

Cabinet Agenda



**5.00 pm Tuesday, 4 May 2021
Via Microsoft Teams**

In accordance with Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, Members will join the meeting remotely rather than by attending a venue. Members of the public can view a live stream of the meeting at:

<https://www.darlington.gov.uk/livemeetings>

Members of the public may make representations on items on this agenda and these will be taken into account when making the decisions. Representations should be submitted to Lynne Wood by e-mail to Lynne.Wood@darlington.gov.uk by 5.00 p.m. on Friday 30 April 2021

1. Introductions/Attendance at Meeting.
2. Declarations of Interest.
3. To hear relevant representation (from Members and the General Public) on items on this Cabinet agenda.
4. To approve the Minutes of the meeting of this Cabinet held on Tuesday, 13 April 2021 (Pages 3 - 8)
5. Matters Referred to Cabinet –
There are no matters referred back for reconsideration to this meeting

6. Issues Arising from Scrutiny Committee
 - (a) Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People – Report of the Chair of the Review Group.
(Pages 9 - 34)
 - (b) Joint Autism Joint Review Group – Report of the Chair of the Review Group.
(Pages 35 - 48)
7. Key Decision - Customer Engagement Strategy 2021/24 – Report of the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services.
(Pages 49 - 64)
8. Membership Changes - To consider any Membership Changes to Other Bodies to which Cabinet appoints.
9. SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM(S) (if any) which in the opinion of the Chair of this Committee are of an urgent nature and can be discussed at this meeting.
10. Questions.



Luke Swinhoe
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Friday 23 April 2021

Town Hall
Darlington.

Membership

Councillors Clarke, Dulston, Johnson, Keir, Marshall, Mills, K Nicholson and Mrs H Scott

If you need this information in a different language or format or you have any other queries on this agenda please contact Lynne Wood, Elections Manager, Resources Group, during normal office hours 8.30 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. Mondays to Thursdays and 8.30 a.m. to 4.15 p.m. Fridays (e-mail Lynne.Wood@darlington.gov.uk or telephone 01325 405803).

**DECISIONS SHOULD NOT BE IMPLEMENTED BEFORE
MONDAY 26 APRIL 2021**

CABINET

Tuesday, 13 April 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Mrs H Scott (Chair), Clarke, Dulston, Johnson, Keir, Marshall, Mills and K Nicholson

INVITEES – Councillors Curry, Harker, Snedker and Tait

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Councillor Haszeldine

C116 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

**C117 TO HEAR RELEVANT REPRESENTATION (FROM MEMBERS AND THE
GENERAL PUBLIC) ON ITEMS ON THIS CABINET AGENDA.**

No representations were made by Members or members of the public in attendance at the meeting.

**C118 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS CABINET HELD ON
TUESDAY, 9 MARCH 2021.**

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Cabinet held on 9 March 2021.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be confirmed as a correct record.

REASON – They represent an accurate record of the meeting.

C119 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET

There were no matters referred back for re-consideration to this meeting.

C120 ISSUES ARISING FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no issues arising from Scrutiny considered at this meeting.

C121 KEY DECISION - ANNUAL PROCUREMENT PLAN 2021/22

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report of the Managing Director (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the Annual Procurement Plan (also previously circulated) including the assessment of contracts that are considered to be strategic or non-strategic and updating Members on the outcomes of procurement(s) previously designated as Strategic; the decisions

taken by the Procurement Board to waive the Contract Procedure Rules; and Savings and Social Value measures achieved in the previous financial year.

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio reported at the meeting that there were four contracts that were designated strategic in the update to the Annual Plan and not three as detailed in the submitted report.

RESOLVED - That the assessment of strategic and non-strategic contracts as presented in Appendix 1 of the submitted report, be approved and it be agreed that:-

- (a) further reports/updates on the procurement process for those contracts designated as strategic (including decisions made by the Procurement Board) be brought to Cabinet;
- (b) the contract award decisions for the contracts designated as non-strategic be delegated to the appropriate Director as listed in the plan at Appendix 1 of the submitted report; and
- (c) the contract award decisions for the contracts designated as strategic, as listed in the plan at Appendix 1 of the submitted report, be delegated to the Procurement Board to approve and be reported back to Cabinet.

REASONS - (a) In respect of strategic/non-strategic contracts, the recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -

- (i) the Contract Procedure Rules require Cabinet to approve the designation of contracts as strategic and non-strategic;
- (ii) contracts designated strategic are of high value and high significance in respect of the impact on residents, Health and Safety and public safety; and
- (iii) the contracts designated non-strategic are of a lower value and lower significance in respect of the impact on residents and public safety.

(b) In respect of Procurement Board waiver decisions, the recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -

- (i) in order to comply with the Contract Procedure Rules;
- (ii) to provide Cabinet with information about the decisions made by the Procurement Board; and
- (iii) To supplement the reports that are taken to Cabinet about proposed spend over £100,000, that are set out in the Annual Procurement Plan and the in-year update to that report.

C122 LOCOMOTION NO 1 AND REPLICA

The Leader introduced the report of the Director of Economic Growth and

Neighbourhood Services (previously circulated) updating Members on the outcome of the negotiations with the Science Museum Group (on behalf of the National Railway Museum (NRM)) with regard to Locomotion No 1; Beamish Museum with regard to the Replica of Locomotion No 1; and requesting that consideration be given to acquiring the Replica of Locomotion No 1 from Beamish Museum.

The submitted report stated that a Memorandum of Understanding on the future loan exhibits from the NRM had been agreed and Locomotion No 1 had been transferred to Locomotion in Shildon; it would return to Darlington in 2025 for a period and then on an on-going basis moving forward; and that in addition, the Council had secured the transfer of ownership of the Replica of Locomotion No 1 from Beamish Museum to the Council.

Discussion ensued on how the replica of Locomotion No 1 came to be under the ownership of Beamish Museum; when it was last working; on the amount of work required for it to work again; and the Memorandum of Understanding. The Chair and the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services responded thereon.

RESOLVED – (a) That the acquisition of the Replica of Locomotion No 1 from Beamish Museum, as detailed in the submitted report, be approved.

(b) That the provision of a grant to Beamish Museum, to a maximum of £150,000, be approved, to enable them to restore the Locomotive Dunrobin.

(c) That the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services, be authorised, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio holder, to finalise terms.

(d) That the Assistant Director Law and Governance be authorised to complete the legal agreements necessary for the acquisition and grant.

REASONS – (a) To enable the Council to finalise the acquisition of the Replica of Locomotion No. 1.

(b) To support the Council's plans for the Head of Steam and the bicentenary celebrations in 2025.

C123 COUNCILLORS STRONGER COMMUNITY FUND

The Cabinet Member with the Stronger Communities Portfolio introduced the report of the Managing Director (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the establishment of a pilot scheme to enable Councillors to utilise the fund, at their discretion, to deliver the objectives of the Stronger Communities Fund (SCF).

The submitted report stated that the approved Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) allocated £50,000 to establish a Stronger Communities Fund (Minute 56/Feb/21 refers); the scheme would operate for one year during which time its success would be reviewed, after which consideration would be given to whether the pilot scheme would become a permanent feature of the MTFP; and that £1,000 would be allocated to each Councillor to be used to deliver the objectives of the SCF which were to build Stronger Communities by supporting individuals and groups to enhance access to opportunities to improve health and wellbeing outcomes and to investing in

environmental improvements that enhance the local area to the benefit of the local community.

It was reported that the scheme would be administered with maximum flexibility to enable learning and benefits to be easily achieved by the pilot; Councillors could merge their allocations with other Councillors within their wards and across the Borough, should they so wish to do so; a third party could be used to allocate funds on their behalf; and that grants and investments should only be made to individuals or 'not for profit' organisations.

RESOLVED – (a) That the pilot Stronger Communities Scheme, as detailed in the submitted report, be approved.

(b) That the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with the Stronger Communities Portfolio, be delegated responsibility, to determine if any proposals made by Councillors were out with the 'spirit' and procedures of the fund.

REASONS – (a) To determine the scheme.

(b) To govern the scheme flexibly.

C124 PROPOSED WAITING RESTRICTIONS GEORGE STEPHENSON DRIVE - OBJECTIONS

The Cabinet Member with Local Services Portfolio introduced the report of the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services (previously circulated) advising Members of the receipt of two objections to a proposal for waiting restrictions on George Stephenson Drive and requesting that consideration be given to whether to proceed with the proposal.

The submitted report stated that concerns had been received from residents via a Ward Councillor in respect of the parking on the bend of George Stephenson Drive on the approach to the junction with West Auckland Road; residents were currently parking on and around the bend which was causing visibility issues for vehicles entering and leaving George Stephenson Drive; Officers had previously consulted on solutions to manage parking at this location and received numerous informal objections on both occasions; since then there had been additional development adjacent which had exacerbated the issue; and that further informal and formal consultation had been undertaken on a proposal for waiting restrictions to prevent parking and improve the visibility/road safety issues, as shown on the plan appended to the submitted report.

It was reported that there had been four submissions to the statutory consultation, once of which was fully supportive of the proposal; one submission stated restrictions were not sufficient; and two objections to the scheme.

Particular reference was made at the meeting as to why the parking restrictions had not been implemented earlier.

RESOLVED - That the objections received, as detailed in the submitted report, be set aside and officers be authorised to proceed with the proposal to introduce the waiting

restriction scheme as shown at Appendix A to the submitted report.

REASON - To improve the traffic flow, visibility and road safety of vehicles entering and leaving George Stephenson Drive. The Council, acting in its capacity as the Highway Authority, have a duty of care to ensure the safety of the travelling public and a duty under the Traffic Management Act 2004 to maintain the expeditious movement of traffic.

C125 RELEASE OF CAPITAL ALLOCATION IN THE MTFP - CAPITALISED REPAIRS IN CORPORATE BUILDINGS AND ADVANCED DESIGN FEES

The Cabinet Member with the Resources Portfolio introduced the report of the Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to the release of capital funding allocated in the Capital Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2021/22 to 2024/25 for the purpose of carrying out capitalised repairs in corporate buildings; advanced design fees to bring forward regeneration projects and prepare sites for development; and for the purpose of carrying out energy saving measures in corporate buildings.

The submitted report requested the release of £250,000 allocated in 2021/22 Capital MTFP for Capitalised Repairs and essential remedial works; £150,000 for advanced design work to develop schemes to bring sites forward for development to create jobs and support the local economy; and the government grant of £443,313 to progress the proposed works to reduce gas consumption at the Town Hall and the Hippodrome.

Particular references were made at the meeting to the scheme to replace the existing heating system at the Town Hall and to the need to include information in future reports showing the effect that the Council's initiatives were having on carbon impact and climate change.

RESOLVED – (a) That the £250,000 allocated in the Capital Medium Term Financial Plan for Capitalised Repairs, as detailed in the submitted report, be released.

(b) That the £150,000 of Advanced Design Fees to bring forward regeneration projects and to carry out necessary preparatory work on those development sites, as detailed in the submitted report, be released.

(c) That the grant funding of £443,313 from the Heat Decarbonisation Scheme for energy saving measures at the Town Hall and Hippodrome, as detailed in the submitted report, be released.

REASONS – (a) To safeguard the condition of the Council's corporate buildings, reduce energy consumption and to meet statutory and legal obligations.

(b) The Advanced Design Fees will enable progress to be made on bringing forward regeneration projects and sites for development.

C126 MEMBERSHIP CHANGES - TO CONSIDER ANY MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO OTHER BODIES TO WHICH CABINET APPOINTS.

There were no membership changes reported at the meeting.

**DECISIONS DATED –
FRIDAY 16 APRIL 2021**

**CABINET
4 MAY 2021**

EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE REVIEW GROUP

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the outcome and findings of the review Group established by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and to seek Members' approval to the recommendations contained within its final report.

Summary

2. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Review Group to examine the effects of the pandemic on children and young people. The Terms of Reference were agreed at the first meeting of the Review Group and all Members of the Committee were invited to participate in the Review.
3. The Review Group has met on many occasions during the course of its review and a wide number of issues have been discussed and considered and these are included in the notes of the meetings.
4. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee considered the final report (**Appendix 1**) at its meeting held on 22 April 2021 and Cabinet is requested to consider and endorse the recommendations contained therein.

Comments of the Director of Children and Adult Services

5. The report of the Review Group is helpful in highlighting the effects that the pandemic has had on the lives of children and young people in Darlington. The work of the review reinforces the importance of the Children and Young People's Plan and the role it provides in focussing the collective effort of partners towards improving outcomes for children and young people.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that Cabinet consider the final report and endorse the recommendations as contained therein and those recommendations specifically for Cabinet's consideration :
- (a) Mental Health – to examine upskilling and augmentation of our own staff and to promote better partnership working between providers and commissioners of mental health and wellbeing services in order to reduce waiting times to access services, to improve signposting and communications to young people, carers and families about opportunities to engage in activities that promote good mental health and positive wellbeing.
 - (b) Call for and encourage take-up of additional career placement opportunities that do not rely on a family's own contacts from a younger age as well as more equitable access to employment/apprenticeship opportunities for young people.
 - (c) Consult and engage more with children and young people as active citizens of Darlington. Organise opportunities to speak with children and young people about the issues making their way through Council in order to encourage a better understanding of the ways young residents can engage with and exert influence upon those decisions that have an impact on their lives or future opportunities.
 - (d) Call for accessible, on-going advertising/ messaging for young people on the improved social offer in the town centre– i.e. Central Hub/Bowling Alleys, etc.
 - (e) Commit to listening to and taking account of the voice of children and young people as part of the Council's strategic, Post-Covid approach across all departments.
 - (f) To promote a commitment to achieving better understanding and tolerance between all age groups within our Darlington communities

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported to ensure that all partners work together to support and improve services for the ongoing effects of the pandemic on Children and Young People.

Councillor C Hughes
Chair of the Review Group

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report other than those referred to.

Allison Hill : Extension 5997

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no specific implications for Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	There are no specific implications for Crime and Disorder.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no carbon impact implications in this report
Diversity	There are no specific diversity issues in this report.
Wards Affected	There are no specific Wards which are affected by this report.
Groups Affected	All children and young people
Budget and Policy Framework	This report has no impact on the budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This report does not constitute a Key Decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not considered an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	To enable people to be more healthy and independent, to enable children with the best start in life, to enable people to be more active and involved and to provide a safe and caring community
Efficiency	The outcome of this report does not impact on the Council efficiency agenda.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
22 APRIL 2021**

**EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
REVIEW GROUP**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

2. To present the outcome and findings of the Review Group established by this Scrutiny Committee to examine the effects of the pandemic on children and young people and to make appropriate recommendations to Cabinet.

Summary

3. At a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 4 January 2021 a draft Terms of Reference (**Appendix 1**) was approved by the Committee and it was agreed to establish a Review Group. All Members of the Scrutiny Committee were invited to participate in the Review and the Review was led by Councillor Cyndi Hughes, Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.
4. The Review Group held two fact finding 'virtual' events on 21 January and 25 March 2021.
5. Following the initial fact finding meeting Members met on 4 March 2021 to consider the evidence received from various organisations and discussed what the Members wanted to gain from the second fact finding event with the children and young people on 25 March 2021.
6. A further meeting of the Review Group was held on 30 March 2021 to enable Members of this Scrutiny Committee to consider all the information gathered and to identify its findings and make its recommendations.
7. A number of issues have been considered and discussed at the meetings and the notes of those meetings are attached (**Appendix 2**).
8. The aim of the review was to examine the current picture, identify good practice and if there are any gaps in service; and to make suggestions or recommendations to the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Darlington Cares Board and/or Cabinet.
9. The review highlighted many matters, related to Darlington children that expanded the brief of 'the effects of the pandemic', however, the Scrutiny Committee will use this information to inform future work programme items where appropriate.

Recommendation

10. (a) That the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee consider the following recommendations of the Review Group :-

- (i) To receive the final results of the 2020 Healthy Lifestyles Survey in order to continue to seek updates on progress made to encourage positive actions on the important issues raised by the 1,900 primary pupils and 1400 secondary pupils; and to consider also the issues mentioned within this review by the participating children and young people and experts ie. those who have been struggling to access IT, experiencing cyber bullying, consuming more fizzy drinks, chocolate and energy drinks and feeling stressed or anxious as well as sharing the good news gathered that many young people surveyed reported family relationships had improved and that they had used the lockdown to engage in creative, new activities.
- (ii) Young people voiced concern at being unfairly blamed for breaking Covid rules and jeopardising the health of older people. Civic Enforcement performance indicators should be monitored to review incidents involving young people in order to address real concerns and highlight any misperceptions in representation in order to improve understanding and solidarity between the generations.
- (iii) Children and Young People were unclear as to where they could find information about activities and events specifically designed for their age groups. To call for and promote a co-produced review/update with young people of the Living Well pages of the Council Website as well as an advertising/communications strategy with the aim of improving access to information by children, young people and families on activities, clubs, services and help available to them.
- (iv) Children and Young People believed there were not enough positive activities universally available for them in their local communities or in the town centre. Call for and promote information on the availability of grants or other funding opportunities from the Council and other bodies that can help to resource more outdoor activities/inter-school activities year round.
- (v) Councillors to promote activities for young people within their wards, to seek additional matched funding opportunities for such activities and to promote green spaces as play areas that could be utilised by children and young people near to their homes.
- (vi) For co-opted partners and educators – who already provide excellent pastoral care, teacher engagement training, dedicated SEND officers, schools and pupil forums to help identify and deal with mental health and bullying, however young people feel more education and awareness is needed within schools covering a range of topics affecting mental health and wellbeing i.e. cyber-bullying, body image; to examine the things that have benefitted young people from the pandemic and to encourage these continue going forward; and additional pastoral contact from schools recognising the difficulties many young people have faced and continue to face and accurate, timely information about exams and transitions.

(b) The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee consider the following recommendations of the Review Group for the Health and Well Being Board :

- (i) Due to the increase in the number of young people experiencing mental health difficulties from increases in eating disorders to anxiety, sleep issues and depression and the concomitant increased NHS investment as a result of higher demand, Members call on the Health and Well Being Board to monitor and broker engagement and liaison between mental health providers, charities, schools, colleges and commissioners, recognising that these difficulties have possibly been exacerbated by the pandemic.
 - (ii) Members call on the Darlington Children's Trust, which is the Health and Well Being Board to ambitiously drive forward the post-Covid children and young people's agenda to improve the health, wellbeing, equitable access to opportunities, engagement, experiences and life chances of all children and young people living in Darlington, recognising that these have possibly been exacerbated by the pandemic
- (c) The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee consider the following recommendation of the Review Group for the Darlington Cares Board: -
 - (i) As the Partnership has previously identified poverty and inequality as the biggest obstacles to residents of all ages being able to share in the borough's success and to being happy, healthy, educated, employed and safe and secure, calls on all agencies, companies, organisations and individuals within the Partnership and throughout Darlington to recommit to the Charter for a Fairer, Richer Darlington, especially those elements relating to children and young people.
- (d) That, if agreed, the above recommendations be forwarded to Cabinet for information, and that Cabinet be requested to consider the following recommendations:
 - (i) Mental Health – to examine upskilling and augmentation of our own staff and to promote better partnership working between providers and commissioners of mental health and wellbeing services in order to reduce waiting times to access services, to improve signposting and communications to young people, carers and families about opportunities to engage in activities that promote good mental health and positive wellbeing.
 - (ii) Call for and encourage take-up of additional career placement opportunities that do not rely on a family's own contacts from a younger age as well as more equitable access to employment/apprenticeship opportunities for young people.
 - (iii) Consult and engage more with children and young people as active citizens of Darlington. Organise opportunities to speak with children and young people about the issues making their way through Council in order to encourage a better understanding of the ways young residents can engage with and exert influence upon those decisions that have an impact on their lives or future opportunities.
 - (iv) Call for accessible, on-going advertising/ messaging for young people on the improved social offer in the town centre– i.e. Central Hub/Bowling Alleys, etc.
 - (v) Commit to listening to and taking account of the voice of children and young people as part of the Council's strategic, Post-Covid approach across all departments.
 - (vi) To promote a commitment to achieving better understanding and tolerance between all age groups within our Darlington communities

Councillor Cyndi Hughes

Chair of Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People Review Group

Allison Hill Ext 5997

Background Papers

Healthwatch Darlington Report – Children and Young Peoples Mental Health November 19 to August 2020

Professor Defeyter, Professor in Developmental Psychology, Northumbria University (two papers) 'Food and Coping Strategies during the Covid-19 Pandemic' and 'Covid-19 Back to School, Rebuilding a better future for all Children'

'Voices' (an Economic and Social Resource Council Project) led by Children North East and Newcastle University

Public Health Evidence Summary 'Impact of Covid 19 on Children and Young People in Darlington' 21 Jan 2021

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder
Health and Well Being	The initiative could have a positive impact on people's health and well-being.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Diversity	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	All children and young people
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	Not a key decision
Urgent Decision	Not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	To enable people to be more healthy and independent, to enable children with the best start in life, to enable people to be more active and involved and to provide a safe and caring community
Efficiency	The outcome of this report does not impact on the Council efficiency agenda
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

11. Since March 2020, Committee met four times and received the following reports relevant to this review: Post-Covid-19 Public Health Priorities for children and young people, Safeguarding and Safeguarding Partnership Annual Reports, Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report, updates from the Darlington Parent Carer

Forum, the Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, a progress report on the Children and Young People's Plan 2017-2022, Youth Unemployment Scoping Paper, A Progress Update on Digital Inclusion, A presentation on the Darlington Mind Children in Need Self-Harm Project, an Update from the North East Regional Schools Commissioner on academies and academy trusts in Darlington and Quarterly Performance Indicators relating to Children on the Edge of Care, Children in Care and Care Leavers, with the purpose of ascertaining how children and young people in Darlington and the services that support them have been fairing through the pandemic.

12. Committee determined to undertake a review that would be wide-ranging in nature in order to understand better how services and partners were responding to the newly emerging needs of children and young people in Darlington since March 2020 and drew up its terms of reference accordingly.
13. The initial fact-finding, virtual meeting held on 21 January, 2021, to which mental health practitioners, council officers, academics, a myriad of organisations, charities and community and youth groups working with young people had been invited, was designed to provide evidence about the type of services and activities that have been on offer; those services and activities that continue to be available and how these have been and are being offered to children and young people during the pandemic.
14. The aim of the Review was to gather evidence, examine areas of good practice and identify any gaps in service and to share their findings; and ultimately make recommendations to influence services and policies moving forward.
15. Members took into consideration Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that the opinions of children and young people should be considered when decisions are made about things that involve them.
16. At the meeting of the Review Group on 4 March 2021 Members examined the substantial evidence received to date from various organisations and gave consideration to the 'virtual event' with children and young people from primary and secondary schools.
17. Members also considered a mind map (prepared by Councillor Snedker) concretising committee's areas of discussion and investigation from the first review meeting: Learning, Mental Health, Socialisation, Physical Health and Employment.
(Appendix 3)
18. The purpose of the second fact finding meeting on 25 March 2021 was to meet with children and young people from primary and secondary level to speak about their life during Covid experiences and those of their peers over the past months, with Members particularly interested in hearing directly from young people themselves in order to better understand whether services were known about, being accessed equally across the borough and covering the full spectrum of need of all children and young people in the borough.
19. Members posed some simple open-ended questions to the young people asking about the best things and the worst things they felt came out of last year; what they believed could have been done to make last year better for them; and what advice they would give to other young people also having been through the past year.

20. Healthwatch report published December 2020 'Children and Young People's Mental Health Report 2020 (including Covid-19 experiences) contained information and findings following consultation with 478 children, young people, parents and carers about what young people, carers and their families were experiencing when using local services in normal times; what everyday life events were affecting young people locally which helped to indicate areas of intervention and what young people and families wanted to see when it came to information sharing in the town. The report also offered an insight into the complexities of how the pandemic had affected young people and their families across Darlington.
21. At the review group meeting held on 25 January 2021 Members received an up-to-date, contextual presentation on child poverty, youth related crime, domestic abuse, digital exclusion, youth unemployment, education gaps, health behaviour and mental health indicators for Darlington along with testimony from various organisations confirming the statistical evidence and the findings of the Healthwatch report.

Acknowledgements

22. The Review Group acknowledges the support and assistance provided in the course of their investigations and would like to place on record its thanks to the following :-
 - (a) Jane Kochanowski, Assistant Director, Children and Young Murray Rose, Director of People
 - (b) Seth Pearson, Chief Executive, Darlington Partnership
 - (c) Mary Hall, Public Health Lead
 - (d) Catherine Shaw, Relationships, Education and Sexual Health Co-ordinator
 - (e) Natasha Telfer, Strategy and Performance Manager
 - (f) Stephen Wiper, Creative Manager, Creative Darlington
 - (g) Allison Hill, Democratic Support
 - (h) Gill Etherington, Virtual School
 - (i) James Graham, Mental Health Commissioning Manager
 - (j) Gillian Leckenby, Locality Manager, CAMHS
 - (k) Andrew Poinen, Kooth
 - (l) Martin Stand, Darlington Area Churches Youth Ministry
 - (m) Jemma Austin, Jessica Mather, Jade Kirk and Amy Adams, Healthwatch
 - (n) Professor Greta Defeyter, Professor of Developmental Psychology and Director of the Healthy Living Lab at Northumbria University
 - (o) Stephen Morgan, Director, NQA Foodbank
 - (p) Peter King, Head Teacher, Mowden Federation
 - (q) Jenny Young, Blue Cabin
 - (r) Nicole Garstin
 - (s) Freya Svendsen, YMCA
 - (t) Carla Scaith, Parent Carer Forum
 - (u) Carole Ridley, Darlington Foster Carer Association
 - (v) Cheryl Hunter, Humankind
 - (w) Hollie Richardson and Donna Wright
 - (x) All the children and young people and staff members from the primary and secondary schools who participated in the event on 25 March 2021.

23. The review group acknowledged the fantastic commitment of all schools during the pandemic and the herculean efforts that were made by all to bring online teaching on board in a short period of time, to open for face-to-face teaching for the children of key workers and the most vulnerable, to provide food, supplies and administer vouchers to children and young people on Free School Meals (FSM), to provide pastoral care, to shoulder safeguarding responsibilities normally led by other professionals and to step-up their community leadership roles.
24. The Review Group were struck by the general resilience, commitment and optimism of the children engaged on the virtual fact gathering meetings and that they were constructive and had innovative ideas about the future.
25. The review group appreciated that the Council, the wider community and in particular Childrens' Services had come together to respond creatively to issues surrounding emergency food insecurity, school uniform provision and Personal Protective Equipment.

Conclusions

26. It was evident that communication between all agencies was good and that most of our children and young people were resilient and able to deal with the change in circumstances well; however, we acknowledged that there were some groups like those with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) that were unable to attend an education setting or access much needed, timely support or services, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, however it was also noted that all Darlington schools remained open to pupils with EHCP's throughout the pandemic and regional data would indicate that attendance at Darlington special schools and for pupils with ECHPs was amongst the highest in the region; that the experience and outcomes of the pandemic amongst children and young people living in relative poverty has been generally worse than that of their more affluent peers and that there admittedly, were a number of groups with which we were unable to engage fully i.e. College and University students; Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS); Children and Young People with a Special Educational Need and/or Disability (SEND); Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) pupils; Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people and Looked after Children. However, it was noted that issues affecting many of these groups, and others, had been reported to full Committee and that the effect of the pandemic was also being monitored by Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
27. Positive feedback from the children and young people echoed what we had also learnt from speaking with other organisations and practitioners; although Members were concerned about the negative attitudes and intolerance often shown toward young people and that these community barriers need to be broken down. Activities and programmes that are able to create and support positive relationships between citizens of different generations would help break down barriers, avoid misunderstanding and increase tolerance.
28. All organisations have learnt much from the experiences of the pandemic and Members encourage everyone to use these experiences as an opportunity going forward to improve outcomes for all.

29. Speaking with the children and young people informed us that going forward as we come out of lockdown restrictions that they would like better access to outdoor spaces, especially in their local areas and that they feel safe in these open areas and on the street; and to be able to access activities; and in particular to be able to access more Arts projects which were referred to specifically by the young people as being insufficient in availability to demand.
30. Members agreed that following the success of the fact-gathering event with the children and young people the authority continue to include the 'voice of the child' in future decisions as engagement with our young people was important.
31. During this Review Members have identified a lot of good practice and there has been a lot of learning throughout this time both good and bad and that there were some areas where more work needs to be done, such as with those with EHCPs, children and young people living in relative poverty, better sign-posting and communications about services and activities available.
32. Members would like to promote a 'child and young person friendly Darlington' and intend exploring further the steps required for the UNICEF model accreditation that would enable Darlington to become a children friendly town.
33. Members agreed that mental health issues were a major concern among our children and young people and highlighted this as a priority and highlighted that on line services had been made available in Darlington and also acknowledged that this was a national issue which needs to be addressed.
34. Members identified areas to continue to monitor that will have been affected by the pandemic including the effect on our SEND young people and also the increase in Home Education.
35. Members heard evidence from multiple stakeholders and providers that the collective effects of the pandemic were to widen and deepen the inequalities experienced by children and young people. It is felt that the ambitions and priorities of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) holds the key to tackling the causes of inequality. Achieving the priorities of the CYPP would not only reduce inequality for all in Darlington but also increase our citizens resilience and preparedness for any future pandemic or national emergency.

REVIEW GROUP TO EXAMINE THE EFFECT OF THE PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

NOTE – This document should only be completed if there is a clearly defined and significant outcome from any potential further work. This document should **not** be completed as a request for or understanding of information.

REASON FOR REQUEST?	RESOURCE (WHAT OFFICER SUPPORT WOULD YOU REQUIRE?)
<p>To examine how children and young people are coping with the current situation arising from the Covid 19 Pandemic and how this is affecting them.</p> <p>The multi-agency review to include the themes of food poverty, mental health and education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Officer. • Relevant representatives of children and young people. • Charities, inc. Firststop, FoodBank, King's Church, Darlington MIND • Families from the Parent Carers Group • Young Carers • Children in Care and Care Leavers • Foster Carers • Businesses/Partnership Board • Schools (Primary and Secondary) • Social Workers
PROCESS (HOW CAN SCRUTINY ACHIEVE THE ANTICIPATED OUTCOME?)	HOW WILL THE OUTCOME MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To arrange a hearing with various organisations, children and young people and their families learn what impact the pandemic is having on them. • To focus on areas of food poverty, mental health, education, jobs and training and digital inclusion. • To gather evidence from the various local groups, organisations and schools involved with children and young people. (This can be both in person and written evidence) • To identify gaps in services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To gain a better understanding of how the pandemic is affecting our children and young people and to gather evidence to share with other authorities and organisations on what has worked well and is making a difference and what more needs to be done. • To share information and highlight good practice and to celebrate achievements. • Make recommendations to Cabinet to influence services and policies moving forward.

Signed CouncillorCyndi Hughes.....

DateNovember 2020.....

SECTION 2 TO BE COMPLETED BY DIRECTORS/ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

(NOTE – There is an expectation that Officers will discuss the request with the Member)

	Criteria
<p>1. (a) Is the information available elsewhere? If yes, please indicate where the information can be found (attach if possible and return with this document to Democratic Services)</p> <p>We don't have any specific information relating to Darlington, but there are national reports on how children have responded to and coped with the pandemic</p> <p>b) Have you already provided the information to the Member or will you shortly be doing so? The national reports can be forwarded if required</p> <p>2. If the request is included in the Scrutiny Committee work programme what are the likely workload implications for you/your staff? Staff will be requested to provide information/data to members and therefore the workload implications will be minor on staff time</p> <p>3. Can the request be included in an ongoing Scrutiny Committee item of work and picked up as part of that? This piece of work would be a new request</p> <p>4. Is there another Council process for enquiry or examination about the matter currently underway? Not at this time</p> <p>5. Has the individual or entity some other right of appeal? N/A</p> <p>6. Is there any substantial reason (other than the above) why you feel it should not be included on the work programme? No</p>	<p>1. Information already provided/or will be provided to Member</p> <p>2. Extent of workload involved in meeting request</p> <p>3. Request linked to an ongoing Scrutiny Committee item of work and can be picked up as part of that work</p> <p>4. Subject to another Council process for enquiry or examination (such as Planning Committee or Licensing Committee)</p> <p>5. About an individual or entity that has a right of appeal</p> <p>6. Some other substantial reason</p>

Signed : Jane Kochanowski

Position: Assistant Director

Date: 30 November 2020

APPENDIX 2

Children and Young People Scrutiny Review Group

Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People

21 January 2021

Present: Councillors Ali, Bell, Crudass, Mrs. Culley, C Hughes (Chair), Lister, Renton and Snedker.

Co-opted Members: John Armitage, Nick Lindsay and Carly Spence.

Officers: Jane Kochanowski, Seth Pearson, Mary Hall, Catherine Shaw, Natasha Telfer, Stephen Wiper, Gill Etherington and Allison Hill.

Participants: James Graham, Gillian Leckenby, Andrew Poinen, Martin Stand, Jemma Austin, Jessica Mather, Jade Kirk Amy Adams, Professor Greta Defeyter, Stephen Morgan, Peter King, Phillip Roberts, Jenny Young, Nicole Garstin, Freya Svendsen, Carla Scaith, Carole Ridley, Cheryl Hunter, Hollie Richardson and Donna Wright.

Purpose of the meeting:

A fact gathering event with various organisations, charities and community groups working with young people to gather evidence on what has been done, and continues to be done during the pandemic. The Chair advised all that the aim of the Review was to gather evidence, examine areas of good practice and identify any gaps in service and to share the findings and ultimately make recommendations to influence services and policies moving forward.

Natasha Telfer, Strategy and Performance Manager gave a presentation to set the scene regarding the impact of Covid 19 on children and young people in Darlington with some contextual Darlington data under the various topics of Education and Childhood (which included child learning, digital exclusion, early years, apprenticeships); Youth Unemployment; Safety (which included crime and safeguarding); Child Poverty; Health (which included general and health behaviours); Mental Health (detailing the Co-SPACE research March to October); Equality (which included SEND, Care Leavers, Young Carers, Low Income and BAME).

Health and Mental Health – Happiness, resilience and well-being:

Mary Hall, Public Health Lead, Adults and Partnerships advised the Group that the impact on young people was huge especially with the lost support within schools by way of nutrition, physical activity and mental health as schools and teachers provided a trusted source of support and help.

Nick Lindsay, emphasised the fact that Darlington has moved ahead on Multi Agency working offering a vast array of services to support young people.

Catherine Shaw, Relationships, Education and Sexual Health Co-ordinator reported on the Healthy Lifestyle Survey and the logistical difficulties with delivery during the pandemic. The Primary Survey had been completed by 20 primary schools (1,900 pupils) and gave some of the main headlines: _

- 14 per cent had struggled to access IT

- 16 per cent were worried about Covid and contracting it
- 71 per cent enjoyed being at home and the added family time
- 22 per cent were undertaking less exercise
- 35 per cent doing more at home regarding exercise
- 33 per cent stated that family relationships had improved
- 14 per cent stated that family relationships were worse
- There had been an increase in screen time – gaming, Youtube
- 6 per cent do not play games
- There had been an increase in the number of those creating Youtube channels
- Some of the reasons for stress given included siblings, health issues and concerns, news, body image
- The majority were excited to return to school
- Dental – 68 per cent actively clean their teeth (concern that most not seeing a dentist)
- No increase in bullying overall however there has been an increase in cyber bullying
- Consumption of Fizzy drinks, chocolate and energy drinks

Secondary – 1400 responses reflecting a similar story. 73 per cent had enjoyed the increased family time; increase in screen time; overall a quarter were feeling anxious; and eating habits similar picture to primary.

James Graham, Mental Health Commissioning Manager advised Members that indicators showed that there was an increase in the number of young people experiencing difficulties; referral demand had reduced since the first lockdown but contacts had gone up; after Summer referrals had increased in excess of pre pandemic and there were a lot of drivers influencing this including isolation, bereavement, vulnerable situations at home; and mental health issues were particularly high in the 12-24 year old age range. He also confirmed that the NHS had a longterm plan on children and young people mental health issues and there was an increased investment because of this significant demand and this will be in liaison with colleagues in Darlington with a whole system approach.

Questions – Secure Units and inpatient facilities – plans to open some beds being progressed.

Gillian Leckenby, Locality Manager, CAMHS advised Members that there had been a significant increase in young people with eating disorders and this was a national issue. By not having the young people in school there was a loss of other agencies seeing these young people. There had also been an increase in neuro development referrals – up from 40 a month to currently 70 a month. Young people were still being seen within 6 weeks.

Andrew Poinen, Kooth advised Members no specific issues in relation to Darlington, North East as a whole has the highest rate of sleep issues and sadness rate was high.

Questions – What is being done to help? A – monitoring reports. Q – How is this fed back? (further information required on this). Gillian Leckenby confirmed that they were aware of the sleep issues fed to them by Kooth.

Martin Stand, DACYM advised Members of the work of the Listening Post – mentoring needs provision for young people and offering low level support. Since September they had helped over 80 students, 320 sessions carried out in 10 locations (mainly educational settings). He stressed that the Listening Post was not a counselling service just offering low level support. Anxieties reported included missing out on key milestone 'existing not living'; university anxiety; exam anxiety; symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Jemma Austin, Healthwatch advised Members of the Children and Young People's Mental Health (including experiences during the Covid-19 Pandemic) November 19 to August 2020 report of Healthwatch Darlington's survey. Confirmed the anxieties of young people in relation to education; going back to school; information being supplied to them and would have preferred to hear more positives rather than negatives; feelings of isolation and loneliness; no face to face contact; digital exclusion barriers.

Jessica Mather, Healthwatch Youth Volunteer advised Members of her work in helping young people and which has included; a project to redesign the waiting area at the Mulberry Centre; creating posters; podcasts and blogs; facebook Live and the 'worried about the future' campaign. The podcasts are Jessica, Jade and Amy (also Youth Volunteers) sharing their own personal experiences.

Food, Learning and Fun:

Professor Greta Defeyter, Professor of Developmental Psychology and Director of the Healthy Living Lab at Northumbria University outlined of her research and report looking at the effects of the pandemic and advised Members that the 2 main groups being the more advantaged and the less advantaged in relation to Food Poverty. Between March and August 2020 2.3 million children (FSM) forced in to food poverty. National data showed many attempts to delivery FSM parcels/Voucher schemes/Winter relief schemes still hadn't addressed the problem. She reported that there had also been an increase in the intake of sugar beverages, snacks and a decrease in the intake of fruit and veg. An increase in obesity and malnutrition and a widening educational gap.

Looking at how we move forward and suggested a coherent strategic approach across all departments with the voice of children and young people to shape locally and advocate for change at a national level.

Stephen Morgan, Director, NQA Foodbank provided Members with information relating to the NQA foodbank. Since December 448 food parcels delivered; an increase in the number of referrals from working families how have recently lost their jobs; on-site training delivered to all volunteers; now supplying nappies and baby food; also cater for food allergies. No questions asked (hence the name), volunteers work weekends and evenings and some out of hours providing services where others can't. Received a lot of support from other business/organisations including Bikestop Darlington and Mango Bean and the Scouts.

Questions – Is there a strategic audit making the connections.

Seth Pearson advised Members about the Bread and Butter Thing , a Charity which operates in Manchester. Predominately different from the NQA foodbank as recipients pay for the food (ie £7 for £35 worth of food) – food which otherwise would have gone to waste.

Hubs located at Harrowgate Hill, Windsor Court, Corporation Road, Red Hall, Firthmoor (100 families in week – working at capacity); and Skerne Park Hub due to open soon.

Recent grant to purchase a second van to double the amount of food available. During March to November 2020 6,236 deliveries to families; 260 families receive regular supplies; and 75 tonnes of food has been delivered to support families.

Question – can Members have some analysis data of this service.

Peter King, Headteacher Mowden Federation advised Members that the pandemic hadn't been all bad for our children although accepted that his school did not have the most disadvantaged students.

He advised that when students returned to school in Autumn there was evidence of significant gaps in knowledge and students weren't as disciplined in schooling; there had been good attendance during the Autumn Term. He advised Members of his involvement with a research project with Children North East Charity – a Poverty Proofing Audit (undertaken recently); family life and contribution of parents had been excellent and the school had been very transparent with the children and offered extra help around well being; a school meal service had been provided throughout. The barriers that he had encountered including balancing the views of all, remote learning; pressures of those in school and the lower ability students not being able to do so well with remote/live learning.

John Armitage, Headteacher Rydal Academy (and Co-opted Member) outlined the key messages from his school. The difficulty with engagement with some groups ie Gypsy, Roma and Travellers where there was a low level of engagement on remote education packages however the Traveller Support Service were looking to address this and offer support.

Questions – Is the Home Schooling Service also being included? A – Yes the Authority work closely with Elective Home Schooling and this has continued throughout the pandemic.

Gill Etherington, Virtual School advised the Members of her involvement with the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for the authorities children in care and that there had been positive contact; and outlined other activities to encourage and keep in contact with the young people in care. Some of the young people were doing well on line and others were accessing schools.

- 38 children in Year 1 and Year 7 received a monthly book supply from Books Trust
- Between Mar and October 2020 Letterbox parcels to all young people
- Supporting the Laptop scheme to ensure all LAC have access to laptops
- Working with BlueCabin — 111 primary school children received Arts packs over the Summer with positive feedback
- 55 activity packs delivered in December to KS3 pupils

Questions – The Chair requested evaluation and impact feedback to be supplied to the Group.

Jenny Young, Blue Cabin outlined the work of the Community Interest Group over the past 18 months alongside the authority; thinking of new creative activities planned in conjunction with the Virtual School; £55K funding available for digital resources and

also a further years funding with the virtual school; referred to the Dream Catcher, Theatre, Doodle Jam, Puppet Theatre packs that had been created and delivered to the young people; the bespoke work in relation to the 'merry maker' that had been gifted to 10 children in need.

Stephen Wiper, Creative Manager outlined the work of Creative Darlington :

- **Darlington Hippodrome**, have led the **In2 programme**. The programme is backed by Darlington Borough Council and addresses particular recommendations by the Durham Commission report, commissioned by Arts Council England, In2 has offered access to culture and leisure activity and worked with schools including Corporation Road Primary and Longfield Academy. In2 intend to work post Easter 2021 with a cohort of c 100 children from years 6 and 7.
- Creative Darlington, Darlington Hippodrome and Durham Music Service and Brightwater are supporting the **Skerne project**, ongoing work in schools including Haughton Academy, involving Opera North and co-ordinated by Orchestras Live, to create a new film and original music celebrating the river.
- **Head of Steam** railway museum have developed digital engagement, recognized in its scope by Tees Valley Museums.
- The Virtual School and Creative Darlington have supported various programmes of work, co-ordinated by **Blue Cabin**, including a creative mentoring programme and the distribution of creative packs.
- Creative Darlington has supported Theatre Hullabaloo who have also been supported by the Health Visitor Network, in distributing over **500 baby play packs** (a package including creative materials, a puppet, video packages available by phone) encouraging creative play. This programme has reached families with young children at a time when The Hullabaloo has not been open.
- Creative Darlington has offered support to Theatre Hullabaloo to develop a **Thriving Communities** proposal, decision expected 8 March 2021. If funding secured Theatre Hullabaloo will work with core partners, Foundation UK and Groundwork NE & Cumbria, to offer a variety of social prescribing options to address an increase in postnatal depression since March 2020. Other providers will include Darlington Library Service (outreach pop up library offer) and the Dolphin Centre (creche, baby play and swim offer) and we will work with Healthwatch Darlington to respond to the service user voice.
- **Tracks** are currently promoting a Back on Track programme in Spring 2021 supported by Creative Darlington and Arts Council England, which includes a digital programme of **Big Little Gigs** (live performances promoted to families with young children and babies) and **Noisy Daughters** online workshops. They've also led Hark! The Sound of Christmas events and other online programmes, including Darlo@Home, with support from Darlington Borough Council's events service and Creative Darlington.
- Creative Darlington has also either offered or allocated support to particular organisations and enterprises, including **The Forum Music Centre**, and **The Bridge Centre** for Visual Arts, to help them prepare for and respond to challenges to sustained operation, arising from the pandemic.
- Creative Darlington has commissioned **Helix Arts** to provide training and support to nine artists and producers to devise and submit funding proposals to support community based projects in Darlington in 2021/22. Creative Darlington will offer support to these proposals subject to their success

in securing additional funding from other sources, e.g. Arts Council England. Some of the artists and producers intend to engage with young people at risk of homelessness, to address mental well-being.

Freya Svendsen, Tees Valley YMCA advised Members of the work of the YMCA particularly in relation to throughout the pandemic (mainly via Zoom) which included targeted group sessions; a healthy living programme with a personal trainer; Since April 330 attendees and continued promotion of the sessions available; distribution of tables and some dongles; creative sessions with the IN2 project; working with two groups 10-13 year olds (jnr) and 14-19 year olds (snr) and over 25 SEN.

Carole Ridley, Darlington Foster Carer Association advised Members how the Association were still offering a service through virtual methods i.e Zoom, and on line via Facebook

Carla Scaith, Parent Carer Forum advised Members what services the Parent Carer Forum were continuing to offer families and young people including weekly SEND sessions; virtual exercise sessions; and advised that feedback from families as that it is difficult for SEND children to access on line learning so the Forum are working with local businesses to create some on line sessions.

Cheryl Hunter, Humankind advised Members how she was trying to replicate the services offered to young people remotely and looking at the increased support required for those young carers who were new to the service and the vulnerability of young carers at this time. She acknowledged the good partnership working with colleagues in Healthwatch, Kooth, MIND and CAMHS; and also with schools.

Role of the Strategic Partnership :

Due to time restraints it was agreed to discuss the role of the Strategic Partnerships at a separate meeting to be arranged.

Next Meeting: – Meeting on 4 March 2020 to hear the 'Voice of the Young Person'.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Review Group

Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People

4 March 2021

Present: Councillors Ali, Crudass, Mrs. Culley, C Hughes (Chair), Lister and Lucas.

Co-opted Members: John Armitage.

Officers: Jane Kochanowski, Allison Hill.

Apologies: Councillors Renton and Snedker; Carly Spence and Nick Lindsay.

Purpose of the meeting:

To examine the evidence received to date from various organisations and to consider the next steps (list of evidence received below).

Aim of the review to examine the current picture, identify good practice and if there are any gaps in service; and to make suggestions or recommendations to the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Darlington Partnership and/or Cabinet.

Members considered a mind map (supplied by Councillor Snedker) outlining the various areas of investigation: Learning, Mental Health, Socialisation, Physical Health and Employment.

Members discussed young persons mental health issues as a major concern and highlighted it as a priority. Members also discussed Kooth, the on line service offered to young people aged between 11-18 across Darlington and accessible from any internet device and some of the responses they had received regarding the service. Once registered the young person can access support and advice on their emotional wellbeing and mental health, however this is a digital platform and Members acknowledged that a face-to-face element was missing.

The next meeting of the Review Group is the Virtual event to hear the views of young people and Members discussed the questions to ask the young people i.e. What are the good things about the current situation? What are the negative aspects because of Covid? How has your home situation changed? Food provision?

Next Meeting – ‘Voice of the Young Person’ Event to be held virtually on 25 March 2021 with primary and secondary students.

Evidence received from:

4Motion Darlington

Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team

Healthwatch Mental Health 2020 Report

Humankind, Darlington Young Carers Service

Public Health, Impact of Covid 19

Professor Defeyter, Professor in Developmental Psychology, Northumbria University (two papers)

Voices Project led by Children North East and Newcastle University

Children and Young People Scrutiny Review Group

Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People

25 March 2021

Present: Councillors Ali, Bartch, Crudass, Mrs Culley, C Hughes, Lucas, Renton and Snedker.

Also: Councillor Clarke

Co-opted Members: John Armitage and Nick Lindsay

Officers: Joanne Shutt, Allison Hill.

Apologies: Councillors Bell and Lister.

Purpose of the meeting:

This is the second fact gathering 'virtual event' with children from secondary and primary level to ask them about their 'Life during Covid' experiences and those of their peers over the past months.

Members were interested in hearing directly from young people themselves in order to understand whether services are known about, being accessed equally across the borough and cover the full spectrum of need of all children and young people in the borough.

The students were asked 3 simple questions as follows:

- what are the three best things to come out of the last year for young people like you? The three worst?
- what could have made the last year better for you (or young people you know)?
- what advice would you give to young people your age, having been through the past year?

These questions were specifically designed to be open ended to allow the children and young people to share their experiences and thoughts more comfortably. A Youtube video by the Chair as an introduction was circulated to all schools, along with the questions prior to the meeting.

List of the schools which participated in the event:

Primary

- West Park Academy
- St Teresas RC
- Mowden
- Education Village (Beaumont Hill)
- Northwood
- Reid Street
- St Augustines RC

- Bishopton Redmarshall
- Redhall
- St Bedes RC
- Holy Family RC
- Whinfield
- Firthmoor
- Harrowgate Hill
- St Georges

Secondary

- Longfield Academy
- Haughton Academy
- Education Village (Beaumont Hill)
- Wyvern Academy
- Carmel College
- Polam Hall
- Hummersknott Academy

Responses to the questions from Primary students:

What was good?

- *More time with my family*
- *Able to go outside more*
- *Learnt new skills ie. cooking*
- *Visiting friends house*
- *Walks with my Dad*
- *Could spend more time with my family and pets*
- *At home more*
- *Not having to do school work during the first lockdown*
- *Learning to see people in a different way*

What was bad?

- *Not knowing what was going on during lockdown*
- *Not seeing friends from school*
- *Couldn't go to the shops*
- *Lack of freedom*
- *Not being able to practice conversation*
- *Not being able to see distant family*
- *Not being able to see friends*
- *Going into school when others didn't*
- *Having to wear masks and social distance*
- *Being bored*

What advice would you give to other young people as we go forward?

- *Not to take anything for granted*
- *Not to take it too seriously*
- *Follow the rules and it will be better for the future and we will get out of this sooner*
- *Keep exercising because it is good for you*
- *Keep a positive mindset*
- *Be patient as there is light at the end of the tunnel*
- *Don't worry – stress can hurt your mental health*
- *Don't give up and stay positive*
- *Even though it is going to be hard and some will get hurt, it will get better*
- *Keep spirits high and share feelings, keep strong and prepare to expect the unexpected*
- *Stay connected*
- *Stay safe*
- *Follow school advice and listen to the teachers*
- *Don't stop believing*
- *Cherish the moments in primary school*
- *Keep head up high and keep positive inner strength*
- *Make it safer for us to ride our bikes near our home*
- *More activities in the park*

What ideas would you give to us to make things better/services we could provide?

- *A list of activities to show where we can go*
- *Exercise and Arts Groups*
- *Planned activities that can be done safely*
- *Activities outside in woods and in nature*
- *We are sick of sitting at computer screens and want to be able to go out to Arts Clubs, Museums and activity clubs*
- *Reopen clubs*
- *Keep exercising, keep safe and stay in the UK*
- *More school based holiday activities – football etc. less IT activities*
- *Shops opening sooner*
- *More activities around transition – face to face rather than virtual. Lost time and opportunities during lockdown*
- *Being back to normal and back to school*
- *Preparing to be out of lockdown*
- *Activities outdoors to promote self esteem and good mental wellbeing*
- *Access to support at school*
- *Access to outdoor space, more football pitches, arts and crafts and music opportunities closer to schools*
- *Help to get back to normal (stats etc)*
- *Access to more gloves and masks for all to be able to use if needed*
- *Adults need to follow the rules*
- *Having a virtual end of school year and beginning of new school year*

Responses to questions from Secondary students:

What was good?

- *On line learning (also helped to stay connected with friends)*
- *Appreciation of school*
- *Having more free time*

What was bad?

- *Lack of motivation*
- *It was a struggle for everyone*
- *Feedback from teachers was generally good but in some cases it wasn't*
- *Unprecedented times*
- *Difficult to socialise without leaving the house*
- *Not being able to see friends face to face*
- *Hard to remember your programme for on line learning, it was better in school*
- *Not being able to see family, particularly for the younger students*
- *Negative picture painted by the government was not helpful*

What advice would you give to other young people as we go forward?

- *Always wear masks*
- *Keep connected with friends*
- *Make sure you manage your workloads/good time management*
- *Positive mental health and attitude*
- *Stay calm and don't get stressed as it can get out of hand*
- *Organisation is important*
- *Important to set timetable as you would in school and not go over your hours*
- *Don't put pressure on yourself, take a break and support will be there if you need it*
- *Mix it up, down time also*
- *Listen to music to calm you down after a long day or exercise on a morning to motivate you for the day*
- *Set an alarm every hour so you don't go over your lesson time*

What ideas would you give to us to make things better/services we could provide?

- *Stress relief classes*
- *Support each other*
- *Not to be scared, be brave and do challenging things*
- *Ask students about some of the decisions being made 'pupil voice' in how things are going to be organised going forward*
- *More outside activities not just school work (also pastoral care)*
- *Keep in contact with friends*
- *More clubs and activities to take place as a lot of social skills have been lost during lockdown*

- *Meet other people to get back to normal and meet new friends*
- *Team building skills*
- *Home learning – organised chats with pupils only*
- *Website so that students can contact and talk to Councillors more easily – advertise who the councillors are and how young people could contact them - councillors could maybe introduce themselves and their responsibility area to pupils in assemblies etc*

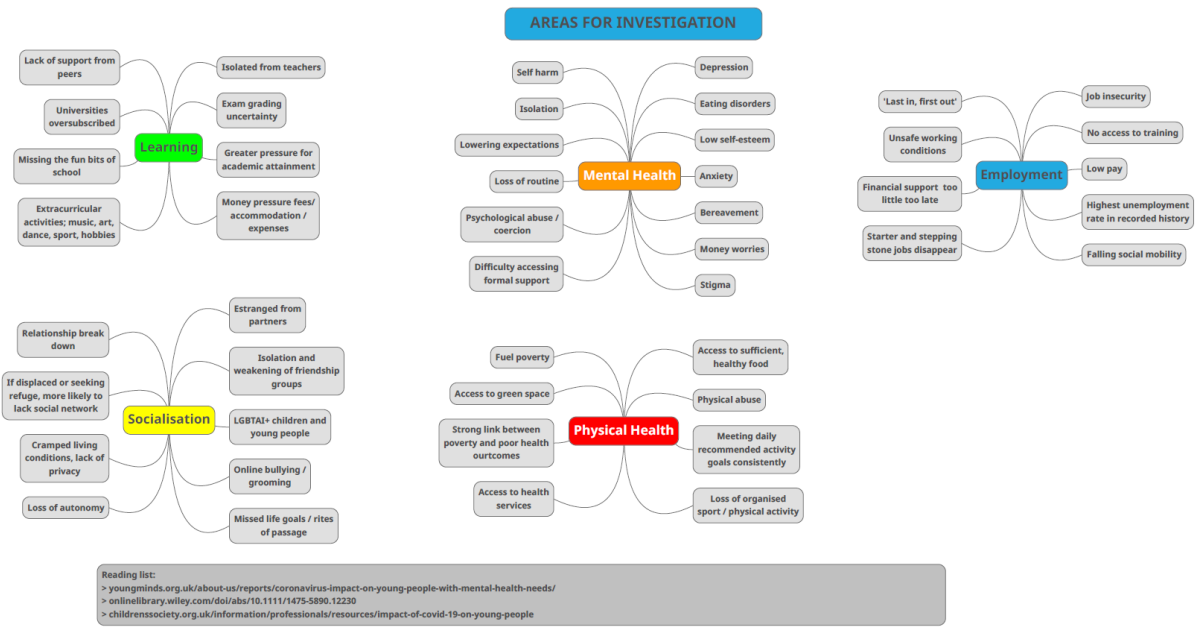
What support do you have in school?

- *Instagram welfare page*
- *School council*
- *Student ambassadors*
- *Kooth*

Suggestions for what to do?

- *Badmington and Tennis Clubs*
- *Sports Day/Town fairs (outside events)*
- *Inter schools competitions to get back some community spirit*
- *Activities during school holidays*
- *Arts – fun for everyone*
- *Provide a mixture of activities for everyone including Sports/Arts/Science/Maths*
- *Outdoor music events/movie nights outdoors*
- *Career advise/activities – work placements*
- *Youth Clubs*
- *Negative media portrayal of young being to blame for the spread of Covid – annoying – not fair to blame one generation*
- *There has been a huge amount of pressure on young people – stress issues of not being able to see friends and it can be intimidating if you go out to see your friends as the police tell you to social distance*
- *When we go out we see others not adhering to the rules and this is unfair and you feel disappointed*

APPENDIX 3



**CABINET
4 MAY 2021**

JOINT AUTISM REVIEW GROUP

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the findings of the Joint Autism Review Group established to examine the autism provision with Darlington Borough Council and to seek Members' endorsement of the recommendations of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Summary

2. At a meeting of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee held on 14 April 2021, Scrutiny considered a report (**Appendix 1**) which outlined the findings and recommendations of the Joint Autism Review Group.
3. The Review Group, which met on two occasions and discussed a number of issues, concluded that a Cross Party Autism Working Group should be established to progress the key themes of training and awareness, support, diagnosis and employment.
4. Members of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee considered the Review Group's recommendation that a Cross Party Working Group should be established and agreed that this was an appropriate way forward to progress the key themes.
5. Scrutiny Members gave further consideration to the governance arrangements around the Cross Party Working Group, which included all interested Members being invited to join the Working Group, it meeting bi-monthly and its reporting into the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
6. The Working Group will need to be supported and advised by an Officer of the Council.

Comments of the Director of Children and Adult Services

7. The local autism group is required to update a Self Assessment Framework on a 4 yearly basis. The last one was completed in Dec 2018 and therefore needs to be updated by Dec 2022. Issues covered in the SAF are aligned to those identified by the review, notably: Planning, Training and Awareness Raising, Diagnosis, Care and Support, Other services (employability and housing), and Innovation (Autism Friendly Town)
8. The recommendation of the Director is to refresh membership of the local autism group, for the group to meet quarterly with SAF areas being allocated to

appropriate lead officers, and updates being given at Health and Housing as part of their work programme.

Recommendation

9. It is recommended that Cabinet :

- (a) considers the recommendation of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee that a cross party Autism Working Group be established to progress the key themes identified by the Joint Autism Review Group.
- (b) be requested to consider the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committees proposed governance arrangements for the Cross Party Autism Working Group, including :
 - (i) that the Cross Party Autism Working Group meets bi-monthly;
 - (ii) that all interested Members be invited to join the Working Group; and
 - (iii) that the Cross Party Autism Working Group reports to Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Reasons

10. The recommendations are supported to enable Cabinet to consider the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee recommendations.

Councillor A Scott
Chair of Joint Autism Review Group

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report other than those referred to.

Hannah Fay : Extension 5801

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no specific implications for Crime and Disorder.
Health and Well Being	The outcome of this report could have a positive impact on people's health and well-being.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no carbon impact implications in this report
Diversity	There are no specific diversity issues in this report.
Wards Affected	There are no specific Wards which are affected by this report.
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This report has no impact on the budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	This report does not constitute a Key Decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not considered an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	To enable people to be more healthy and independent and to provide a safe and caring community.
Efficiency	The outcome of this report does not impact on the Council efficiency agenda.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
14 APRIL 2021

JOINT AUTISM REVIEW GROUP

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the outcome and findings of the Joint Review Group established to examine the autism provision within Darlington Borough Council and to consider the most appropriate way to progress the key themes identified by the Joint Review Group.

Summary

2. At a meeting of the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee held on 30 January 2020, a draft Terms of Reference (**Appendix 1**) in relation to autism provision in Darlington was approved by the Committee and it was agreed to establish a Joint Autism Review Group with the Adults and Children and Young People Scrutiny Committees.
3. Members of each Scrutiny Committee nominated representatives to participate in the Review and comments were provided from officers from the Children, Education, Adults and Public Health Service areas on the Quad of Aims (**Appendix 2**).
4. Although an initial meeting of the Review Group was held on 2 March 2020, where Officers from Darlington Borough Council were also in attendance, the review group did not meet again until 24 February 2021 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. A number of issues have been considered and discussed at the meetings and the notes of those meetings are attached (**Appendix 3**), along with the recommendations.
6. The Review Group recommended that the Adults, Children and Young People and Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee give consideration to the recommendation that a Cross Party Autism Working Group be established to progress the key themes identified by the Review Group, and that, if agreed, the recommendation be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.
7. In considering the recommendations of the Review Group, Members are asked to consider whether the establishment of a Cross Party Autism Working Group is the appropriate way forward to progress the key themes which have been identified through the Review Group.

8. As Members will be aware, the Council's democratic arrangements support the scrutiny function and there is no reference to the governance arrangements around the establishment of working groups, so it may be more appropriate for this Committee to agree to monitor and progress the key themes as part of its work on-going work programme.

Recommendation

9. That, taking into account the views of the Adults Scrutiny Committee and Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee as detailed in paragraph 15, the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee consider the most appropriate way to progress the key themes identified by the Review Group.

Councillor A Scott

Chair of Joint Autism Review Group

Hannah Fay : 5801

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder
Health and Well Being	The initiative could have a positive impact on people's health and well-being.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Diversity	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address
Wards Affected	There are no specific Wards which are affected by this report.
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	Not a key decision
Urgent Decision	Not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	To enable people to be more healthy and independent, to enable children with the best start in life and to provide a safe and caring community
Efficiency	The outcome of this report does not impact on the Council efficiency agenda
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

10. At the initial meeting of the Review Group on 20 March, Officers from Darlington Borough Council informed Members of the work that had been undertaken to date in Darlington and Members held an in-depth discussion in respect of the services available in Darlington for residents with autism, identifying a number of key areas for further consideration.
11. The Chair of the Review Group and the Cabinet Member with the Adults Portfolio met with Officers from the Commissioning Team in January 2021 prior to the Review Group reconvening, to gain an understanding of the commissioning arrangements for autism services in Darlington and to identify an approach to progress the review. Reference was made to the 2018 Autism Self-Assessment Framework which was recognised as a useful tool to enable Members of the review group to identify gaps in services.
12. At the meeting of the Review Group on 24 February 2021 Members held an in-depth discussion regarding the 2018 Autism Self-Assessment Framework.
13. The Review Group identified a number of key themes requiring further investigation concluded that a Cross Party Autism Working Group be established to progress the key themes of training and awareness, support, diagnosis and employment.

Consultation

14. As the review is joint across three scrutiny Committees, this report has been circulated electronically to Members of the Adults and Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to give them the opportunity to consider and respond to the recommendations contained in this report. Unfortunately, due to timescales, it was not possible for the report to be considered at a formal meeting of those Scrutiny Committees.
15. Responses from the Members of the Adults and Children and Young People Scrutiny Committees have been limited, however the views of one Member who did respond were in line with the recommendations of the Joint Review Group.

Constitution

16. In considering how to monitor and progress the key themes, Members are asked to give consideration to the Council's Constitution
17. As Members will be aware, the Council's democratic arrangements support the scrutiny function and there is no reference to the governance arrangements around the establishment of working groups, so it may be more appropriate for this Committee to agree to monitor and progress the key themes as part of its on-going work programme.
18. If Members agree to adopt this approach, it will be less resource intensive for Officers as the work will be included as part of the scheduled meetings. If there are particular areas of concern, the Review Group could be reconvened to look at

those areas and report back to this Scrutiny Committee.

19. If a working group is to be established some thought will need to be given to its membership, frequency and reporting arrangements and a recommendation will need to be made to Cabinet.

JOINT REVIEW GROUP TO EXAMINE AUTISM PROVISION WITHIN DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

REASON FOR REQUEST?	RESOURCE (WHAT OFFICER SUPPORT WOULD YOU REQUIRE?)
<p>To review and understand the provisions and services and contractual arrangements between this Council and our providers who provide the Autism provisions, diagnoses and support services for Darlington.</p> <p>To ascertain that the best services possible are provided for the benefit of individuals on the autistic spectrum to enable them to thrive. To hold ourselves and our partner organisations accountable for the services provided.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representatives from relevant partner organisations, for example (and not limited to) Durham Constabulary, DDFS, TEWV, NHS, CCG, CQC, NEAS etc. • Relevant Council Officers where necessary • Independent advisor(s) where necessary.
PROCESS (HOW CAN SCRUTINY ACHIEVE THE ANTICIPATED OUTCOME?)	HOW WILL THE OUTCOME MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Examine organisations, partners and the services they provide. 2. Make an evaluation of the benefits to individuals on the Autism Spectrum and their carers of the services provided and investigate their effectiveness and value to the service users. 3. Discuss possible improvements to the services and provisions that may be highlighted by Scrutiny and/or service users, thereby enabling meaningful inclusion of those on the Autism Spectrum and their parents/carers within the Scrutiny process in 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ongoing accountability via scrutiny of partners who provide services and provision. Ongoing scrutiny of any arrangements between partners, and partners and service users to provide assurance that they are in the best interest of the service users.. 2. Any reasonable recommendations for improvements outlined by ongoing investigation and scrutiny to be given reasonable consideration. 3. To gain a better understanding of the needs of individuals with autism and their carers and the services provided to them by this Council. 4. That this Council leads with and is an active proponent of good services for individuals with Autism, champions best practice within

line with best practice as defined by the current Autism Strategy.	Darlington and plays an active role in keeping themselves and partners accountable. 5. Darlington be recognised as an Autism Friendly Town.
--	--

Signed Councillor Rachel Mills
(Member of Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee)

Date

Comments on Quad of Aims from Service Areas

CHILDRENS

Any recommendations and improvement in the service area will be welcome. A caveat would be that the outcomes will be achieved when timely diagnosis takes place, something which is not effective at the moment, and as provided by CAMHS is out of our control to some degree. We believe Speech and Language therapists have to be recruited to provide input to the diagnosis and there is a national shortage!! However; we would look forward to contributing in the main from an Early Help, CAP and Lifestages perspective as these services are instrumental in working within the autism spectrum.

EDUCATION

I think it is positive that scrutiny are considering this need and it demonstrates members interest and involvement in SEND issues. The base at Hurworth is contracted by the LA and funded through the ESFA so there should be no MTFP implications in this quad of aims in terms of the base. Any recommended significant changes may, however, impact on the High Needs budget. It is important to note that the base only offers placements for secondary age pupils and if any recommendations are made for increased primary support this would be an additional pressure on HNB. Due to DfE funding arrangements any change in commissioning the base or pupils' numbers would have a long (likely to be 2 academic years) lead in time. I would suggest Graham Easterlow as Head of Service should provide officer support rather than a case officer. The Parent Carer Forum would also be a useful mechanism for obtaining parent/carers views.

ADULTS

I would like to see the reason for the request to include other partners, especially NHS, but also other community stakeholders, rather than a focus on 'contractual arrangements between this Council and our providers' It is an issue that cuts across all age groups and communities. This is reflected within the cross scrutiny focus, but not necessarily within the reason for the review.

PUBLIC HEALTH

The proposed approach is shared across 3 Scrutiny Committees , I think that is positive rather than each committee addressing issues separately. Earlier this week I attended a Health and Housing Scrutiny Pre meet with Cllrs Bell and Clarke and Cllr Bell indicated that he was in agreement that the Health and Housing Committee would be the lead

I have some concern about the expected level of " Officer support" indicated in the Resources Required part of the form. A number of the Members are new and will have not operated one of these before , they will need clarity from Democratic Office that the work is to be largely conducted by members

This is a topic of great interest across the committees , so it is work that will be welcomed. I am also pleased to see reference to Autism Friendly Town , actions have already been progressed on that.

AUTISM JOINT REVIEW GROUP

2nd March 2020

PRESENT – Councillor A Scott (Chair), Councillors Bartch, Bell, Curry, Layton, Mills and Renton

APOLOGIES – Councillor Heslop

Following the decision by the Adults, Children and Young People and Health and Housing Scrutiny Committees to establish a Joint Review Group to examine the Autism Provision, the Group met to receive an overview of work undertaken to date in Darlington and to consider how it wished to undertake its review, noting the aims to champion best practice, improve awareness and scrutinise what was not working well.

Details were provided of the work undertaken to make Darlington an autism friendly town which included the introduction of Quiet Hour in the Cornmill Centre; roll out of a training programme to Council frontline staff and a number of hotels in the town. Work had been undertaken with DWP to improve the employment opportunities for people with autism however this had limited success; and work undertaken with schools to implement autism ambassador proved challenging.

Discussion ensued in respect of services available in Darlington and reference was made to two significant incidents in relation to abuse of inpatients with autism and learning disabilities. Members highlighted that current services for Darlington residents were very limited.

Concern was raised in respect of formal diagnosis of autism; that the diagnosis tool was inadequate; and diagnosis for adults, in particular females, was very poor. Reference was made to mental health issues associated with autism diagnosis; and the need to improve awareness of pathways and of support available.

Members identified a number of areas for further consideration which included a scope of autism services that were available to bid for, noting that the bidding process needed to be more autism friendly; the need to explore what support was on offer in Darlington schools; the role of Health and Well Being Board in reviewing delays in diagnosis; to identify national framework to benchmark Darlington against; and to ascertain from the LGA what work had been undertaken by other Local Authorities

Members felt that autism should be taken into consideration in all Council decisions; and Members agreed that the Darlington MP be contacted to lobby for improved diagnosis for children, young people and adults with autism.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the Chair and Councillor Mills meet with the Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Transformation to discuss commissioning arrangements in respect of autism services.

(b) That the MP for Darlington be contacted to lobby for improved diagnosis for children, young people and adults with autism.

AUTISM JOINT REVIEW GROUP

24th February 2021 (via Teams)

PRESENT – Councillor A Scott (Chair), Bell, Curry, Heslop Layton, Mills

APOLOGIES – Councillor Renton

The Chair of the Review Group reminded Members of the initial meeting of the group that was held in March 2020; and that the group had been put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chair and Councillor Mills met with the Commissioning Team in January 2021 to discuss a way forward for the group. Reference was made to the Autism Self-Assessment Framework which was undertaken in 2018 and it was agreed that the Autism Self-Assessment Framework be shared with the Review Group, to enable the group to identify gaps in the provision and next steps.

Discussion ensued on the Autism Self-Assessment Framework:

- Members noted that the Autism Lead Role for the Local Authority was designated to the Assistant Director of Adult Services; that this role was in the process of being appointed to; and highlighted the importance of a named lead being in post.
- Reference was made to the Autism Steering Group and the Members discussed the suggestion of political representation on this group. It was suggested that the Chair of the Steering group could be invited to participate in the review group.
- Members noted that data recorded by the Local Authority for children and young people with autism was robust, however the data collected for adults with autism was sparse and as such the full picture was not known.
- Members agreed that awareness in respect of adults with autism was very limited.
- It was reported that there was very limited training for professionals in respect of assessing people who present with mental health problems and autism. Members noted that some staff within the Local Authority had received awareness training, however the self-assessment identified that 600 members of staff were eligible for training. Members highlighted the need for consistency in the quality of training. Members agreed that further work was required to identify gaps in training.
- In respect of diagnosis, Members felt that there was an invisible co-hort of undiagnosed people that were on the spectrum; that these individuals could often present at partner agencies for a number of different reasons; and this highlighted the need for improved partnership working to help obtain a diagnosis.
- Members discussed the challenges faced by individuals and families in obtaining a referral and felt that significant work was needed to make the autism diagnostic pathway more accessible. Members felt that schools should play a bigger role in

helping to identify children and young people with autism. Members agreed that further investigation was required in respect of referrals and diagnosis.

- Members questioned the availability of support groups for parents, carers and people with autism and were advised that whilst there were no Council run groups there were other groups available.
- Members highlighted the need to acknowledge the impact of COVID-19 and lockdown on mental health and that support for people with autism needed to be prioritised.
- Members suggested the use of council owned facilities to run autism friendly events; reference was made a number of initiatives and events that had been in place prior to the pandemic; and that consideration should be given to continue these in the future.
- Members noted that regular employment for adults with autism was a key area to help improve quality of life. Members agreed that there was a requirement for improving awareness and training for employers to help support existing employees that were either undiagnosed or not open about their diagnosis.
- In relation to the Criminal Justice System it was report that people with autism were more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, and this was a key area that could help identify undiagnosed individuals.

Members agreed that training and awareness, support, diagnosis and employment were key themes requiring further investigation.

Particular discussion ensued on the future of this review group. Members proposed that this review group becomes a cross party working group to progress the key themes.

IT WAS AGREED –

- (a) That Members support the proposal to establish a Cross Party Autism Review Group.
- (b) That the Adults, Children and Young People and Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee consider the following recommendation of the Autism Joint Review Group:-
 - (i) That a Cross Party Autism Working Group be established to progress the key themes identified by the Review Group.
- (c) That, if agreed, the above recommendation be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

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CABINET
4 MAY 2021

CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2021-2024

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Kevin Nicholson,
Health and Housing Portfolio**

**Responsible Director – Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth and
Neighbourhood Services**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval for the Customer Engagement Strategy for 2021-24.

Summary

2. Darlington Borough Council Housing Services has a long and successful track record of engaging with and involving tenants in the delivery of housing services.
3. One of the key strands of the new Social Housing Regulator's Consumer Standards covers 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment'. These state that we must consult our tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving them in the governance and scrutiny of our housing service.
4. The Customer Engagement Strategy for 2021-24 (**Appendix 1**) sets out the process for how we will involve and empower our tenants, including how our engagement activities will be monitored and reported.
5. These matters were considered by Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on 14 April 2020 and no amendments were recommended to the proposals.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that Cabinet:-
 - (a) Consider the contents of the report, and
 - (b) Approve the Customer Engagement Strategy for 2021-24.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
 - (a) The Social Housing Regulator's Consumer Standards places a duty on social housing providers to involve and empower our tenants in the delivery of housing services.

- (b) The adoption of a formal Customer Engagement Strategy is the best way to demonstrate how we will achieve this and allows formal reporting and monitoring of engagement activities through the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Ian Williams
Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

Background Papers

- (i) The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper
- (ii) Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard: Regulator of Social Housing

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues
Health and Well Being	There is no impact in this report
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There is no impact in this report
Diversity	The Customer Engagement Strategy ensures that all tenant involvement and empowerment activities will take into account the diverse needs of Council tenants
Wards Affected	All wards with Council housing
Groups Affected	Council tenants and leaseholders
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no implications
Key Decision	This is a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This report supports the 'Building Strong Communities' theme of the Sustainable Community Strategy.
Efficiency	There are no implications
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	There are no implications

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. One of the key strands of the Government's Social Housing White Paper: 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents' is 'To have your voice heard by your landlord'. Specifically, social landlords are expected to:
 - (a) Seek out best practice and consider how they can continually improve the way they engage with their tenants.
 - (b) Support more effective engagement with tenants by giving them the tools to influence their landlords and hold them to account.
 - (c) Review professional training and development to ensure tenants receive a high standard of customer service.
9. Social Housing is controlled by the Regulator of Social Housing and they have set out specific expectations and outcomes that providers of social housing are expected to achieve. The main area of regulation covering Local Authorities is the Consumer Standard.
10. One of the four Consumer Standards set by the Regulator is the **Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard**, which social housing providers must comply with. For Local Authorities, Members who govern service delivery, are responsible for ensuring the Council meets the relevant standards and determining how this is done.
11. The Customer Engagement Strategy 2021-24 sets out how the Council will meet the standards, including what specific activities will be undertaken, the expected outcomes that will be achieved and how these will be monitored and reported.
12. The Council's Housing Services has a long and successful track record of engagement with our tenants and consulting with them on every aspect of service delivery through:
 - (a) The Tenants Scrutiny Panel
 - (b) The Readers Panel
 - (c) Housing Connect magazines and the Annual Report
 - (d) The Housing pages of the Council website and the Housing Facebook page
 - (e) Customer satisfaction surveys
 - (f) Mystery shopping exercises
 - (g) Customer complaints
 - (h) Estate walkabouts
13. The Customer Engagement Strategy focusses on four specific themes:
 - (a) **Providing the right information.** This is about how we will provide our tenants with the right information about our services that meets their diverse needs, how we will encourage tenants to use our digital services and what support we will provide to ensure that no-one is excluded.
 - (b) **Listening to our tenants.** This is about how we will consult our tenants on all aspects of service delivery; how the outcome of consultation will be reported and how we will ensure tenants can make their voice heard.

- (c) **Making decisions with our tenants.** This is about how we will involve our tenants in decision making processes and how we will use the outcome of consultation to make decisions and shape the services tenants receive.
 - (d) **Maximising scrutiny and accountability.** This is about how we will build trust and transparency and ensure our tenants can hold us to account, how we will support our tenants to build their capacity and empower them to be more effectively involved, and how we will use complaints about our services to understand what has gone wrong and what we need to do to put things right.
14. Specific actions within the strategy will be supported by an annual Engagement Plan, setting out the detailed activities we will undertake to consult with and involve our tenants.
 15. Where possible, we will promote opportunities for engagement through digital channels, whilst always providing more traditional methods of engagement through surveys, telephone contact and face to face meetings. For those tenants who are digitally excluded from our services, we will provide the right level of support to ensure that everyone can become involved.
 16. The Customer Engagement Strategy has already been considered by the Tenant's Board and the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee and covers the three year period from 2021 to 2024. The Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard states that social housing providers must consult tenants at least once every three years on the best way of involving tenants in the governance and scrutiny of the organisation's housing management service.
 17. Regular updates on the progress against the strategy will be provided to the Tenants Board and on an annual basis reported to the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

Customer Engagement Strategy

2021 - 2024





SAVE TIME, DO IT ONLINE....



DO IT ONLINE

For details of everything you can do online, visit
www.darlington.gov.uk/doitonline

Introduction

Darlington Housing Services has a long history of working with our tenants to help shape their communities and influence decisions about their homes and the services we provide. Our approach to tenant engagement and participation is embedded in our culture of openness and honesty, demonstrated through our resident groups and tenant's panel.

This strategy sets out how we will continue to involve and empower our tenants, ensuring they are at the heart of everything we do. It also sets out how we will explore new ways to engage with our tenants and ensure that no-one is left out.

Our strategy will help us to strengthen and expand opportunities for our tenants to make a positive difference to our services and future direction.

Our Aims

- Provide our tenants with the right information and hold us to account.
- Ensure our tenants can give us their views in the ways they want to and make their voice heard.
- Improve and expand the ways our tenants can be involved and participate in decision making.
- Improve the ways we can engage with our tenants through digital and social media channels.
- Empower tenants by providing training opportunities to ensure they have the right skills to make a meaningful contribution.
- Involve our tenants in making key decisions, such as improving safety and tackling climate change.

Our Priorities

1. Providing the right information

- Work with our tenants to improve services and help us implement change.
- Ensure we provide our tenants with feedback following consultation.
- Learn from complaints about our services, put things right and be open and honest when things haven't gone so well.
- Work with our partners to get the best outcomes for our tenants.



Councillor Kevin Nicholson,
Cabinet Member
Health and Housing

We will provide our tenants with the right information about our services in the ways they want. We will encourage our tenants to use our digital services, providing opportunities for everyone to be involved. We will ensure that we provide the right level of support for our tenants to access our services, ensuring no-one is excluded.

How will we do this?

- We will make all of our written communications easy to understand and clear about how our tenants can access services, providing information in a way that suits our tenants.
- We will provide up to date information about our services through our easy to use website and Housing Facebook page.
- We will provide the right level of support with explanations and advice on how our tenants can use our digital services and through our Darlington Home Online service.
- We will regularly update our social media platforms giving tenants information about their homes and the area they live in. We will also provide a forum where tenants can provide feedback on our services.
- We will provide telephone and face to face services for those who need it and ensure our staff are always on hand to speak to our tenants.





How will we know we have been successful?

- All of our written communications will be in Plain English and approved by our reader's panel.
- Increased hits to our website pages and more subscribers to our Facebook page.
- More subscribers to the Darlington Home Online service.
- Less calls to our housing contact team, with more support provided to the people who need us the most.
- Positive feedback from our tenants about the information we provide and the ways in which they can contact us.

2. Listening to our tenants

We will encourage and grow tenant involvement and participation. We will provide opportunities for our tenants to develop and feel fulfilled. We will put our tenants at the heart of everything we do and ensure their voice is heard.

How will we do this?

- We will provide a range of opportunities for our tenants to give their views and get involved through surveys, our tenant's panel, and mystery shopping.
- We will give clear expectations and explanations of the role our tenants will play in engagement activities and how these will shape services.
- We will develop training opportunities to ensure everyone has the right skills to get involved and participate fully in activities which they feel are important to them.

We will understand the barriers to effective engagement and take action to remove them.

- We will ensure community activities support locally prioritised actions.
- We will create a positive engagement culture where all staff understand the importance of customer engagement and actively promote it as an essential part of their roles.



How will we know we have been successful?

- Increased tenant participation and evidence that tenants have given their views through a range of activities.
- Our tenant's panel are consulted about key decisions affecting our services. Training is provided to ensure their contribution is valued and meaningful.
- Evidence that our consultation activities reflect the diversity of our communities and that we work with tenants we don't usually hear from.
- Increased participation through online engagement.
- Customer engagement is a key training priority for all housing staff to ensure everyone plays a role in listening to our tenants and implementing change.

3. Making decisions with our tenants

We will ensure the results of customer engagement are used to develop services and bring about positive change. We will use customer insight to make improvements and shape what we do and how we do it. We value the contribution tenants make in improving services and will ensure we provide feedback each time a contribution is made. We will involve our tenants to ensure their homes are safe and decent.

How will we do this?

- We will use the results of customer engagement to make decisions about our services and their communities.
- We will provide feedback on what we have done to improve services and bring about positive change as a direct result of customer engagement.
- We will involve our tenants with the maintenance, safety and energy efficiency of their homes.
- We will create health and safety and fire safety champions in local communities and provide our tenants with the right training and support to undertake these roles.
- We will empower our tenants to make decisions and take the lead.
- We will engage with the tenants of our new build homes and use their feedback to inform our future designs and choice of products.
- We will ensure our tenants can make a positive contribute to their health and wellbeing and tackle poverty and exclusion.

How will we know we have been successful?

- Increased satisfaction in housing services.
- Evidence that customer engagement has been used to make decisions and shape services.
- Evidence that tenants have been empowered to make a positive contribution to the maintenance, safety and energy efficiency of their homes.
- Fire safety checks are carried out regularly with tenants.



- Evidence that tenant's views have informed our future designs and choice of products.

4. Maximising scrutiny and accountability

We will build trust and transparency and ensure our tenants can hold us to account. We will ensure Councillors can provide scrutiny of our decisions to ensure our tenants have been involved and listened to. We will work with our partners to get a better understanding of how we can engage with and support our communities. We will use complaints about our services to understand what has gone wrong and what we need to do to put things right.

How will we do this?

- We will explore opportunities for wider tenant involvement, which can form a bridge between local communities and housing services.
- We will use our tenant's panel to provide scrutiny and challenge and ensure that decisions that will affect our tenants are transparent.
- We will publish our performance on our website on a regular basis so that tenants can see how we are measuring up and improving.
- Key decisions about our services will be made by Councillors and the results of customer engagement and involvement will form the basis of any recommendations. Equality impact assessments will help us understand any adverse effects on the decisions we make.





- We will ensure tenants understand the level of service they can expect from us and what to do if they don't think we are meeting it.
- We will ensure our tenants know how they can complain about our services and that complaints are given priority. We will thoroughly investigate all complaints and provide tenants with a full and honest response.
- We will put right what has gone wrong and ensure we learn from any mistakes, publishing the details of any improvements.
- We will engage with our colleagues and external organisations about how we can better engage and support our tenants.

How will we know we have been successful?

- Evidence of decisions made in consultation with our tenant's panel.
- Evidence of challenge and scrutiny by Councillors.
- Evidence that key performance measures and how we compare with others are regularly published and communicated to our tenants. Evidence that performance has improved.

Evidence that complaints are consistently resolved promptly, politely and fairly.

Complaints about our service are reducing.

Evidence that complaints about our services have been used to drive changes and improvements.



Measuring and Monitoring

Effective monitoring and reporting of this strategy will help us understand if our engagement activities are making a difference. Therefore, we will measure and report on the effectiveness of this strategy by doing the following:

- We will expect to see an increase in the number of our tenants becoming involved and influencing decision making. We will measure and report on this through our website, our tenant's panel, Housing Connect magazine and an annual report to our tenants.
- We will evaluate the progress of engagement activities at regular intervals throughout the year to ensure these are working effectively.
- We will publish the details of customer engagement opportunities through an annual plan, regularly reporting on how we are progressing.
- We will publish the records of meetings and decisions made.
- We will provide an annual report to the Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee on progress against our strategy.
- We will ensure customer engagement forms a core competency for housing staff and is reflected in all job roles, recruitment processes and training plan

“We want to hear your views on the service we provide and encourage more people to get involved with the tenants panel.”

Matthew Hufford

**Communications and Engagement
Co-ordinator.**

**Contact one of our Customer
Engagement Officers today**

Call
405333

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Darlington Borough Council Housing

Email
customerengagement@darlington.gov.uk



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