the most vulnerable in Gateshead. Social Workers deliver interventions aimed at bringing positive change to the lived experiences of vulnerable children and families by assessing their needs, and providing interventions designed to protect and promote wellbeing.

To enable each Children's Social Worker to perform to the highest standard a programme of continuous professional development (CPD) must reflect national, local, and individual expectations ensuring amongst other things that every Social Worker in Gateshead continues to be deemed fit to practice through professional registration.

We support managers in practice leadership through regular development sessions and training; promoting a focus on 'leading from the middle'. Our Quality of Social Work practice lead is developing and leading delivery of a Quality of Practice Improvement Plan for the service focussing on skills development for the frontline workforce.

Priorities:

- Develop and consolidate the programme of Systemic Practice training for all Social Workers.
- Reduce regulation and prescription in the child protection system and focus more on the needs and experience of children.
- Ensure all staff have the appropriate tools to carry out effective and meaningful supervision which has a focus on practice through a systemic lens.
- Continue to support the Frontline programme for high achieving graduates and career changers.
- Embed the knowledge and skills statement for approved practitioners into the training and development we offer.
- Monitor progress of the National Assessment and Accreditation system for social work practitioners and ensure our workforce is prepared for the roll out of this programme.
- Ensure the PCF is embedded into the policies, practice and the training and development we offer to social workers.
- Continuation of our collaboration with Teaching Partnerships, the 'Step up to Social Work' programme and Frontline.
- Continue to embed the NQSW ASYE workshops – develop ASYE Assessors to ensure they fully understand the requirements of the ASYE programme and are equipped to give NQSWs the best start to their social work career.

## **Performance and Quality Assurance**

Through our performance clinic and audit processes we know our services well. Development and delivery are informed by evidence and evaluation. Areas of strength and development are quickly identified and addressed.

The voice of the child and families are systematically collated and are central to our understanding of impact. Management grip is strong, developing and has been a focus for improvement.

## **Commissioning and Resources**

The service ensures that all delivery, whether commissioned or delivered in house, is monitored carefully considering effectiveness and value for money.

We ensure that we make the greatest use of resources within budget to enable us to sustain funding to help all children to thrive.

The service works extremely closely with Children's Commissioning to ensure any provision meets the needs of children and families while ensuring efficient use of resources. Where appropriate the service will trade with other organisations providing for example, short break respite care.