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The Care Review: a North East Perspective

North East ADCS
Leading Children's Services



A snapshot of the North East

- Approx. 2.6 million people; a mixture of cities, large rural counties and coastal towns across 12 local authorities
- Industrial history and a strong sense of regional identity and pride, with importance placed on family and local community
- Long-standing and significant levels of disadvantage. The steepest increase in child poverty of any region
- Disproportionately impacted by funding cuts
- Highest rates of children's social care referrals and, since 2016, consistently the highest rates of statutory involvement of any region (CiN, CP & CiC)
- A 77% increase in CiC population since 2009 (Inner London has seen a 25% reduction over the same period)

Changing the narrative

- Assumptions about the reason for high levels of demand in the North East are overly simplistic
- Every North East local authority has a CiC rate above the national average, including those judged good and outstanding
- There is no evidence that regional difference in demand is due to practice or thresholds
- Context is driving the numbers and not quality of practice

“The view that good intervention leads to problems ‘going away’ is pervasive. The reality is that some families have a myriad of complex problems which cannot easily be resolved by social work intervention.”





The system challenges

- Poverty and unmet parental need are closely correlated to high demand. These issues cannot be resolved by children's services and require system-wide responses
- In areas of high demand, resources have to be focused on statutory services, reducing the capacity for prevention and early help services
- There are significant workforce challenges across the system. We don't have a system wide workforce strategy for children's services
- There is insufficient focus on children in the health system and substantial shortfall in investment in mental health provision

The system challenges

- There is insufficient provision for children with the most complex needs, costs are too high and quality is too variable
- Concept of a 'market' is flawed and we urgently need to review how high quality care can be provided for children and young people
- The regulatory framework is out of date and needs reform. It is inflexible and not focused closely enough on children's outcomes
- The binary nature of the system and focus on thresholds are driving cases down a legal route. This is unsustainable and bad for families





What we need

- A paradigm shift from a binary care system to one which is responsive and flexible, with an emphasis on a continuum of support
- A broad system wide workforce strategy for children's services
- Pooled budgets and integrated ways of working to drive collaboration across the system
- The broken care 'market' to be substantially overhauled
- A regulatory system that enables more fluid models of care based on the needs of children and young people



The Big 'Asks'

- Joined up national policy agenda of 'social levelling up' to address endemic levels of poverty in far too many of our communities.
- Sustainable system wide investment that ensures all parts of the system are properly funded

The Review must understand context and not be overly focused on structures