



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Agenda

9.30 am

Monday, 23 August 2021

The Council Chamber, Town Hall, Darlington DL1 5QT

Members of the Public are welcome to attend and make representations at this Meeting.

1. Introductions/ Attendance at Meeting
2. Declarations of Interest
3. To approve the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 21 June 2021 (Pages 3 - 6)
4. Designated Officer Annual Report 2020/21 (Pages 7 - 28)
Report of the Group Director of People
5. Children and Young People Public Health Overview (Pages 29 - 34)
Report of the Group Director of People
6. Self Assessment Overview (Pages 35 - 60)
Report of the Group Director of People
7. Trauma and Horizon Scanning (Pages 61 - 64)
Report of the Group Director of People
8. Children's Social Care - Off Framework Placements (Pages 65 - 70)

Report of the Group Director of People

9. Work Programme (Pages 71 - 88)

Report of the Group Director of Operations

10. 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

11. Questions



Luke Swinhoe
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Friday, 13 August 2021

Town Hall
Darlington.

Membership

Councillors Ali, Mrs Culley, Bell, Crudass, C L B Hughes, Lister, Lucas, Renton, Snedker, Sowerby, Willis, Malcolm Frank, Carly Spence, Maura Regan, Tim Fisher, Nick Lindsay, Janet Woodcock and John Armitage

If you need this information in a different language or format or you have any other queries on this agenda please contact Allison Hill, Democratic Officer, 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 email: allison.hill@darlington.gov.uk or telephone 01325 405997

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 21 June 2021

PRESENT – Councillors Ali, Mrs Culley, Bell, Crudass, C L B Hughes, Renton, Snedker, Sowerby and Willis

STATUTORY CO-OPTees – None

NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees – Nick Lindsay

APOLOGIES – Councillors Lister and Lucas; Carly Spence, Tim Fisher and John Armitage

ABSENT – Malcolm Frank, Maura Regan and Janet Woodcock

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Jane Kochanowski (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Tony Murphy (Head of Education and Inclusion) and Allison Hill (Democratic Officer)

CYP1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22

RESOLVED – That Councillor Crudass be appointed Chair of this Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2021/22.

CYP2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22

RESOLVED – That Councillor Willis be appointed Vice Chair of this Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee for the Municipal Year 2021/22.

CYP3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP4 TO CONSIDER THE TIMES OF MEETINGS OF THIS COMMITTEE FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22 ON THE DATES AGREED IN THE CALENDAR BY CABINET AT MINUTE C97/FEB/21

RESOLVED - That meetings of this Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee be held at 9.30 a.m. for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2021/22.

CYP5 MINUTES

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 12 April and the Special Meeting held on 22 April 2021.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings of this Scrutiny Committee held on 12 and 22 April 2021 be approved as a correct record.

CYP6 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2020/21 - YEAR END

The Group Director of People submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators.

The submitted report provided year end performance (April 2020 to March 2021) in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group and subsequently by each individual Scrutiny Committee.

The submitted report highlighted where Children and Young People Services were performing well and where there was a need to improve. It was also outlined that where indicators are reported annually, quarterly updates will not be available.

It was highlighted that 94.4 per cent of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) were held within 15 working days of the Strategy meeting being held / section 47 being initiated, which remains higher than statistical neighbour, regional and national average benchmarks; 100 per cent of children with a Child Protection (CP) plan and 100 per cent of Children in Care (CiC) have an allocated social worker; during 2020/21 no child has ceased to be subject to a CP plan who had been subject to the plan for 2 or more years and continue to positively perform below the target of 5 per cent; 89.0 per cent of children received a statutory CP visit within 10 working days during 2020/21; 93.1 per cent of statutory CiC visits were completed within timescale year to date above the target of 90 per cent and an improvement on the timeliness of visits when compared with the same period last year 89 per cent; 8.1 per cent of Children in Care (CiC), as at March 2021, had three or more placements within the previous 12 months which was better than the internal target, national, regional averages (all at 10 per cent) and statistical neighbour (9.9 per cent); 71.9 per cent of our Children in Care aged under 16 (who have been looked after for at least 2.5 years) had been in their current placement continuously for at least two years, above our target of 68.0 per cent and statistical neighbours (69.3 per cent), regional (69.0 per cent) and national average (68.0 per cent); 9.4 per cent of our Children in Care had been placed 20 or more miles away from home as at March 2021 which is below the target of 10 per cent; 90.9 per cent of the children, newly into care, were seen by CDDFT within 20 working days for an initial health assessment during 2020/21; 91.2 per cent of children due a review health assessment year to date had one completed; and 24.6 per cent of Care Leavers were not in employment, education or training (NEET) which was positivity below target of 30 per cent and 98.1 per cent were in suitable accommodation.

The areas highlighted for focus were in respect of referrals screened and completed within 1 day which was 77.7 per cent during 2020/21 below the target of 90 per cent; 19.1 per cent of re-referrals year to date, were repeated within 12 months, above the target of 18 per cent; timeliness of assessments was 86.4 per cent, below the target of 90 per cent; at the end of March 2021, the percentage of children becoming subject to a Child Protection plan for a second or subsequent time within two years of the previous plan ending was 9.4 per cent, above the six per cent target; the number of Children in Care had decreased to 272 by the end of March 2021, in line with the number at the end of March 2020 (270) and work continues to safely reduce the number of children becoming looked after; and as a result of dental surgery closures during lockdown, 57.2 per cent of Children in Care, that were due a dental check assessment had one completed.

Members discussed in particular the re-evaluation of the certain targets for 2022/23 and the timescales for these indicators being reset; the current position with Early Help and the effect of the lockdown on families; the general effect the pandemic had on services including the increase in families choosing elective home education (EHE).

The Assistant Director of Childrens' Services advised that the Children's Services Self-Assessment will be presented to Members at the next scheduled meeting of Scrutiny in August to provide more detail on the practice behind the data.

RESOLVED – That the performance information reported for the year end 2020/21 be noted.

CYP7 WORK PROGRAMME

The Group Director of Operations submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the Municipal Year 2021/22 and any additional areas to be included in the previously agreed work programme.

Discussion ensued on the current work programme and it was suggested that information be presented to future Scrutiny meetings in relation to Trauma; Self Appraisal; Children's Services and Tees Valley; Looked After Children Off-framework accommodation and costs; and Early Help services available for new mothers.

RESOLVED – That the Work Programme be updated to reflect the decisions of this Scrutiny Committee.

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**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
23 AUGUST 2021**

DESIGNATED OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on the progress and performance of the Designated Officer, April 2020 to March 2021 and to highlight the required actions for April 2021 to March 2022.

Summary

2. In line with national guidance, the Designated Officer function is to ensure that:
 - a) Advice and guidance are provided to partner agencies and staff where an allegation is made against a person who works with children (paid or voluntary capacity).
 - b) The Designated Officer will facilitate and oversee this process. The Designated Officer does not investigate. Investigation is the role of the employer or the police where a criminal offence has been committed.
 - c) An agreed outcome of the investigation is established.
 - d) Allegations are appropriately managed by employers to protect not only the welfare of children but also staff.
 - e) Support actions are taken without delay to protect children.
 - f) All learning is effectively disseminated.
3. All organisations working with children in Darlington are required to have policies and procedures in place on what their organisation should do when an allegation is made against an employee/volunteer who has contact with children. These policies and procedures should be in line with Darlington Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency procedures.
4. The allegation can be in connection with:
 - a) employment
 - b) voluntary activity
 - c) work placement

- d) the individual's own children
- e) related to the community or private life of a partner, member of the family or other household member.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that:
- a) The contents of the report and the work undertaken during 2021/22 and the priorities of the Designated Officer service for 2021/22 be noted.
 - b) The annual report be agreed.
 - c) All agencies consider how to promote the role of the Designated Officer within their own organisation.

James Stroyan
Group Director of People

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Marian Garland: Extension 6451

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder
Health and Wellbeing	The work of the Designated Officer can have a positive impact on the health and well-being of children and young people
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
Corporate Plan	This report has no implications for the Corporate Plan
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

Designated Officer Annual Report 2020/21

Managing Allegations and Concerns against Staff, Carers or Volunteers

Contents

1. Purpose of report
2. Introduction / National Context
3. Local Arrangements
4. Cross Boundary issues
5. Contact made with the Designated Officer
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7. Source of Referrals by Profession / Employment Setting
8. Allegations by Staff Group
9. Outcome of Allegations
10. Performance
11. Freedom of Information Requests
12. Service Improvements & Developments 2019/20
13. Designated Officer Service Priorities and Plan 2021/22
14. Recommendations
15. References

Appendices

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| Appendix 1 | Service Improvements & Developments 2020/21 |
| Appendix 2 | Designated Officer Service Priority Plan 2021/22 |

Designated Officer Annual Report 2020/21

Managing Allegations and Concerns against Staff, Carers or Volunteers

1.0 Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members of Scrutiny on the progress and performance of the Designated Officer (DO) service, (previously known as the Local Authority Designated Officer LADO) between April 2020 and March 2021 and to highlight the required actions for April 2021 to March 2022.

2.0 Introduction / National Context

- 2.1 The framework for the management of allegations of abuse is set out in [Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children \(July 2018\)](#) and [Keeping Children Safe in Education: Statutory Guidance for Schools and Colleges \(September 2018\)](#).

In line with the guidance, the Designated Officer function is required to ensure that:

- advice and guidance are provided to partner agencies and staff
 - any allegation made against a person who works with children in either a paid or a voluntary capacity is investigated. The Designated Officer will facilitate and oversee this process to conclusion. The Designated Officer does not investigate. That is the role of the employer or if a criminal allegation, the police
 - Designated Officer meetings are chaired effectively, and an agreed outcome of the investigation is established
 - allegations are appropriately managed by employers to protect not only the welfare of children but also staff
 - support actions are taken without delay to protect children
 - learning from Designated Officer referrals is effectively disseminated
- 2.2 All organisations within Darlington are required to have clear policies and procedures in place which outline how and what their organisation should do when an allegation is made against an employee/volunteer who has contact with children. These policies and procedures should be in line with Darlington Safeguarding Partnership procedures.
- 2.3 The criteria for a Designated Officer referral is when a person is alleged to have:
- behaved in a way that has harmed or may harm a child

- has possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates that he or she may pose a risk of harm if they work regularly or closely with children

The allegation can be in connection with employment / voluntary activity / work placement, regarding individual's own children or related to the community or private life of a partner / member of the family / household member.

3.0 Local Arrangements

3.1 Darlington Borough Council currently has one Designated Officer who is based with the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Business Unit and has undertaken the role since November 2019. The current Designated Officer has a dual role and is also a Policy Development Officer within the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Business Unit.

3.2 Clear arrangements are in place to ensure robust oversight and monitoring of the Designated Officer function. This has been provided through supervision with the Assistant Director of Adult Services to ensure that policies are applied consistently and fairly and that all enquiries are progressed in a timely manner.

4.0 Cross Boundary Issues

4.1 Where a child from the Darlington Local Authority area makes an allegation in a setting or placement which is outside the Darlington Borough Council jurisdiction, the lead responsibility for action lies with the local authority for the area where the alleged abuse occurred. In 2020/21 the Designated Officer was notified of 5 allegations concerning Darlington children placed in other Local Authorities.

4.2 In these circumstances, the Designated Officer and where appropriate, the child's Social Worker, will liaise with the relevant local authority and agree a joint strategy.

4.3 Checks should be made as to whether there are any other children in the placement. If so, the child's Social Worker and manager must be informed, and the Designated Officer should consult them about the action required.

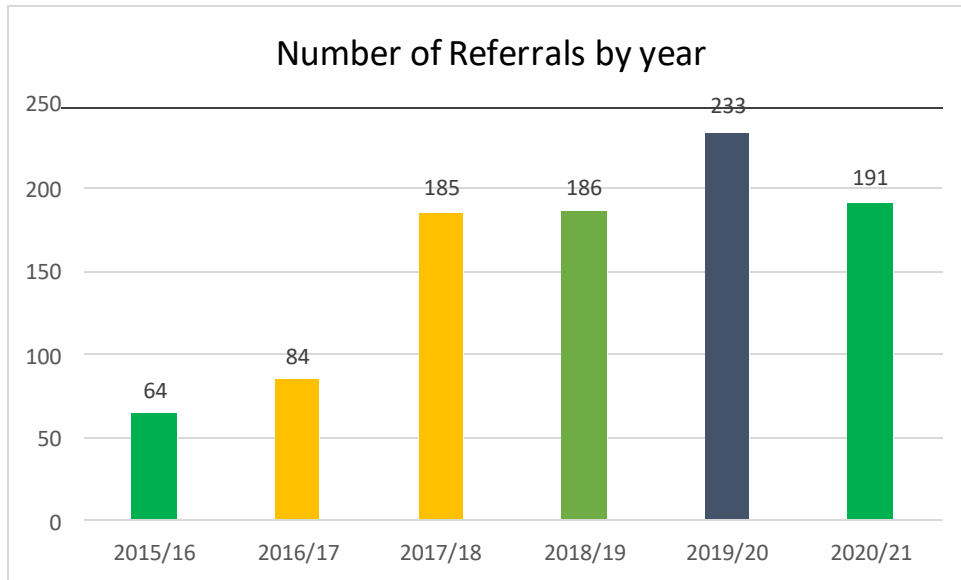
4.4 Interviews of children from Darlington Local Authority areas will usually be undertaken by their own local children's social care services in conjunction with the police as appropriate.

4.5 Where the referral relates to a child from another local authority temporarily placed in an establishment located within the Darlington Local Authority area, the Designated Officer should liaise with the child's home authority about the roles and responsibilities in carrying out this procedure. In 2020/21 the Designated Officer received 44 allegations concerning children from other local authority areas either temporarily placed in an establishment in Darlington or receiving education in Darlington.

5.0 Contact made with the Designated Officer

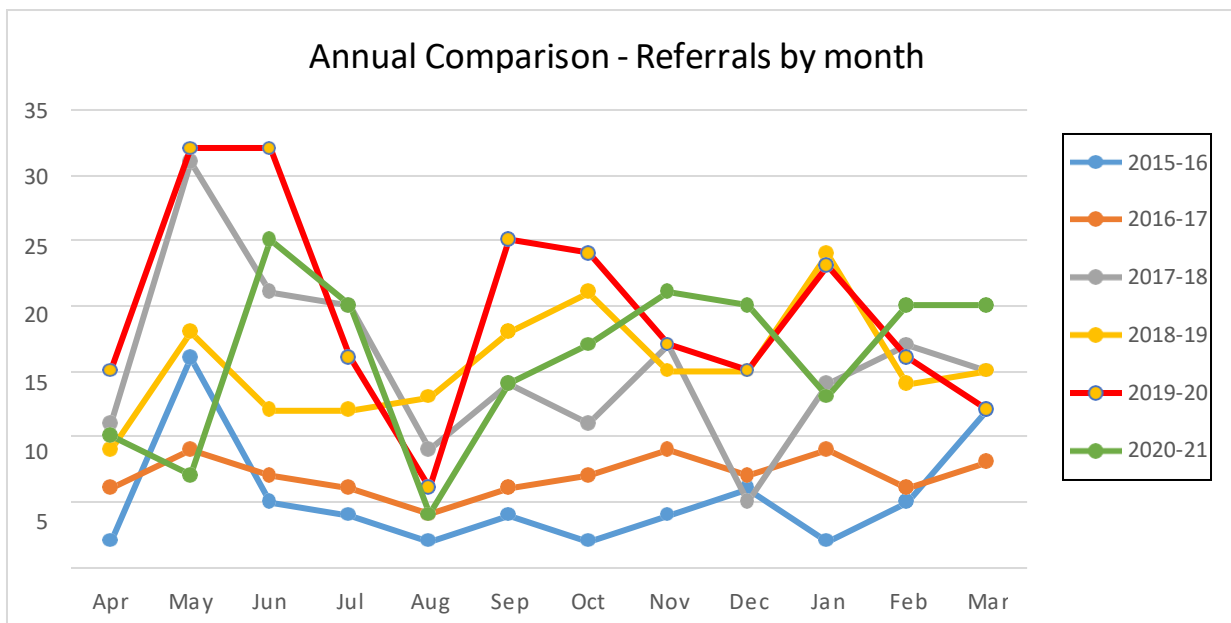
- 5.1** In 2020/21 the Designated Officer service received a total of 191 contacts in respect of allegations. This represents an 18% decrease on the number of contacts received in 2019/20. Of the total number of contacts received, 32 progressed to an Initial Evaluation Meeting (IEM), (all of which were conducted via Microsoft Teams), amounting to 17% of all contacts, which is a slight decrease on the figures last year. This demonstrates that despite the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, the response of the Designated Officer and partner agencies in terms of holding Initial Evaluation Meetings (IEM) and conducting enquiries in respect of reported allegations has remained consistent throughout the reporting period, with a similar percentage of allegations being subject to an IEM as in previous years. The remaining 159 contacts were either dealt with by means of telephone discussion with the employer, (particularly during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic) and were subsequently monitored by the Designated Officer or did not meet the threshold for intervention.
- 5.2** Initial Evaluation Meetings take place when information sharing is beneficial between agencies involved, for example, Designated Safeguarding Leads within the referring organisation, Human Resources, Police and Children's Services. This can be after a Strategy meeting held by Children's Services or it may be a standalone meeting. In some circumstances, it is appropriate to share information via telephone without the need of convening an Initial Evaluation Meeting, for example; when the allegation is not of a serious nature, there is no involvement with other agencies or there is limited information to share with the employer. These allegations are still monitored by the Designated Officer and during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, two allegations were dealt with by means of a telephone discussion with the employer.

CHART 1



5.3 The figures in **Chart 1** show that the rate of contacts in 2020/21 decreased by 18% (a total of 42 contacts) in comparison to the previous reporting year. This is in contrast with previous years, which have consistently shown year on year increases in the rate of contacts. The decrease in 2020/21 is a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the effects of the national lockdown which commenced in March 2019, immediately before the start of the reporting year. This can be seen in **Chart 2** which provides a month by month breakdown of the rate of contacts and an annual comparison.

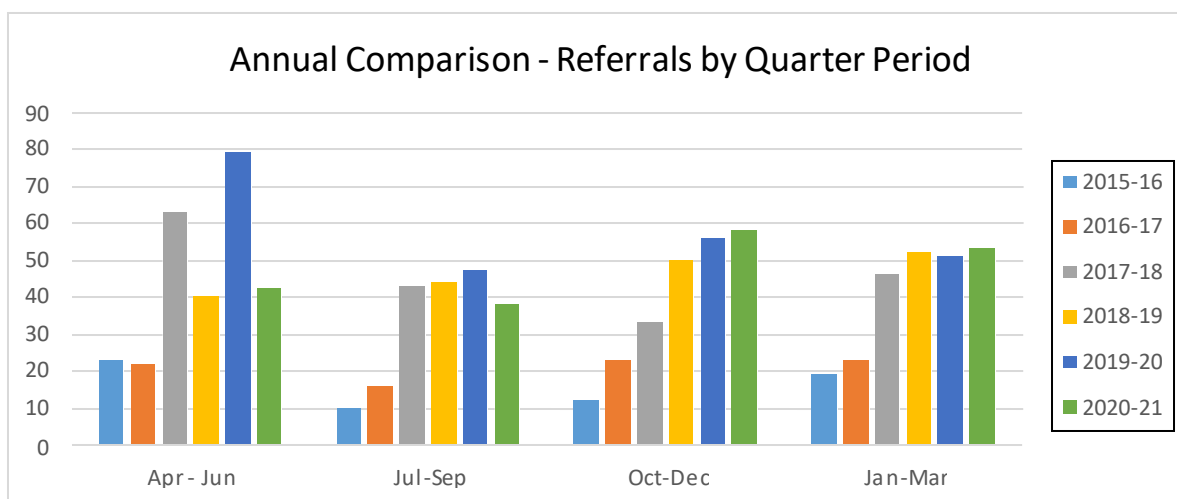
CHART 2



5.4 The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic throughout 2020/21 is evident in the annual comparison of monthly contacts. Analysis shows that there was a significant decrease in the rate of contacts in April and May 2020, which coincides with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the first lockdown. In previous years the Education sector has consistently been the largest ‘source of referral group’ and largest ‘allegations by staffing group’. Although all schools in Darlington remained open, in April and May 2020, there was a significant reduction in the numbers of pupils attending school, which partly explains the significant decrease in contacts. There was also a decrease in the number of employees attending the workplace across all agencies. The rate of contacts increased significantly in June 2020 (25 contacts), almost back to the level of the June 2019 (32 contacts). The likely explanation is more students started to return to school and college from 1st June 2020 (28% of referrals in June were connected to Education) and the fact that the first lockdown ended in June 2020.

5.5 The majority of contacts with the Designated Officer relate to schools. The number of contacts tends to fall significantly in the month of August during the summer break.

CHART 3



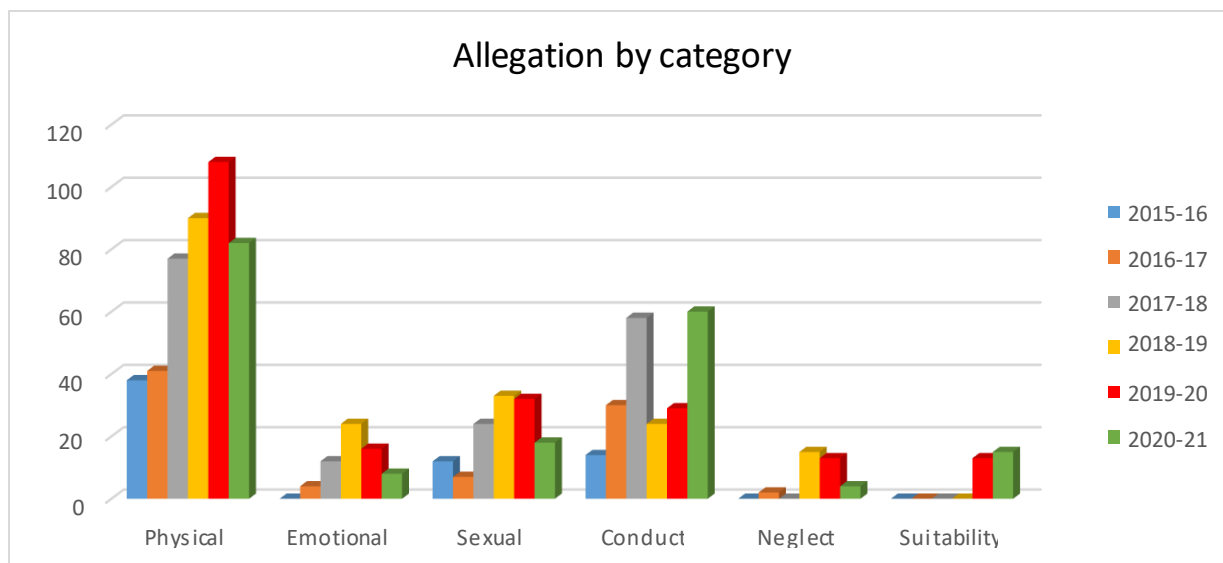
5.6 The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are also demonstrated in **Chart 3**, which provides an annual comparison of the rate of contacts by quarter and shows a 47% decrease in contacts during Quarter 1 in comparison to the previous year. Quarter 2 also shows a 19% decrease in the rate of contacts to the Designated Officer in comparison to the previous year. The majority of pupils had returned to school in Quarter 2, but social distancing was still required, and this may have impacted on the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) in schools.

5.7 Figures for Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 are slightly higher than those of the previous reporting year, despite the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic was ongoing and there was a second lockdown during Quarter 4. This is possibly explained by the fact that during the second lockdown (Quarter 4), a higher percentage of pupils attended school than during the first lockdown. Also in Quarter 3 and Quarter 4, there was an increase in contacts to the Designated Officer in respect of ‘conduct,’ some of which referred to

incidents which had occurred in the private lives of employees and involved issues such as mental health, self-harm, alcohol abuse and child abuse. There has been an overall increase in contacts relating to such incidents in 2020/21 and this may be a consequence of the adverse effects of the pandemic on the wellbeing of the population, which has been recognised as a national issue.

6.0 Categories of Concern

CHART 4



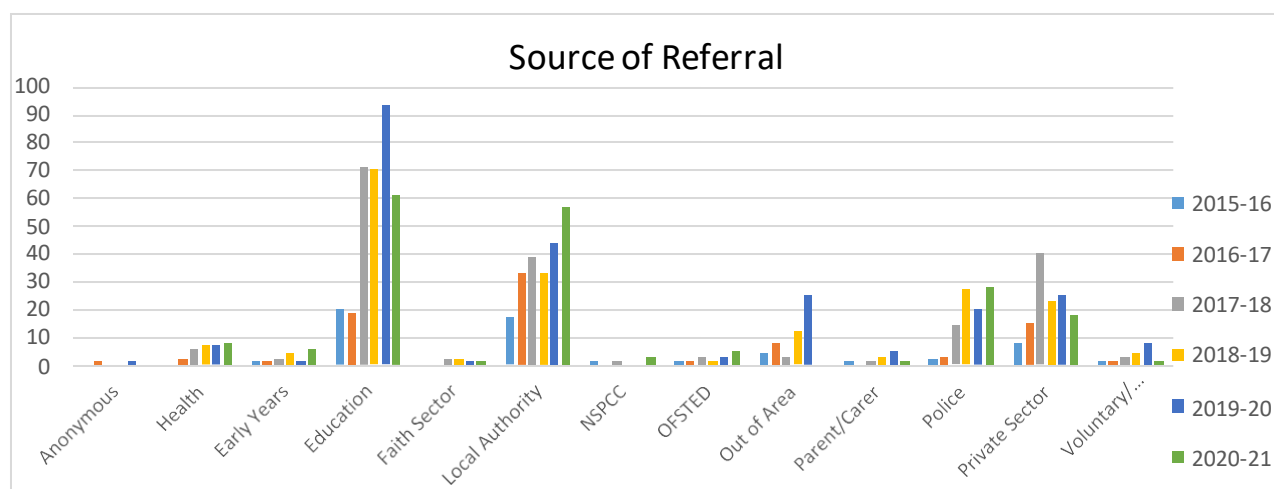
- 6.1** Of the 191 contacts in 2020/21, the main category for referral was allegations of physical abuse. This is in line with the data from previous years.
- 6.2** In 2020/21, 82 (42%) contacts were in relation to physical abuse which represents a decrease of 24% on last year's figures within this category. This is partly explained by the decrease in allegations of physical assault within education settings as a result of the restrictions of the pandemic and lockdowns when pupil attendance in schools has been much lower. There has also been a significant reduction in the number of allegations relating to the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) in schools, which are included in this category (see paragraph 8.5).
- 6.3** Allegations under the category 'conduct' have seen a significant increase accounting for 60 (31% of total) contacts to the Designated Officer in 2020/21.

This represents a significant increase of 106% of contacts recorded under this category, in comparison to the previous reporting year. Contacts recorded within this category relate to behaviours which do not easily fit into the four main categories. A total of 32 (55%) contacts recorded as 'conduct' were in relation to incidents which occurred in the private lives of individuals and did not occur within the workplace.

- 6.4** A total of 15 contacts have been recorded under the category of 'suitability'. This category amounts to 8% of the total and a 15% increase in contacts under this category compared to last year. This category usually relates to issues in an employee's personal life, such as mental ill-health or 'association' with an offender, or association with proscribed organisations, which may affect their suitability to work with children. Some of these incidents related to mental health and alcohol abuse and self-harm or association with a partner who has committed sexual offences. Again, the increase is potentially a consequence of the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the wellbeing of the population, and improved reporting from Children's Social Care to the Designated Officer in allegations where a parent's employment involves working with children.
- 6.5** There were 18 contacts regarding allegations of sexual abuse in 2020/21. This is 9% of all contacts and represents a 44% decrease in contacts under this category compared to last year.
- 6.6** There were 4 contacts regarding allegations of neglect in 2020/21. This is 3% of all contacts and represents a 69% decrease in contacts under this category in comparison with last year.
- 6.7** There has also been 50% decrease in the number of contacts regarding emotional abuse in comparison to the rate of contacts in the previous reporting year, with a total of 8 recorded in 2020/21. Emotional abuse contacts represented 4% of all referrals to Designated Officer.
- 6.8** The remaining recorded allegations have not been categorised because they are recorded for information purposes, for example, in support of employers seeking advice and reassurance but requiring a record of the referral to the Designated Officer to satisfy governance requirements or providing additional information about a case which has already been investigated.
- 6.9** A total of 80 contacts to the Designated Officer in 2020/21 were related to incidents which have occurred in the private lives of individuals (as opposed to the workplace), which is 42% of the total contacts and is an increase on previous reporting years (though the incidence has not been previously reported in annual reports). These incidents mainly relate to alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, mental health problems and allegations of child abuse and neglect within the family and were predominantly reported in quarters 3 and 4. Such allegations can be complex in terms of disclosure and resolution and may require review meetings.

7.0 Source of Referrals by Profession / Employment setting

CHART 5



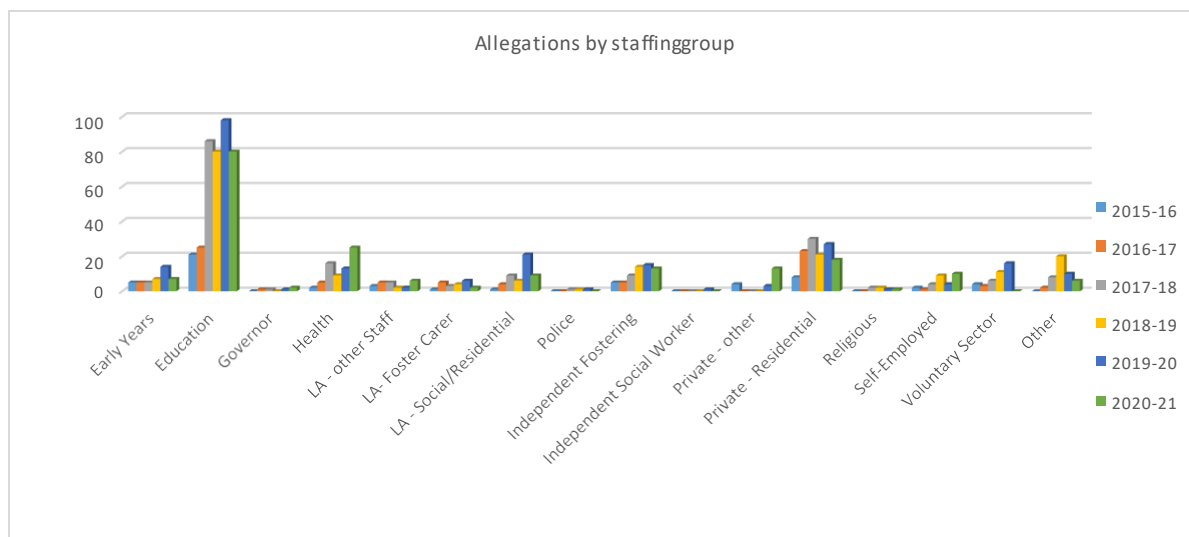
7.1 As can be seen in **Chart 5** Education settings in 2020/21 continues to be the largest referring group, accounting for 61 (32%) of the 191 contacts with the Designated Officer. The majority of referrals from and involving schools were as a result of allegations of physical abuse and correspond to the analysis of ‘category of concern’ data, showing that physical abuse is the most common category of allegation reported to the Designated Officer. It should be noted that the total number of allegations relating to education establishments in the ‘allegations by staff group’ is slightly higher at 80 and this is because some of the allegations involving an employee in education were referred to the Designated Officer by other agencies.

7.2 Referrals have continued to be received from a wide range of professions and organisations. In 2020/21, there were a total of 57 contacts to the Designated Officer by a Local Authority, the majority of which originated from Darlington Borough Council. This represents a 32% increase on the previous reporting year and is possibly a result of the new safeguarding arrangements within Children’s Social Care at Darlington and the creation of the Children’s Initial Advice Team, which has improved the process of referral to the Designated Officer. It is also once again possibly a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the potential increase in safeguarding referrals to Children’s Social Care of incidents involving domestic abuse and parental mental health concerns, or other categories of abuse which are referred to the Designated Officer if a parent or carer works with children.

8.0 Allegations by Staff Group

8.1 **Chart 6** shows that referrals are made across a wide range of roles and settings, whether paid staff or volunteers, as outlined in the national guidelines.

CHART 6



8.2 As expected and in accordance with previous years, the largest number of allegations by staffing groups is Education, accounting for 80 referrals which is 42% of all allegations referred to the Designated Officer in 2020/21. This is despite schools operating under restrictions for a significant part of the reporting period because of the pandemic, and contacts regarding allegations against employees within education having fallen 18% in comparison with the previous reporting period.

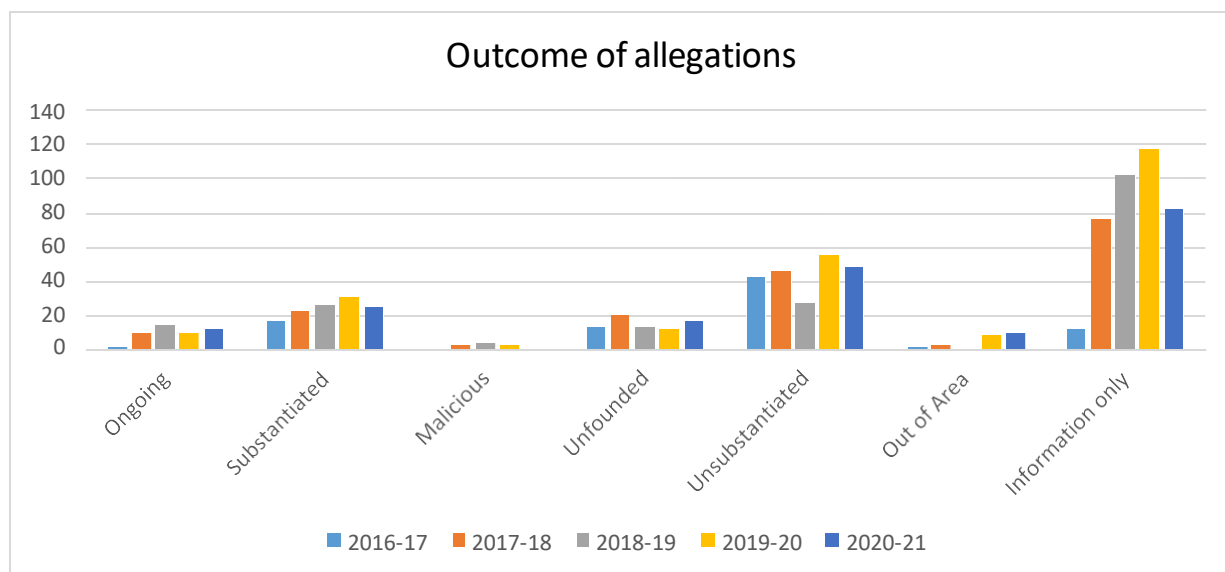
8.3 During 2020/21, of the 80 contacts relating to allegations about employees in education settings, 23 (29%) were regarding employees from primary schools; 16 (20%) from secondary schools; 5 (6%) from Further Education settings; 1 (1%) referred to an agency teacher and 1 (1%) from a residential establishment with attached education provision. A total of 33 (41%) were from schools which provide a service for children with Special Educational Needs (both primary and secondary age groups).

8.4 There were a total of 39 allegations (49%) in the category of physical abuse relating to the education sector; this is a 26% reduction in comparison with 2019/20. This figure correlates with the presenting referrals from education, often involving Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) being used within educational settings, for example, Team Teach, which is an approved management model for dealing with children and young people who are posing a risk to themselves or others.

- 8.5** The rate of allegations involving the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) in education settings has been closely monitored by the Designated Officer throughout this reporting period. There were 21 allegations involving the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) across the education sector in 2020/21, which accounts for 54% of all allegations under the category 'Physical' in education settings. This is a significant reduction in the number of allegations involving the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) in schools in comparison with the previous reporting year. One school which has an intake of pupils who are unable to have mainstream education because of Special Educational Needs and challenging behaviour, has seen a 75% reduction in allegations involving the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) across the reporting period. The overall reduction in the incidence of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) across the education sector may be a consequence of fewer pupils attending school during the lockdowns and the requirement for social distancing in schools. However, it is important to note that schools for children with Special Educational Needs remained open throughout both lockdowns. Some pupils with Special Educational Needs, vulnerable children and children of key workers were able to attend school throughout the lockdowns and it is possible that work undertaken by the Designated Officer and Local Authority with one setting in early 2020 has positively impacted on the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI), thereby reducing the number of allegations within the category Physical across the sector. The Designated Officer will continue to monitor the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) in schools throughout 2021/22.
- 8.6** The number of contacts regarding Independent Foster Carers has decreased slightly with 13 allegations being referred during 2019/20. There have been 2 contacts relating to Darlington Borough Council Foster Carers during the recording period, a decrease on last year's figures.
- 8.7** The Designated Officer continues to work closely with the Service Manager for the Fostering Team (Darlington Borough Council), following a decision in 2018 that all referrals about foster carers (including Independent Fostering Agencies) would be shared with the Service Manager. This enables the Service Manager to keep a close check on those agencies where the standards of care fall below what is expected of an accredited provider of services. When appropriate, this information is shared with the Commissioning Team.

9.0 Outcome of Allegations

CHART 7



9.1 In relation to the 24 substantiated allegations, 5 employees were dismissed (21%), 1 was deregistered (4%), 6 resigned from their position (25%), 1 allegation resulted in a conviction (4%) and 11 staff members were reinstated (46%) with management advice/written warnings.

9.2 There were 48 unsubstantiated outcomes and of these, 2 staff were re-instated (4%) and 43 resulted in no further action (89%), 1 staff member was dismissed (2%) and 2 staff members resigned (4%).

9.3 There were 16 allegations deemed to be 'unfounded', of these 2 staff were re- instated (12%) and in respect of 14 allegations no further action was taken (88%).

9.4 No allegations were recorded under the category 'malicious'. This outcome is not used by the Designated Officer unless there is overwhelming evidence that the allegation was based on deliberate falsehoods

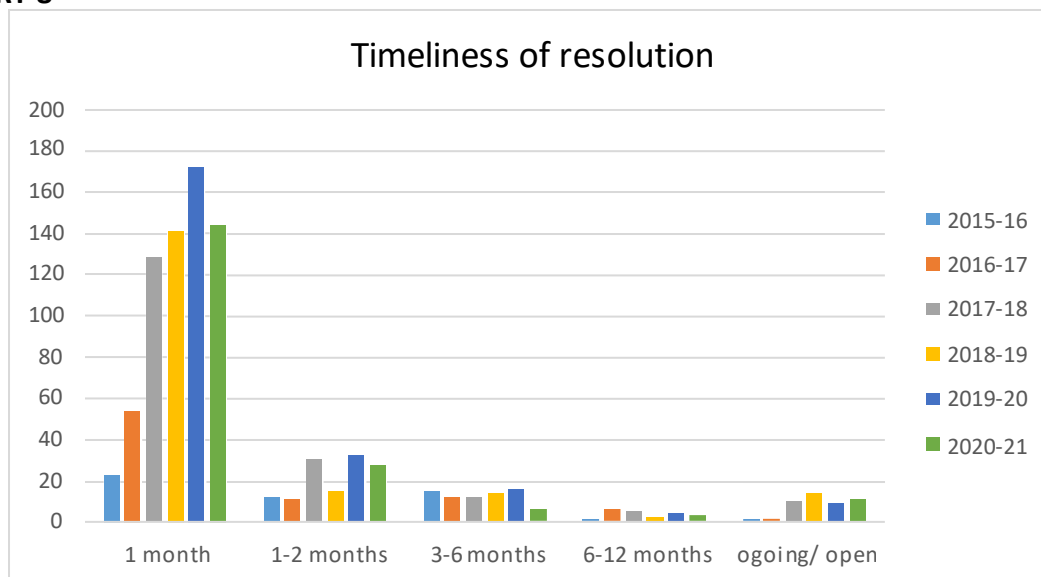
9.5 In this reporting period, 82 allegations were recorded for 'information only'. This includes allegations which are 'out of area' (sometimes this fact is only established after initial enquiries have been carried out by the Designated Officer), which are reported to the Designated Officer but are subsequently found not to be in the remit of the Designated Officer procedures and result in advice being given and enquiries which are transferred to the Safeguarding Adult Manager, as they are better dealt with under the Managing Allegations Procedures in accordance with the Care Act 2014. Some allegations can fall within the remit of both the Designated Officer and the Safeguarding Adult Manager, for example, agency employees or employees with two roles. In such enquiries the Designated Officer works closely with the Safeguarding Adult Manager and a joint meeting may take place.

9.6 At the time of writing, a total of 11 allegations (5%) remain open. These are either ongoing police investigations, complex internal disciplinary investigations, or

investigations which are awaiting the outcome of a court case or an appeal.

9.7 Performance

CHART 8



9.8 The Designated Officer continues to work to the professional standards set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2010, even though there is no longer a timescale for completion of enquiries stipulated in the updated versions of the legislation. The performance of the Designated Officer is measured and monitored through supervision between the Assistant Director of Adult Services and the Designated Officer.

9.9 It is important to manage allegations within timescales to ensure that investigations are dealt with promptly, firstly to ensure that children are protected from employees who may pose a risk of harm, but also to ensure a fair and consistent process for employees (who should be supported by the employer throughout the process). Oversight and management of allegations within timescales helps employers to conduct investigations and disciplinary proceedings lawfully and expeditiously, enabling employees to be either reinstated, disciplined or dismissed at the earliest opportunity thereby minimising disruption to the employer and employee.

10.0 There is currently no requirement in legislation for enquires to meet timescales. However, local targets are set in line with an earlier version of Working Together (2010) in that:

- 80% of allegations are resolved within one month
- 90% within are resolved within three months

10.1 Allegations are resolved in a timely manner with 144 (75%) of total being resolved in one month, and this is consistent with the previous year's performance data. Resolution timescales can be impeded by the complexity of allegations involving ongoing criminal investigations and internal investigations where the employee has declared themselves unfit for work, therefore delaying disciplinary action.

10.2 A total of 87% of allegations were resolved within 3 months and 93% within 6 months. And 95% within 6 months. The remaining allegations were ongoing and not finalised at the end of this reporting period, all involve ongoing complex allegations and criminal or internal disciplinary investigations. At the time of writing the report, a total of 11 (5%) of investigations were still active.

10.3 The Designated Officer tracks all open enquiries on a 4 weekly basis to ensure that updates on outcomes of investigations are received and to enable enquiries to be closed in a timely manner. However, it should be noted once a police investigation is involved or a case is referred to an employer for disciplinary procedures to be followed, the Designated Officer is reliant on external process which impact on resolution timescales.

11.0 Freedom of Information Requests

11.1 During 2020/21, the Designated Officer service has continued to take the lead with regards to Freedom of Information Requests with regards to allegations made about employees or volunteers working with children. Over the 12 months reporting period, 2 Freedom of Information requests and 2 Subject Access requests were processed.

12.0 Service Improvements & Developments 2019/20

12.1 See Appendix 1.

13.0 Designated Officer Service Priorities and Plan 2021/22

13.1 In 2021/22, the Designated Officer service plans to continue to promote awareness of the service across a range of professions to ensure that appropriate referrals are coming in and to break down any barriers to agencies seeking the advice and support of the Designated Officer service. The role of the Designated Officer and the responsibilities of employers are included in multi-agency safeguarding training.

13.2 The Designated Officer service will continue to be crucial to frontline practice to safeguard children in Darlington. Working in partnership with the Designated Officer and sharing information effectively ensures that children are protected from people who pose a risk of harm and promotes good practice and challenges unsafe practice. Recent data suggests that work carried out by the Designated Officer with education settings has resulted in a reduction in the number of allegations resulting from the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) and this will continue to be monitored by the Designated Officer. The Designated Officer continues to work with the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Trainer and the Education Safeguarding Officer to raise awareness of the role of the Designated Officer and the Managing Allegations Procedures to promote good practice and safeguard children.

13.3 The service also wants to improve the quality of the performance information gathered and to maximise the efficiency of the service using electronic recording systems. It is anticipated that in 2021/22, the recording of referrals to the Designated Officer service will be integrated within the casework system Liquid Logic. This will enable Children's Services to improve data matching where appropriate. This has been deferred from 2020/21 owing to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

13.4 In 2020/21, the Designated Officer service has identified 4 key priorities (Appendix 2) which are pivotal to the on-going development of the service.

14.0 Recommendations

14.1 To note the contents of the report and the work undertaken during 2020/21 and to acknowledge the priorities of the Designated Officer service for 2021/22.

14.2 To share the Annual Report with Darlington Safeguarding Partnership and Members who will be asked to:

- agree this Annual Report
- consider how they will continue to promote the role of the DO within their own organisation.

15.0 References

- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- Keeping Children Safe in Education September 2018
- Guidance for staff facing an allegation 2014

16.0 Author

Marian Garland
Designated Officer
Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Business Unit
Date: 21st May 2021

Appendix 1

Service Improvements & Developments 2020/21

Actions were identified for development of the Designated Officer function during 2019/20 which would further improve the performance of the service. The progress against these actions is highlighted below.

	Action	Lead	Timescale	Update
1	To ensure the induction of a newly appointed DO is successful and the appointee is retained	AD	Jan 2022	Review of the role and function to ensure the Designated Officer role is in the appropriate service area
2	The Designated Officer will monitor the rate of allegations involving the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) in schools for pupils with SEN and identify themes and take action where appropriate.	DO	Ongoing	The DO holds regular meetings with one provider regarding allegations involving the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) (as a means of monitoring the rate of allegations) and has regular conversations with head teachers in the schools for children with SEN. In 2020/21 there was a significant reduction in the number of allegations of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) in the education sector.
3	DO will continue to raise awareness of the DO role via a range of media throughout the coming year	DO	Completed	All relevant information re the DO service has been posted on the revised Darlington Safeguarding Partnership website (July 2020). Websites and literature to have the name and contact details of the DO. All agencies will have correct details of DO. DO information will be easily accessible and relevant referrals made.
4	DO will continue to engage with the Safeguarding Multi Agency Trainer and Safeguarding Education	DO	March 2022	This is an on-going process and a top priority.

	Officer in relation to continual roll out of designated training to improve practice and reduce referrals across all organisations			
5	DO to liaise with police in relation to any historical allegations that may come as a result of the Independent Enquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.	DO	Ongoing	The DO has an agreed strategy in place referring any notifications of historical sexual abuse from the Independent Enquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. There has been one referral from the IICSA via the NSPCC.
6	The DO will continue to maintain accurate records of referrals, decision making and outcomes; monitor data and identify any themes that emerge and feed these themes into training	DO	Ongoing	Records are reviewed monthly to ensure that they are accurate and up to date. Regular conversations take place between the DO and the principals of the schools for children with Special Educational Needs to monitor allegations about the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI).
7	DO to attend all pre-agreed regional DO meetings to ensure that Darlington's views and opinions are represented. DO to attend National Annual DO Conference.	DO	Ongoing	The DO attends quarterly regional DO meetings or receives an update by e mail.
8	DO will continue to develop recording practice with system developments for future reports	DO	Ongoing	This was a priority for 2019/20 but has been delayed because of the pandemic. The DO has liaised with the Liquid Logic (LL) team and devised an appropriate recording system within LL and it is anticipated that recording be integrated within Liquid Logic in 2021.

9	To develop a safer recruitment guidance to offer further support and guidance to settings	DO and HR	Completed	The Safe Recruitment guidance is available on Darlington Borough Council's Recruitment and Selection Policy.
10	Review the format of DO initial evaluation meetings template for inclusion in Liquid Logic.	DO and LL	Ongoing	The DO has liaised with the LL team and has devised a form for inclusion within the LL recording system. This is ongoing.
11	The DO will provide feedback on National DO standards and seek approval from DSP and legal services	DO	Ongoing	The National Standards are not yet completed. There is an ongoing discussion as to whether a National Guidance will be appropriate for such a wide diversity of Local Authorities.
12	The DO will review and update the procedure for Managing Allegations and concerns against staff, carers or volunteers and seek approval via the DSCB Practice and Development and Procedures sub-group.	DO	Completed	The procedures were reviewed in July 2019 within the framework of the DSP Learning and Development sub-group, the procedures have been updated to reflect the changes to legislation – Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.
13	To review and up-date the guidance for staff facing an allegation	DO	Completed	This guidance was reviewed in July 2019 within the framework of the DSP Learning and Development sub-group but will be kept under review.

Designated Officer Service Priority Plan 2021/22**Priority 1: Training and Awareness Raising in respect of the Designated Officer role and local procedures**

Action	Planned outcome	Lead	Timescale
DO will continue to engage with the Safeguarding Multi Agency Trainer and Safeguarding Education Officer in relation to continual roll out of designated training and will hold awareness raising sessions with employers as requested.	Increased awareness amongst employers of the DO procedures and their responsibilities in reporting allegations to the DO and improved transparency in reporting allegations. This will potentially increase the number of referrals to the DO service and will improve safeguarding outcomes for children.	DO	March 2022

Priority 2: To monitor and address the prevalence of allegations involving the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) in SEN Education settings in Darlington

Action	Planned Outcome	Lead	Timescale
Monitor the rate of allegations involving the use of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) in SEN education settings in Darlington in respect of repeat allegations.	To work with Head Teachers and Safeguarding Leads to ensure that the DO is informed when such an allegation is made by a pupil/parent and that staff are using Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) appropriately and that any breaches of Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) guidelines are dealt with appropriately schools with a view to reducing the annual number of allegations of	DO	March 2022

	Restrictive Physical Intervention (RPI) within this category. This work is ongoing.		
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Priority 3: DO database/recording to be integrated within Liquid Logic

Action	Planned Outcome	Lead	Timescale
In conjunction with the Liquid Logic team devise an appropriate DO casework recording system within Liquid Logic.	Improved recording and enhanced searching capacity for the DO and improved data matching for Children’s Services where appropriate. Performance Indicators to be available on Liquid Logic which will feed figures into the DO Annual report.	DO/LL team	September 2021

Priority 4: The future of the Designated Officer service in Darlington to be agreed and a decision made as to where the service will be placed within the Local Authority

Action	Planned Outcome	Lead	Timescale
A decision to be made as to where the Designated Officer would be best placed within the Local Authority with regards to workload and taking into consideration resilience for abstraction.	A decision regarding where the DO role should be placed.	Assistant Director	September 2021

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23 August 2021

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PUBLIC HEALTH OVERVIEW

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with an update of the Children and Young People Public Health interventions and programs.

Summary

2. This report will brief members on the Healthy Lifestyles Survey 2021, Childhood Healthy Weight Plan, mental health in schools projects and 0-19 Service.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that members note the contents of the report.

James Stroyan
Group Director of People

Background papers

Childhood Healthy Weight Plan 2019-2024

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report supports the Council's Crime and Disorder responsibilities
Health and Well Being	This report supports to health and wellbeing of children, young people and families in the borough.
Sustainability	This report supports the Council's sustainability responsibilities
Diversity	This report supports the promotion of diversity
Wards Affected	This report supports performance improvement across all Wards
Groups Affected	This report supports performance improvement which benefits all groups
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report contributes to the Council Plan by involving Members in the scrutiny of performance relating to the delivery of key outcomes

Efficiency	There are no implications arising from this report.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report impacts on all children across the borough.

MAIN REPORT

Healthy Lifestyles Survey

4. The Healthy Lifestyles Survey (HLS) has been delivered for 11 years with a total of up to 8500 pupils across 33 schools completing the survey annually.
5. Between April and June 2020, the Public Health team delivered virtual focus groups and online surveys with pupils from year 5 to year 10, parents and carers and school staff.
6. Responses were received from 167 pupils, 32 parents and carers and 41 school representatives.
 - (a) Pupils said they liked the survey; feel they can be honest, and it tells the schools what the issues are.
 - (b) Parents and carers said they mostly knew (86%) about the survey from their children's school, they receive information on the survey but would like to know more about the data collected.
 - (c) Schools said the project is helpful, fantastic evidence of pupil needs, helps them to plan, drives their curriculum, identifies issues to be addressed in a timely manner, they thanked us for our support and expertise.
7. This year the questions were reviewed by topic specific 'experts' to ensure they were fit for purpose to provide relevant and useful information, a total of nine professionals provided feedback and adapted questions.
8. All 33 schools have completed Service Level Agreements to participate in the HLS from September 2021.
9. Delivery will begin in September and be tracked weekly, to be completed by October half term. The final report should be completed by January.

Childhood Healthy Weight Plan

10. The Childhood Healthy Weight Plan (HWP), aims to increase a healthy weight in children and young people, the objectives are focused to increase fibre and fruit and vegetable uptake, reduce sugar by increasing healthy food and drink swaps and aim to achieve 60 minutes of physical activity for every child and young person in the borough.
11. Partnership work has resulted in the coproduction of a looked after young people and families toolkit, a children's home food policy and a nutrition education staff training programme.
12. Catering staff at Carmel College have completed a five module training award programme developed by Public Health (PH) and Environmental Health (EH) in collaboration with catering managers, to support staff in delivering innovative healthy food choices, the evaluation will be collated over summer 2021.
13. In June 2021 the Healthy Families Catering Award was launched which was a result of collaborative work with PH, EH and local restaurants to develop menus which meet government targets for calories, sugar and salt including behaviour change techniques to support children under 11 years to easily choose healthy options.
14. Opportunities to enable children and young people to move more and sharing of public health messages have been advertised across Darlington, including 'play on the way' hopscotch in the Cornmill, weaning and start4life, treasure hunts and free summer activities.
15. The Healthy early years task group supported all Early Years settings to take part in the national healthy eating week in June, sharing information with parents/carers and introducing activities to encourage familiarity of fruits and vegetables.
16. The group continue to work towards a Healthy Early Years (HEY) catering award and whole setting strategy.
17. PH are also working with a sample of primary schools to trial a 'whole school' approach to food to commence in September 2021, including the launch of a healthy eating for parents course developed with Darlington Learning and Skills team.
18. PH have also supported the Darlington Holiday Activity Food Program project in delivering nutrition content and ideas for signposting healthy lifestyle resources and links to parents.

Mental Health in Schools

19. The Children and Young Peoples (CYP) Mental Health Network has continued to meet, and this has enabled an overview of CYP Mental Health to be provided on a fortnightly basis. The group has highlighted that CYP are still being affected by

COVID-19 in terms of mental health and there are signs that children are inclined to be a little more disruptive as they struggle to get back into routine whilst having to isolate on a number of occasions.

20. CAMHS and other services are noticing increased referrals although some of this may be due to the backlog when services could only be provided face to face for some patients with more complex needs.
21. To support staff in schools a Suicide Prevention Grant programme for training in relation to suicide prevention and self-harm was launched in June and the two applications submitted were successful in getting £2000 each.
22. The two organisations were Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College and St Aidans' Academy.

0-19 Service

23. The 0-19 Service has introduced an enhanced digital offer to children and families during the Covid-19 pandemic as restrictions are lifted the Service is introducing more face to face appointments, while continuing to build on the success of the virtual offer.
24. Digital working with schools continued until the end of the summer term with early years and puberty interactive presentations being offered.
25. The Service is in the process of launching a YouTube channel to allow schools to access content.
26. Face to face appointments for antenatal, new birth checks, 6-8 weeks, 3-4month and 9-12month visits are being reintroduced.
27. All vulnerable families always had the option of face to face appointment during the pandemic, with staff wearing full PPE and Covid-19 risk assessments in place prior to visits. Some virtual contacts will remain in place at the request of the individual families.
28. Bookable face to face clinic appointments are also beginning with appropriate risk assessments in place.
29. Breastfeeding support has continued throughout the Covid-19 pandemic virtually with a WhatsApp group of mums supporting each other. 'Attend Anywhere' appointments have been utilised by the Breastfeeding Co-ordinator to support new mums. As a result, at the end of quarter 4 (2020/21), breast feeding initiation has increased up to 58% and up to 47.5% at 10-14days.

30. The Service has introduced a Demand and Capacity tool with 0-19 teams and practitioners to be able to support staff with workload pressures, due to the increase in caseloads over the Covid-19 pandemic.

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**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23 AUGUST 2021**

SELF ASSESSMENT - OVERVIEW

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Scrutiny with the Annual Self- Assessment for Children's Services so that constructive 'critical friend' challenge takes place to drive improvement in public services.

Summary

2. Darlington Children's Services update each quarter an assessment of social work practice, inclusive of Early Help, based on changes in performance data. To bring the information into a stand-a-lone easy read document an annual self-assessment overview document is completed.
3. The self-assessment draws on existing documentation and activity and reflects the local authority's business for children's services. It identifies what leaders are doing to maintain or improve good practice for children and their families, demonstrating the effectiveness of our actions and address weaknesses in practice, with clear, appropriate plans to improve services.
4. The self-evaluation should answer 3 questions: 1) What do we know about the quality and impact of social work practice in our local authority? 2) How do we know it? and 3) What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
5. The self-assessment is used as part of Ofsted's ILACS Annual Engagement Meeting and plays an important role in their understanding of local authorities and how they work. It helps them see whether leaders and managers have a grip on practice and are taking suitable action.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that:
 - (a) The contents of the report are considered in terms of Children's Services role and functions and critical challenge is afforded to improve outcomes for children and their families.

**JAMES STROYAN
Group Director of People**

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the completion of this report.

Jane Kochanowski: jane.kochanowski@darlington.gov.uk

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report supports the Council's Crime and Disorder responsibilities
Health and Wellbeing	This report supports the health and wellbeing of children, young people and families in the borough.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	This report supports the Council's sustainability responsibilities
Diversity	This report supports the promotion of diversity
Wards Affected	This report supports performance improvement across all Wards
Groups Affected	This report supports performance improvement which benefits all groups
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report contributes to the Council Plan by involving Members in the scrutiny of performance relating to the delivery of key outcomes
Efficiency	There are no implications arising from this report.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report supports the health and wellbeing of Looked After Children and Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

See attached Self – Assessment Document

Children's Services

Knowing Ourselves Knowing Our Children



Self Assessment Overview report (Data year end 2020/21)



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Governance of the self-assessment
Yearend data and annual report to Scrutiny in
August

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- Annual Financial Statement**
- Annual Staffing Structure**

Introduction

Darlington Children’s services received an Ofsted Focus Visit in February 2019, that noted our strengths, areas for development and improvements made since our judgement of ‘requires improvement to be good’ in 2018, which confirmed our view that we are making progress in ensuring children and families working with us, achieve positive outcomes.

Our Strengthening Families Programme Board has been instrumental in driving through improvements and encourages forward and progressive thinking. We benefit from corporate and political commitment to this work and are confident in our success of sustaining the model.

Our ‘Front Door’ has been redesigned to streamline the number of transfer points that occurred from the Access Team to the safeguarding teams. The Children’s Initial Advice Team (CIAT) a new integrated service which went live in March 2020. It provides information and advice to members of the public and professionals, act as the screening route for all telephone contacts and ensures appropriate referrals

are passed through to Safeguarding and Assessment. The percentage of cases concluded through information and guidance has increased from 53.2% in 2019/20 to 73.2% in 2020/21. Having direct conversations with social workers at the front door, helps partners become more effective and confident in their decision making. Children and families are now more likely to receive the most appropriate intervention at first contact which has reduced the number of re-referrals.

Our children in care numbers (272 at year end) currently remain higher than our statistical neighbours as below.

Our vision is for every child to have “The Best Start in Life” which is articulated in our Council Plan 2020-2023.

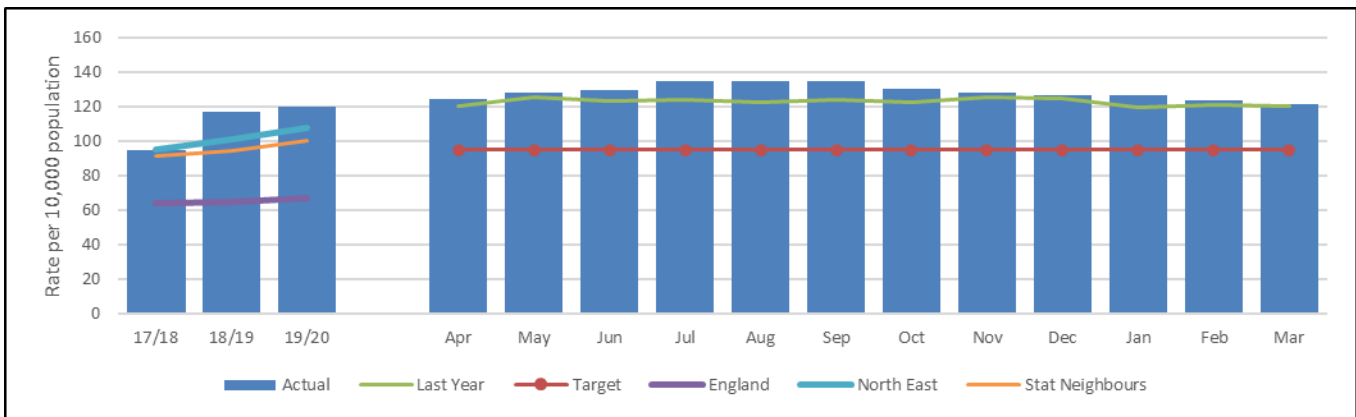
“The Best Start in Life” focuses on ensuring that every child in Darlington has the best start in life so that our children and young people can grow and flourish. There are some groups of children who require enhanced and targeted support to achieve their full potential.

Our priorities are to support the most vulnerable by

- providing care and support when needed
- working with people to build on their strengths to maximise their potential
- working with partners and to

maximise the potential of our young people by

- working with partners to maximise educational achievement
- working to remove barriers to young people reaching their potential
- working at a Tees Valley level to match jobs with skills and training.



As we implement **Relational Practice** in all services, we are beginning to see signs of better outcomes and a reduction in numbers. Over the last year children are less likely to become looked after and placement with extended family more readily found for children who do require to live outside their parents’ care. We are encouraging a ‘**think family first**’ approach in Darlington to ensure that children

remain in the care of their family and in cultural backgrounds. Working with parents to build on their strengths and values to keep their families together; where it is safe to do so. Confidence in care planning of children is growing as relationships between practitioners and parents and family members becomes stronger.

Quality Assurance
and Improvement
It's everyone's
Business.....



Our learning culture for our continued improvement journey would ordinarily access peer support via the regional Sector Led Improvement and Partners in Practice. However, since the start of the pandemic normal routes of support have been replaced by regional collaboration appropriate to virtual methods. Our quality assurance framework has been revised and updated with a real emphasis on the quality of practice. This has been informed by four stages: plan, do, check, and act. The framework sets out roles and responsibilities, so staff are clear

about expectations on improving practice as part of business as usual. The framework sets out what goods looks like for children, young people, and families of Darlington. It details how we measure and analyse the quality of the practice through: observations; active audit activity; feedback from families and thematic dip sampling. We have evolved our practice and learning panel to reflect our journey with the development of the Quality Improvement Group (QIG). This is to create a real learning culture where we're able to reflect on our practice and share learning. We want to learn from families with a much stronger focus on the feedback from families enabling us to build on what they find positive within our service delivery and approach.

We have an emphasis on using data and quality monitoring to drive performance. Improvements and areas requiring deep dive reviews are now driven by team managers and service managers who report their findings into monthly practice clinics. In clinics with senior leaders, including the Principal Social Worker and the Director of Children's Services (quarterly), both support and challenge occur ensuring data and quality is analysed, owned, and understood by all managers.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) group provide the governance for scrutiny and challenge regarding our Early Help/Neglect Strategy. The Community Safety Partnership Board provide governance and oversight of domestic abuse, with a County Durham and Darlington Executive Group (DASVEG) providing direction for services. The Darlington multi-agency delivery plan, which supports The County Durham and Darlington Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Plan has been strengthened to ensure a collective approach and coordination of actions. The strategic and operational governance of children who are at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation is robust, with the Child Exploitation Group reporting into the Safeguarding Partnership.

In September 2020 the existing Assistant Director for Adult Services took on an acting role of both Director of Children's and Adult Services this became permanent in February 2021. Given the internal appointment, the transition was streamlined. The newly appointed Director is extremely familiar with the Safeguarding Agenda, the culture and vision of Children's Services and strategic plans for Education and Skills.

The Lead Member, Managing Director and Director of Children's Services continue to influence and drive several key board meetings, ensuring continued political and corporate oversight and scrutiny.

Areas of Strength

Strategic direction and commitment to invest in children’s services
 Improved consistency of good practice, including direct work shaping assessments and plans
 Robust response to Covid ensuring children remain safe
 Embedded relational practice in all service areas ensuring positive and sustained relationships with families
 Good multi-agency response for children experiencing organised harm outside the family
 Strong oversight of children electively home educated
 Strong relationships with Schools
 Good work acknowledged in Court
 Stable workforce, retention remains good

Areas of Priority

The voice of our families is evidenced in our work and their feedback is used to improve our services
 Increase use of safe family arrangements to reduce the need for children to be cared for in regulated/commissioned placements meaning they can remain within their family network
 Work with partners to improve responses to childhood adversities and poverty
 Continued work with education partners to improve outcomes at KS4
 Increase sufficiency in placement choice for children in care, particularly foster care
 Develop an apprenticeship offer for Children in care and Care leavers

Response to Covid

The pandemic has presented challenges for us in 2020 however, adopting a proactive approach in early 2020 led to establishing a Covid Safeguarding Partnership Group (CSPG), the introduction of Multi – Agency Operational Procedures for the wider children’s workforce, enabling statutory and non-statutory organisations to have clear roles, responsibilities and expectations and the development of two vulnerable risk registers, monitoring the risks and safety of children open to Children’s Social care and children subject to Education, Health and Care plans.

The procedures outlined multi-agency collaboration in the completion of safeguarding children covid risk assessments, visiting expectations and safe systems of work. The procedures have been regularly updated in line with changes in government guidance, legislative flexibilities and individual organisation service delivery.

Schools have provided an excellent response during the pandemic with 100% remaining open, inclusive of opening over the easter 2020 bank holidays to allow vulnerable children and children of front-line workers to attend.

Following the announcement to the pandemic in March 2020, all children services employees were required to work from home. This presented logistical challenges in respect of staff having home working equipment and robust IT systems supporting a smooth transition from an office environment to a working from home. Employees were supported through internal operating procedures, regular management oversight, supervision and support from HR. This included mental well-being seminars, training and access to counselling services which has been invaluable in ensuring staff health,

workforce capacity and strong work ethic. This enabled business continuity with only minor impact on service delivery.

Initial anxieties regarding PPE were noted however robust links with Public Health colleagues ensured that staff were fully equipped by early May. Although high risk vulnerable children and families had always been visited, universally face to face visits commenced and have remained to date except for some children with a disability.

Children's voice

During January and March 2021 Children's Scrutiny established a review group to examine the effects of the pandemic on the children and young people living in Darlington. Two virtual events were held 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 for improvement.

Some children and young people reported they felt that family relationships had improved and that they had used the lockdown to engage in creative, new activities. In contrast some others reported to have been struggling to access IT and/or had experienced cyber bullying. They were consuming more fizzy drinks, chocolate and energy drinks and were feeling stressed or anxious and some reported sleeping problems and depression. Some young people voiced concern at being unfairly blamed for breaking Covid rules and jeopardizing the health of older people.

Mental health issues were a major concern among our children and young people, and they highlighted this as a priority, although they recognized that online services had been made available in Darlington.

Children and Young People were unclear as to where they could find information about activities and events specifically designed for their age groups and felt there were not enough positive activities universally available for them in their local communities or in the town centre.

The report and recommendations of the review group were fully accepted and endorsed by Cabinet in May and will ensure that issues impacting on children and young people will remain high on the Council's agenda. Young people identified

- Cyber bullying,
- IT difficulties
- Poor healthy eating/lifestyle choices
- Children's mental health for all partners/charities/schools to work collaboratively on service delivery
- Improve life chances for children
- Improve career opportunities for young people
- Look at better communication for young people so they are informed of services in the borough

Working with children and families

Children residing in our internal residential homes

have been amazing and in the main they have adhered to all the restrictions put in place by government. One young person had to move due to their own safety in the first lockdown. Staff have been eager to ensure the young people's mental health is maintained to a high standard and have encouraged them to walk and take regular exercise during the day. We have maintained sufficient workforce capacity enabling the homes to function effectively. Reg 44 visits have been undertaken virtually and are continuing to report on high levels of care in place for our young people.

Foster carers have been supportive in ensuring that contact with families is maintained through WhatsApp and various video technology as they recognise the importance of children seeing their families. Placement stability remains high because of this positive attitude. In year 2020/21, 71.9% of our children in care, aged under 16 (who have been looked after for at least 2.5 years) have been in their current placement continuously for at least 2 years. This is better than our statistical neighbours (69.3%), regional (69.0%) and national average (68.0%).

Children have been seen and relationships built with children's practitioners from Early Help, YOS and children's social care throughout the pandemic, albeit during the first few months families were reluctant to have staff visit their homes resulting in early help service delivery being offered to a much smaller group of families and social workers providing virtual visits to the majority of children and doorstep and garden visits with the most vulnerable.

The introduction of the covid risk assessments helped identify children who were most vulnerable and who needed visits.

Harewood Hill, respite provision provided a discreet bespoke package of support to those most vulnerable with a disability. It developed staff and children into bubbles ensuring children were safeguarded and reducing the chance of cross infection.

Teesside Combined Family Court provided a reduced timetable of hearings for the first six months of the pandemic, hearing only high risk and emergency cases which resulted in reduced numbers of children's hearings for discharges of care orders, adoption orders. Since the Courts has reopened fully they have taken measures to provide additional court offices therefore ensuring more hearings can take place and as a result our children are starting to return home to family in a measured and steady pace.

Once risk assessments and safe systems of work had been developed with Health and safety and Public Health colleagues, the Supervised Contact service resumed facilitation of contacts between children and their families. Parents were extremely supportive in the way in which we put our procedures in place and were able to work with us to ensure that everybody was safe while visits took place.

The Impact of Leaders on Social Work Practice with Children and Families

Strategic management

As senior leaders we are ambitious for our children and families. We have a clear vision and areas of priority, enabling us to promote and maximise the potential of our children and young people. We pride ourselves in knowing our children well and by also being aware of ourselves well we know our strengths and areas requiring continued focus. We effectively target the support we offer to children and their families using our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), which ensures that we also know our communities well and can identify vulnerable groups at ward level. Safeguarding Partners are involved in joint work with the Community Safety Partnership to be assured that services are co-ordinated and accessible, for example for Gypsy, Roma, and Travelling (GRT) families, to share information and establish clear contact routes for partners working with families.

Our overall strategic direction, which acknowledges a strength in partnership working, of giving children and young people the Best Start in Life is driven by our Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB), which is also our Children's Trust. Robust governance arrangements demonstrate clear lines of accountability, challenge and communication between the HWBB and other key groups such as Scrutiny Committees, the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Safeguarding Partnership and the Children and Young People Plan Steering Group. Knowing the quality of practice is continuing to improve, ensures that services are managed well, and we are realistic about what is needed. We continue to have effective political and corporate support with continued commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people across the Borough.

Safeguarding Partnership arrangements are in place with a strong supportive Independent Scrutineer providing and enabling professional challenge, and commitment from all partners to ensure our respective safeguarding work is robust. Our Strategic MAPPA Board is chaired by the Chief Superintendent for Safeguarding and Neighbourhood Command and is well attended by all organisations, including local prison services and Safeguarding Partners.

Our role as Corporate Parent is strong and is taken seriously by members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, the wider Council and lead member. The Corporate Parenting Panel is co-chaired by members from our Children in Care Council (Darlo Care Crew) who directly support the Panel in measuring and monitoring the effectiveness and quality of Corporate Parenting in Darlington. Children and Young People in the Darlo Care Crew have been influential in developing formal and informal meetings to ensure their voices are heard listened to and acted upon. They have also developed the "Promises Tree", which outlines our corporate parental responsibility.

Strategic managers have a good sense of children benefitting from improved timely management decisions, and children and their families are sustaining and maintaining relationships with their social workers and as a result, receive a sustained consistency of approach to their care planning pathway and achieve better outcomes.

We are committed to ensuring that practitioners feel valued, knowing that good practice is recognised while we continue to be aware of and are responsive to the negative impact of high caseloads on quality of practice. The **'think family first'** approach is being driven and a strong steer in relation to restorative practices are being welcomed by our workforce as they are committed to reducing risk and preventing escalation of children becoming subject to child protection plans or coming into care.

Learning Culture

Our journey is based on sound building block which we have seen evolving from initial focus on compliance and performance targets to improving quality of practice, which continually sits alongside more recent improvements in relational and strengths-based practice with children and families. The next phase is to improve our restorative relationships by commissioned and collaborative joint working practices enabling colleagues from CSC, Health Education, Police and others to provide services together.

Our workforce is well trained, committed and engaged and is supported with a wide range of development through our extensive training programme, leadership and staff Forums, which are well informed by information from complaints, quality assurance, audit activity, data and performance. Practitioners at all levels actively participate in developing our vision and purpose, and work on key priorities and areas of service development. Children, young people and families influence ongoing service improvement and development through engagement and feedback via commissioning, quality monitoring, complaints and compliments. Examples include; parental support in developing safe working practices and risk assessments for Contact Arrangements with children in care, following the initial lock down restrictions in March 2020 and parental consultation on Special Guardianship information and pathways within Early Help Services where children are experiencing autism and learning disabilities.

We have refreshed and updated our Workforce Development Strategy and continue to deliver a strong social care training offer, which now includes training in restorative practice and introduction into management. Practice Educators are valued and invested in, resulting in students reporting a positive experience of their placement in Darlington, and many applying for permanent posts.

Workforce

Our stable senior management team is cohesive, visible and in touch with staff through modems such as Microsoft teams and WhatsApp. Practitioners are well supported, with our culture in restorative approach of high support high challenge, to further empower them and their managers to be responsible and accountable. Workforce surveys on the impact on working from home in the pandemic, report positives such as improved work life balance, and efficiencies, and negatives where staff report; social isolation, increase in poor mental health and anxiety issues. The local authority has responded well to the findings with additional counselling support, wellbeing sessions and access to mental health consultants put in place to achieve positive outcomes for the staff.

Our workforce remains stable enabling children and their families to develop long term relationships with their social workers, IROs and other practitioners. Staff turnover (15.9) SW vacancy (12.5) and agency (18.4) rates as of end March 2021. (all up slightly from 2019 but reduced from 2018). We continue to be responsive to pressures on the workforce by creating another safeguarding and assessment team from existing capacity enabling a manageable number of direct reports for team managers so that caseloads remain at a manageable level (18 for SW 10 for ASYE) and each practitioner receives improved reflective supervision. ASYE's are supported by a designated ASYE co-ordinator,

Feedback from staff training includes:
"The training I've done so far has helped in the way I communicate with children, young people and their families. Although it's early days I'm working more 'with' families, rather than 'for' them, by looking at their strengths more."
"I was aware of ACE's before the training, but I feel this has given me an understanding of mindfulness of trauma in children. I have researched and use appropriate questions raised in the training and work with individuals and families to understand where they are coming from."

providing weekly and monthly 1-1 adding additional value to supervision undertaken by team managers. Our new 'Darlington Academy' means we can 'grow our own', and we have two staff completing the social work apprenticeship. Highly experienced and skilled staff remain committed to Darlington and work to improve our marketing and recruitment is underway, ensuring that we remain competitive within the social care market. Due to more agile working practices throughout the UK, we have recognised a potential decrease in agency workers able to cover maternity and long-term sickness and work has commenced to improve our regional MOU to be competitive on our offer against neighbouring regions.

The Experiences and Progress of Children who are in Need of Help and Protection

Following family feedback, we have improved relational practices and our approach in responding more quickly to children and families which has led to an increase in families agreeing to our involvement and taking up our services at the earliest stage (57.2% 159 families received services within 5 working days). We have been able to listen to family and children's needs and work together to provide the right level of support required. We have worked to improve the quality of early help assessments and plans, with SMART methodology being used to identify risk and set clear goals. Plans are developed in relational language that is clearly understood by all involved, outlining what is required, by when and by whom. We are working to ensure the quality of plans are consistent for all children.

Our Family Information service and online directory helps children, professionals and partners know where to go for information and advice. Families are more receptive to us working *with* them rather than services being offered *to* them and, by maintaining an approach where children remain within the family network, this is helping shape and develop strong trusting relationships with families. Families are beginning to see that practitioners are thinking 'family first' by developing family and friend networks, with the introduction of family group conferences

Early Help services support children and their families, 72.3% are recorded as having seen a positive impact following Early Help Support in a recent survey. Families are integral to understanding their progress and by using scaling methods they can see the level of their improvements. Children who are not experiencing improvements in their family situation are stepped up to statutory services appropriately, with each child and family being considered at our transfer panel.

Young children develop well and are ready for education and where necessary are supported with targeted speech and language input. Our early help offer helps children maintain progress within school and within their family as they are supported by effective programmes. For older children who are demonstrating emerging academic, attendance or behaviour need, they are considered within our multi-agency Vulnerable Pupil Panel (VPP), who establish a plan to keep them in school, inclusive of managed moves to other schools, if required.

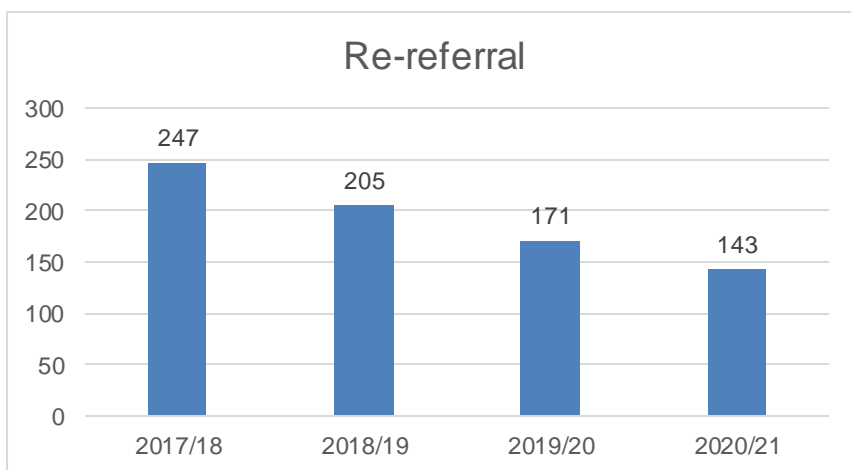
We have a strong multi-agency approach to children who go missing, or are at risk of harm/exploitation outside the family home which means they are identified quickly and receive a return home interview (94.2% of Return Home Interviews are conducted within 72hrs in 2021) from a dedicated officer who, with parents, carers and practitioners, helps coordinate information relating to risks using the harm matrix tool within and out with the child's family, locations and community to determine what level of

support is required. Parents are supported to understand why their child goes missing so they may help to reduce the episodes for their child. In January 2021, we started to see a slight increase in younger children 11 & 12yrs being reported. An urgent analysis initiated by the covid critical safeguarding partnership group showed that the responses from children were them wanting to be out with friends and not wanting to return home at the scheduled time set. We continue to monitor the age range of the children presenting as missing and we have not seen a repeat in those so young since January.

Children most vulnerable to CSE receive proactive multi-agency support from a range of workers in the Educate and Raise Awareness of Sexual Exploitation Team (ERASE).

Identifying and responding to children’s needs and appropriate thresholds

The Front Door was restructured in March 2020 enabling all contact information to be screened centrally via the Children’s Initial Advice Team (CIAT). Partner agencies and members of the public engage in conversations about children whom they are worried about with experienced social workers so that decision making for next steps is agreed and action taken so that children receive the right service at the right time. Having direct conversations with social workers at the front door, helps partners become more effective and confident in their decision making, ultimately reducing the number of re-referrals. Domestic violence and family dysfunction continue to be the main reasons for re-referral in 19/20 and 20/21. 20/21



has seen a decrease in re-referrals for physical abuse but an increase in adult on adult conflicts.

Through the Children’s Initial Advice Team children and families benefit from reduced delay in allocation and fewer social workers are involved during the assessment pathway. Across 2020/21 86.4% of children and family assessments are completed within 45 working days, this is above national average of 83.1% recorded in 2020. We promote quality in the information gathered and robust analysis ensures the best possible plan enabling positive outcomes for the child and family. We have clarity in parents giving consent for assessments to be completed.

We have very few young people 16-17 years old (who present as homeless and those who do are supported to access a range of accommodation and community-based support, through our Positive Pathway Support offer, following a children and family assessment.

Children and families are supported outside of office hours by our Emergency Duty Team (EDT) and robust, information sharing between them and CIAT ensures that families who are in need receive continuation of timely and effective support.

Hi I would like to provide a compliment about S, social worker I would just like to say how helpful and friendly she is and to thank her for her help and support towards me and my children S, always acted in an appropriate and professional manner and was always suggesting ways to help us as a family and help us access services and help for my daughter and as a result helped us to move forward so again I would just like to say thank you kind regards Parent'

Making good decisions and providing effective help

The introduction of a weekly review meeting comprising representatives from the senior leadership team, quality assurance and performance provides scrutiny and challenge with regard to quality of information, rationale and decision making from transfer of referral through to strategy outcomes for children. This live audit of practice has evidenced that children are kept safe from harm through timely, appropriate and effective childcare planning arrangements. Children are seen quickly and are almost always seen alone with their views informing decision making. Risks to children are managed through increased improvement in safety planning and we have good mechanisms for establishing multi-agency

collaboration, action and decision making in emergency circumstances that we are moving to embed in working pathways for all children. An example recently has been with regard to a young person with autism and learning disabilities in need of a placement to meet her needs. Commissioners from CCG, TWVE, Local authority and practitioners, including police working together to enact a robust plan and review s117 plan.

We have a high number of strategy meetings and are conducting a whole service review looking at children subject to a strategy and their journey in children’s social care involvement to understand how practice deals with issues of non-consent, ongoing domestic abuse and where children make disclosure of significant harm.

Strategy meetings are well attended with appropriate input from agencies, identifying concerns, actions and timescales needed to safeguard children, and they demonstrate effective use of analysis that informs decision making. We have strong performance in ensuring there is no drift and delay for children requiring a child protection plan with 94.4% of ICPC’s, held within 15 working days of the strategy meeting at year end, 2021. We know that our rates of children being escalated to Initial Child Protection Conference are sometimes low, however regular monitoring determines whether the outcomes are appropriate. The low numbers are therefore reflective in the overall number of children subject to a child protection plan which conversely results in an increase rate of children having a second/subsequent plan. This inevitable change is in line with the practice under the strengthening families programme and we monitor this robustly to ensure the change is within a managed process.

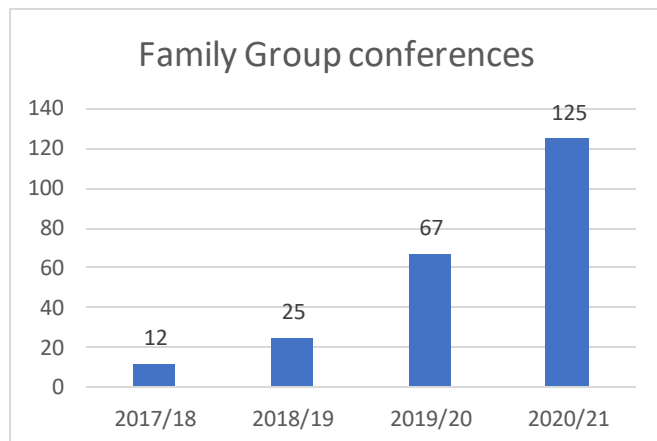
Improved communication and practice with midwifery services and the CIAT results in risks to unborn children being identified earlier and assessed in a timely manner. Parents have plans and actions in place prior to birth and although covid has led to some women presenting late for booking, this much improved pathway has led to some increased use of parent and baby placements to help us assess whether baby can remain within the care of their parents.

LADO referrals have reduced (18% reduction since 19/20), due to work undertaken in 2019 with a particular school on the use of restraint practices and covid with the need to socially distance, limiting the use of hands-on restraint. Physical abuse remains the highest factor of reports and, in most cases, when referrals are made, organisations receive prompt and effective action from the Local Authority’s Designated Officer (LADO).

A recent audit of children’s records showed that practitioners need more awareness in relation to MAPPA meetings, to fully understand that the meetings can assist with risk assessments on individuals which can inform/be amalgamated into their own assessments. Training has been rolled out to improve understanding and increase referrals into the MAPPA process.

Children and young people have reported that use of technology has made their practitioners are more accessible. Throughout the last year our staff have increased in confidence and creative use of technology i.e. WhatsApp/video calls allowing social workers to sustain positive working relationships and make a real difference to children and their families.

Parents and carers are supported to have a clear understanding of what they can do to improve outcomes for their children through our increased use of Family Group Conferences. The offer of a conference is given to all families at the point of referral. The joined-up planning with members of their family network ensures a sustainability of support that will be evident long after the statutory intervention ceases. Managers and practitioners are increasingly more reflective during planning meetings and supervisions which has led to improved planning for children, therefore reducing drift and delay in children receiving services to meet their needs.



Most children and their families receive an assessment which is child focused and records the child’s lived experience. Assessments are well written with the child’s historical information, chronologies, views of relevant family members and contain research-based analysis which informs future planning. We have a focus in gaining Input from absent males so their voice can be heard and informs care planning.

We have worked hard to hear our Children’s voices, especially in the last year and have conducted surveys and an impact review, facilitated by the Chair of Scrutiny on how they have coped during the pandemic.

Direct work continues to improve through practitioners using rapport techniques and tools to engage and capture their views. Consistent recording of this and how it influences planning and decision making for the child, continues to be an area of focus for us.

The quality and consistency of children in need plans has improved although this remains a focus for us. We have ensured that plans are purposeful, and outcome focused. Clarity in language helps all involved have good understanding of what is expected. Children receive regular and timely visits (92.2% in timescales) and their plans are reviewed regularly, (95.2% within timescales). We have clear documentation as to the rationale for escalation into Public Law Outline (PLO)/Child Protection processes which has been strengthened enabling this to be understood by parents.

Our relational practice approach to holding ICPC and Review Conferences has been impacted by the pandemic although we have been able to facilitate them with both parents and children participating via mobile technology. 92.3% of parents attended the ICPC with 10 children during 20/21 and 95.2% of

parents attended the review conference with 6 children. Children and young people are encouraged to attend and share their views and can do so with the support of an advocate. Social worker reports submitted for conferences are timely and of good quality, and multi-agency involvement is good within the meetings.

The quality of Child Protection Plans continues to improve, better plans are driven by experienced practitioners in multi-agency forums and better attended core groups reviewing the plan for the child, setting clear and realistic timescales. The plan ensures that children, young people and family members know what to do and which services to engage with to effect change to their home situation. Outcomes for children are good and we have low repeat Child Protection Plans.

Management oversight of frontline practice

We continue to maintain a stable front line and senior management team along with an experienced and skilled workforce which has enabled the embedding relational practice within our services to the benefit of children and their families and promote effective relationships between managers and practitioners.

Our Strengthening Families Programme Board has oversight of the transformational plan, driving through improvements and changes in restorative culture and practice. We have been able to benefit from commitment from the Managing Director and the Lead Member who are both champions of the programme offering challenge and scrutiny where required.

We have had a consistent drive and focus on quality of practice and therefore are aware of performance measures that have been mostly impacted by this change in practice such as, Contacts progressing to referral and family assessments which extend beyond the 45 working day timescale. The oversight given to these areas within the weekly referral meeting and practice and develop meetings from managers ensures there is no drift and delay in care planning or in services provided to the child.

We have continued to maintain focus on reducing risks to children by services being put in place at the right time, with permanence planning and pre-proceedings being timely. Managers are promoting a 'think family first' approach with practitioners to ensure consistency across the whole service.

Children experience effective care planning that is driven by Independent Reviewing Officers, who build and sustain positive relationships with children through actively listening, and oversight of the child's progress between review meetings. Plans progress with little delay through IROs appropriately championing plans for children and their needs.

Managers consider the demands of the individual children and those of the allocated social worker to ensure the best relationships can be formed with the children and their families to gain the best outcome. Managers are more able to identify themes of good practice and areas of focus and are confident in addressing poor practice.

They are self-reflective and accountable for their own practice, which is being further enhanced through our positive engagement with the NAAS programme. This is providing beneficial information on key skills demonstrated by the staff and teams, as well as identifying areas of focus for future training to ensure that all aspects of child development, theory and research is being applied when meeting the

needs of the children. Although the programme had been suspended due to Covid, we have exceeded our agreed DFE target of between 20% to 30% of the children's workforce having completed the assessment as 35% have successfully completed the assessment to date. We are in the process of recommencing the programme once in place.

Participation and direct work with children and families

Most children and families are benefitting from social workers building rapport and sustaining relationships with each other. Social Workers know their children well and children report feeling confident and safe. Children experience less changes in Social Worker and this is increasingly resulting in more meaningful relationships. Children are seen and most are seen alone, which makes them feel involved throughout their journey with us. The child's voice is evident and is captured well through use of tools and positive engagement techniques, demonstrating effective communication with the children.

A recent audit of children who experience domestic abuse, demonstrated that whilst the assessments were robust and services were provided effectively and timely, more understanding was needed around coercive control and the impact of this on family members. A full review of our training offer has enabled us to develop podcasts and on-line training both internally and with safeguarding partners.

Through 2020 support for children with ADHD was provided by early help practitioners, social workers TWVE and a number of third sector provision accessible within education settings such as the Listening Post, who also supported children with anxiety issues. In addition, although we had low referrals, Humankind supported young people with drug and alcohol issues. Emotion cards and the use of the Mind of My Own app has helped us capture the views and wishes of children. Our therapeutic workers provide 1-1 support to help children understand their lived experiences and provide strategies to help with this, however challenges can remain when children require more specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health support.

Feedback from Police; 'Can I say that I was really impressed with the professionalism of social worker H at both child's house and also at the address of X in this afternoon's joint visit. I felt H presented as very open, personable and interested when she spoke with child. Equally at X's address H was honest, direct, professional and very resilient in giving what was uncomfortable

Children and Young People requiring an advocate are supported to access this. Children report good relationships with their advocate who effectively represent children's views clearly at meetings. There have been no complaints regarding any advocate practice. We have increasing take up from children requesting advocates.

Identifying and responding to all types of abuse recognising the vulnerability of specific groups of children

Feedback from young people:

"Working with them (ERASE) means that I have the same life as other teenagers my age, which is all that I wanted – a normal life".

Feedback from parents:

"I like the support from Early Help, it is helping my daughter's behaviour, which is getting better. I understand I need to be patient and I am now more confident" (parent following 1-1 session with early help worker)

"She was fantastic. She gave me strength to end my relationship with my abusive partner and realise my child and I are worth more"

We know we respond quickly and effectively when children are in immediate and acute risk situations. Good attendance at multi-agency meetings and improvements in our safety planning, enables children to feel safe and that immediate action helps their situation, reducing risk.

ICPC – 19/20 – 56.1% of invites attended,
86.2% of reports received.

20/21 – 58.5% of invites attended,
87.2% of reports received.

RCPC – 19/20 – 40.5% of invites attended,
87.6% of reports received.

20/21 – 50.0% of invites attended,
90.3% of reports received

Through the continued opening of schools, we were able to maintain communications and support via *Operation Encompass* for child. Women and families supported by the

refuge, receive bespoke help tailored to their circumstances and adult victims and children witnessing domestic abuse access outreach support service, and Social workers are experienced and refer into Checkpoint, a Police led multi-agency approach to deescalate and deter from criminal proceedings in cases where domestic abuse is prevalent.

Our 4Kids programme launched in December 2020. A joint programme between the Local Authority, Police and the Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner to improve outcomes, aimed at reducing the negative impact of drugs and also the number of Children Looked After. Initial feedback is demonstrating positive action and outcomes from the programme.

In 2020 our commissioned substance misuse team SWITCH, transitioned in house. This has enabled a whole service review, effectively reducing long-term treatment plans to more robust and timely interventions that suit need and provide positive outcomes for young people. The service is effective in its approach and is incorporated within the front door and early help service

Partnership working between social workers, Public Health and health visitors was further enhanced throughout a particular time in 2020 in response to a slight increase in children presenting with injuries at A&E. This enabled the children's workforce to promote consistent messaging regarding ICON programme and trips and hazards in the home, developed by TWVE to drastically reduce the risks to children and stress within the home environment.

Children with a disability have been those most impacted by reductions in face-to-face contact taking place, mainly due to families wishing to limit the number of visitors to the home. Carers, PAs and health colleagues have been prioritised although, through the completion of covid risk assessments, children most at risk have received face to face contact, where necessary. Our Transition to Adult Social Care (TASC) panel has continued to oversee young people moving into adulthood benefitting from co-designed packages of support that are tailored to meet needs whilst improving independence.

Children in Private Fostering arrangements continue to be low with 33.5% of the children in care in March 2020 in a private fostering arrangement compared to 36.7% in the previous year. Individuals have timely assessments and are visited regularly by qualified social workers.

Safeguarding Partners have continued to have oversight and updates on the support offered to children who are Electively Home Education (EHE) (123 children) and from Gypsy Roma Travelling families, through the work of the Critical Safeguarding Partnership Group, set up at the outset of the pandemic. Attendance at school of children and young people with an EHCP have continued to be above the national average and have benefited as a result, having resumed to more normal practices within the school settings.

We continue to have low levels of young people at risk of radicalisation, or who experience honour-based violence or female genital mutilation (FGM) however our multi-agency response to children who do experience these issues receive appropriate response and services to meet their need, and where risk is deemed high, immediate action/safety plans are put in place to make them safe.

The Experience and Progress of Children in Care and Care Leavers

Making good decisions

Children and young people report having good relationships with their social workers who are skilled and experienced with good knowledge of legal frameworks and care planning arrangements. Children are safeguarded from situations of harm, as social workers and managers recognise risk and threshold and act appropriately to safeguard the child, however, our improving approach to 'think family first' enables more children to remain living at home with their families or extended family networks. Parents and carers have a better understanding of what they need to do to ensure that their children are safeguarded, through family network meetings/family group conferencing and improved clarity in Letter Before Proceedings.

Feedback from Court; the Guardian has made a point on this case of stating that the Local Authority have been very impressive in their case management on this matter and have pulled out all the stops!

We continue to exercise positive practice in relation to care proceedings, ensuring children's plans are progressed timely, with extensions being agreed between all parties. The quality of our written work with the child, parents and carers voices evidenced throughout good quality Court documents and robust case management is often commended upon by the judiciary and CAFCASS.

One barrister wrote of a social worker giving evidence in court:

“her evidence was absolutely brilliant – she left no one in doubt that she has an absolute command of the facts of the case, and of her assessments. Despite hours of questions, the advocates got absolutely nowhere with her, she was in short, the sort of witness we as barristers dread! She has clearly worked hard on this case and it really showed in her evidence, as other advocates in the case

We have routinely commended our foster carers and connected carers who have provided excellent care to children and young people through the most difficult of circumstances and as a direct result has enabled children to have better placement stability with more children remaining in placements long term. Carers have continued to be creative in facilitating contact between children and their families via media methods such as WhatsApp and Zoom, which families have really appreciated.

Children in our residential homes have responded exceptionally well to the restrictions in place over the last year. Missing episodes have reduced and the staff within the homes have encouraged young people to be supported with indoor activities. Young people have been able to maintain contacts with their families wherever possible. Only recently on one occasion have the homes been called upon to help in an emergency situation for a young person and although the end destination was not within one of the units, they have correctly offered professional challenge with regard to the decisions made over the easter period. Apart from this issue the homes have maintained total protection for the young people in their care, inclusive of the children who have been placed more recently.

In early 2020 the Court made the decision to hold emergency hearings only which impacted on children being able to leave care in a timely manner. This change in practice had affected our overall looked after children numbers although we have throughout the year continued to promote reunification and discharges of care orders through thoughtful, balanced and appropriately risk assessed care planning, enabling children to return safely to their parents with support from dedicated workers resulting in our Children in Care numbers effectively reducing.

Participation and direct work with children in care and care leavers

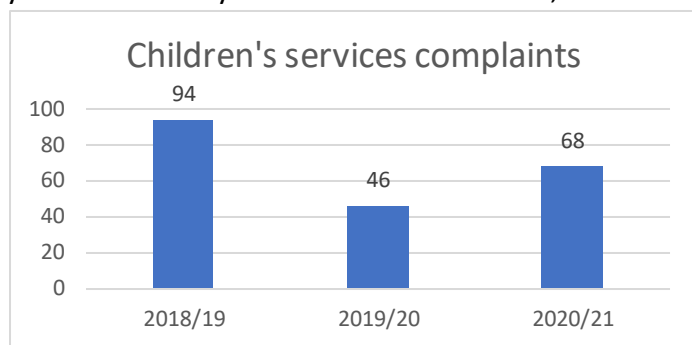
Feedback from Judge; “Miss KI would like to commend you on the excellent piece of work you have completed, this was incredible and incredibly helpful. You have developed an amazing insight into this case and completed a thorough piece of work which has made the situation very clear to me what life is like through these children’s eyes”

Our children in care and care leavers have continued to report they have good and trusting relationships with their Social Workers, Personal Advisers and IROs, who know them well and have maintained contact with them through technologies such as WhatsApp and Zoom. Children have benefitted from the virtual calls with most reporting they have renewed and timely access to their social workers and IROs. (93.1% of statutory visits and 99.4% of reviews within timescale) Although all children aged 4yrs are encouraged to attend their reviews, initial indications are that the increased contact with practitioners between reviews, especially IROs, is impacting on the attendance which is showing a slight

decrease (93.8% of children and young people, aged over 4 years, contributed to their review).

There has been significant work undertaken to help children and young people understand their histories and their complex relationships largely based around training with Richard Rose throughout 2019. We have since been selected to work with Blue Cabin, Gateshead and South Tyneside to develop a Creative Life Story Work model for our children. This project is being funded by What Works and will take place through 2021. All about Me/More about Me and Therapeutic Life Story work already commenced with young people, practitioners and an artist with more training scheduled throughout the coming year.

Children tell us they feel valued and can influence services as they voice their views more confidently and easily. Care Leavers are aware of their rights, they know how they can access their records, how to complain, and how to get an advocate. Children’s complaints have reduced over the last year, although IRO’s ensure that each child understands, and is given information on, how they can make a complaint and encourage take up of an advocate or independent visitor (if appropriate). They tell us that they feel fully involved in service developments such as the Local Offer, and that they value their involvement in staff interview panels.



The Darlo Care Crew and the Leaving Care Forum are central to the Corporate Parenting Panel, which has continued to take place virtually since March 2020, with young people instrumental in driving the redesign and subsequent review of our ‘Promises Tree’.

Helping and protecting

Feedback from Family Court Advisor about two social workers; I have spoken to mother, nana and child today as part of my enquiries. I just wanted to share (I have mum's permission to do so) that nana has told me that you have both been amazing and she cannot fault the support she has received. She said that both child and her were thrown into this situation and it has been a massive learning curve for them both, but she doesn't know what she would have done if it was not for you both. She really could not praise you enough. Upon speaking to child, it is clear that she adores her nanny and wants to remain living there. She was so positive about her maternal family, but clear in her views about her mother and how let down and angry she feels. It sounds like you have built fantastic relationships with child and MGM. Child certainly feels safe and able to share her views'

Children in care have responded well to all restrictions in place over the last year which meant until December 2020, missing episodes were significantly reduced in number. The number of Children in Care who had missing episodes in 2020/21 was 30 which represented 19.7% of children who went missing across the year. 84.8% of the Return to Home Interviews took place within 72 hours.

Children in care classified as being at risk of CSE is low are well supported by Child Exploitation Group (CEG) who drive multi-agency places to reduce risk and Children who are victims or perpetrators of bullying are responded to by social workers around their individual need, with an agreed approach to help them understand the impact of bullying.

We have had low numbers of children in care, currently active to Youth Engagement and Justice Service (formally known as YOS) who are remanded into custody and for those who are, (5.1%, (3) young people at year end) we have robust collaboration and coordinated care planning between our and Children’s Social Care. We have recently identified there is more work needed in collaboration between CSC, CCG, and TWVE for children who are diagnosed with autism, learning disabilities assessed as having capacity, yet their behaviours will often lead them onto assault and aggression, with them ultimately being placed in custody.

Health

Children in care are reported as being healthy. Children in Care and Care Leavers can access therapeutic service and Psychological Well-Being Practitioner Nurse who provide flexible and creative interventions delivering outcomes determined at their own pace resulting in issues they experience being identified quickly to prevent escalation. Throughout the last year we have been able to ensure that our children who come into care, have received their initial health assessment within 20 days and for those in care

for more than 12 months (91.2%) received a Health review. We do not have many older young people who refuse and for those that do, the LAC nurse encourages creative ways to ensure health scrutiny takes place.

Pre covid we had increasing numbers of children attending a dentist, Covid restrictions saw this reduce although emergency and dental realignment appointments took place. Consideration was initially given to have children attend private dentists but as Covid restrictions reduce more children are starting to be seen, 57.2% by the end of the year.

Care leavers benefit by receiving their full health passport enabling them to have control over their own medical history and health information. They are supported to have a full understanding of their health status since birth through access to full health information when they are 18, which a high proportion have. At the point of becoming 'eligible' for leaving care services all care leavers are offered and encouraged to consent to a health passport during their first pathway plan needs assessment. The health passport format and process in Darlington was developed with young people in conjunction with the LAC nurses. Each health passport is shared with the young person by the LAC nurse ensuring if young people have any questions about it, they can be answered by a health professional. Currently there are 57 eligible care leavers all have been offered a health passport.

Learning and employment

Children in care are well supported in education by a highly qualified and well-trained Virtual School staff and designated teacher team. Most children in care attend mainstream schools graded good or better. Attendance is good and exclusions are infrequent. The majority are making good progress in school.

The Education Strategy Group has been meeting weekly throughout the COVID-19 crisis.

Feedback from parents or carers of children in care:
"thank you for helping XX reach his full potential and education aspirations. We find you enthusiastic in all areas. XX loves your visits and his written cards, he also likes the time you take in looking in his bedroom at his possessions and new electrics. He knows and values your interest in his wellbeing"

Services have continued throughout this period to maintain statutory work and ongoing workstreams as well as responding to the changing situation. In many cases additional network meetings have been convened virtually to ensure that colleagues are kept informed about the latest guidance and developments and are able to share good practice (eg SENCO Network, Vulnerable Pupil Panel, Exams Officers, School Leadership Group, Mental Health Leads Network, Early Years Leads Network, NQTs, PVI Network).

Weekly health clinics with the Head of Education and Inclusion and Public Health Principal have been offered to all schools, colleges and early years settings. These sessions have been very well received and providers tell us that they have found them very useful. The Educational Psychology Service has developed and provided resources for education colleagues on mental health issues, the recovery curriculum and critical incident management.

Information, advice and guidance is provided for children previously looked after via well trained Designated Teachers and liaison with Adoption Tees Valley's Education Officer.

Stability and permanence

Placement stability is a critical outcome for our children in care, and we ensure that social workers work closely with carers and residential workers on sustainability plans and wherever possible sibling children are placed together supported by a Siblings Together or Apart assessment. Most children (71.9%) remain safe and settled in their placement for 2 years or more, and we have our best performance in the last three years whereby only 8.1% of children in care have had 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months, below 11.1% in 2019/20.

We supported our children in maintaining contact with their families via virtual methods and families were extremely supportive in helping carers maintain stability for their children. Parents were very welcoming of regular communications and discussions with senior managers enabling safe working practices, risk assessments and PPE to be in place to make all safe for the contacts to take place. Regular communications from the Tees Valley Local authorities into the family court enabled consistency in approach and clarity when Judges were summarising directives for contacts during proceedings.

Both internal and external residential placements are of good quality and are commissioned through a collaborative North East wide framework contract, with Tees Valley Local Authorities also holding a local based residential care and IFA framework. Children are receiving excellent care and any issues within a provision are dealt with swiftly and robustly.

Children benefit from excellent permanence planning, with 100% of plans being in place at the second review, inclusive of twin or triple tracking if the matter is in Court with all decisions based on a sibling together or apart assessment to ensure impact on the child is minimal. We have improved our pathways and information for families of children with a Care Order and live with a relative, to progress them swiftly to a Special Guardianship or Child Order in line with the children's personal circumstances. Delay in care planning is minimised as potential drift is identified early through a monthly Performance Tracking Panel chaired by the Head of Service.

We have increased the number of fostering panels in the last year enabling us to continue to match children, where appropriate, with their long-term carer/s, enabling children to form attachments and clearly identify with their own family or foster family as they know they are not going to be moved. Children experience foster care placements that are of a high standard, with carers promoting safe care/placements and who are improving their own training needs. Children report positive feedback on the care they receive.

We are increasingly utilising foster to adopt placements for young babies and children where the child's permanence plan is highly likely to result in adoption to minimise the number of homes children live in. The use of foster to adopt placements are highly effective as the young child will experience minimal moves prior to an Adoption Order being granted, rather than needing to be moved to adoptive parents once an adoption match has been identified the child will already be living with their prospective adopters. This minimises the trauma and disruption in attachments to various care givers experienced by the child.

If we have been unable to progress a child's permanence plan to adoption, the matter is returned to Court in a timely fashion to seek a revocation of the child's Placement Order and for alternative permanence planning to be achieved often via long-term fostering.

Our approach to adoption support demonstrates the positive impact this has on children and their families as the adoption disruption rate is low, meaning that children are supported to remain with their adoptive family.”

Care leavers and transitions

Care leavers up to the age of 25yrs

have been impacted by the pandemic and the team have worked hard to ensure that all of them are supported in their understanding of finances, accommodation, education, and employment. Care leavers who were living independently with no additional support other than their leaving Care PA were considered individually as to whether they would require on-going ‘face to face’ support from their PA or could receive ‘virtual support’, however it was acknowledged that individual circumstances could change quickly and a need to amend the form of contact may be required going forward. Care Leavers are well informed about their entitlements, they know their rights. Care leavers feel valued due to their being integral in-service development, such as the Leaving Care Offer. A dedicated Care Leaver page is on the Council’s website. <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/leaving-care-and-the-local-offer/our-local-offer-to-care-leavers/>

They engaged in regular contact with their PA and other staff. Usually, the care leaver base is always a hub of activities from cookery classes, mother and baby groups, budgeting workshops, leaving care forums and access to the leaving care larder. However, during the first week of ‘lockdown’ staff ensured all care leavers were aware that Pease House would not be open for access and alternative arrangements were put in place. The weekly food delivery provided by Fareshare was re-directed to Kings Church Food Bank, and arrangements were made for all care leavers that required this support to be registered with this provision. Support to the young people was provided by the Children Support Officers who had been re-deployed from their role as Contact Supervisors to assist the Personal Advisors (PA’s) with the distribution of the food hampers to care leavers.

We were very pleased that one of our PAs won the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF) **“PA of the Year Award”** 2020, from over 120 potential nominating Local Authorities.

PA’s ensured that all their care leavers could be contacted, therefore a small number of mobile phones (3) were purchased for those who did not have access to one and they kept in touch with all young people more frequently than the statutory requirements (8 weekly), which for some young people, meant daily contact.

Ordinarily care leavers benefit from dedicated work coaches within the job centre, giving them increased support and opportunities (such as peer mentoring, marketplace events with training providers) however, following the onset of the pandemic, our weekly job club has continued to be delivered ‘virtually’ which has led to a number of care leavers securing employment, mainly in the care sector via Careline.

A total of 29 requests were made for Government Laptops and 10 requests for 4g dongles for care leavers which were distributed in July 2020 with the purpose of ensuring care leavers had access online training and education opportunities and support with their studies. For young people who were not attached to a training provider or college, the

73.5% are in Education, Employment or Training, 10 were at university, and 3 were in apprenticeships. A further 10 had achieved higher education qualifications.

devices were not as effective as we had hoped, as they were not linked to enable access to their Universal Credit Journal or help them liaise with their work coach and/or apply for jobs. This was a priority for us and resulted in many requiring more virtual contact to ensure they did not go into financial hardship or be subject to more stress than necessary; creative and bespoke packages are commissioned where Care Leavers had not previously engaged in other options.

Feedback from a care leaver
"This service helps me feel I can have confidence and self believe in myself. Also has been very helpful in all ways including my wellbeing"

Opportunities are improving in the 'family business' and within the business sector with a range of options increasing for Care Leavers to choose.

We are delighted that one of our care leavers has been successful in securing one of the care leaver internships at the DfE in Darlington.

Those at University can access supported lodgings and staying put arrangements should they require to remain in placement. This sustainability in placement allows the young people to concentrate on studies rather than living arrangements for those young people who are living outside of LA provision, PA Support is active with them offering 1-1 advice and guidance to our leavers.

Care leavers wellbeing is supported through access to a Psychological Well-being Practitioner on a weekly basis with no waiting times, albeit 'virtually' over the phone and video calls. During Covid-19 the Psychological Well-being Practitioner has provided a flexible appointment system with support taking place on weekends and evenings to suit the individual needs of the young people. This has reduced the need to make a referral for tier 4 mental health services for most young people.

Care leavers all receive a copy of their birth certificate whilst they are in care, have support in obtaining their National Insurance Number when they reach the age of 16, and can be provided with a passport and support to secure a driving licence.

Care leavers are prepared for their transition to adulthood as they experience a smooth transition into independent living due to effective pathway planning. Their personal views are central to the planning and are well reflected. Individual risks are clearly identified, their needs are understood, and support is provided to reduce risks. They are supported to think about their choices and to keep safe. If a care leaver is in crisis, they are supported with increased access to their PA, through visits, which at time are daily to minimise risk and help to address the issue.

Care leavers are supported to remain with their foster-carers in Staying Put arrangements post-18, and numbers doing so continues to increase, with 10 in Staying Put arrangements, with a further 4 in Supported Lodgings at the end December 2020 and there are a further 5 Staying Put arrangements planned within the next month. They have a good housing offer, with a range of accommodation options, and sufficient choice and availability, resulting in very minimal waiting for accommodation. "Taster flats" in use are close to home meaning that support with the transition to independence is high. All care leavers live in suitable accommodation, with none in in bed and breakfast accommodation, and only those in custody being classed as being in unsuitable accommodation.

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**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23 AUGUST 2021**

TRAUMA AND HORIZON SCANNING

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an outline and overview of 'Trauma Informed Practice' and how Children's Services are starting to embed and respond to Trauma.

Summary

2. To outline how Children's Services will work towards becoming a Trauma Informed Service.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that:
 - (a) The contents of the report are considered in terms of Children's Services enhancing the Relational Practice Framework based on a whole system Trauma Informed approach, where considering trauma is a key starting point for all interactions and interventions.

**JAMES STROYAN
Group Director of People**

Background Papers

Research background papers were used in the completion of this report.

Jane Kochanowski: jane.kochanowski@darlington.gov.uk

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report supports the Council's Crime and Disorder responsibilities
Health and Wellbeing	This report supports to health and wellbeing of children, young people and families in the borough.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	This report supports the Council's sustainability responsibilities
Diversity	This report supports the promotion of diversity
Wards Affected	This report supports performance improvement across all Wards
Groups Affected	This report supports performance improvement which benefits all groups

Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report contributes to the Council Plan by involving Members in the scrutiny of performance relating to the delivery of key outcomes
Efficiency	There are no implications arising from this report.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report supports the health and wellbeing of Looked After Children and Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

What do we mean by Trauma?

4. Trauma is conceptualised in a broad spectrum, from the impact of poverty to the significant events that can be thought of in terms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (having a clear clinical start point). Trauma for children, young people and families can also occur via interaction with professionals and organisations, particularly when the approach does not follow a relational and strength-based methodology.
5. Traumatic events are often unexpected, outside of ordinary experiences. They can take away a sense of being in control and can often involve actual or perceived threat to life. Trauma can mentally overwhelm individuals and their ability to cope in that moment.
6. Impact - The more threatened the child is, the more 'primitive' or regressed the style of thinking becomes. When a child is traumatised and in a state of alarm, they are less able to concentrate, will be more anxious and will pay attention to non-verbal clues such as tone of voice, body posture and facial expressions. Ongoing and persistent trauma requires developing coping strategies.

What do we mean by Trauma Informed Practice?

7. Trauma Informed Practice is relational and strengths-based, grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment (Hopper et al., 2010).
8. Trauma Informed Practice requires a Whole System Approach, ranging from understanding the impact of trauma on the workforce, on partner organisations and most importantly on the children, young people and families of Darlington.

Trauma Informed Practice in Children's Services 2021/22:

9. In Children's Services our overarching practice methodology is based on Strengthening Families and Relational Practice. Trauma Informed Practice will fit seamlessly into this well embedded approach to working with families. It will provide staff from across the service with additional knowledge, skills and tools in order to work in a Trauma Informed way.

10. Staff in Children's Services have fed back that they feel we need to be Trauma Informed and are keen to learn more about Trauma Informed approaches. They feel that it will benefit the children, young people and families they work with; will support them in terms of the potential development of clinical supervision approaches and feel that being a Trauma Informed organisation will help support the recruitment and retention of staff.
11. *Understanding Trauma Informed Practice* – On 31st August 2021 Children's SLT (Senior Leadership Team) are meeting with potential training providers to outline a 4 Step Training Model for staff across the service. The steps (The 4 R's) focus on Relationship, Resilience, Reconnection and Recovery.
12. *Developing a Trauma Informed Workforce* – It is key to outline that becoming a Trauma Informed Service isn't a "quick win". Although Children's Services have an extremely strong foundation in terms of the Strength Based and Relational Practice methodology that is embedded in all aspects of the service, Trauma Informed Practice is more than just a one-off training course for staff. Throughout 2021 and 2022 Children's Services will look to offer Trauma Informed Training, briefings, tools and resources, including the potential development of a Trauma Informed Practice Manual. The aim is to embed Trauma Informed starting points into all related training and development programmes, linking to student placements, apprenticeships, Step Up to Social Work programme and ASYE Newly Qualified Social Worker programmes.
13. *Maintaining a Trauma Informed Approach* – the introduction of Trauma Informed systems and processes – e.g. the development of Clinical Supervision approaches and ensuring Trauma Informed Practice is embedded in our Strengthening Families Relational Practice methodologies, particularly regarding the voice of the child and the views of our own teams will be central to developing a Whole System Approach to Trauma Informed Practice.

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CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23 August 2021

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE – OFF FRAMEWORK PLACEMENTS

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Scrutiny members with an overview of children in care who are placed in provision that is 'off – framework'. The report outlines several rationales to why off-framework provision is commissioned and demonstrates annual costing and comparison with placements made, 'on-framework'.

Summary

2. Once it is determined that a child requires a placement, ordinarily the placement pathway will be firstly; in house fostering search; DBC residential; then Independent Fostering Agency; external block contract (children's residential), framework agreement and if a placement still not secured, then off framework.
3. Off framework placements arise because of several complex factors which are dominated primarily by children's social care market forces, whereby placement demands significantly outstrips placement availability.
4. The number of off framework residential placements is 66% based on all residential placements made in the 2020/21 but is reflective of regional and national trends. Darlington have a comparatively very low number of off framework placement within Independent Fostering, comprising 25% of all placements at any one time.
5. There is greater value for money for Council's in spot purchasing off Framework as and when the need arises owing to the operating costs of this form of accommodation provision which is the same as a 3 bed children's home without the scale of economy.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that the contents of the report are noted.

James Stroyan
Group Director of People

No Background Papers were used in the completion of this report

Authors: Josh Slack, Helen Watson
Extension 5866

S17 Crime and Disorder	N/A
Health and Wellbeing	N/A
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	N/A
Diversity	N/A
Wards Affected	N/A
Groups Affected	Children in Care
Budget and Policy Framework	There is a financial impact relating to this report
Key Decision	N/A
Urgent Decision	N/A
Council Plan	Promote sufficiency of placements for children in the care of the local authority
Efficiency	N/A
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. Once it is determined that a child requires a placement, ordinarily the placement pathway will be firstly; in house fostering search; DBC residential; then Independent Fostering Agency; external block contract (children's residential), framework agreement and if a placement still not secured, then off framework.
8. A Placement Officer sources a provider and any offers received are forwarded to the social worker to evaluate with the team manager. If an off-framework placement has been identified as being suitable for the child, Procurement Board will seek to approve the commissioning process; quality assurance and value for money. There are times when it is expedient for the child to take up placement prior to the Procurement Board process, however in the main, this is generally when only one provider offer is received to meet the complex needs of the child.
9. Off framework placements arise because of a number of complex factors which are dominated primarily by children's social care market forces whereby placement demands significantly outstrips placement availability. Placements aren't necessarily more costly just because they are off framework. The cost comparison below shows the different prices and spend of on and off framework placements.

Residential Placements				
	YP	Placements	Average Weekly	Total 2020/21¹
On Framework	8	8	£3,069.00	£1,072,244.10
Off Framework	17	19	£3,791.00	£2,573,734.89
Block	2	2	£3,060.00	£302,065.72
Total	26	29	£3,493.08	£3,948,044.71

10. The average off framework residential placement cost for Darlington in 2020/21 was £3,791 per week compared with £3,069 per week on Framework (which was one of the lowest in the region in previous benchmarking). The off framework average cost was however significantly skewed by two particularly high-cost specialist placements, 1 for a solo placement with 2:1 staffing and the second a 90-day emergency residential placement.
11. The number of off framework residential placements is 65% based on all residential placements made in the 2020/21 but is reflective of regional and national trends. The average off framework IFA placement cost for Darlington in 2020/21 was £864.82 per week compared with £770.29 per week on framework. Darlington have a comparatively very low number of off framework placement within Independent Fostering, comprising 25% of all placements made during 2020/21.

¹ Spend is indicative and has not been validated by Finance, although has been taken from Controcc reports.

IFA Placements				
	YP	Placements	Average Weekly	Total 2020/21 ²
On Framework	80	92	£770.29	£1,092,198.96
Off Framework	33	33	£864.82	£2,473,396.23
Pre Dates	5	5	£788.91	£151,469.93
Total	116	130	£795.00	£3,717,065.12

12. Detailed below are the factors which have generated the current off framework placements for Darlington Children and Young People.
- (a) Owing to the huge demand for children's social care placements, providers don't need to operate on framework contracts. Small residential providers (4 bed homes) receive in excess of 100 referrals every week and some larger national providers make strategic determinations not to participate in framework contracts. This is reflected in the Independent Children's Homes Association, December 2020 State of the Sector report, which highlighted that 54% of the independent children's home only operate on specific contracts and a further 17% do not engage in any framework or formal procurement. Increasingly providers are withdrawing from large scale framework contracts.
 - (b) Some small local providers find the bureaucracy associated with large framework contracts/procurements prohibitive. Several providers are well established with high quality care provision and don't need to go and seek referrals from surrounding councils or further afield. In these instances, the provider placement costs aren't necessarily higher, just reflective of an operational and engagement preference by the provider.
 - (c) Some off framework placements are reflective of the complex care needs of some children and young people. Providers of complex care generally don't operate on framework contracts, as the care package naturally can't be pre-set and to have a positive impact, it needs to be tailored to the individual requirements of the young person. These placements require joint working and negotiation with the provider and health and social care.
 - (d) Providers of more niche placement types such as solo placements, do not operate on frameworks as placement demand is so high and service provision comparatively small (equating to less than one solo home per Local Authority in the country). Additionally, as Council's requirements for this form of placement can be equally as small as one or two children a year, volatile in terms of when the need may arise, it is cost prohibitive for Council's to be direct providers of this form of care and accommodation on an ongoing basis. There is greater value for money for Council's in spot purchasing off framework as and when the need arises, owing to the operating costs of this form of accommodation provision which is the same as a 3 bed children's home without the scale of economy.

² Spend is indicative and has not been validated by Finance, although has been taken from Controcc reports.

- (e) The timescale within which the placement is needed, and the geographical distance of the placement is a key factor, where a placement is needed urgently, and the child is a match with the carers/ or in the home. This is a primary consideration in progressing with a placement offer.

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**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23 AUGUST 2021**

WORK PROGRAMME

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the 2021/22 Municipal Year and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included.

Summary

1. Members are requested to consider the attached draft work programme (**Appendix 1**) for the 2021/22 Municipal Year which has been prepared based on Officers recommendations and recommendations previously agreed by this Scrutiny Committee in the last Municipal Year.
2. Once the work programme has been approved by this Scrutiny Committee, any additional areas of work which Members wish to add to the agreed work programme will require the completion of a quad of aims in accordance with the previously approved procedure. (**Appendix 2**)

Recommendations

3. Members are requested to note the work programme and consider any additional items which they may wish to include.

**Elizabeth Davison
Group Director of Operations**

Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

Author: Allison Hill

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder
Health and Well Being	This report has no direct implications to the Health and Well Being of residents of Darlington.
Carbon Impact	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	The impact of the report on any individual Ward is considered to be minimal.
Groups Affected	The impact of the report on any individual Group is considered to be minimal.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
Council Plan	The report contributes to the Council Plan in a number of ways through the involvement of Members in contributing to the delivery of the Plan.
Efficiency	The Work Programmes are integral to scrutinising and monitoring services efficiently (and effectively), however this report does not identify specific efficiency savings.
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

4. The format of the proposed work programme has been reviewed to enable Members of this Scrutiny Committee to provide a rigorous and informed challenge to the areas for discussion.
5. The Council Plan sets the vision and strategic direction for the Council through to May 2023, with its overarching focus being 'Delivering Success for Darlington' .
6. In approving the Council Plan, Members have agreed to the vision for Darlington which is a place where people want to live and businesses want to locate, where the economy continues to grow, where people are happy and proud of the borough and where everyone has the opportunity to maximise their potential.
7. The vision for the Children and Young People portfolio is :

'a borough where young people get the best start in life, can maximise their potential and are safe'

to maximise the potential of our young people by working with partners to maximise educational achievement; working to remove barriers to young people reaching their potential and working at a Tees Valley level to match jobs with skills and training.

Forward Plan and Additional Items

8. Any Member seeking to add a new item to the work programme will need to complete a quad of aims.
9. A copy of the Forward Plan has been attached at **Appendix 3** for information.

Joint Scrutiny Review

10. Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee have requested that Youth Unemployment be included in their work programme and have proposed a joint piece of work to be undertaken with Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and that this Scrutiny take the lead on this piece of work.
11. Members are requested to give some initial thoughts on a joint piece of work and how it can impact on the economy, apprenticeship schemes and the numbers claiming benefits.

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Topic	Timescale	Lead Officer	Link to PMF (metrics)	Scrutiny's Role
Performance Management and Regulation	Q1 25 Oct 2021 Q2 20 Dec 2021 Q3 25 April 2022	Sharon Raine	Agreed set of indicators	To receive quarterly monitoring reports and undertake any further detailed work into particular outcomes if necessary
Self-Assessment - Overview	23 August 2021	Jane Kochanowski		To provide Scrutiny with the Annual Self-Assessment for Children's Services so that constructive 'critical friend' challenge takes place to drive improvement in public services
Local Designated Officer Annual Report	23 August 2021	James Stroyan		To examine the Annual Report and assure Members that allegations made against staff who work with children are reported and how they are actioned
Looked After Children Off-Framework	23 August 2021	Jane Kochanowski		To examine the current situation with those placed off framework, commissioning of accommodation and costs
Trauma and Horizon Scanning	23 August 2021	Paige Thomason/ Martin Webster		To examine how Children's Services are starting to embed and respond to Trauma
Children and Young People Public Health Overview	23 August 2021	Ken Ross	PBH 009 PBH 013c	Annual Monitoring

Topic	Timescale	Lead Officer	Link to PMF (metrics)	Scrutiny's Role
and Childhood Healthy Weight Plan			PBH 016 PBH 018 PBH 020 PBH 021 PBH 054	
Learning and Skills Service Annual Report	25 October 2021	Paul Richardson		Annual Report to demonstrate challenge
IRO Annual Report	25 October 2021	Martin Graham	CSC201	To examine the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer for Looked After Children
Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report	25 October 2021	Ann Baxter, Independent Chair		Annual monitoring
Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report 2020/21	25 October 2021	Vicky Davidson-Boyd, Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley		Annual monitoring
Early Help Services	25 October 2021	Joanne Benson		To examine what services are available for new mothers
Darlington Care Collective	20 December 2021	Christine Shields		To provide an Update on the Care Collective
Children and Young Peoples Plan	21 February 2022	Christine Shields		Annual Update
2021/22 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment	21 February 2022	Tony Murphy/Nicola Davies		Annual Report

Topic	Timescale	Lead Officer	Link to PMF (metrics)	Scrutiny's Role
Accessibility Strategy	21 February 2022	Tony Murphy/Helen Ellison/Karen Williamson		To consult with Scrutiny prior to Cabinet approval

REVIEWS

Autism Provision Review Group	Final Report to Health and Housing on 14 April 2021. Cross Party Joint Working Group to be established	Christine Shields		To review the provisions and services and contractual arrangements between this Council and our providers who provide the Autism provisions, diagnoses and support services for Darlington
Adoptive Services	Approved by Scrutiny at their meeting held on 29 June 2020	Vicky Davidson-Boyd		To examine how the Regional Adoption Agency is serving Darlington and to examine how the Coronavirus Pandemic has affected adoption

ARCHIVED ITEMS

Looked After Children Missing From Care	2 July 2018	Alison Poulter / Chris Bell	Enough support for people when needed			To examine the reasons why children in care go missing and the
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						interventions in place to avoid episodes and examine partnership working and parent engagement
LAC Missing from Care – Reasons and Interventions	10 September 2018	Joanne Stoddart	Children with the best start in life Enough support for people when needed		CSC246	To examine the reasons why children in care go missing and the interventions in place to avoid. To invite the Police Liaison Officer to attend Scrutiny to discuss
Educational Landscape	Archived on 3 Oct 2018	Tony Murphy	Children with the best start in life	Build Strong Communities		To examine school improvement including the decline in performance for maths and English and what action is being taking to address this.
Stability of Places for Looked After Children	10 December 2018	Joanne Stoddart	Children with the best start in life Enough support for people when needed	Build strong communities	CSC 228 CSC 229	To be monitored via the regular performance reports in future
Children Services Accessibility Strategy	10 December 2018		Children with the best start in life Enough support for people when needed			To consider the Strategy prior to Cabinet.

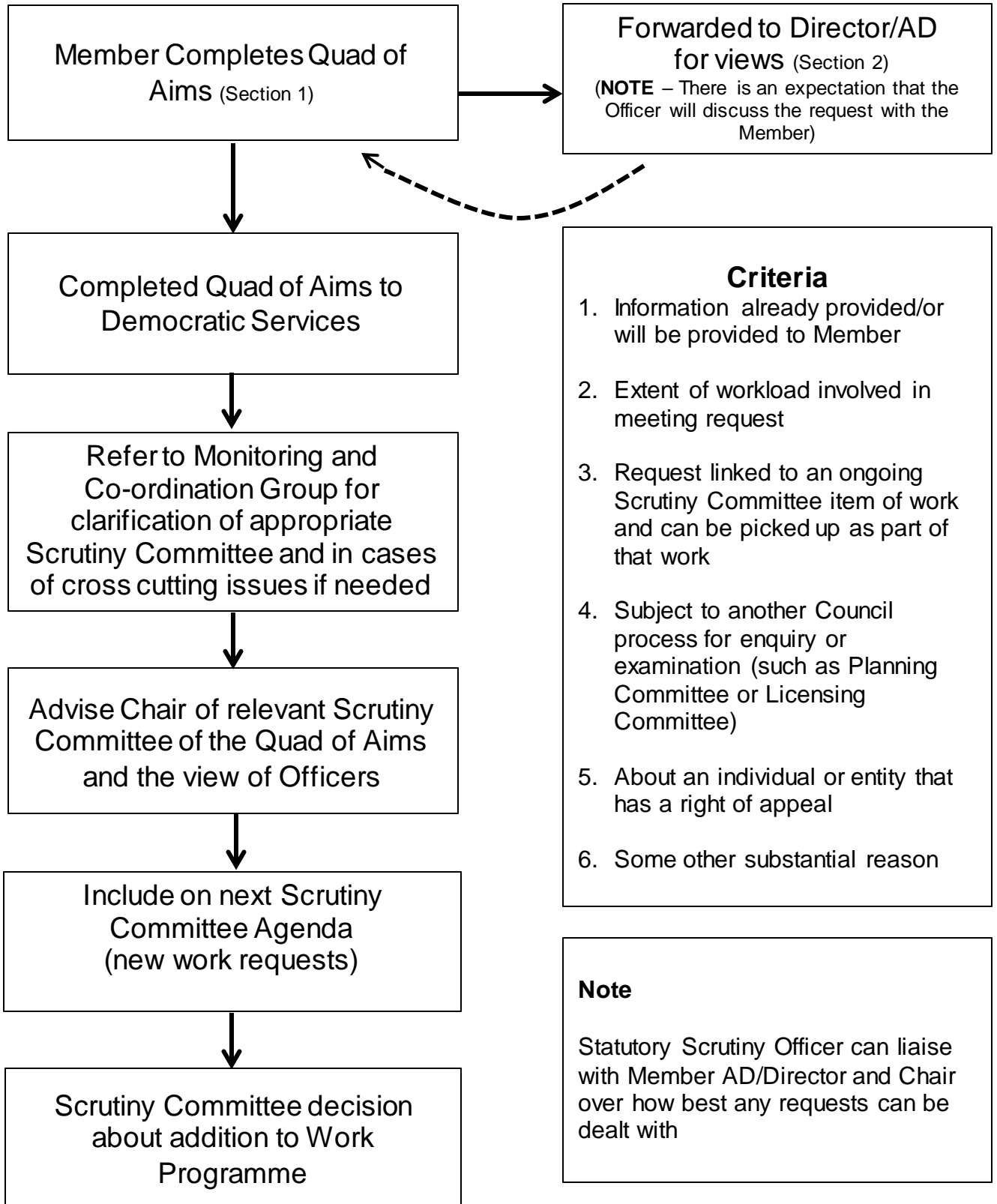
<p>SEND High Needs Review:</p> <p>Strategy and Funding</p> <p>Home to School Transport</p>	<p>29 October 2018</p> <p>10 Dec 2018</p> <p>29 October 2018</p>	<p>Tony Murphy</p>	<p>Children with the best start in life</p> <p>More People healthy and independent</p> <p>Enough support for people when needed</p>			<p>To consider 3 of the 4 core elements of the Review. Members to carry out a T/F Review on the proposals.</p> <p>Verbal update to Members</p>
<p>SEND Strategy and Funding Consultation Review Group</p>	<p>10 December 2018</p>		<p>Children with the best start in life</p>			<p>To give a Scrutiny response to the consultation on the SEND Strategy and Funding and SEND Travel Assistance Policy</p>
<p>Childhood Obesity/ Oral Health/Mental Health Links</p>	<p>Review suspended – to continue to monitor the effectiveness of the Childhood Healthy Weight Plan.</p> <p>Update report on the Childhood Healthy Weight Plan to Scrutiny on 3 February 2020.</p>		<p>Children with the best start in life</p> <p>Enough support for people when needed</p> <p>More People Healthy and Independent</p>	<p>Build Strong Communities</p>		<p>To investigate the high incidence of childhood obesity in Darlington and the associated links to poor dental health; and whether the desire to promote good ‘self image’ has an impact on mental health issues in young people.</p>
<p>Medium Term Financial Plan 2020/21 to 2023/24</p>	<p>Special Meeting 13 January 2020</p>	<p>Elizabeth Davison</p>	<p>One Darlington Perfectly Placed</p>	<p>Spend Every Pound Wisely</p>		<p>To consider the Medium Term Financial Plan in relation to the areas</p>

						within this Scrutiny's remit
Council Plan 2020/23	Special Meeting on 13 January 2020	Paul Wildsmith				To consider the Council Plan
Voluntary and Community Sector Funding Update	3 February 2020	Christine Shields				Update report on the community based initiatives funded from Voluntary Sector Development Fund monies, piloted during 2019/20.
Home to School Transport	3 February 2020	Tony Murphy/ Graham Easterlow				To update Members on the current position/ changes to regulations which may impact on the MTFP
Extension of Funding to 21 for Children in Foster Care	March 2020	Jane Kochanowski	Children with the best start in life A safe and caring community Enough support for people when needed More people healthy and independent	Build strong communities		Annual monitoring – a duty on Local Authorities to facilitate, monitor and support staying put arrangements. Now monitored by quarterly performance reports.
Academy Trusts	2 November 2020	Presentation by Katherine Cowell, the Interim Regional Schools	Children with the best start in life			To examine safeguarding measures and health and safety training in place

		Commissioner for the North of England				within the boroughs Academies and attainment within Academy Trusts.
SEND - Outcomes for Parents following Covid-19	4 January 2021	Carla Scaith Darlington Parent Carer Forum				To continue to monitor SEND/ EHCPs. To receive the survey results from the Parent Carer Forum SEND Survey and to receive information relating to experiences of the Parent Carer Forum.

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PROCESS FOR ADDING AN ITEM TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S PREVIOUSLY APPROVED WORK PROGRAMME



PLEASE RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

QUAD OF AIMS (MEMBERS' REQUEST FOR ITEM TO BE CONSIDERED BY SCRUTINY)

SECTION 1 TO BE COMPLETED BY MEMBERS

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?)
PROCESS (HOW CAN SCRUTINY ACHIEVE THE ANTICIPATED OUTCOME?)	HOW WILL THE OUTCOME MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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Signed Councillor

Date

SECTION 2 TO BE COMPLETED BY DIRECTORS/ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

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

	Criteria
1. (a) Is the information available elsewhere? Yes No If yes, please indicate where the information can be found (attach if possible and return with this document to Democratic Services)	1. Information already provided/or will be provided to Member
(b) Have you already provided the information to the Member or will you shortly be doing so?	2. Extent of workload involved in meeting request
2. If the request is included in the Scrutiny Committee work programme what are the likely workload implications for you/your staff?	3. Request linked to an ongoing Scrutiny Committee item of work and can be picked up as part of that work
3. Can the request be included in an ongoing Scrutiny Committee item of work and picked up as part of that?	4. Subject to another Council process for enquiry or examination (such as Planning Committee or Licensing Committee)
4. Is there another Council process for enquiry or examination about the matter currently underway?	5. About an individual or entity that has a right of appeal
5. Has the individual or entity some other right of appeal?	6. Some other substantial reason
6. Is there any substantial reason (other than the above) why you feel it should not be included on the work programme?	

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Signed **Position** **Date**

PLEASE RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

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**DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
FORWARD PLAN**



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

**FORWARD PLAN
FOR THE PERIOD: 4 AUGUST 2021 - 31 DECEMBER 2021**

Title	Decision Maker and Date
Annual Review of the Investment Fund	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Climate Change Action Plan	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Complaints Made to Local Government Ombudsman	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Complaints, Compliments and Comments Annual Reports 2019/20	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Introduction of a Civil (Financial) Penalty Policy and Enforcement Protocol – Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Land at Faverdale / Burtree Garden Village Feasibility Work	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Playing Pitch and Facilities Strategy	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring - Quarter One	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Proposed Waiting Restrictions on Woodland Road, Outram Street and Duke Street	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Regulatory Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Schedule of Transactions	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
School Term Dates 2022/23	Cabinet 7 Sep 2021
Annual Procurement Plan 2021/22 - Update	Cabinet 5 Oct 2021
Land at Faverdale – Former St Modwen Land Development Strategy	Cabinet 5 Oct 2021
Treasury Management Annual and Outturn Prudential Indicators 2020/2021	Council 25 Nov 2021 Cabinet 5 Oct 2021
Council Tax Support - Scheme	Cabinet 9 Nov 2021

**DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL
FORWARD PLAN**

Approval 2022/23	
Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring - Quarter Two	Cabinet 9 Nov 2021
Rail Heritage Quarter Update	Cabinet 9 Nov 2021
Restoration of Locomotion No 1 Replica	Cabinet 9 Nov 2021
Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2	Cabinet 9 Nov 2021
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Capital Projects	Cabinet 9 Nov 2021
Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility	Cabinet 9 Nov 2021
Mid-Year Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management 2020/21	Council 27 Jan 2022 Cabinet 7 Dec 2021
Council Fleet	