
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Children and Young People Portfolio.

Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)

2. In April 2015 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) put out a call for the next round of European Social Fund (ESF) under the Youth Employment Initiative. Projects are to support 15 to 29 year olds who are at risk of not engaging in education, employment or training (NEET) to progress into employment.
3. The Tees Valley five local authorities put together a partnership bid along with a number of employability and training organisations, with Hartlepool Borough Council as the lead accountable body.
4. In February the DWP confirmed that subject to contract and completion of pre-contract conditions the bid had been successful. The project will run until 31 July 2018.
5. Darlington Councils share of the programme will be £520,000, made up of £390,000 of YEI/ESF funding, £50,000 match from County Durham Community Foundation (CDCF) and a further £80,000 one off contribution from the Council.
6. The DBC Learning and Skills Service will act as the delivery body and a small team of staff will be recruited on fixed term contracts using the YEI funding to deliver the required outcomes. The Learning and Skills Service has successfully managed similar ESF projects since 2008.
7. The project will deliver support to around 200 young people (aged 16 to 29) to engage them in education and training and move them into employment. This will include 1:1 support, careers advice, employability and enterprise skills training as well as developing the practical skills required for interview and employment.
8. There are currently 117 16 to 17 year olds not participating in education and training and a further 665 18 to 29 year olds on out-of-work benefits as well as a number of 18 to 29 years olds who are classed as economically inactive. All these groups are eligible for support under YEI.

The Collective

9. Children's mental wellbeing was raised as a concern at the Darlington Partnership and the Children's Collective has been asked to undertake a review and make

recommendations of how services to support children's mental health and wellbeing might be better supported. A Task and Finish group has been set up and will report back to a future meeting of the Darlington Partnership, when the report will be made available.

Corporate Parenting Panel

10. The Panel met on 29 March 2016 and considered a report from the Darlo Care Crew which gave an update on their activities since the last meeting and also gave further details and the Regional Children in Care Conference to be held on 8 July 2016.
11. The Children's Homes Ofsted Full and Interim Reports for the last 12 months were shared with Members. All of the Council's Children's Homes have sustained the 'Good' judgements. Panel Members extended their congratulations and thanks to the managers and staff of all of the children's homes. The Fostering Service report for the quarter year period 1 October to 31 December 2015 was presented giving details of the recruitment activity together with indications of the focus of the new Fostering Recruitment Strategy for 2016/2017. There was an interesting discussion around the table with some excellent suggestions made by panel members to improve advertising for foster carers.
12. Reports from the Looked After Children Nurse and the Health Trust were presented giving details of performance in relation to Initial and Review Health Assessments and Dental Checks. There was discussion regarding the actions currently being taken to improve performance in all of these areas. Agreement was made for more regular reports to be presented to Corporate Parenting Panel to ensure a continued focus analysis of data in all of these performance areas in order to demonstrate improvements made with new processes and monitoring in place.

Children's Services Improvement Plan

13. Work is ongoing with regards to the Children's Services Improvement Plan. Further detail can be found in the 3 May Cabinet report at <S:\COMMITTEE REPORTS\CABINET\2016\160503\Stage 6 - Final Reports\160503 People Update on Children's Services Improvement.docx>

Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)

14. The Board met on 23 March 2016 and agreed to the forward plan of the multi-agency training programme which is available on the website <http://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/local-safeguarding-children-board/training>
15. The Board agreed the approach to a co-ordinated section 11/section 175 audit to be undertaken by all constituent agencies across Darlington, that will provide assurances on the discharge of statutory responsibilities appropriately in relation to safeguarding and to identify any areas of development or training needs.

16. The Board received an update from the Council's Children's Services on the progress against the Children's Services Improvement Plan. The Chair (Clive Harrison) of the Improvement Board attended the meeting as an observer and was invited to outline the role of the LSCB post improvement plan to continue to monitor and challenge the Local Authority and its Board Partners and to ensure there is effective challenge that demonstrates their work is making a difference to families' lives in Darlington.
17. The Board agreed to a proposed approach to a coordinated multi-agency data set which is in response to the LSCB Ofsted recommendations. This will be used to populate quarter 1 (April 16 – June 2016) data and Darlington Borough Council is providing support to the LSCB Quality Assurance and Performance Management Subgroup and the Business Unit to embed the dataset.

Schools Forum

18. Schools Forum met on 8 March. The main business of the meeting was to review the hourly rates paid to providers for nursery entitlement in 2016/17. The Forum agreed to increase the hourly rate for two year old entitlement to £5.10 per hour (an increase of 12p per hour on the rate agreed at January Forum) to reflect increasing pressures in this area. This increase is paid for from two year old funding reserves. No change was made to the three and four year old rate agreed at the January meeting.
19. The Forum was given a brief outline of the consultation that was released by the DfE on 7 March regarding the proposed changes, concerning a schools national funding formula.

Education

20. St Teresa's RC Primary School was inspected by Ofsted in February 2016 and graded good. Springfield Primary School and Holy Family RC Primary School were both graded as requires improvement by Ofsted in February 2016. The local authority has met with both schools and will attend the improvement board meetings arranged by the Academy Trusts of both schools. Both schools are drawing support from a number of agencies including the local authority to address areas for improvement.
21. Corporation Road Primary School was also inspected by Ofsted in February 2016. The school was graded inadequate. The local authority has submitted a 'Statement of Action' to HMI. The overarching objective is that all children in Corporation Road Community Primary School should attend a school which is graded as at least good in all aspects of its performance. Within the agreed LA procedures, as applied to a school which requires special measures, the governors and headteacher are being supported and challenged to produce an effective action plan setting out the key targets, actions, success criteria, key personnel, timescales and monitoring/evaluation procedures. The school improvement plan outlines the detailed actions being taken to address the key areas for improvement as highlighted in the inspection report

22. In a recent Ofsted inspection Little Acorns Nursery was graded outstanding.
23. The Local Authority Adult and Community Education provision (the Learning and Skills Service) was inspected on the 9th and 10th of March. This was a short Ofsted inspection to determine whether the provision remained 'Good'. The inspectors judged the Service to be 'Good'. Safeguarding was judged to be effective and the report states that, 'the designated safeguarding officer for the service takes a strong lead in promoting a culture of safeguarding across the whole service.' The mission of the Service in focusing on the most vulnerable members of the community was strong and curriculum planning was highly responsive to need. The report states that, 'managers and tutors have sustained the high quality of the community learning programme since the last inspection, with your family learning programmes having transformative effects on the lives of many parents and their children.' The report went on to say that, 'you communicate this mission to your staff particularly effectively, with the result that they are highly committed and ambitious'. Quality improvement planning in the service was considered highly effective. The high quality of apprenticeship programmes was commended and the inspectors indicated that this provision should be made available to more young people.

Locality Teams

24. The staffing levels in the area teams have stabilised and this has meant that the number of children allocated to each social worker has in turn stabilised and reduced although the complexity of issues and the ever increasing demands of the Family Courts means that demand remains high. There remains a concern regarding the mix of permanent and agency staff however this is being addressed through work on the recruitment and retention.
25. The first line management has been increased by a permanent member of staff being appointed and a permanent appointment will be made shortly to the only remaining vacancy.

Child Protection/Looked After Children Statistics

26. The number of children who are currently looked after remains steady at around 200. Placement stability as measured by the number of placements has improved slightly.
27. Darlington's performance in relation to achieving adoption for the children that need adoption is one of the highest nationally.
28. The number of children subject to child protection plans has increased over the last quarter. This reflects a steady rise over the year

Children's Commissioning

29. Darlington has led a collaborative exercise to develop a framework contract of children's home providers for those children who are looked after. Partnering authorities are Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. The Tees Valley residential framework attracted bids from 31 providers, providing opportunities for possible placements in 125 individual homes. Only one provider failed the evaluation exercise. This enables the authorities to contribute to improving choice and quality and provides opportunities, through the framework, to develop the market further to meet the needs of our populations.
30. The framework was effective from 1 April 2016 and will be opened up twice yearly to encourage new entrants, thereby extending choice further.
31. Darlington has also joined with the other eleven North East regional authorities and their Clinical Commissioning Groups to develop a framework for the commissioning of residential and/ or day school placements in registered, non-maintained and independent special schools and colleges. This commissioning framework has been led by Newcastle City Council. This framework has been operating since 1 February 2016.

Meetings

32. Since the last meeting of Council, I have:
 - (a) Attended the Corporate Parenting Panel.
 - (b) Weekly briefings with the Director of Adults and Children's Services and Interim Director of Children's Services.
 - (c) Attended Children and Young People Scrutiny.
 - (d) Attended Health and Well Being Board.
 - (e) Attended Darlington Partnership Executive.
 - (f) Improvement Board Meeting.
 - (g) Met with the Youth Member of Parliament and Deputy Youth Member of Parliament
 - (h) Children and Young People Scrutiny Consultation.
 - (i) Addressed the Darlington Social Worker Summit.
 - (j) Visited the Children Access Point.
 - (k) Took part in the recruitment of the Assistant Director of Children's Services.
 - (l) Mental Health Task and Finish Group (Children's Collective)
 - (m) Attended the Best of Darlington Awards Evening.
 - (n) Attended the Official Opening of the new Science and Music Wing at Carmel College.
 - (o) Attended Darlington Partnership meeting.

Councillor Cyndi Hughes
Children and Young People Portfolio