
OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following areas of work have been progressed under the Children and Young People Portfolio.

Children and Young People's Plan 2017-2022

2. Following approval by Council of the Children and Young People's Plan 2017/22 at its meeting on 28 September 2017, the next stage is to work with colleagues across the partnership to market and launch the plan and to implement the one-year Delivery Plan.

Ofsted Monitoring Visit

3. Ofsted carried out its fifth and final monitoring visit of Children's Services on 20 and 21 September 2017. During the course of this visit, inspectors reviewed the experience and progress of children looked after, with a particular focus on:
 - (a) planning for permanence
 - (b) the quality of children's plans
 - (c) management oversight
 - (d) effectiveness of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).
4. This was a positive visit with inspectors concluding compliance with statutory requirements has been achieved. Senior managers show improved understanding and prioritisation of service strengths and areas for development. Staff are being better supported to reach the right decision within a timeframe that meets the child's best interests.
5. Workforce stability has greatly improved. There is a high level of engagement by senior managers with social work teams. This is engendering a culture and environment in which staff feel supported to invest in the service and develop skills and competencies. Social workers report that senior managers are highly visible and supportive. This is contributing positively to staff retention and recruitment.
6. Children are experiencing fewer changes in social worker and are better able to develop positive relationships with them. Caseloads are more manageable and new technology is supporting agile working. This is helping social workers to focus more on direct work with children and their families.
7. The IRO role in monitoring and challenging the local authority's overall performance as corporate parents is beginning to improve. Caseloads are well managed, providing IROs with the capacity to fulfil the statutory functions of their role. The

service is now achieving 100 per cent compliance in relation to holding timely reviews. IROs now need to focus on ensuring that the care plans reflect the children's current needs and that the wishes and feelings of the children are fully considered with an emphasis placed on ensuring that the impact of their scrutiny results in improved outcomes for children.

8. Continued focus is required to improve the quality and consistency of practice of assessments and plans. Assessments need to be updated, thorough, contain multi-agency input and the use of research is used enough to inform evidence based practice, enabling care plans to reflect the children's current needs well enough.
9. The Improvement Board took place on the 8 November and received a report giving an overview of the improvements made regarding quality of practice, including an update on the audit activity in Quarter 2.
10. An update report regarding Placement Stability was given together with examples of how work over the last four months was resulting in improved performance and outcomes.
11. The board also received an update on Early Help and the current position regarding multi-agency offer. Examples of outcomes for children and families were shared with Board members.

Children's Centre's – New Delivery Model

9. On 13 September, Cabinet approved the proposed delivery model for Children's Centres across Darlington and the closure of the Haughton Children's Centre. A hub and spoke model was agreed, maintaining services to be delivered full time from McNay Street, with reduced hours from Mount Pleasant, Skerne Park and Outreach services from Maidendale and Red Hall.
10. The final decision took into consideration the findings of the public consultation exercise, undertaken over a seven week period; equality impact assessments, the future use of buildings and claw back clauses.
11. Children's Services staff are scheduled to vacate Haughton at the end of November 2017 and transfer to the Children's Centre at McNay Street. The building will revert to the responsibility of Corporate Landlord, until agreement is reached on future functioning.
12. Changes to the delivery of Early Help Services was agreed as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in June 2016 and responses to consultation feedback evidenced broad support for the new delivery model. The new delivery model will also deliver £100,000 of savings contributing to the MTFP target.

The Children's Trust

13. The Darlington Health and Well-being Board includes the Children's Trust agenda, embedding the issues and actions for the 'best start in life'. The Board met on 26 October 2017, topics included headlines from the Schools Healthy Lifestyles Survey, an update on the 0 to 19 years Healthy Child Programme contract and a briefing on actions to develop a Darlington childhood healthy weight action plan, including the role of sugar reduction in tackling obesity and promoting oral health.
14. The Health and Well-being Board also discussed the NHS Children and Young People Mental Health Local Transformation Plan, a 'refreshed' version of the original multi-agency plan, which is currently in development.

Corporate Parenting Panel

15. The Panel met on 3 October 2017, where it discussed the Child in Care Council Agenda Day, held in August, which had been very successful with young people. Information on health passports and delivering mental health awareness to young people in foster or residential groups were items raised that will inform future training needs for young people. The Panel recognised the work being delivered to retain social workers, acknowledging that this will have a positive effect in having consistency of those involved in their care.
16. Darlington has been successful in increasing the participation of 16 and 17 year olds that continue in education and training until at least their 18th birthday. The 'family firm' initiative to improve education and training opportunities for care leavers, complements the youth employment initiative which commenced in mid-2016 and runs until the end of July 2018 supporting 16-29 year olds into employment, education or training.
17. The overall Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) figure for Darlington is decreasing and is now the best in the Tees Valley with currently just under 100 young people in Darlington who are classified as NEET, including looked after children and care leavers who are resident in Darlington.

Education

18. There have been a number of recent Ofsted Inspections carried out; two childminders, both of whom were graded 'Good'. Paradise After School Club retained a grade of 'Good' and one home-based childcare provision (on the childcare register) was confirmed as 'having met the standards'.
19. The consultation by George Dent Nursery School and Borough Road Nursery School resulted in both school governing bodies resolving to proceed with the process of forming a Federation. A letter advising parents of the Governor's decision was circulated to the parents of each school. The Federation of Darlington Nursery Schools commenced on 1 November 2017.

20. Three new Head Teacher's/Head of School and one acting Head Teacher commenced duty in September. Richard Gartland has returned to Springfield Primary School as Principal, Jonathan Briggs is the new Head Teacher of The Federation of Abbey Schools, Judith Skirving is the Head of School at Bishopton Redmarshall (joining the Bishopton Redmarshall and Heighington Trust) and Josie Wilson is Acting Head Teacher at Holy Family Primary School.

School Forum

21. The Forum met 10 October 2017. The agenda items included regular reports concerning the 2016/17 budget position and commissioned school services. The Forum was notified of a projected year end budget deficit position of approximately £900,000 arising from on-going pressures in special education needs.
22. The Forum also received an update on the new National Funding Formula following the release of guidance and consultation responses from the Department of Education over the Summer. The new national arrangements will require some changes to Darlington's local school formula calculation which will be consulted on with all schools. The Forum will receive additional information at future meetings before the 2018/19 formula is completed in January 2018.

Child Protection/Looked After Children Statistics

23. At the end of August 2017 there were 218 children looked after by Darlington Borough Council. This is in line with the 2016/17 year end (219).
24. The number of children who are subject to Child Protection plans has remained stable over the last quarter with 91 children recorded at the end of September.

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

25. The supply of 30 hour places is being monitored and to date no parents have reported difficulty in accessing a place via the provider portal. The Department for Education capital funding of £115,000 which the local authority was awarded in December 2016 has enabled 94 new 30 hour places to be created; 16 places opened in September 2017 at a pre-school in the Eastbourne area and 78 places are due to open at a primary school in Bank Top and Lascelles in January 2018. As of 13 October 2017, a total of 578 Darlington parents have received a 30 hours HM Revenue and Customs (HRMC) eligibility code.
26. A collaborative group consisting of the 12 regional authorities (NE12) and 10 CCG's was established in May 2014 to undertake the joint commissioning of Independent Special School placements for children with a Special Educational Need or Disability. Phase 2 of the NE12 collaboration is currently underway and a tender evaluation was completed on 23 October to expand the contract to include Childrens Residential Homes and Short Breaks provision. Further updates will be provided regarding the outcome of the tender process which is due to conclude in January 2018.

Meetings

27. Since the last meeting of Council I have:

- (a) Addressed the Internet Safety Group launch at Teesside University;
- (b) Attended weekly briefings with the Director of Adult and Children's Services;
- (c) Attended the Corporate Parenting Panel;
- (d) Met with Darlington MP, Jenny Chapman to discuss young people's mental health issues;
- (e) Presented certificates at the Mayor's Tea Party to community volunteers;
- (f) Met with Ron Hogg (Police, Crime and Victims Commissioner) at Carmel College;
- (g) Attended Schools Forum;
- (h) Attended the North East Schools Summit in Newcastle;
- (i) Held monthly "young person surgeries" at the Dolphin Centre;
- (j) Welcomed European teachers on an Erasmus funded exchange to Darlington;
- (k) Presented awards at the National Citizens Service awards dinner in Newcastle;
- (l) Attended the Children's Safeguarding Board;
- (m) Chaired the Local Government Appointments Panel;
- (n) Convened a meeting to discuss the future of 'Top Deck';
- (o) Attended the Health and Well-being Board;
- (p) Attended the Darlington Partnership Board;
- (q) Attended the Combined Authority Education and Skills Board;
- (r) Chaired the termly All-Darlington governors meeting held at the Education Village; and
- (s) Attended the first meeting of the newly federated George Dent/ Borough Road governing body.

Councillor Cyndi Hughes
Children and Young People Portfolio