

Children's Services Budget Rationale

Giving every child the best start in life

Darlington's children and young people are our future. We will build on progress made and support all of our children to aspire and achieve their own potential. Enjoying life as active participating citizens free from poverty, ignorance, neglect, crime, harm, abuse and distress. We will achieve this by working together to ensure families have access to effective, high quality integrated services. "
Darlington Children's Trust 2008.

In 2014 Elected Members and partners have reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring that there are effective early intervention and preventative services in place to work with children and their families to reduce the incidence of abuse and neglect, family breakdown, social exclusion and poor outcomes. This builds on the commitment made in the Children and Young People's Plan 2011-14 which included an early intervention commissioning strategy based on the research evidence produced by Graham Allen MP and the Marmot review and which has delivered improved outcomes for children and young people.

Our vision for children and young people in Darlington continues to be that each and every one has the best start in life through access to high quality early years provision, high performing schools, excellent health care and leisure opportunities.

Prevention and Early Help

Our Early Help offer delivered with partner agencies is based on the premise that intervening early in the onset of difficulties is both more cost effective and contributes to better outcomes for children and young people.

We are developing a new integrated early help offer, which will include children's centre delivery for under 5's, early help, and Troubled Families. Working with partners we are transforming our approach, building on what works to target support at those children and families in greatest need.

Children's Centre activity will be delivered through a hub and spoke model. This will allow us to support those in most need in the Borough. This model will enable one centrally located Children's Centre, which will be the focal point for a range of activities, such as targeted parenting skills programmes and home to nursery transition programme with vulnerable children. In addition, there will be 4 or 5 "hubs" or "delivery points" each of which will offer a smaller range of services specifically in local communities. We will continue to work closely with

other professionals such as Health Visitors in providing combined easily accessible services to under 5's and their families.

Alongside the Children's Centre activity that is targeted at under 5's and their families there will be Early Intervention Teams that will consist of a range of professionals e.g. social workers, youth workers who will work with the most vulnerable children and families, for example those at risk of exclusion, children on the edge of care, preventing the need to escalate to Court intervention, wherever possible.

By using a needs led approach we will target resources at those children who are in most need to prevent further deterioration, and further managing demand for specialist statutory services such as the Youth Offending Service.

We aim to reduce gaps and overlaps between services and working with partners through a team around the family model:

- (a) Identify needs earlier, particularly those at the edge of statutory intervention
- (b) Support co-ordinated packages of support for children and their families
- (c) Reduce the number of cases that escalate to require statutory intervention
- (d) Provide step up support to children and families who need statutory intervention to expedite the right support and step down for families where a statutory intervention is no longer required to assist them in building resilience and coping mechanisms in their community.
- (e) Target support at children who are vulnerable around transition points e.g. Home to nursery/school, Primary to secondary school.

Over the next 3 years through April 2019 we will review and reconfigure the Children's Centres and Early Intervention Teams and Troubled Families to develop a smaller, better targeted early help offer.

Children in need of help and protection

Following the Ofsted inspection last year a number of improvements have been implemented, through training, development and better management oversight. As part of this we have increased the number of social work posts in the service bringing caseloads within National guidelines.

The staffing for this part of the service has been calculated carefully taking account of current needs and demand.

Building on improvements to date, we continue to be committed to providing

timely, high quality social work support and intervention to ensure that children and young people in need of help and protection receive this. We will continue to work in partnership with children and their families and other agencies, building on the good relationships that exist in Darlington.

We are committed to developing an evidence based, solution focussed model of social work in Darlington that builds on the strengths of families and communities. We strongly believe that the best place for children to be brought up is within their own family and community.

Developing a new operating model across Children's Services.

Building strong effectively targeted early help services, with partners is vital to managing demand for specialist services, through early targeted support to the most vulnerable children.

Whilst there are no immediate plans to change the configuration of social work teams the structure of Children's Social Care teams will be reviewed as both the evidence based practice model and early help model are developed.

The new early help model will be delivered by 2019 within a reduced Local Authority resource base, in partnership with other agencies such as schools and early years providers.

The YOT and ASB team functions will be targeted at meeting the Youth Justice Board National priorities through a reduced but focused resource.

We will also review our placement strategy including the use of our 3 in house residential units to ensure that we provide the right mix and type of placements to meet the needs of children looked after.

We will redesign education support services to better target the required resources on SEN and school improvement to meet the Local Authority responsibility for driving school performance and improvement, closing the gap for vulnerable groups through championing their needs across the sector.