
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

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

Accessibility Strategy – Children’s Services (Special Education Needs and Disability)

2. Cabinet have approved the Childrens’ Services Accessibility Strategy and agreed actions to comply with the Equality Act 2010.
3. It is a requirement that an accessibility strategy is prepared in relation to all schools for which we have responsibility. The Strategy will allow us to support our local authority maintained schools and provide guidance, where practicable, to Academy schools to meet the legal requirements of the Children and Families Act and Section 10 of the Equality Act 2010.
4. Consultation on the strategy took place between 16 December 2016 and 3 February 2017 with all Darlington schools, Darlington Association on Disability, Darlington Youth Partnership and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Update on Children’s Services Improvements

5. A third Ofsted monitoring visit took place in February 2017, during which Inspectors focused on the local authority’s response to Contact and Referrals, information sharing, quality of practice and management oversight.
6. The visit demonstrated evidence of improved compliance in meeting statutory timescales and highlighted work still required to embed consistency of quality in practice.
7. The Inspectors noted the purposeful action taken by senior managers to improve workforce strategy both locally and across the region.
8. An improved suite of performance information is now available to managers. A more detailed analysis of this data, as well as monitoring of quality of practice is now needed.
9. Also noted was the enthusiasm and commitment of social workers and managers at all levels. They were described by inspectors as-- highly visible, supportive and accessible.

10. Key priorities have been identified to address areas for improvement over the next three months. A fourth Ofsted monitoring visit is scheduled for June 2017 with a 6 monthly follow up visit scheduled by the Department for Education on the 28 June 2017.
11. The Improvement Board met on 5th April. The board sought reassurance on progress made in respect of managing the “Contacts into the Safeguarding Service”, work force development, the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board Improvement Plan and Early Help Services.
12. References were made to the links between the Early Help Reference Group, which is now established and the Darlington Safeguarding Children’s Board and the Improvement Board were reassured to see those quality assurance links were now in place and the need to strengthen voluntary sector services around children’s services and utilise funding which was retained within the Medium Term Financial Plan to support communities.
13. The Board also received a performance report highlighting that of the 18 recommendations for improvement, six were rated as green, seven were classed as amber and five completed.
14. The next board meeting is scheduled for the 12th July 2017 and will consider progress on the quality assurance cycle including audit and impact of the Independent Reviewing Service and Placement Stability for children looked after.

Corporate Parenting Panel

15. The Panel met on 18th April 2017 where updates on Fostering and Adoption were noted. The panel heard that the Adoption Scorecard, a performance threshold for capturing timeliness in the adoption system, ranked Darlington 27 in England 2016-17.
16. Members of the Darlo Care Crew advised Panel that during half term a number of young people took part in a graffiti project with their work being displayed in the Cornmill Shopping Centre.
17. During February and March young people attended Curious Monkey, a Children North East play ‘Leaving’ at Northern Stage Newcastle and the Council Leader’s meeting in Durham where the Regional Offer for Looked After Children was discussed to consider how the offer could be taken forward within each local authority.
18. A Celebration Event for all children looked after was held on 11 April 2017 at Mowden Park, RFC, Northern Echo Arena. Blue Cabin co-ordinated arts based activities and Outdoor Ambition with Rugby players setting up some challenges. Attendees agreed overwhelmingly that the event had been a success. Together, we will look forward to considering future events.

19. The Darlington Foster Carer Association (DFCA) reported that a drop in session was held in March for foster carers and that members of the DFCA Committee have now set up a Facebook page to offer support and advice to foster carers.
20. Representatives from the council continue to be involved in progressing the national requirement for a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020 and it was agreed that an update report on the proposals be presented to the next Corporate Parenting Panel.

Darlington Safeguarding Children Board (DSCB)

21. The Board met on 7 March 2017 and received a report on the current position and an overview of the 'Legal Planning' based on findings from the inspection. The Board were assured that children subject to section 20 arrangements have been reviewed and arrangements have been strengthened.
22. A joint report was received from Durham Constabulary and Darlington Borough Council on children who go missing. The detailed report provided assurances that agencies understood the issues affecting young people who go missing and are working collaboratively to resolve these. The Board acknowledged that detailed understanding of why children go missing is required and will receive regular updates on how work is progressing to reduce the missing episodes.
23. Two commissioned "lessons learned" reviews have concluded and are in the quality assurance process in advance of them being presented to an Extra-ordinary Board meeting designed to be sure that the learning and the actions required to improve multi-agency practice are fully understood and embraced.
24. The Board now have embedded horizon scanning information which is presented as part of the Business Managers report and this should enable the Board to have in their sights external development/changes that Board may need to respond to in a more pro-active manner such as the Children and Social Work Bill.
25. DSCB has develop a 'messages bulletin' after every Board meeting to inform the general public and practitioners working with children on the work of the Board. This is available from the Boards' website:
www.darlingtonsafeguardingboards.co.uk.

Early Help

26. The remodelling of the Early Help service is now complete with three area teams responding to children and families who require a targeted service. The completion of Early Help assessments is increasing, ensuring that families receive a timely response and their needs are addressed at the earliest opportunity.
27. The multi-agency Early Help Reference group is responsible for ensuring that the Early Help Offer is equitable to all and that partners understand their responsibilities in providing early help service from within their organisations.

Children Centres

28. The consultation process in respect of the delivery of Children Centre Services, commenced on Tuesday 18th April 2017. The aim of the consultation is to seek the views of the wider public, current and potential service users and stakeholders to inform a final proposal on the delivery model for Children's Centres.
29. Members will be aware that within Medium Term Financial Plan 2016 it was agreed that Children Centre Delivery could possibly be delivered using alternative methods and thereby make a significant contribution to required financial savings.

Child Protection/Looked After Children Statistics

30. At the end of March 2017 there were 66 children subject to a Child Protection Plan and 219 children Looked After. The figures for the cohort of looked after children have remained at a stable level since January 2017 with February and March demonstrating similar numbers for children who are the subject of a child protection plan.

School Forum

31. The Forum met on 7th March and received updates concerning the 2016/17 budget position and commissioned school services. The Forum received a proposal to increase the "growth fund" to cover additional places at St Georges' Primary School from September 17, which was approved. It also approved the early years funding formula for the 2017/18 financial year.

Education

32. Work continues to produce a draft Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Position Statement, in preparation for a SEND inspection. This is structured around the three inspection questions, which are intended to capture the strengths and the areas for development within a local authority area, based on input from and collaboration with partners in Health, Education, Care and the voluntary sector.
33. A dedicated SEND Partnership Steering Group is in place to enable an integrated approach to this area of work. An action plan has been developed, and is monitored through the group, based on the outcomes of partners' self-evaluation of practice.
34. Beaumont Hill Academy was inspected by Ofsted in January 2017. The overall effectiveness of the academy was judged as inadequate. All other areas were judged inadequate except for the Quality of teaching, learning and assessment and Outcomes for pupils. The Regional Schools Commissioner is responsible for supporting the school in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the inspection. Safeguarding concerns are being addressed by the Local Authority in collaboration with the Regional Schools Commissioner's Office.

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

35. Work continues on the new Children and Young Peoples plan, following extensive engagement. The emergent draft themes are now under consultation.
36. In March 2017 Darlington received another successful 30 Hours Childcare capital award of £85,050 from the Department for Education. This funding will enable The Rydal Academy to create 78 new 30 Hour Childcare places for local parents from September 2017.
37. The local authority has also had a successful Digital Accelerate funding award from the DfE of £20,689 which will enable 30 Hours Childcare data collection and payments to become more automated.

Meetings

38. Since the last meeting of Council, I have:
 - (a) Met with volunteers at Top Deck;
 - (b) Met with a Head Teacher and the Council's SEND officer to discuss changes;
 - (c) Attended and address a Darlington Assistance for Refugees (DAR);
 - (d) Participated in the Improvement Board;
 - (e) Participated in a Darlington Partnership Executive Board meeting;
 - (f) Met with the Director for Adult and Children's Services and other officers for weekly briefings;
 - (g) Attended a celebration event for looked after children at the Northern Echo Arena;
 - (h) Participated in the Corporate Parenting Panel;
 - (i) Attended a meeting with representatives from YMCA; and
 - (j) Participated in a meeting with DACYM (Darlington Area Churches Youth Ministry) to discuss work currently underway in schools and communities throughout the borough;

Councillor Cyndi Hughes
Children and Young People Portfolio