



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council

# Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Agenda

9.30 am, Monday, 8 January 2024  
Council Chamber, Town Hall, Darlington. DL1 5QT

**Members of the Public are welcome to attend 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 23 October 2023 (Pages 5 - 8)
4. Performance Indicators Quarter 2 2023/24 – Report of the Assistant Director, Children’s Services (Pages 9 - 40)
5. Darlington Children’s Services - Self-Assessment 2023 – Report of the Assistant Director, Children’s Services (Pages 41 - 74)
6. SEND Resource Base Remodelling at Heathfield Primary School – Report of the Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion (Pages 75 - 78)
7. Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2022-23 and Child Protection Conference Chair Annual Report 2022-23 – Report of the Assistant Director, Children’s Services (Pages 79 - 98)

8. Young People SEND Engagement – Report of the Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion (Pages 99 - 102)
9. Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report 2022/23 – Report of the Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley (Pages 103 - 144)
10. Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report 2022-23 – Report of the Assistant Director, Children’s Services (Pages 145 - 180)
11. Work Programme 2023/24 – Report of the Assistant Director, Law and Governance (Pages 181 - 192)
12. 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
13. Questions



**Luke Swinhoe**  
**Assistant Director Law and Governance**

**Thursday, 28 December 2023**

**Town Hall**  
**Darlington.**

**Membership**  
Councillors Ali, Allen, Crudass, Dillon, Durham, Johnson, Layton, Renton, Storr and Toms.

**Statutory Co-optees**  
Carly Stonier

**Non Statutory Co-optees**  
Maura Regan, Janet Woodcock, John Armitage and Sally Hudson.

If you need this information in a different language or format or you have any other queries on this agenda please contact Paul Dalton, Democratic and Elections Officer, Operations 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: paul.dalton@darlington.gov.uk or telephone 01325 405805805

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 23 October 2023

**PRESENT** – Councillors Ali, Allen, Crudass, Dillon, Johnson, Layton, Renton and Toms.

**NON-STATUTORY CO-OPTees** – John Armitage.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillor Storr and Sally Hudson.

**ABSENT** – Councillor Durham, Carly Stonier, Maura Regan and Janet Woodcock.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE** – Councillors Wallis and Snedker.

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services), Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion), Paul Richardson (Head of Skills and Employability), Martin Graham (Head of Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement), Marian Garland (Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)) and Paul Dalton (Democratic and Elections Officer).

### CYP16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

### CYP17 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 AUGUST 2023

**Submitted** – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 21 August 2023.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 21 August 2023 be approved as a correct record.

### CYP18 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS YEAR END 2022/23

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators.

The submitted report provided performance information for the period April 2022 to March 2023, in line with an indicator set agreed by the Monitoring and Coordination Group on 2 July 2018, and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs. The submitted report highlighted those areas where the Council were performing well, and identified those areas where improvement was required.

Members enquired about the changes to the 'front door' function; the increase in Early Help Assessments (EHAs); the measures in place to safeguard those who were victims of domestic abuse and coercive control; the definition of suitable accommodation for Care Leavers; the recording of missing episodes, and whether there was a greater need for individualised assessments.

Discussion ensued on recruitment and retention, and whether the service was adequately

resourced, with Members also keen to understand more around the support available for Social Workers and the Council's Fostering Teams. Members were also interested in the reasons for the recent success in terms of recruitment.

**RESOLVED** – That the performance information provided be noted.

#### **CYP19 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 1 2023/24**

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators.

The submitted report provided quarterly (April 2023 to June 2023) performance information 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's Services were performing well and where there was a need to improve. It was also outlined that where indicators were reported annually, quarterly updates would not be available.

(NOTE: Members took this report alongside Minute CYP18, and therefore the discussion is outlined above).

**RESOLVED** – That the performance information provided in the submitted report be noted.

#### **CYP20 REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE INDICATORS USED IN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND REGULATION**

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an overview of the current Performance Indicators used within the Scrutiny process and to consider appropriate next steps in relation to a review of the Performance Indicators.

The submitted report highlighted that Children's Services provide a range of statutory services and functions on behalf of the Council, as well as being a regulated service, subject to regular Inspection and judgement by OFSTED. It was stated that as part of these processes Children's Services were duty bound to measure their performance through a range of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Discussion ensued on Member access to the raw data in light of guidance received from the Local Government Association.

**RESOLVED** – That a Task and Finish Group be established to review the Performance Indicators used within the Scrutiny process.

#### **CYP21 DESIGNATED OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23**

The Assistant Director, Children's Services, submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an update on the progress and performance of the Designated Officers' (DO) response to all contacts received relating to allegations/concerns of abuse by those who work with children for the period April 2022 to March 2023, and to highlight the required

actions for the period April 2023 to March 2024.

The submitted report outlined the function of the Designated Officer and stated that all organisations that worked with children in Darlington were required to have policies and procedures in place in relation to what their organisation would do when an allegation was made against an employee / volunteer who was in contact with children. It was stated that these policies and procedures should be in line with Darlington Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency procedures.

Members entered into discussion on the linkages that took place between organisations following a substantiated allegation to ensure that a Social Worker's record reflected any action taken; the propensity for SEND children to demonstrate challenging physical behaviour; and the sectors from which referrals may be expected.

**RESOLVED** - a) That the contents of the report and the work undertaken during 2022/23, and the priorities of the Designated Officer service for 2023/24, be noted.

b) That the annual report be agreed.

#### **CYP22 LEARNING AND SKILLS ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23**

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion submitted a report to provide Members with an update on the performance of the Learning and Skills Service for academic year 2022/23, and to allow Members oversight of, and an opportunity to challenge, the performance of this externally funded service.

The submitted report advised that the service was now seeing a recovery of learner numbers and performance remained high, and that the service was growing provision whilst continuing to respond to employer and community need. It was reported that the service was inspected by Ofsted in June 2022, and retained its assessment of 'Good' overall.

Discussion ensued on the similarities and differences in the provision of the Learning and Skills Service and the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI); the robustness of the service provided, the involvement of refugees and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); and the mechanisms for growing funding and promoting the Learning and Skills Service.

**RESOLVED** – That the content of the report be noted.

#### **CYP23 ADOPTION TEES VALLEY ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23**

The Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley was unable to attend the meeting, and therefore Members agreed to defer the item until the following Ordinary Meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (Monday, 8 January 2024).

#### **CYP24 DEDICATED SCHOOL GRANT AND THE SAFETY VALVE**

The Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion submitted a report (previously circulated) to provide an update on progress made on the Council's Safety Valve agreement to address historic deficit in the High Needs Block which supported education provision for young

people with Special Educational Needs.

The submitted report stated that the Council has entered into the “Safety Valve” agreement with the Department for Education (DfE), enabling funding over a five year period to address the accumulated deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block (HNB). It was reported that the agreement would require commitment to areas of review and improvement identified by Department for Education (DfE) to bring in year spend in line with the in-year budget by 2023/24.

Discussion ensued on who retained oversight of the agreement and how it was addressed; the pressures of maintaining a balanced budget whilst ensuring services are of high quality and deliver for families; whether adjustments could be made if costs were to increase; and the concerns of some parents were raised. Members were also interested to learn what safeguards were in place to ensure annual reviews of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and the wider dialogue with parents.

Members entered into discussion as to how the deficit was recorded, how long the deficit had taken to accrue, and whether the Council as an organisation retained a liability for the deficit.

**RESOLVED** – That the terms of the agreement and progress made to date in relation to the Safety Valve, be noted.

#### **CYP25 WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024**

The Assistant Director, Law and Governance, submitted a report (previously circulated) requesting that consideration be given to this Scrutiny Committee’s work programme and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included in the previously approved work programme

**RESOLVED** – That the work programme be noted.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 8 JANUARY 2024

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### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 2 2023/24

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#### Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with an update on performance against key performance indicators.

#### Summary

2. This report provides performance information (July 2023 – September 2023) in line with an indicator set agreed by Monitoring and Coordination Group on 2 July 2018, and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs.
3. It is suggested monitoring focuses on issues and exceptions, and relevant Assistant Directors will attend the meeting to respond to queries raised by the committee regarding the performance information contained within this report.
4. Where indicators are reported annually, quarterly updates will not be available.

#### Where are we performing well?

5. 78.0% of referrals received in Q2 2023/24 were completed within one working day. We are still below the internal target of 90% completed within one working day and a result of a dip in timeliness during August where only 65.0% of referrals were outcomed in one working day. 2.6% referrals took over three working days to be completed in Q2 2023/24 which is achieving our target of 5%.
6. At the end of Q2 2023/24, there were 223 families, 460 children open to the Building Stronger Families team. A further 35 families with 60 children were open to an external agency supporting the families.
7. 314 Early Help Assessments (EHA) were started in Q2 2023/24, 6.4% (20) of which were initiated by external agencies. This is a decrease when compared to Q2 2022/23 (363 EHA's) and a decrease on the proportion of externally started EHA's (11.3%).
8. In Q2 2023/24, 97.6% of the children who were reported missing (excluding children from other authorities) were offered a Return Home Interviews (RHI), 90.6% of which were offered within 72 hours and 85.9% of the children/young people engaged in their RHI. Each are a performance improvement when compared with Q2 2022/23. Where the co-ordinator cannot engage the child or young person, discussions take place with parents, carers, teachers, or social workers to offer insight around reducing the missing episodes. Of those who went missing, 31.6% were a Child in Care accounting for 33.3% of the missing episodes.

9. 123 children were subject to a Child Protection plan (CP) as at the end of September 2023, this is a slight decrease on the 118 children who were subject to CP at the end of September 2022.
10. 100.0% of CP cases were allocated to a social worker and 93.3% of the CP reviews were conducted in timescale. As of September 2023, no child open to CP has been on their plan for more than two years.
11. 46.4% of the 28 children who ceased to be in care in Q2 2023/24 were reunified home to a parent.
12. 100.0% of Children in Care (CiC) were allocated to a qualified social worker. 95.3% of the reviews have been completed within required timescales at September 2023/24.
13. 79.2% of children due a review health assessment by September 2023 have had one completed. 51.8% of Children in Care, which were due a dental check assessment by September 2023 have had one completed.
14. 98.4% of our care leavers aged 19-21 and 94.6% aged 22-25 were in suitable accommodation at the end of September 2023.
15. The percentage of care leavers who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) continues to be positively below the target set of 30% at 23.8% for care leavers aged 19-21 and 21.4% for those aged 22-25 at the end of September 2023. 27.0% of the young people, aged 19-21, were engaging in education (including studies beyond A level) and 49.2% of the young people were in training or employment (including apprenticeships). 5.4% of the young people, aged 22-25, were engaging in education (all of which are in studies beyond A level) and 73.2% of the young people were in training or employment (including apprenticeships).

#### Where do we need to improve?

16. We have continued to see an increase in re-referrals this quarter in comparison to previous years with 22.8% of re-referrals during Q2 2023/24. Due to the increase in contacts being made, it is expected that the number of children referred will increase, this means that we have missed our internal target of having no more 18% of referrals being re-referrals. Re-referrals are being scrutinised during the weekly WRM meeting to ensure best practise and learning outcomes are shared.
17. 376 children had a C&F assessment completed in Q2 2023/24. This is a continual increase when compared to Q2 2022/23 (310), Q2 2021/22 (158) and Q2 2020/21 (189). This increase in C&F assessments is a result of the increase in children being referred which has also contributed to the decline in timeliness of assessments with 50.0% of them being completed within timescale in Q2 2023/24. Stop the clock days are taking place to support social workers clear any backlog they may have. As a result of these measures, a number of the assessments that were completed during this time were already out of timescale, bringing the overall percentage down.
18. 70.2% of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) were held within 15 working days from the strategy meeting / section 47 being initiated, excluding children who were



transferred-in conference, in Q2 2023/24. Work is ongoing to reduction in late requests for conferences.

19. 59.3% of Child Protection statutory visits were completed within 10 working days in Q2 2023/24 and 85.8% of the visits were completed within 15 working days. This is a decrease when compared with Q2 2022/23 which had more visits completed with 64.1% completed within 10 working days. The capacity of social workers to make regular visits continues to be impacted on due to rising workloads. Changes to the new locality allocations for the A&S teams have occurred and are regularly reviewed to ensure a fair and even distribution of allocation and workloads.
20. 354 children were in care as of September 2023, 5.1% of which are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. During Q2 2023/24 a total of 39 children came into the care of DBC, four of which were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and a total of 28 children ceased to be in care (3 of which were UASC).
21. 79.9% of statutory visits for Children in Care (CiC) were completed in timescale in Q2 2023/24. This is a reduction compared to the 81.9% of visits carried out in timescale in Q2 2022/23, however there have been an increase in the number of visits being carried out due to the increase in children in care.
22. 15.5% of our Children in Care, as of September 2023, have had three or more placements within the previous 12 months, which is above our internal target of 10%.
23. 64.5% 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 two years as of September 2023, which is an improvement but below our internal target of 68%.
24. 11.9% of our Children in Care have needed to be placed 20 or more miles away from home as of September 2023. This is just above our target of 10%, team managers have confirmed all placements to be appropriate for the child enabling them to have the best support either with family links or specialised care.

### **Recommendation**

25. It is recommended that performance information provided in this report is reviewed and noted, and relevant queries raised with the appropriate Assistant Director.

**Chris Bell**  
**Assistant Director of Children's Services**

Sharon Raine Head of Performance and Transformation: Extension 6091

## Background

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

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report supports the Council's Crime and Disorder responsibilities
Health and Well Being	This report supports performance improvement relating to improving the health and wellbeing of residents
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	This report has no impact on Carbon and Climate Change
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 Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) by involving Members in the scrutiny of performance relating to the delivery of key outcomes
Efficiency	Scrutiny of performance is integral to optimising outcomes.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report may have an impact on their emotional and physical health, social development, education, and future employment.



# Children's Social Care Performance & Practice Report

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**September 2023      Quarter 2 (Jul-Sep)**

**Scrutiny**

# Scrutiny

## Q2 2023-24 Performance Summary

**Referrals:** 78.0% of referrals received in Q2 2023/24 were completed within 1 working day. We are still below the internal target of 90% completed within 1 working day and a result of a dip in timeliness during August where only 65.0% of referrals were outcomed in 1 working day. 2.6% referrals took over 3 working days to be completed in Q2 2023/24 which is achieving our target of 5%.

**Re-Referrals:** We have continued to see an increase in re-referrals this quarter in comparison to previous years with 22.8% of re-referrals during Q2 2023/24. Due to the increase in contacts being made, it is expected that the number of children referred will increase, this means that we have missed our internal target of having no more 18% of referrals being re-referrals. Re-referrals are being scrutinised during the weekly WRM meeting to ensure best practise and learning outcomes are shared.

**Building Stronger Families:** At the end of Q2 2023/24, there were 223 families, 460 children open to the Building Stronger Families team. A further 35 families with 60 children were open to an external agency supporting the families.  
314 Early Help Assessments (EHA) were started in Q2 2023/24, 6.4% (20) of which were initiated by external agencies. This is a decrease when compared to Q2 2022/23 (363 EHA's) and a decrease on the proportion of externally started EHA's (11.3%).

**Missing:** In Q2 2023/24, 97.6% of the children who were reported missing (excluding children from other authorities) were offered a Return Home Interviews (RHI), 90.6% of which were offered within 72 hours and 85.9% of the children/young people engaged in their RHI. Each are a performance improvement when compared with Q2 2022/23. Where the co-ordinator cannot engage the child or young person, discussions take place with parents, carers, teachers, or social workers to offer insight around reducing the missing episodes. Of those who went missing, 31.6% were a Child in Care accounting for 33.3% of the missing episodes.

**Children & Families Assessments:** 376 children had a C&F assessment completed in Q2 2023/24. This is a continual increase when compared to Q2 2022/23 (310), Q2 2021/22 (158) and Q2 2020/21 (189). This increase in C&F assessments is a result of the increase in children being referred which has also contributed to the decline in timeliness of assessments with 50.0% of them being completed within timescale in Q2 2023/24. Our frontline social workers are often prioritising visiting families; undertaking duty visits or supporting families during a crisis; resulting in the written completion of assessments being delayed. Plans are in place and reviewed to ensure social workers are given dedicated time to catch up on outstanding admin tasks. Stop the clock days are taking place to support social workers clear any backlog they may have. As a result of these measures, a number of the assessments that were completed during this time were already out of timescale, bringing the overall percentage down.

**Section 47 Enquiries:** 76 section 47 enquires were started in Q2 2023/24, involving 152 individual children.

**Child Protection Conference timeliness:** 70.2% of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) were held within 15 working days from the strategy meeting / section 47 being initiated, excluding children who were transferred-in conference, in Q2 2023/24. Work is ongoing to reduction in late requests for conferences.

**Child Protection Plans:** 123 children were subject to a Child Protection plan (CP) as at the end of September 2023, this is a slight decrease on the 118 children who were subject to CP at the end of September 2022. 100.0% of CP cases were allocated to a social worker and 93.3% of the CP reviews were carried out in timescale. As of September 2023, no child open to CP has been on their plan for more than 2 years.

**Child Protection Statutory visits:** 59.3% of Child Protection statutory visits were completed within 10 working days in Q2 2023/24 and 85.8% of the visits were completed within 15 working days. This is a decrease when compared with Q2 2022/23 which had more visits completed with 64.1% completed within 10 working days. The capacity of social workers to make regular visits continues to be impacted due to rising workloads. Changes to the new locality allocations for the A&S teams have occurred and are regularly reviewed to ensure a fair and even distribution of allocation and workloads.

**Children in Care:** 354 children were in care as of September 2023, 5.1% of which are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. During Q2 2023/24 a total of 39 children came into the care of DBC, 4 of which were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and a total of 28 children ceased to be in care (3 of which were UASC). 46.4% of the 28 children returned home to a parent when ceasing care.

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**Children in Care Reviews:** 100.0% of Children in Care (CiC) were allocated to a qualified social worker. 95.3% of the reviews have been completed within required timescales at September 2023/24.

**Children in Care Statutory visits:** 79.9% of statutory visits for Children in Care (CiC) were completed in timescale in Q2 2023/24. This is a reduction compared to the 81.9% of visits carried out in timescale in Q2 2022/23, however there have been an increase in the number of visits being carried out due to the increase in children in care. Due to rising workloads the capacity of social workers time has been impacted resulting in delayed visit recording. Changes to the new locality allocations for the A&S teams have occurred and are regularly reviewed to ensure a fair and even distribution of allocation and workloads.

**Children in Care Placements:** 15.5% of Children in Care (CiC), as of September 2023, have had 3 or more placements within the previous 12 months. 64.5% 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. 11.9% of our Children in Care have been placed 20 or more miles away from home as of September 2023. This relates to young people who have been placed in residential care due to their disability / placed with family / or placed for adoption, and this provision is not available within 20 miles.

**Initial Health Assessments:** 45.7% of the children whose IHA form was sent to Health, received a health assessment by them within 20 days.

**Health and Dental Reviews:** 79.2% of children due a review health assessment by September 2023 have had one completed. 51.8% of Children in Care, that were due a dental check assessment by September 2023 have had one completed.

The percentage of children who have refused their medical checks continues to remain low, with 1.7% refusing their health review and 1.2% refusing their dental review. Although they are currently refusing, they are continually reminded of the benefits of having a check-up and encouraged to take part.

**Care Leavers:** 98.4% of our care leavers aged 19-21 and 94.6% aged 22-25 were in suitable accommodation at the end of September 2023. The percentage of care leavers who were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) continues to be positively below the target set of 30% at 23.8% for care leavers aged 19-21 and 21.4% for those aged 22-25 at the end of September 2023. 27.0% of the young people, aged 19-21, were engaging in education (including studies beyond A level) and 49.2% of the young people were in training or employment (including apprenticeships). 5.4% of the young people, aged 22-25, were engaging in education (all of which are in studies beyond A level) and 73.2% of the young people were in training or employment (including apprenticeships).

## REFERRALS: TIMELINESS

**DEFINITION** Percentage of referrals completed within 1 working day and over 3 working days. Referrals completed within 1 working day indicates that decisions regarding the services required are made in a timely manner to minimise drift and delay and to ensure that children are safe.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**

In Q2 2023/24, 78.0% of children had their referral completed within 1 working day. This is below our 90% target and a result of a dip in timeliness during August where only 65.0% of referrals were outcomed in 1 working day. 2.6% referrals took over 3 working days to be completed in Q2 2023/24 which is achieving our target of 5%.

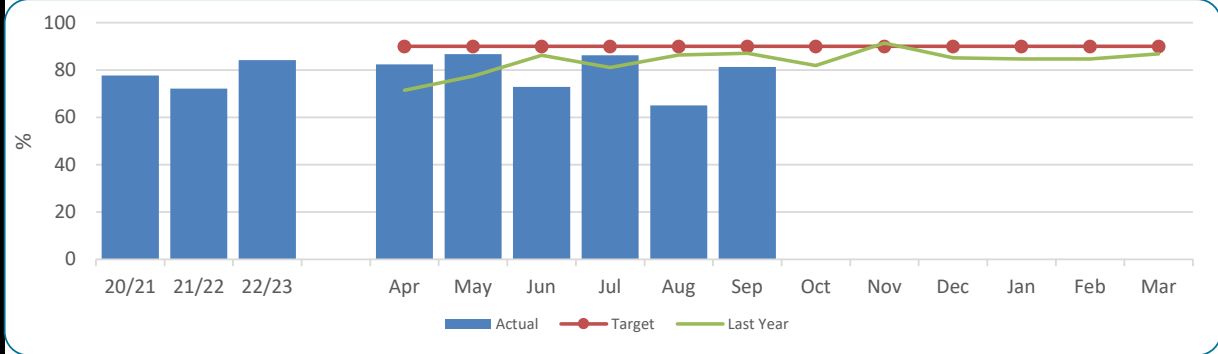
All referrals that are completed out of timescale are reviewed by the service manager to ensure the delay was unavoidable. A summary of the reasons are as follows:

- Difficulties in contacting the family for further information
- Awaiting further information from a 3rd party
- Further information gathering to allow for an informed decision.

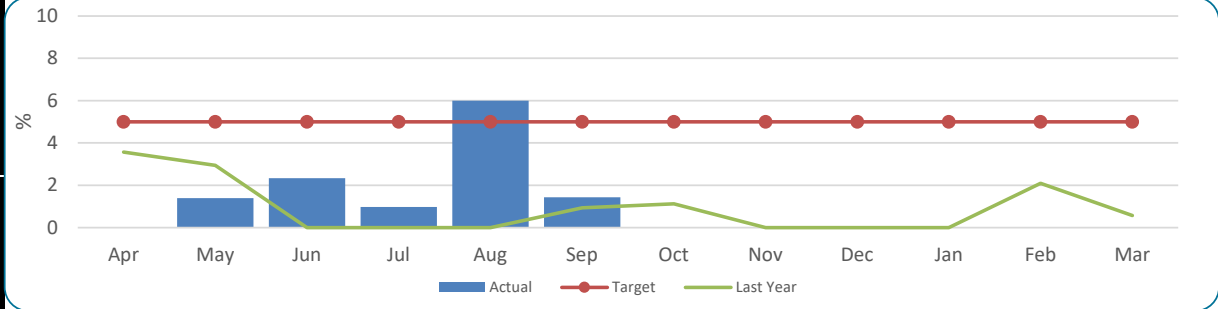
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		CSC 022	CSC 026
		Monthly % of referrals completed within 1 working day.	Monthly % of referrals completed in over 3 working days.
<b>In Month Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>5%</b>
	Apr-23	82.4	1.4
	May-23	86.7	1.4
	Jun-23	72.9	2.3
	Jul-23	86.3	1.0
	Aug-23	65.0	6.0
	Sep-23	81.3	1.4
	Oct-23		
	Nov-23		
	Dec-23		
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	77.7	4.7
	2021/22	72.1	5.6
	2022/23	84.1	0.8
	2023/24	79.5	1.9

CSC 022: Monthly % of referrals completed within 1 working day.



CSC 026: Monthly % of referrals completed in over 3 working days.



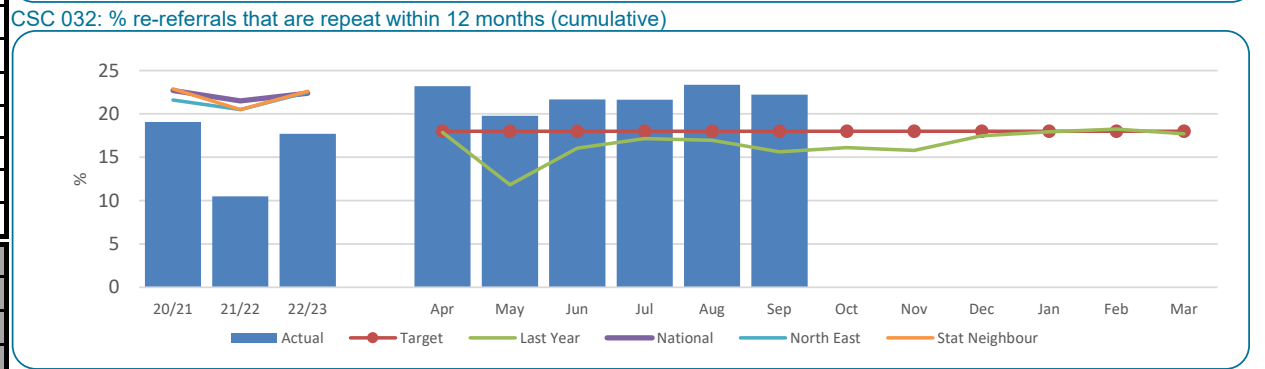
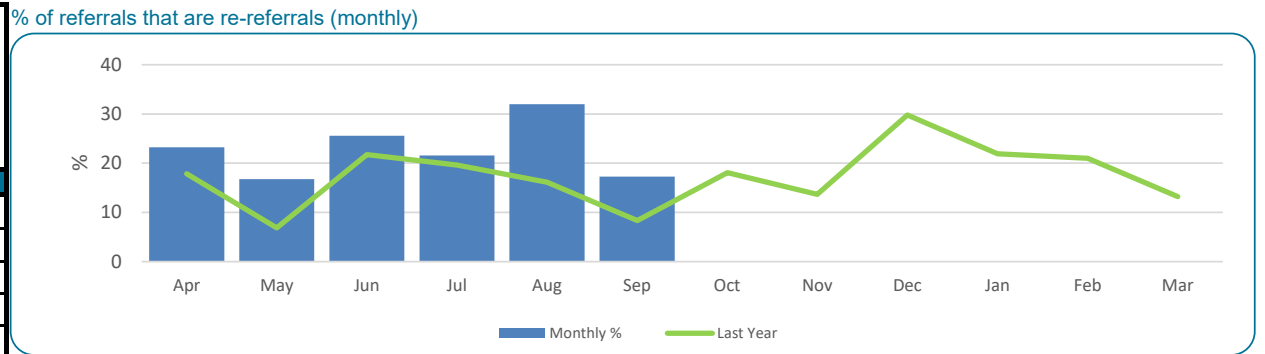
## REFERRALS: RE-REFERRALS

<b>DEFINITION</b>	Percentage of re-referrals that are received within 12 months of a previous referral (based on referral start dates and in line with DfE definition). A re-referral to Children's Social Care could be an indication that the previous referral was inappropriately closed down without addressing the initial concerns or issues.
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<b>PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS</b>	<p>We have continued to see an increase in re-referrals this quarter in comparison to previous years with 22.8% of re-referrals during Q2 2023/24. Due to the increase in contacts being made, it was expected that the number of children referred will increase, however this means that we have missed our internal target of having no more 18% of referrals being re-referrals.</p> <p>The Service Manager has been reviewing the re-referrals each month to identify any reoccurring theme or how we can improve our processes and decision-making to reduce the need for families to come back into our service and are also scrutinised during the weekly WRM meeting to ensure best practise and learning outcomes are shared.</p>
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		CSC 034	CSC 032	
		Monthly number of re-referrals that are repeat within 12 months	% re-referrals that are repeat within 12 months (cumulative)	% of referrals that are re-referrals (monthly)
<b>In Month Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>		<b>18%</b>	
	Apr-23	29	23.2	23.2
	May-23	24	19.8	16.8
	Jun-23	33	21.7	25.6
	Jul-23	22	21.6	21.6
	Aug-23	32	23.4	32.0
	Sep-23	24	22.2	17.3
	Oct-23			
	Nov-23			
	Dec-23			
	Jan-24			
	Feb-24			
	Mar-24			
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	143	19.1	
	2021/22	106	10.5	
	2022/23	286	17.7	
	2023/24	164	22.2	





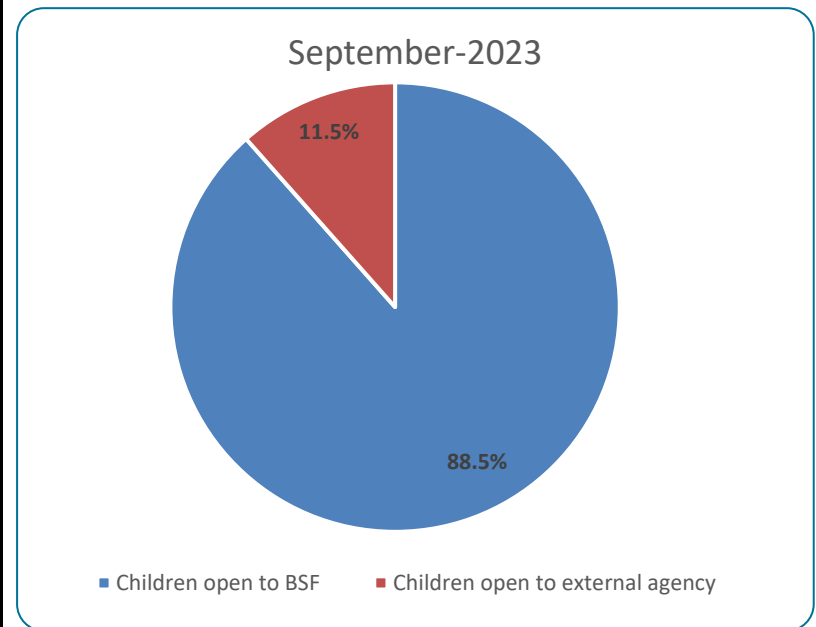
## BUILDING STRONGER FAMILIES: OPEN EPISODES

**DEFINITION** The number of children and families that have an open episode with the Building Stronger Families (BSF) team at the end of each reporting month. Also reported is the number of children and families that have an open episode with an external agency. The proportion of children open to BSF is then calculated using the total cohort and displayed as a percentage.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS** At the end of Q2 2023/24, there were 223 families with 460 children open to the Building Stronger Families team. A further 35 families with 60 children were open to an external agency supporting the families.

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		Open to BSF at month end		Open to an external agency at month end		% of children open to BSF
		Children	Families	Children	Families	
		%				
<b>In Month Performance</b>	Apr-23	487	223	123	65	79.8%
	May-23	491	230	124	68	79.8%
	Jun-23	511	240	97	52	84.0%
	Jul-23	472	225	97	57	83.0%
	Aug-23	468	225	87	51	84.3%
	Sep-23	460	223	60	35	88.5%
	Oct-23					
	Nov-23					
	Dec-23					
	Jan-24					
	Feb-24					
	Mar-24					
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	253	123	93	43	73.1%
	2021/22	411	191	73	35	84.9%
	2022/23	490	218	125	68	79.7%
	2023/24	460	223	60	35	88.5%

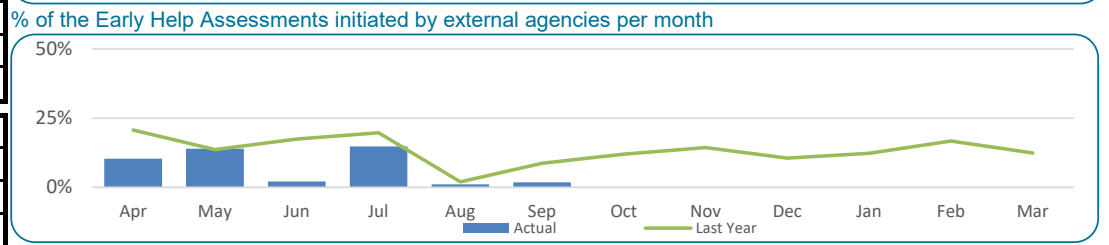
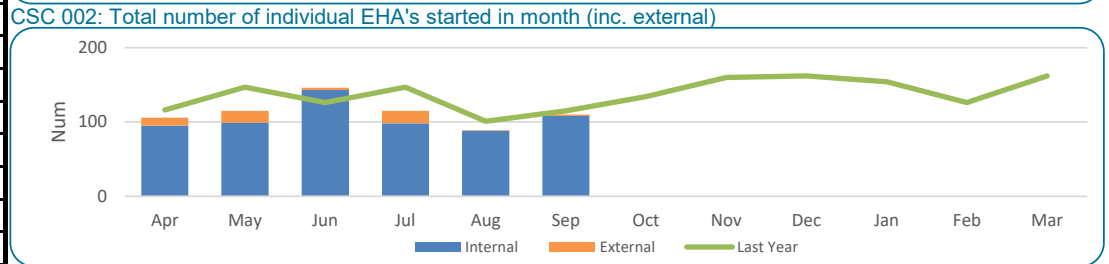
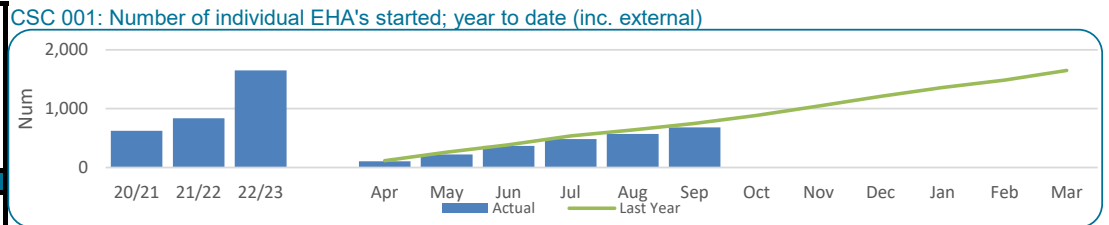


## EARLY HELP ASSESSMENTS: STARTED

**DEFINITION** The number of individual Early Help Assessments (EHA) started in month and year to date, including those initiated by external agencies. The start date of the EHA is taken from the form created date in Liquid Logic and the start date of the external EHA is taken from the contact date when the agency informed us of the EHA.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS** 314 Early Help Assessments (EHA) were started in Q2 2023/24, 6.4% (20) of which were initiated by external agencies. This is a decrease when compared to Q2 2022/23 (363 EHA's) and a decrease on the proportion of externally started EHA's (11.3%).

	CSC 002		CSC 001		
	Target	Total number of individual EHA's started in month (inc. external)	Number and percentage of the EHA's initiated by external agencies per month	Number of individual EHA's started; year to date (inc. external)	
			TBC		
<b>In Month Performance</b>	Apr-23	106	11	10.4%	106
	May-23	115	16	13.9%	221
	Jun-23	146	3	2.1%	367
	Jul-23	115	17	14.8%	482
	Aug-23	89	1	1.1%	571
	Sep-23	110	2	1.8%	681
	Oct-23				
	Nov-23				
	Dec-23				
	Jan-24				
	Feb-24				
	Mar-24				
	<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	623	127	20.4%
2021/22		839	161	19.2%	839
2022/23		1,650	223	13.5%	1,650
2023/24		681	50	7.3%	681



**MISSING: EPISODES**

<b>DEFINITION</b>	The number of episodes of children going missing in Darlington, including Children in Care, Children in Care with another authority and children who are not currently open to Social Care. The percentage of Return Home Interviews (RHI) completed within 72 hours and the level of engagement by the child. The number of episodes missing is cumulated to give a year to date figure but the children are only counted once for the year to date total.
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<b>PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS</b>	<p>The total number of missing episodes in Q2 2023/24 was 144 involving 46 individual children and young people.</p> <p>In Q2 2023/24, 97.6% of the Return Home Interviews (RHI) (excluding children from other authorities) were offered, the ones that were not offered an RHI was due to not being able to contact the family to arrange an interview despite numerous attempts.</p> <p>90.6% were offered within 72 hours and 85.9% of the children engaged in their RHI. This is an increase in children engaging with their RHI compared to previous quarters (Q2 2022/23, 56.6% and Q2 2021/22, 48.4%).</p> <p>71.5% of the total missing episodes were for less than 12 hours.</p>
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		CSC 215		CSC 246				
		Total number of missing episodes and children involved in month		Missing - Children in Care with DBC		Of which are in a placement more than 20 miles from home		
In Month Performance		Episode	Child	Episode	Child	Episode	Child	
		Apr-23	24	17	10	7		
		May-23	55	30	26	12		
		Jun-23	38	26	22	10	2	2
		Jul-23	62	30	26	11	2	2
		Aug-23	40	15	14	5	3	1
		Sep-23	42	19	14	6		
		Oct-23						
		Nov-23						
		Dec-23						
		Jan-24						
		Feb-24						
		Mar-24						
Annual Trend	2020/21	370	152	107	30	15	4	
	2021/22	582	174	253	31	22	4	
	2022/23	691	162	383	31	2	2	
	2023/24	261	81	112	20	7	3	

## ASSESSMENTS

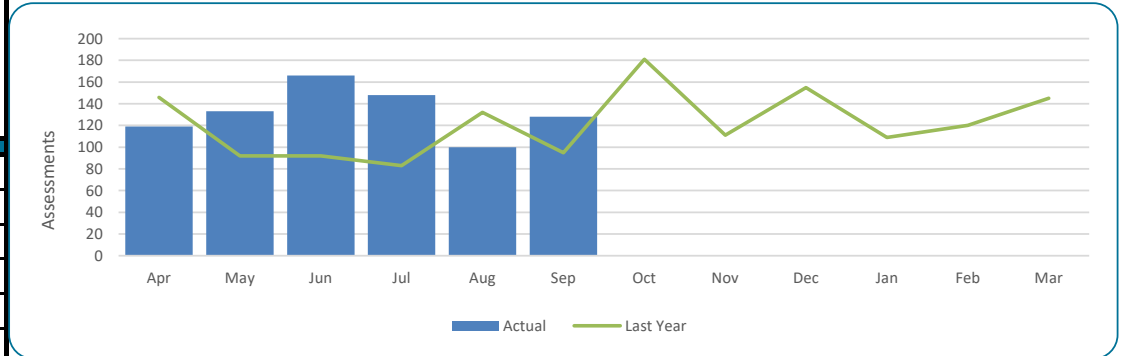
**DEFINITION** Monthly and cumulative number of Children & Families (C&F) assessments completed for a child.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS** 376 children had a C&F assessment completed in Q2 2023/24. This is a continual increase when compared to Q2 2022/23 (310), Q2 2021/22 (158) and Q2 2020/21 (189).

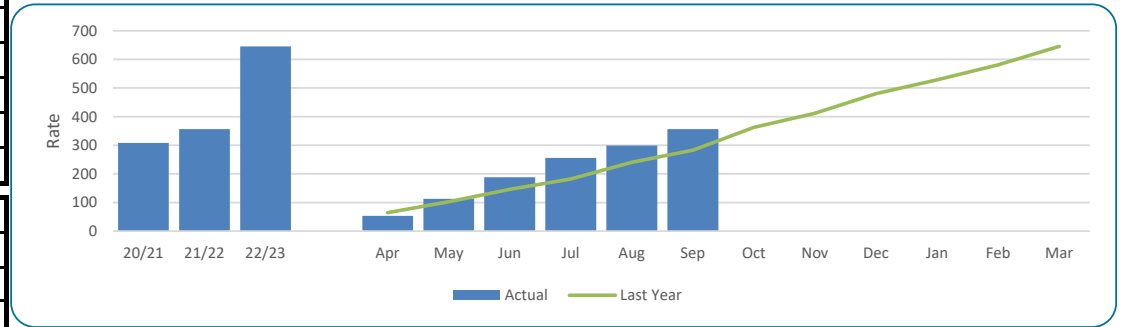
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		CSC 037	CSC 036	CSC 035
		Monthly number of C&F assessments completed	Number of C&F assessments completed year to date	Rate of C&F assessments completed per 10,000 of the 0-17 population.
<b>In Month Performance</b>	Apr-23	119	119	53.5
	May-23	133	252	113.2
	Jun-23	166	418	187.8
	Jul-23	148	566	255.7
	Aug-23	100	666	299.3
	Sep-23	128	794	356.8
	Oct-23			
	Nov-23			
	Dec-23			
	Jan-24			
	Feb-24			
	Mar-24			
	<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	692	692
2021/22		806	806	356.1
2022/23		1,461	1,461	645.5
2023/24		794	794	356.8

CSC 037: Monthly number of C&F assessments completed



CSC 035: Rate of C&F assessments completed per 10,000 of the 0-17 population.



## ASSESSMENTS: TIMELINESS

**DEFINITION**

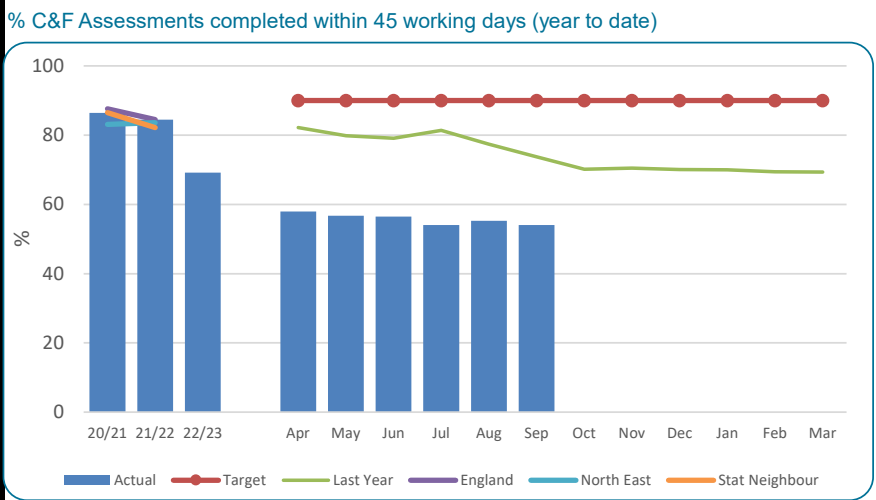
Of those assessments completed in a period, the percentage completed within 45 working days. Day zero is the first working day on or after the start date of the referral, or strategy discussion decided to initiate S47 enquiries, or where new information indicates that an assessment should be undertaken. The end date is the first working day on or after the recorded date the Team Manager closes the single assessment. A process indicator as a proxy measure for improved child safety and how quickly services can respond when a child is thought to be at risk of serious harm. Local authorities should investigate and address concerns in a timely and efficient way.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**

376 children had a C&F assessment completed in Q2 2023/24. This is a continual increase when compared to Q2 2022/23 (310), Q2 2021/22 (158) and Q2 2020/21 (189).

50.0% (188 / 376) of our C&F assessments were completed within timescale in Q2 2023/24.

		CSC 038	CSC 040
		% C&F Assessments completed within 45 working days (year to date)	Monthly % completed within 45 working days
In Month Performance	Target	90%	90%
	Apr-23	58.0	58.0
	May-23	56.8	55.6
	Jun-23	56.5	56.0
	Jul-23	54.1	47.3
	Aug-23	55.3	62.0
	Sep-23	54.0	47.7
	Oct-23		
	Nov-23		
	Dec-23		
	Jan-24		
	Feb-24		
	Mar-24		
Annual Trend	2020/21	86.4	
	2021/22	84.5	
	2022/23	69.2	
	2023/24	54.0	47.7



**SECTION 47 ENQUIRES: STARTED**

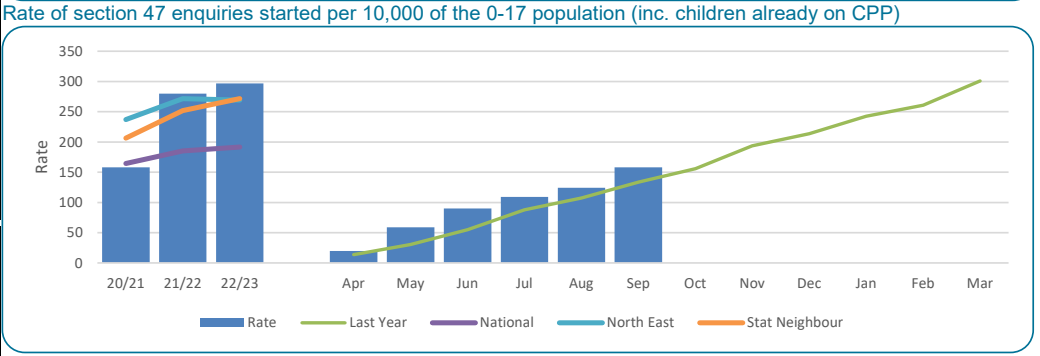
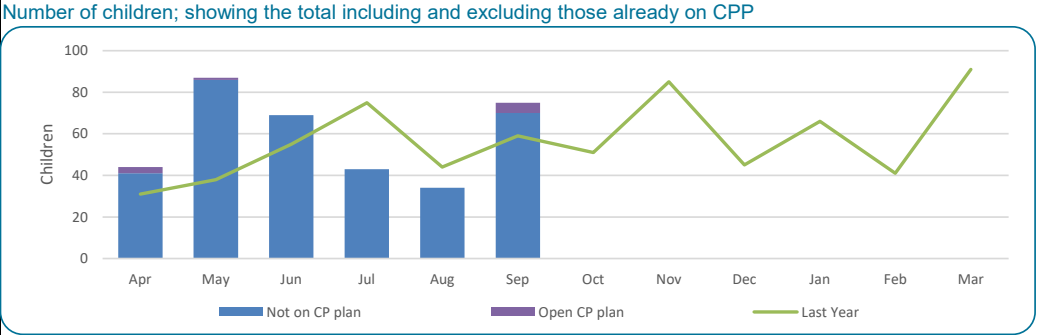
**DEFINITION** Number of children who have had a section 47 enquiries started monthly and year to date and the actual number of enquires started.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**

76 section 47 enquires were started in Q2 2023/24 involving 152 individual children.

Our rate of enquires per 10,000 population was 158.2 at the end of Q2 2023/24. This was above that at Q2 2022/23 (133.4) and as a result of the increased strategies held this year.

		CSC 166		CSC 164	
		Section 47 enquires started in the month	Number of children who had a section 47 enquiry	Of which also had an open CPP plan	Rate of section 47 enquires started per 10,000 of the 0-17 population (Cumulative)
<b>In Month Performance</b>	Apr-23	24	44	3	19.8
	May-23	48	87	1	58.9
	Jun-23	39	69		89.9
	Jul-23	19	43		109.2
	Aug-23	18	34		124.5
	Sep-23	39	75	5	158.2
	Oct-23				
	Nov-23				
	Dec-23				
	Jan-24				
	Feb-24				
	Mar-24				
	<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	195	358	7
2021/22		317	633	14	279.7
2022/23		351	681	30	296.6
2023/24		187	352	9	158.2



## INITIAL CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES: TIMELINESS

**DEFINITION** Of those Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) held within the period (excluding transfer ins), the percentage recorded in the Safeguarding Unit workbook where Child Protection strategy meeting / section 47 enquiry to ICPC are within 15 days (CPP). This provides an indication of how quickly the safety of the child is considered by a multi-agency meeting.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**

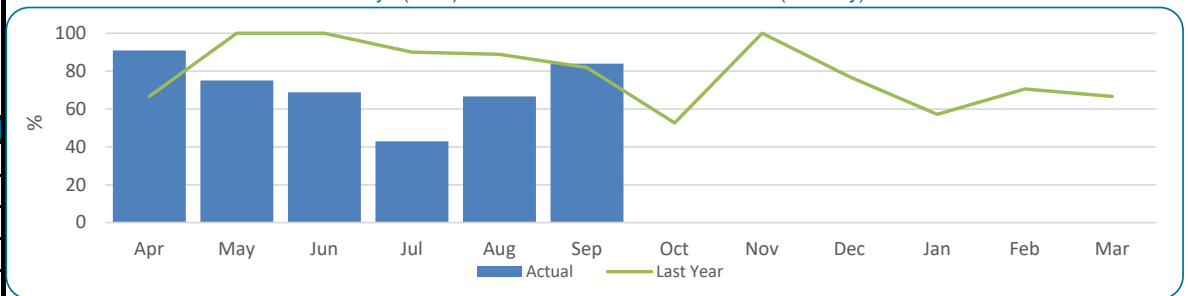
Of the 57 children (who were not transferred in), 40 had their Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) within timescale (70.2%) in Q2 2023/24. Of the families who did not have their ICPC within timescale, the reasons provided were due to the late conference notification by the social worker.

This measure continues to be below the target of 95%.

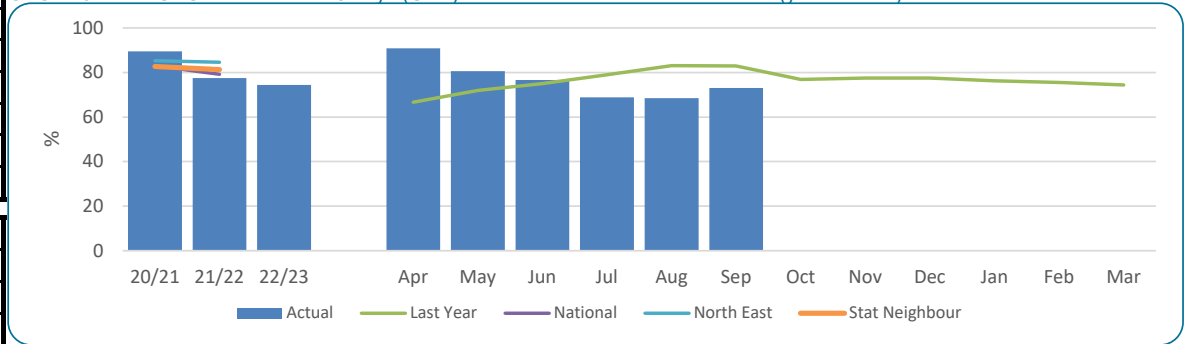
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		CSC 178		CSC 176	
		% ICPC's held within 15 days (CPP). Excludes transfer-in conferences (monthly).		% ICPC's held within 15 days (CPP). Excludes transfer-in conferences (year to date).	
In Month Performance	Target				95%
	Apr-23	10 / 11	90.9	10 / 11	90.9
	May-23	15 / 20	75.0	25 / 31	80.7
	Jun-23	11 / 16	68.8	36 / 47	76.6
	Jul-23	6 / 14	42.9	42 / 61	68.9
	Aug-23	8 / 12	66.7	50 / 73	68.5
	Sep-23	26 / 31	83.9	76 / 104	73.1
	Oct-23				
	Nov-23				
	Dec-23				
	Jan-24				
	Feb-24				
Mar-24					
Annual Trend	2020/21	112 / 126	89.5	112 / 126	89.5
	2021/22	135 / 174	77.5	135 / 174	77.5
	2022/23	116 / 156	74.4	116 / 156	74.4
	2023/24	76 / 104	73.1	76 / 104	73.1

CSC 178: % ICPC's held within 15 days (CPP). Excludes transfer-in conferences (monthly).



CSC 176: % ICPC's held within 15 days (CPP). Excludes transfer-in conferences (year to date).



## CHILD PROTECTION PLANS

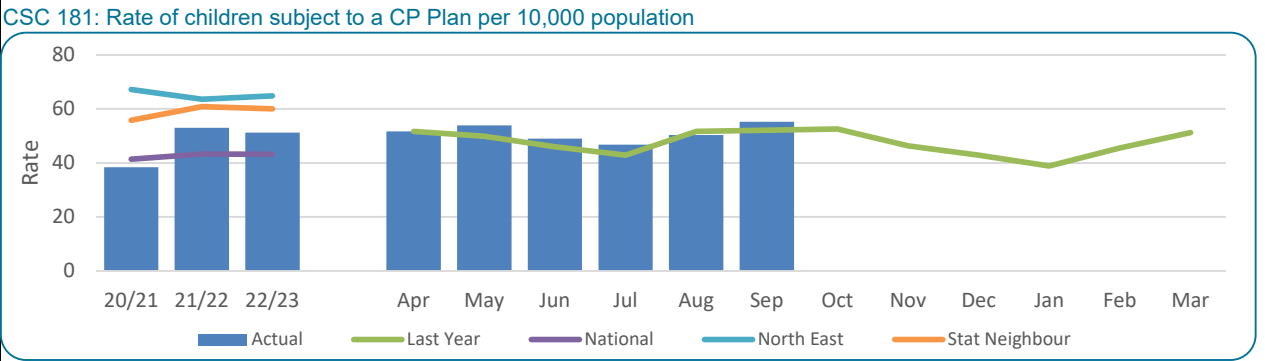
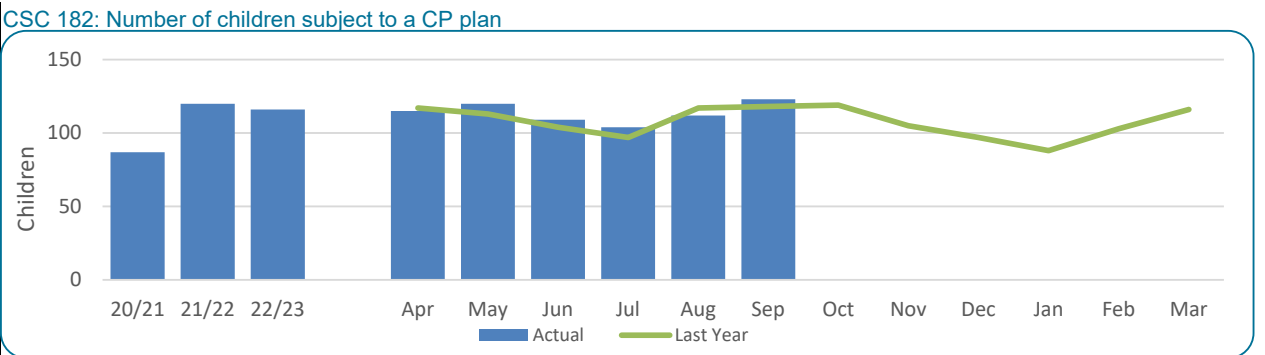
**DEFINITION** Number of children subject to a Child Protection plan at the end of the month.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS** 123 children were subject to a Child Protection plan (CP) as at the end of September 2023 with a rate of 55.3 per 10,000 population with a CP plan. This is just above to the rate of 52.1 for the 118 children who were subject to CP at the end of September 2022 and above the 45.9 rate for 103 children at the end of September 2021.

Although Darlington's rate per 10,000 population for children subject to a CPP has increased, this is still below our statistical neighbours and regional trend rate as seen in the 2023 LAIT.

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		CSC 182	CSC 181
		Number of children subject to a CP plan	Rate of children subject to a CP Plan per 10,000 population
<b>In Month Performance</b>	Apr-23	115	51.7
	May-23	120	53.9
	Jun-23	109	49.0
	Jul-23	104	46.7
	Aug-23	112	50.3
	Sep-23	123	55.3
	Oct-23		
	Nov-23		
	Dec-23		
	Jan-24		
	Feb-24		
	Mar-24		
	<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	87
2021/22		120	53.0
2022/23		116	51.3
2023/24		123	55.3





## CHILD PROTECTION PLANS: ALLOCATION & REVIEWS

**DEFINITION** Reviews are a key element in delivering CP Plans and effective reviews should ensure the provision of good quality interventions. This indicator is a proxy for the measurement of effectiveness of the interventions provided to children subject to a CP plan. "Working Together to Safeguard Children" guidance requires that the first review should be within 3 months of their ICPC and thereafter at intervals of no more than 6 months.

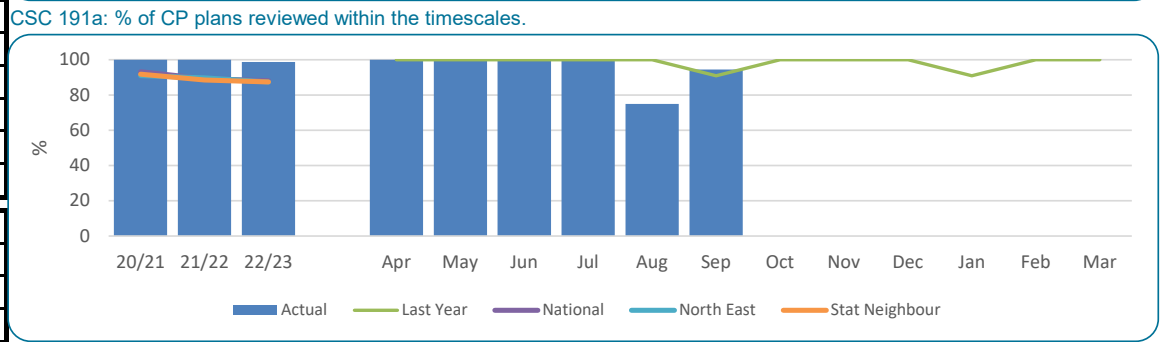
**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**

100% of Child Protection Cases were allocated to a qualified social worker.

93.3% of Child Protection reviews have been completed within the required timescales.

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		CSC 183	CSC 191a	
		% of children with a CP plan allocated to a qualified social worker	CP plan review meetings held in timescale during the month	% of CP plans reviewed within the timescales.
<b>In Month Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>
	Apr-23	100.0	14 / 14	100.0
	May-23	100.0	13 / 13	100.0
	Jun-23	100.0	17 / 17	100.0
	Jul-23	100.0	19 / 19	100.0
	Aug-23	100.0	6 / 8	75.0
	Sep-23	100.0	17 / 18	94.4
	Oct-23			
	Nov-23			
	Dec-23			
	Jan-24			
	Feb-24			
	Mar-24			
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	100.0	138 / 138	100.0
	2021/22	100.0	159 / 159	100.0
	2022/23	100.0	153 / 155	98.7
	2023/24	100.0	86 / 89	96.6

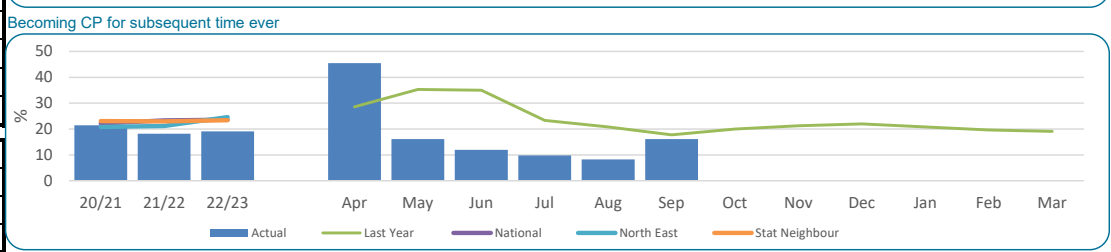
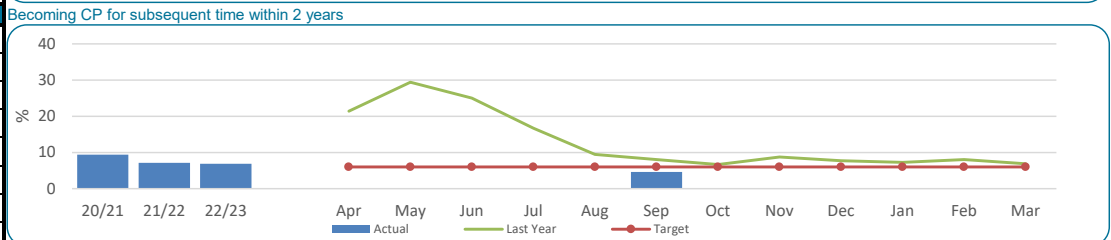
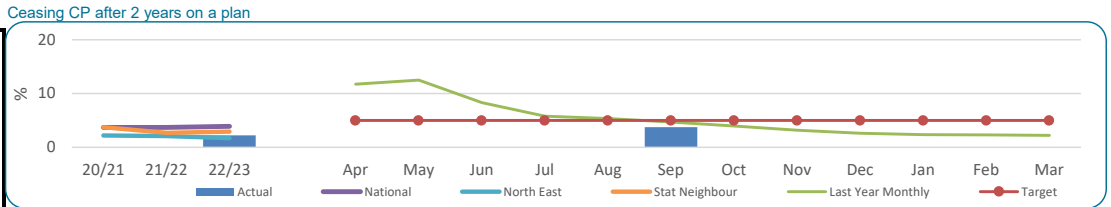


**CHILD PROTECTION PLAN: TIME PERIODS**

**DEFINITION** Percentage of children ceasing to be subject to a Child Protection Plan who had been subject to a Plan for 2 or more years, and percentage of children becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan for the 2nd or subsequent time within a) 2 years of a previous plan, and b) with a previous plan at any point. These indicators reflect the underlying principle that professionals should be working towards specified outcomes which, if implemented effectively, should lead to all children not needing to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan within a maximum of two years, or becoming subject of a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS** Of the 45 children who became subject to a CP plan in Q2 2023/24, 5 children from 1 family became subject to a CP plan for a second or subsequent time within 2 years of the previous plan ending (previously ended in 03/2022), and 4 children from 2 families became subject to a CP plan for a subsequent time ever.  
1 family has ceased to be subject to a CP plan in Q2 2023/24 after being subject to the plan for 2 or more years.

		CSC 186		CSC 188			
		% children ceasing a CP plan who had been subject to CP for 2 or more years (Cumulative)		% of children becoming subject to a CP plan for a 2nd or subsequent time within 2 years of a previous plan ending (Cumulative)		% of children becoming subject to a CP plan for a 2nd or subsequent time ever (Cumulative)	
In Month Performance	Target		5%		6%		
	Apr-23	0 / 12	0.0	0 / 11	0.0	5 / 11	45.5
	May-23	0 / 27	0.0	0 / 31	0.0	5 / 31	16.1
	Jun-23	0 / 49	0.0	0 / 42	0.0	5 / 42	11.9
	Jul-23	0 / 63	0.0	0 / 51	0.0	5 / 51	9.8
	Aug-23	0 / 65	0.0	0 / 61	0.0	5 / 61	8.2
	Sep-23	3 / 80	3.8	4 / 87	4.6	14 / 87	16.1
	Oct-23						
	Nov-23						
	Dec-23						
Jan-24							
Feb-24							
Mar-24							
Annual Trend	2020/21	0 / 115	0.0	11 / 117	9.4	25 / 117	21.4
	2021/22	0 / 121	0.0	11 / 154	7.1	28 / 154	18.2
	2022/23	3 / 135	2.2	9 / 131	6.9	25 / 131	19.1
	2023/24	3 / 80	3.8	4 / 87	4.6	14 / 87	16.1



## CHILD PROTECTION: STATUTORY VISITS

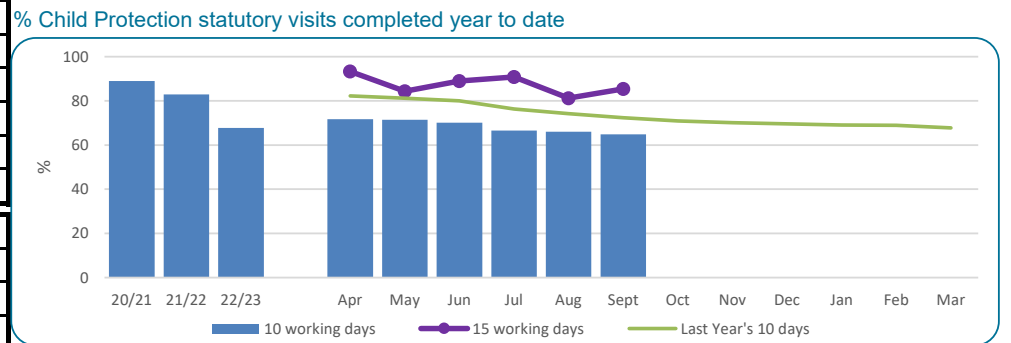
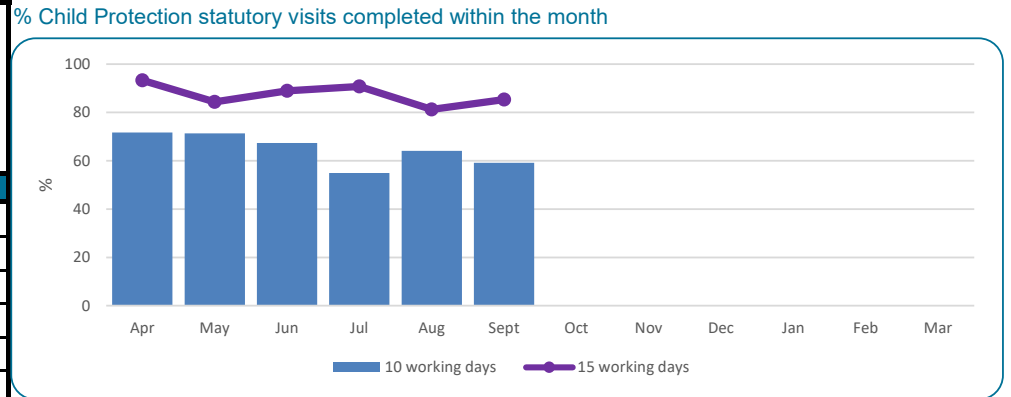
**DEFINITION** Percentage of children subject to a Child Protection (CP) plan who had all statutory visits carried out within timescales and percentage of Child Protection statutory visits completed within timescale monthly and year to date.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS** 59.3% of Child Protection statutory visits were completed within 10 working days in Q2 2023/24.

When compared with Q2 2022/23, the number of visits carried out has decreased (from 682 to 585 visits) but due to competing priorities the timeliness of completing the visits has also decrease. Teams, along with managers are currently working to address the drop in performance.

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		CSC 252a		CSC 252b	
		% CP visits completed within 10 working days within the month	% CP visits completed within 15 working days within the month	% CP visits completed within 10 working days year to date (cumulative)	% CP visits completed within 15 working days year to date (cumulative)
<b>In Month Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>
	Apr-23	71.7	93.3	71.7	93.3
	May-23	71.3	84.3	71.5	84.3
	Jun-23	67.3	88.9	70.1	88.9
	Jul-23	54.9	90.8	66.5	90.8
	Aug-23	64.1	81.3	66.0	81.3
	Sep-23	59.1	85.4	64.9	85.4
	Oct-23				
	Nov-23				
	Dec-23				
	Jan-24				
	Feb-24				
	Mar-24				
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21			89.0	98.4
	2021/22			82.9	96.8
	2022/23			67.8	90.0
	2023/24	59.1	85.4	64.9	85.4

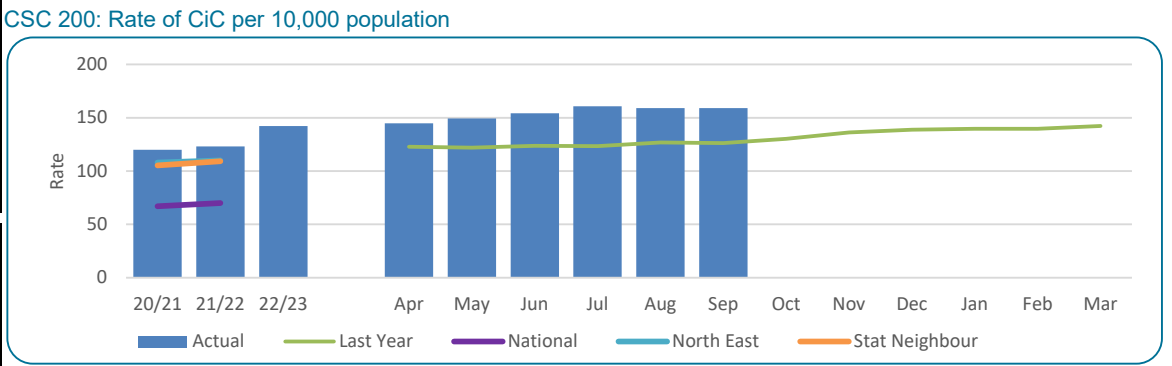
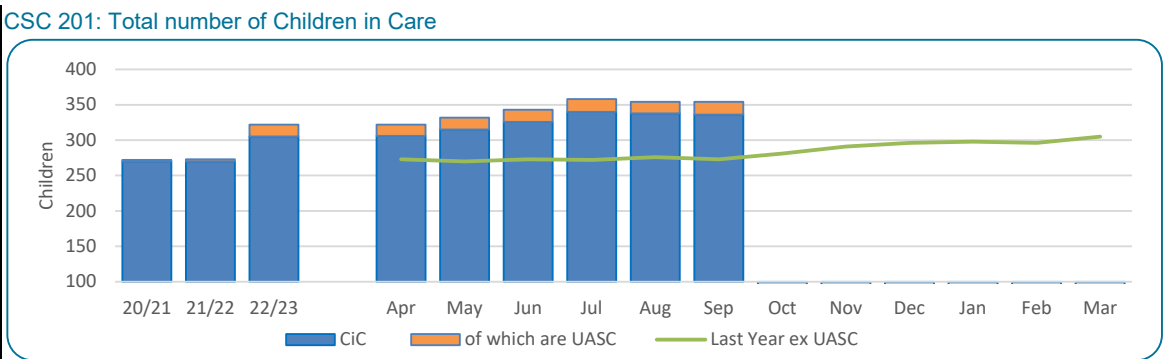


## CHILDREN IN CARE

**DEFINITION** Number of Children in Care (CiC) at the end of each month and of which are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC).

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS** 354 children were in care as at September 2023, 18 (5.1%) of which are unaccompanied asylum-seekers. Although we have continued to see a rise in children coming into care since the pandemic, Q2 did see a period of plateauing.

		CSC 201	CSC 200	
		Total number of Children in Care	Of which are identified as a UASC	Rate of CiC per 10,000 population
<b>In Month Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>			<b>95</b>
	Apr-23	322	16	144.7
	May-23	332	17	149.2
	Jun-23	343	17	154.1
	Jul-23	358	18	160.9
	Aug-23	354	16	159.1
	Sep-23	354	18	159.1
	Oct-23			
	Nov-23			
	Dec-23			
	Jan-24			
	Feb-24			
	Mar-24			
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	272	2	120.0
	2021/22	273	3	123.0
	2022/23	322	17	142.3
	2023/24	354	18	159.1



## CHILDREN IN CARE: COMING INTO CARE

**DEFINITION** Number of children coming into the care of the local authority during the month and year to date and where they are an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC). This is further broken down to show their first placement type.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**

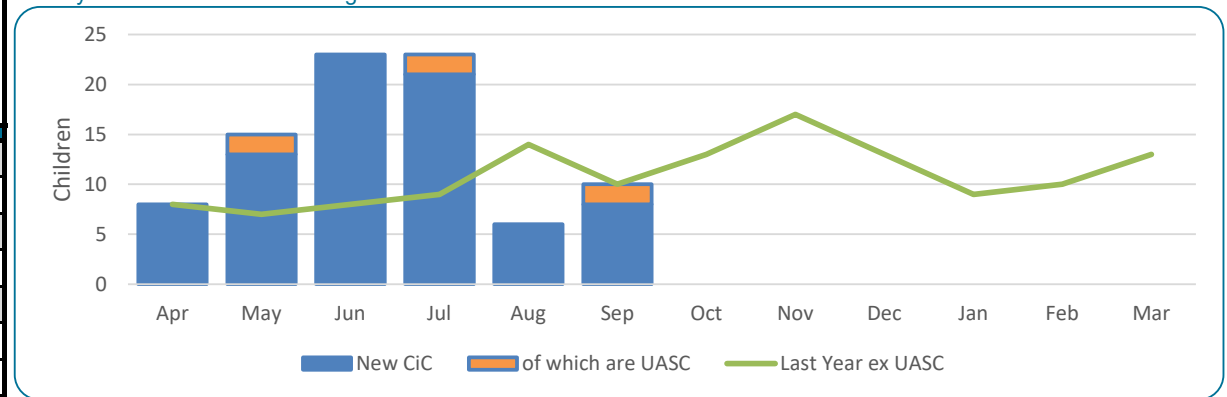
35 children from 19 families came into care in Q2 2023/24, a further 4 young people came into our care as UASC through the NTS. This is similar when compared with the 33 children (excluding UASC) who came into care in Q2 2022/23.

20 of the 35 children (excluding UASC) (57.1%) were aged 5 or younger, 5 of which had not had their first birthday when they came into care.

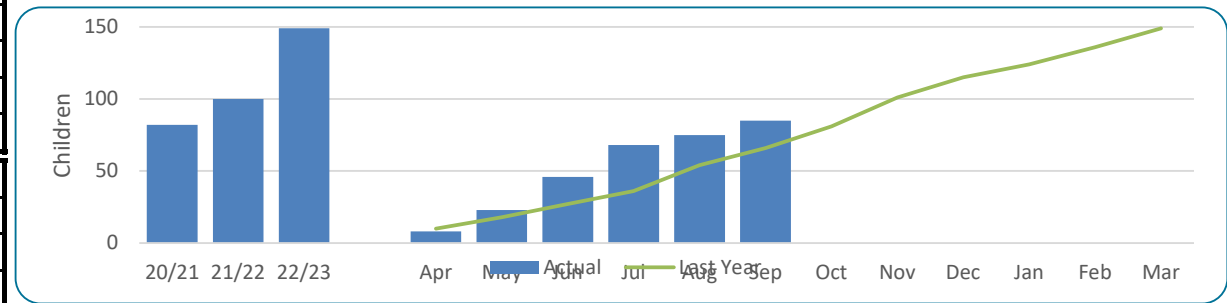
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		<i>CSC 209</i>	<i>CSC 208b</i>	
		Monthly number of children coming into care	Cumulative number of children coming into care	of which are UASC
<b>In Month Performance</b>	Apr-23	8	8	
	May-23	15	23	2
	Jun-23	23	46	
	Jul-23	23	68	2
	Aug-23	6	75	
	Sep-23	10	85	2
	Oct-23			
	Nov-23			
	Dec-23			
	Jan-24			
	Feb-24			
	Mar-24			
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	82	82	2
	2021/22	100	100	2
	2022/23	149	149	18
	2023/24	85	85	6

Monthly number of children coming into care



Total number of children coming into care within the year



### CHILDREN IN CARE: CEASING CARE

**DEFINITION** Number of children ceasing to be a Child in Care during each month and year to date and their destination when they ceased being in care. This could be due to returning home to parent or other person with no PR (planned and unplanned), having a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) / Child Arrangement Order (CAO) granted by the courts to a carer, adoption or turning 18 years old and becoming a care leaver and supported by a personal advisor. Other reasons why a child could cease care could be due to receiving a custodial sentence or moving out of the area and transferring to a different local authority.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**

28 children and young people, from 28 families ceased to be in care in Q2 2023/24. This is a small decrease when compared with the 33 children ceasing in Q2 2022/23 but an increase on Q2 2020/21 (19 children) and Q2 2021/22 (12 children).

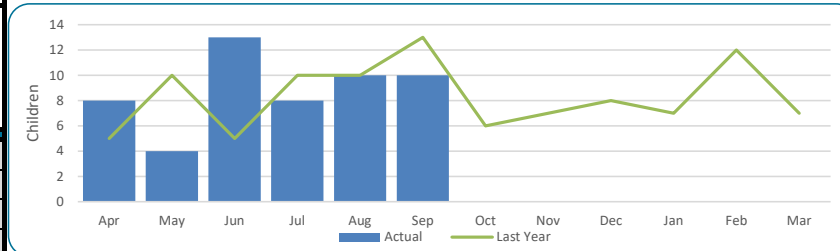
Of the 28 children and young people who did cease CiC:

- 46.4% returned home to their parent(s).
- 21.4% had a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) / Child Arrangement Order (CAO) granted to a relative.
- 7.1% were adopted
- 25.0% due to turning 18 and becoming a care leaver (10.7% of which were UASC).

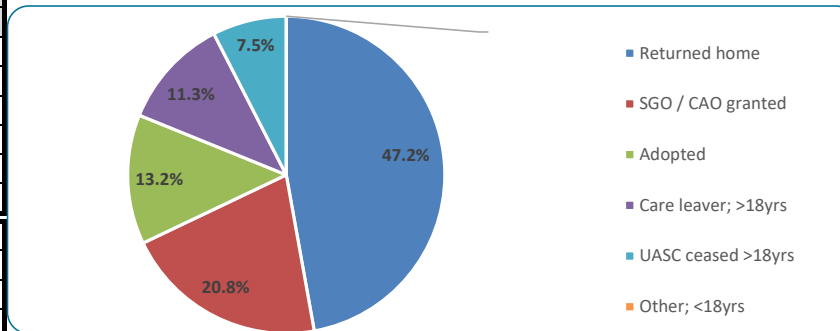
The proportion of children who returned home to their parent(s) has increased when compared to Q2 2022/23 (18.2%) and comparable to Q2 2021/22 (42.1%) and Q1 2020/21 (41.7%).

		CSC 212	CSC 211	Reason for ceasing to be a Child in Care					
		Monthly number of children ceasing care	Cumulative number of children ceasing care	Returned home	SGO / CAO granted	Adopted	Care leaver; >18yrs	UASC ceased >18yrs	Other; <18yrs
<b>In Month Performance</b>	Apr-23	8	8	6	1			1	
	May-23	4	12	1	1	1	1		
	Jun-23	13	25	5	3	4	1		
	Jul-23	8	33	5	2			1	
	Aug-23	10	43	5	1		2	2	
	Sep-23	10	53	3	3	2	2		
	Oct-23								
	Nov-23								
	Dec-23								
	Jan-24								
	Feb-24								
	Mar-24								
	<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	80	80	22	39	7	9	
2021/22		99	99	28	34	15	19		3
2022/23		100	100	21	39	17	21		2
2023/24		53	53	25	11	7	6	4	0

CSC 212: Monthly number of children ceasing care



Cumulative reason for children ceasing care



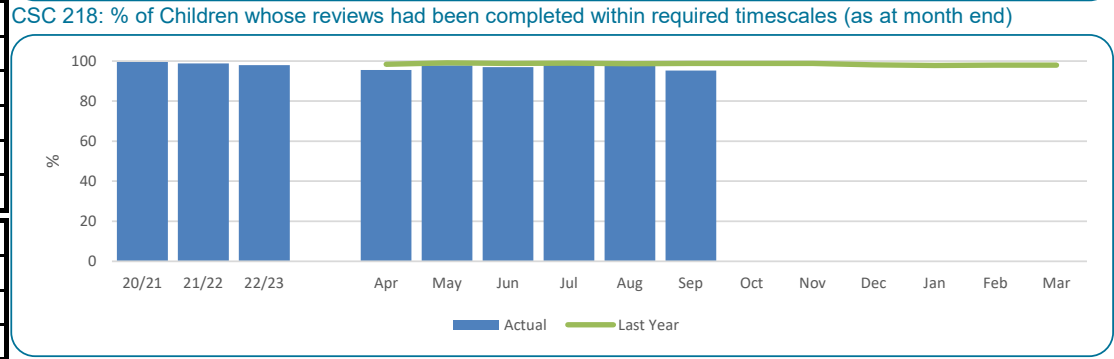
**CHILDREN IN CARE: ALLOCATION & REVIEWS**

**DEFINITION**  
 The percentage of Children in Care (CiC) which should have been reviewed during the year ending 31 March that were reviewed on time and the percentage of Children in Care that were allocated to a qualified social worker at the end of the month. The purpose of the review is to consider the plan for the child's welfare, to monitor the progress of the plan and amend it as necessary in light of changed information and circumstances. The statutory intervals are within 20 working days of placement, then within 3 months and 6 monthly thereafter, but reviews may be rescheduled or held inside these intervals if there are significant changes to the child's care plan.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**  
 100% of Children in Care (CiC) are allocated to a qualified social worker.  
 By September 2023, 321 of the 337 reviews (95.3%), were completed within required timescales.

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		CSC 227	CSC 218	
		% Children in Care allocated to a qualified social worker	% of Children whose reviews had been completed within required timescales (as at month end)	
In Month Performance	Target	100	Num	%
	Apr-23	100.0	65 / 68	95.6
	May-23	100.0	139 / 142	97.9
	Jun-23	100.0	194 / 200	97.0
	Jul-23	100.0	252 / 255	98.8
	Aug-23	100.0	291 / 292	99.7
	Sep-23	100.0	321 / 337	95.3
	Oct-23			
	Nov-23			
	Dec-23			
	Jan-24			
	Feb-24			
Mar-24				
Annual Trend	2020/21	100.0	249 / 250	99.6
	2021/22	100.0	243 / 246	98.8
	2022/23	100.0	297 / 303	98.0
	2023/24	100.0	321 / 337	95.3



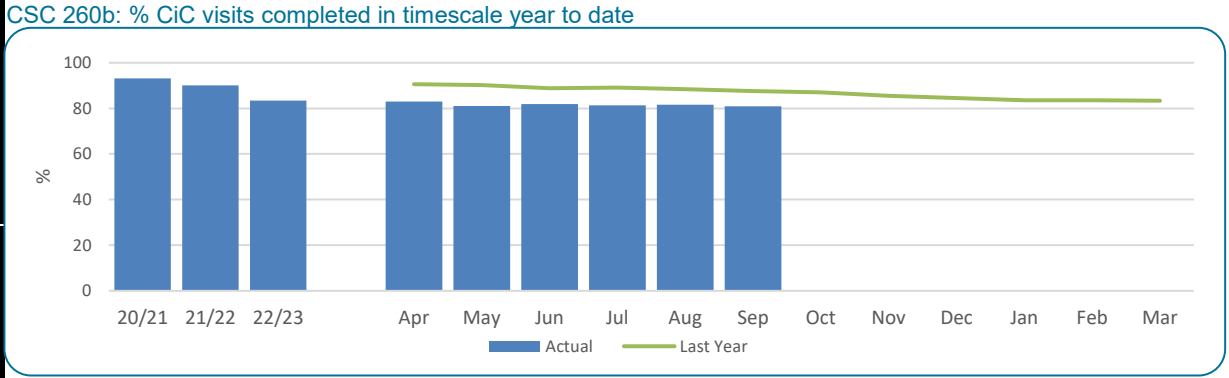
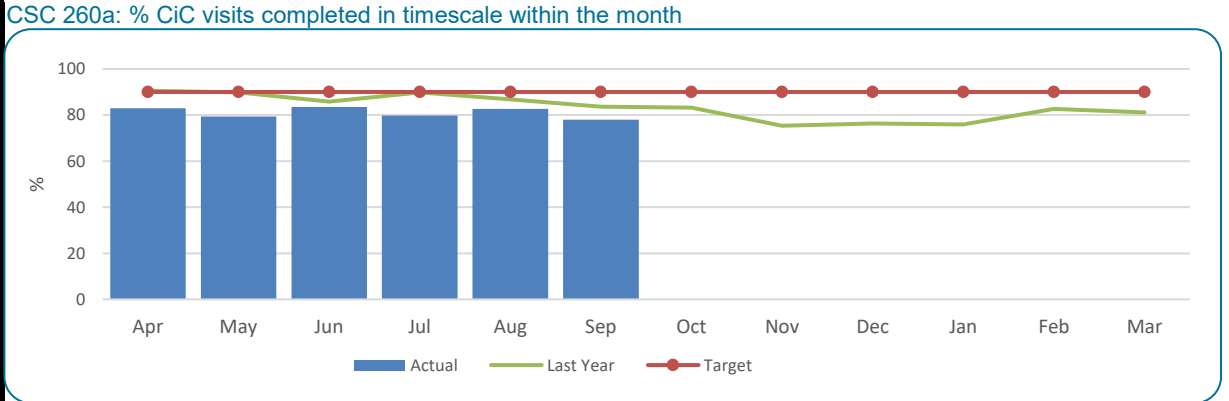
## CHILDREN IN CARE: STATUTORY VISITS

**DEFINITION** Percentage of Children in Care (CiC) who had all statutory visits completed within required timescales each month and year to date.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS** 79.9% of statutory visits for Children in Care (CiC) were completed in timescale in Q2 2023/24. This is a decrease when compared with Q2 2022/23 when there were 81.9% of visits completed in timescale.  
We continue to be below our target of 90% of visits completed in timescale.

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		CSC 260a	CSC 260b
		% CiC visits completed in timescale within the month	% CiC visits completed in timescale year to date
<b>In Month Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>
	Apr-23	82.9	82.9
	May-23	79.4	81.0
	Jun-23	83.5	81.9
	Jul-23	79.8	81.4
	Aug-23	82.6	81.6
	Sep-23	77.9	81.0
	Oct-23		
	Nov-23		
	Dec-23		
	Jan-24		
	Feb-24		
	Mar-24		
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21		93.1
	2021/22		90.1
	2022/23		83.4
	2023/24	77.9	81.0



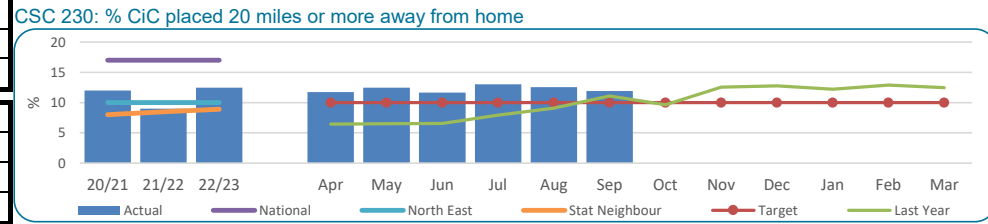
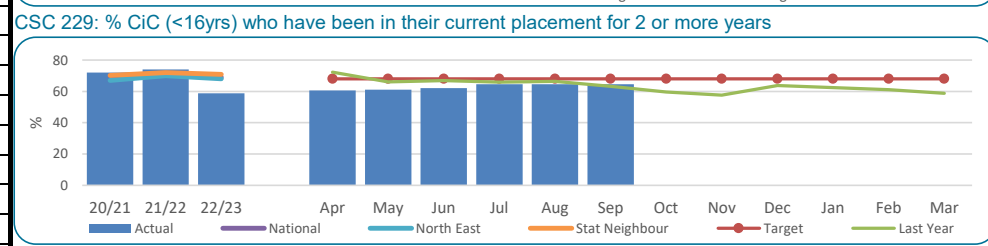
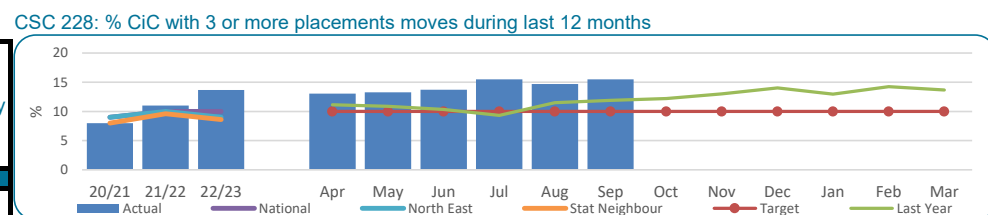


**CHILDREN IN CARE: PLACEMENTS**

**DEFINITION**  
 Of those Children in Care (CiC) at the point in time (excluding series of short-term placements), the percentage that had 3 or more separate placements in the previous 12 months; who (under the age of 16 years) had been in their current placement for 2 or more years. and who were placed more than 20 miles away from their home address. Proper assessment and an adequate choice of placements to meet the varied needs of different children are essential if appropriate stable placements are to be made. Inappropriate placements often break down and lead to frequent moves. Nevertheless, the circumstances of some individual children will require 3 or more separate placements during a year if they and others are to be kept safe.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**  
 15.5% of our Children in Care, as at September 2023, have had 3 or more placements within the previous 12 months. This is not meeting the internal target of 10%.  
 Currently, 64.5% 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 below our 68% target, however there has been an improvement since the start of the year due to targeted work to help support carers and children before a move is required.  
 11.9% of our Children in Care have been placed 20 or more miles away from home as of September 2023 which is above our target of 10%. These children are either placed in a children's home, with a connected carer, with IFA carer, with internal foster carer, placed with parents or in a mother and baby unit.  
 All these placements have been confirmed by team managers to be appropriate for the child enabling them to have the best support either with family links or specialised care.

		CSC 228	CSC 229	CSC 230
		% CiC with 3 or more placements moves during last 12 months	% CiC (<16yrs) who have been in their current placement for 2 or more years	% CiC placed 20 miles or more away from home
<b>In Month Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>10%</b>
	Apr-23	13.0	60.6	11.7
	May-23	13.3	61.1	12.5
	Jun-23	13.7	62.1	11.6
	Jul-23	15.5	64.5	13.0
	Aug-23	14.7	64.5	12.5
	Sep-23	15.5	64.5	11.9
	Oct-23			
	Nov-23			
	Dec-23			
	Jan-24			
	Feb-24			
Mar-24				
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	8.0	72.0	12.0
	2021/22	11.0	74.0	9.0
	2022/23	13.7	58.7	12.5
	2023/24	15.5	64.5	11.9



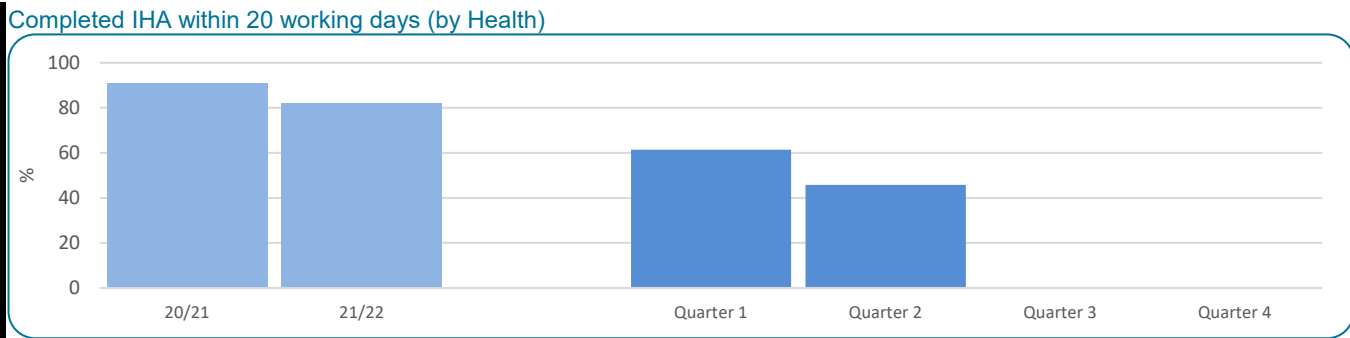
## CHILDREN IN CARE: INITIAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

**DEFINITION** Percentage of Initial Health Assessments completed within 20 working days of a child coming into our care year to date (data from Health), and percentage of IHA forms returned to Health within 5 working days. This excludes children / young people coming into care due to being remand or UASC.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS** 45.7% of the children had their Initial Health Assessment completed within 20 days of coming into care by Health in Q2 2023/24.

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		Completed IHA within 20 working days (by Health)
<b>In Month Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>95</b>
	Apr-23	
	May-23	
	Jun-23	27 / 44
	Jul-23	
	Aug-23	
	Sep-23	38 / 83
	Oct-23	
	Nov-23	
	Dec-23	
	Jan-24	
	Feb-24	
Mar-24		
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	90.9%
	2021/22	82.1%
	2022/23	54.5%
	2023/24	51.2%



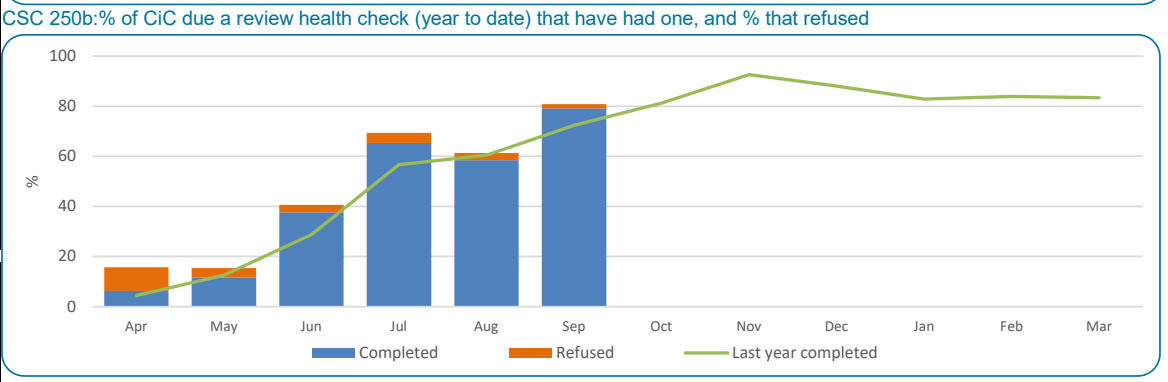
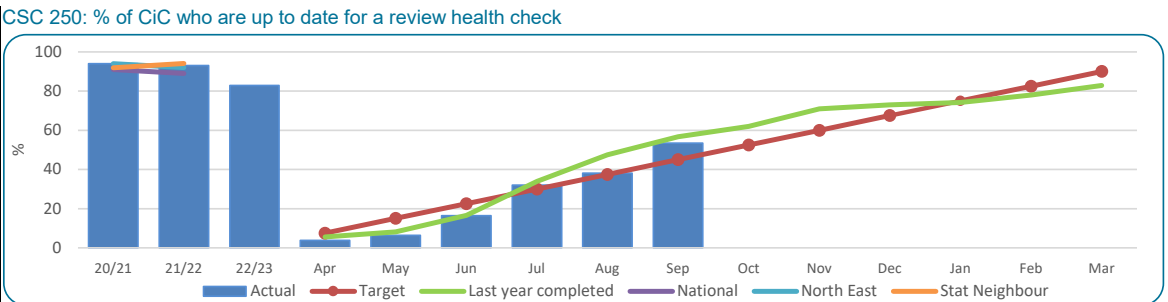
## CHILDREN IN CARE: HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

**DEFINITION**  
 Of the Children in Care (CiC) at 31 March who had been in care continuously for at least 12 months, the percentage who have had their Review Health Assessment (RHA) completed and the percentage who have an up to date Health Check (excludes any who will turn 18 before 31st March).  
 Children in Care share many of the same health risks and problems as their peers, but often to a greater degree. These indicators track the participation of our Children in Care's health as a proxy for monitoring the general health and wellbeing of the children, as well as providing a check on the effectiveness of joint working with Health to secure good health outcomes for Children in Care.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**  
 79.2% of children due a review health assessment by September 2023 have had one completed.  
 Currently only 1.7% of the children are refusing to have a health review completed. They are continually reminded of the benefits of having a check-up and encouraged to take part.

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		CSC 250		CSC 250b
		% of CiC who have an up to date health checks	% of CiC refusing engagement in their review health check (in month)	% of CiC who had a review health check completed (year to date)
<b>In Month Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>90%</b>		<b>90%</b>
	Apr-23	3.8	9.4	6.3
	May-23	6.4	3.8	11.5
	Jun-23	16.4	2.9	37.7
	Jul-23	32.0	4.0	65.3
	Aug-23	38.2	2.8	58.5
	Sep-23	53.5	1.7	79.2
	Oct-23			
	Nov-23			
	Dec-23			
	Jan-24			
	Feb-24			
	Mar-24			
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	94.0	3.7	91.2
	2021/22	93.0	3.7	91.6
	2022/23	82.9	1.6	83.3
	2023/24	53.5	1.7	79.2



## CHILDREN IN CARE: DENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

**DEFINITION**

Of the Children in Care (CiC) at 31 March who had been in care continuously for at least 12 months, the percentage who had had their teeth checked by a dentist during the previous 12 months, and the percentage who had had an annual health check during the previous 12 months (excludes any who will turn 18 before 31st March). Children in Care share many of the same health risks and problems as their peers, but often to a greater degree. These indicators track the participation of our Children in Care with dental checks as a proxy for monitoring the general health and wellbeing of the children, as well as providing a check on the effectiveness of joint working with Health to secure good health outcomes for Children in Care.

**PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS**

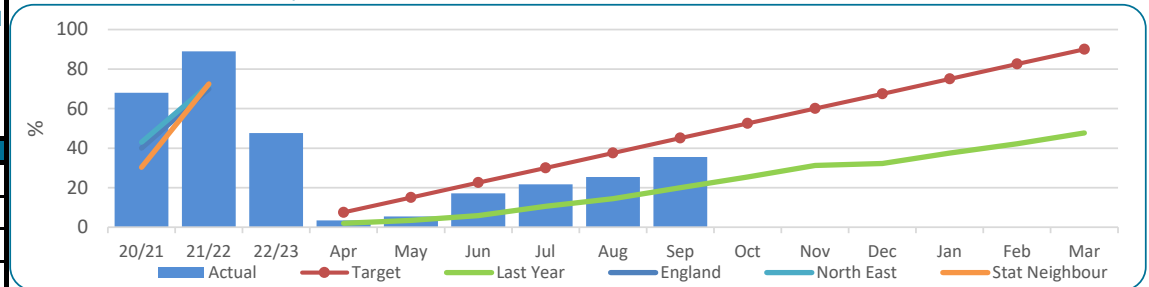
51.8% of children due a dental health assessment by September 2023 have had one completed.

Currently only 1.2% of the children are refusing to have a dental check-up completed. They are continually reminded of the benefits of having a check-up and encouraged to take part.

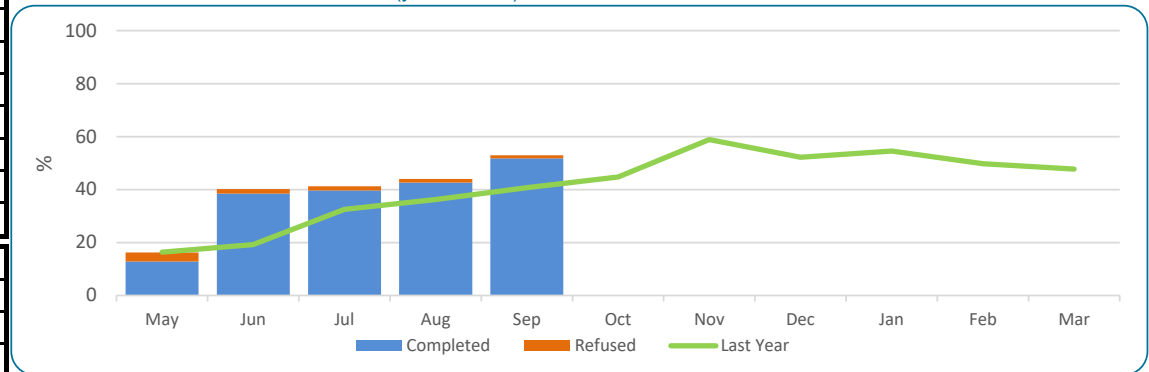
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		CSC 251		CSC 251d
		% of CiC who have an up to date dental check	% of CiC refusing engagement in their dental check (in month)	% of CiC who had a dental check completed (year to date)
<b>In Month Performance</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>90%</b>		<b>90%</b>
	Apr-23	3.5	3.6	8.9
	May-23	5.5	3.4	12.8
	Jun-23	17.1	1.7	38.5
	Jul-23	21.7	1.5	39.7
	Aug-23	25.4	1.3	42.7
	Sep-23	35.5	1.2	51.8
	Oct-23			
	Nov-23			
	Dec-23			
	Jan-24			
	Feb-24			
	Mar-24			
<b>Annual Trend</b>	2020/21	68.0	2.8	57.2
	2021/22	89.0	2.6	83.7
	2022/23	47.7	1.4	47.7
	2023/24	35.5	1.2	51.8

CSC 251: % of CiC who are up to date for a dental check



CSC 251d: % of CiC due a dental check (year to date) that have had one, and the % that refused

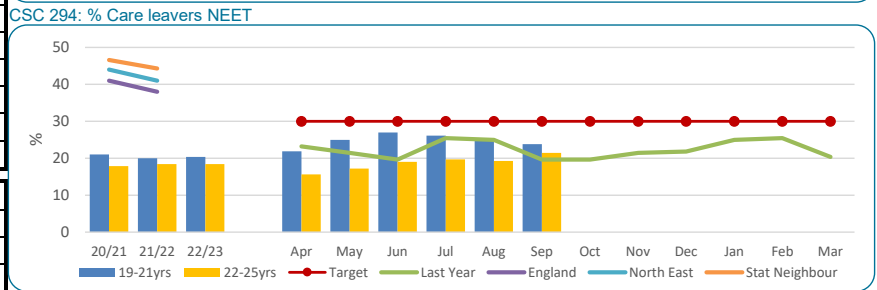
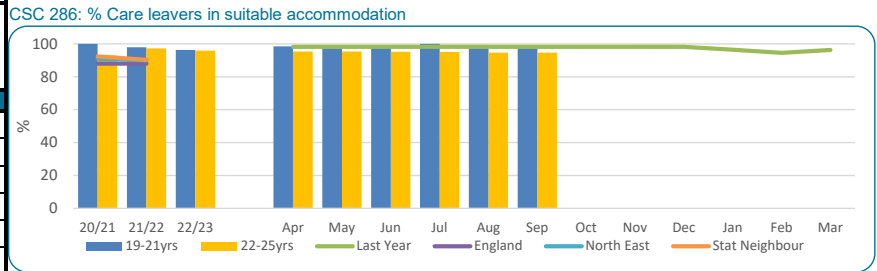


## CARE LEAVERS

DEFINITION	Former relevant care leavers split to show the young people who, at 31st March, will be aged 19-21 and those who will be aged 22-25. The percentage who were in suitable accommodation at their most recent contact, and the percentage who were not in employment, education or training at their most recent contact. This measures accommodation and employment outcomes for young people formerly in care - a key group at risk of social exclusion. It is intended to increase the proportion of former care leavers who are in suitable accommodation and employment, education or training.
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PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS	<p>98.4% of our care leavers aged 19-21 and 94.6% of our care leavers aged 22-25 were in suitable accommodation at the end of September 2023. This was due to some young people being in custody.</p> <p>Of the care leavers, aged 19-21 and as of 30th September 2023, were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6.3% NEET because of illness or disability</li> <li>• 11.1% NEET because of other circumstances</li> <li>• 6.3% NEET because of pregnancy or parenting.</li> </ul> <p>This equates to 23.8% of our care leavers which is positively below the internal target of 30% NEET but the highest proportion we have seen.</p> <p>Of the care leavers, aged 22-25 and as of 30th September 2023, were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7.1% NEET because of illness or disability</li> <li>• 8.9% NEET because of other circumstances</li> <li>• 5.4% NEET because of pregnancy or parenting.</li> </ul> <p>This equates to 21.4%.</p> <p>27.0% of the young people, aged 19-21, were engaging in education (including studies beyond A level) and 49.2% of the young people were in training or employment (including apprenticeships).</p> <p>5.4% of the young people, aged 22-25, were engaging in education (all of which are in studies beyond A level) and 73.2% of the young people were in training or employment (including apprenticeships).</p>
----------------------	---

		CSC 286 19-21 year olds		CSC 294 22-25 year olds	
		% Care leavers in suitable accommodation	% Care leavers NEET	% Care leavers in suitable accommodation	% Care leavers NEET
In Month Performance	Target	90%	30%		
	Apr-23	98.4	21.9	95.3	15.6
	May-23	98.4	25.0	95.3	17.2
	Jun-23	98.4	27.0	95.2	19.0
	Jul-23	100.0	26.2	95.1	19.7
	Aug-23	98.4	25.4	94.7	19.3
	Sep-23	98.4	23.8	94.6	21.4
	Oct-23				
	Nov-23				
	Dec-23				
Annual Trend	2020/21	100.0	21.0	92.9	17.9
	2021/22	98.0	20.0	97.3	18.4
	2022/23	96.3	20.4	95.9	18.4
	2023/24	98.4	23.8	94.6	21.4



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# Darlington Children's Services

## Self-Assessment 2023



Knowing ourselves and knowing our children,  
young people and families



**DARLINGTON**  
Borough Council

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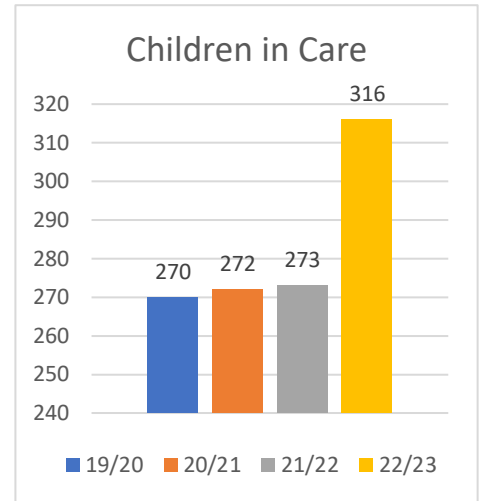
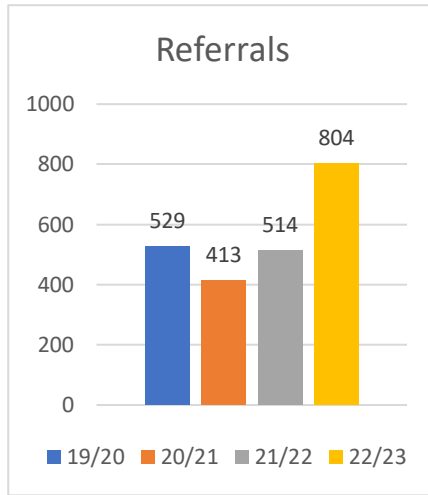
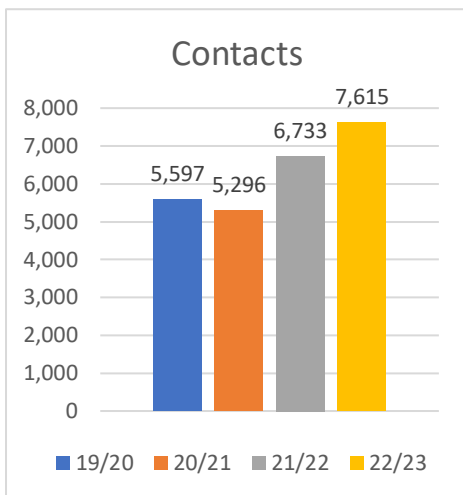


## Introduction and Overview

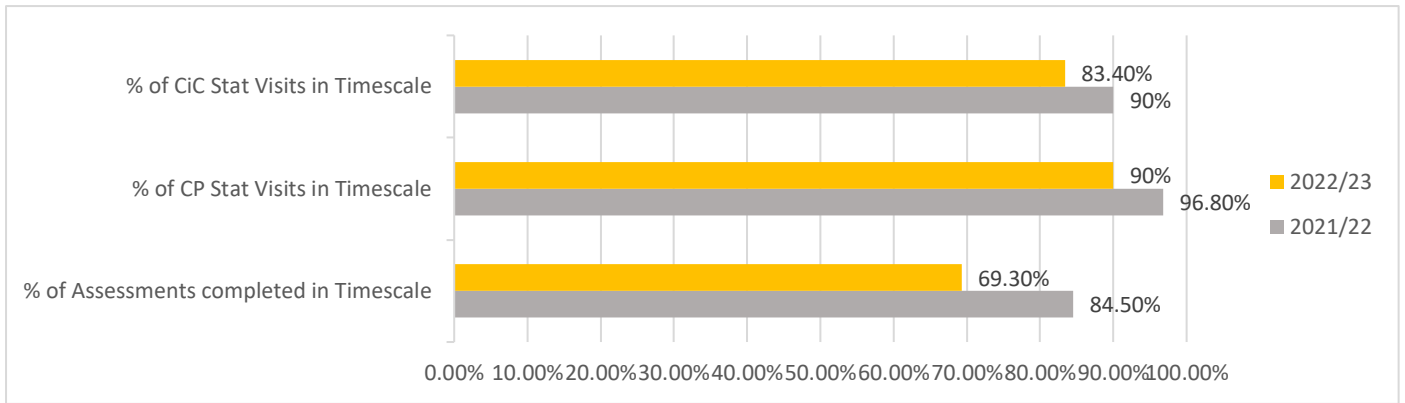
The past year has been a positive and proud one with the findings of the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) in October 2022 recognising the significant work that has been undertaken to improve outcomes for Children and Families in Darlington since the previous full Inspection, 2018. OFSTED’s report reaffirms our belief that in Darlington we have a culture based upon strong foundations of Relational and Restorative Practice that leads to the best outcomes for Children and Families.

*“The development of creative relational approaches to practice are modelled to staff through each layer of management. This is cultivating a culture of learning and an environment where good social work is thriving.”*

The strong findings (Good with Outstanding elements) of the ILACS and associate evidenced is all the more impressive when considered in the context of some of the significant challenges that we have faced over the past year. We have experienced significant and sustained increases in demand for services .



The increases to demand have placed significant pressures on services and the workforce: recruitment and retention has also presented us with challenges. The significant increases in demand, and rise of workloads, has seen a detrimental impact on performance timeliness, as illustrated below.



Our oversight of performance and management grip has continued to be strong. This scrutiny and oversight have assured us that, despite the decline in timeliness the quality of our social work and the impact of our services on our children and families has continued to be positive. This is measured through our quality assurance activity which will be discussed later in the report.

Last year we identified 5 Key Priorities, which are set out below with the progress achieved.

**1. Restorative Culture – empowering the leadership team to embed restorative practice.**

External training was commissioned and has been completed with the Leadership team to consolidate and expand their knowledge and confidence in restorative leadership. This will lead to further development for Team Managers and Advanced Practitioners in Restorative Leadership in the coming year. By using this leadership style, we will further model the “relationship-based approaches” that front line workers build with children and families.

**2. Developing and delivering in-house training**

Training and development is seen as an integral element of building and supporting our workforce across Children’s Services. Over the past year we have created a culture of quality and ownership that empowers staff to fully embrace our ‘High Support and High Challenge’ ethos here in Darlington. Our continuous professional development process reflects an Evidence Based Practice approach that is rooted in what local and national policy tells us, what our staff tell us, and what children, young people and families tell us. Our training and development programme is innovative, creative, informed and relational, giving us the flexibility to be both proactive and reactive to the needs of the workforce.

**Some examples of in-house training projects include:**

**Darlington Academy** – promoting and facilitating our progression and destination model for staff, volunteers, students/learners and our local communities.

**Staff Forums** – regular whole directorate/whole service opportunities to hear from staff teams and partner organisations, communicate key updates and develop cross sector working.

**Xtra Space** - development of a staff support facility, where staff can engage in xtra case discussion, have xtra space to learn and have xtra support from peers, leaders and managers.

**Relational and Restorative Practice** – delivery of well-informed relational practice training and bespoke support to staff and multi-agency partners across the borough.

**Darlington Xtra** – a multi-agency website supporting the training, development, recruitment and retention of staff in the Health and Social Care Sector.

**Experts in Practice** – a unique research project in partnership with Newcastle University, where staff develop as researchers in a specific designated area of practice.

### 3. Increasing the use of Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

The use of Family Group Conferencing (FGC) is central to our principle of having the family at the centre of planning and service delivery. Over the past year we have completed 115 FGCs, which is an increase from 92 the previous year.

### 4. Increasing in-house Foster Carer capacity

Recruitment of foster carers has remained a priority but also a significant challenge, 6 new mainstream foster carer families were recruited during 2022/23.

### 5. Delivering Cedars Emergency and Respite Provision

Much work has been done with Regulatory colleagues to realise our ambition of a new emergency and short break setting to enhance our offer for Children and Young people on the edge of care. Our new home CEDARS was Registered on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

We have reflected upon our very positive outcome in last year ILACS but are not complacent and remain committed in our drive to improve continuously and provide the best possible outcomes for Children and Families, which are reflected in the Strategic aims for the coming year which will be addressed later in the report.



Chris Bell

Assistant Director of Children's Services



James Stroyan

Group Director of People (DCS)

## Darlington Context

The past year has seen significant increases in the demand for services for Children and Families, with increases seen in the number of contacts received at the Front Door and the number of referrals for Social Work Assessments. The increase in demand has also been seen in our Early Help Services.

	Number of Referrals	Contacts to Referral Conversion	Rate of Referrals per 10,000	Rate of Assessments per 10,000	Number of Early Help Assessments
2020/21	413	8.9%	330.5	308.2	623
2021/22	514	8.7%	448.0	356.1	839
2022/23	902	16.6%	713.6	645.5	1650

	Rate of Child Protection Plans per 10,000	Rate of Child in Care per 10,000
2020/21	38.4	120.0
2021/22	53.0	123.0
2022/23	51.3	142.3

This increase in demand has continued in 2023/2024, with quarter 1 seeing a 13% increase in contacts received when compared to quarter 1 2022/2023. Similarly, referrals have continued to increase as have assessments.

## What is the quality and Impact of Social Work Practice and how do we know?

Our services are currently working in the context of significant and sustained increases for demand for services, with increasing numbers of children and families requiring support. We have maintained regular and robust performance management and oversight to understand the impact that these increases have had on service delivery and to also understand what is driving these changes.

Through Performance Management we have developed a clear understanding that the timeliness of our actions has declined, for example in relation to the completion of assessments, which were 69.3% and the timeliness of recording of statutory visits, 90% for Children on a CP Plan and 83.4% for Cared for Children. However, we have used our Quality assurance functions to clarify the impact on services and these reassure us that social workers are making effective and proportionate decisions and interventions with families, but in some circumstances, they are struggling to complete and record these interventions in a consistently timely manner.

In addition to the regular performance management, we have maintained the Weekly Review Meeting which analyses, through the lens of quality and impact, the decisions made at the front door and at the point of case allocation. This is continuing to provide a high level of oversight into practice, in real time, and help us understand the impact of our decision making upon children and families. Through this work we have identified an increasing contact to referral conversion rate and an increasing number of "No Further Action" Assessments, with 59.4% of Assessments concluding with no further action, an increase from 46.4% the previous year. A focused piece of work is underway to understand this change and to reflect in practice improvements in the coming year.

We continue to hold regular Practice Reviews, which is a collaborative approach to audit and understanding quality and impact. We have reflected upon findings from the ILACS about the benefit of family engagement and involvement in the process and have amended our processes to seek greater input from families in our audit process.

Our Practice Review audits are providing reassurance about the quality of services and the positive impact on families, in the context of the impact on timeliness performance as described. For the audits completed in 2023, it was found that 76% of Assessments and Analysis were Outstanding or Good, 70% of Plans were Outstanding or Good, 78% were found to have an overall intervention that was Outstanding or Good and 88% led to an Outstanding or Good outcome when considered in the context of the reason for the referral.

The Practice Reviews also found 75% of case files showing Outstanding or Good evidence of relational practice but did highlight that only 59% showed evidence of Outstanding or Good Management Oversight, which is consistent with some of the action plans identified following ILACS and is a key focus for the coming year.

Improvement are now being focused on ensuring that audits are collaborative and reflective. In addition, ensuring that feedback is given to practitioners and managers and that this incorporates clear actions plans for improvement is being incorporated into the audit process.

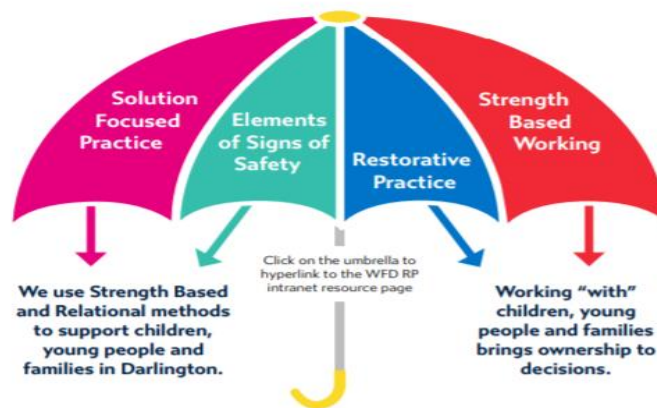
A new Practice Development Group was launched in June 2023, which replaced the activity and focus of the Quality Improvement Group. These meetings are chaired by the Assistant Director and the purpose is to understand the key practice themes emerging from our Quality Assurance activity. In particular the Monthly Practice Reviews and Weekly Review Meetings and to identify actions, share best practice and to address any thematic issues within practice, as gathered through quality assurance.

This Practice Development Group includes Heads of Service/Service Managers as well as Quality Assurance Leads, the Principal Social Worker, the Relational and Restorative Practice Lead and colleagues from the Performance team. This membership ensures that leaders are crucial to the ongoing development of our practice, and the culture that underpins our this, and they are essential to the effectiveness of the group moving forward and ensuring that it has a real impact. The group will have strong links into the Assistant Director clinics so that we gain a real sense of crossover and cohesion between performance and quality.

The group has thus far identified themed audits around re-referrals and no further action assessments and further development and support around reflective management oversight to be key priorities.

The overall focus in terms of quality centres around our Relational and Restorative Practice model and the evidence not only of the key elements of our Practice Umbrella being utilised but also on the impact of the interventions on children and families.

### RELATIONAL PRACTICE UMBRELLA



Solution Focused Practice	Elements of Signs of Safety	Restorative Practice	Strength Based Working
Solution Focused Practice concentrates on helping people move towards the future that they want and to learn what can be done differently by using their existing skills, strategies and ideas – rather than focusing on the problem.	Signs of Safety is a strengths-based, safety-orientated approach to casework designed for use throughout the safeguarding process. Darlington use elements of Signs of Safety when working with children young people and families.	Restorative Practice is based on developing dignity, healing, and strength in relationships. Restorative practice is a strategy that seeks to repair relationships that may have been damaged.	Strengths-based practice identifies and draws on strengths and assets allowing all parties to work together to determine the best outcome. This approach focuses on positive attributes of a person or a group, rather than the negative ones.

## Family Feedback

We have further developed our Quality Assurance Processes to strengthen our overall assessment of quality.

xxx has been really supportive to the family throughout her intervention she treats me like a human being as sometimes the perceptive can be like that social services don't do that.

"xxx came to my home to complete an initial visit and done some direct work with my children and referred them to support agencies which are also available to help. He has always been available to speak to, whether that be to obtain advice, support or information. xxx made me feel at ease when discussing sensitive information and I could not be more grateful for his involvement."

some family feedback

*"She made a big difference, a good difference."*

## The Experiences and Progress of Children in Need of Help and Protection

### Identifying and responding to children's needs and appropriate thresholds

A rise in contacts received by the Front Door has contributed to a busy year for the Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT). With the re-modelling of the Front Door in March 2020 a rise in the number of contacts received was predicted and the Front Door was designed to meet this demand, encouraging partners to contact CIAT with concerns for children, or for advice. However, what was not predicted was that towards the end of the pandemic there has been a significant rise in referrals to the Assessment and Safeguarding Teams, as well as a rise in referrals to the Building Stronger Families team. This has placed a great deal of pressure on the whole service and an ongoing understanding of what is driving the increase in referrals is essential; knowing ourselves and knowing our families has never been so important.

The increase in the number of contacts and the presenting issues are elements of helping to gain a picture of what life is like for a child and their family in Darlington, however this is only a small part of the bigger picture. We know that the increase has come about due to a variety of factors, e.g. the model introduced in 2020 that promotes conversation and stronger relationships with partners is about a conversation where the focus is not about meeting a defined threshold and viewing the

service as a ‘gateway’ to statutory services but rather a discussion and working together to gain the right outcome. This approach promotes ‘contacts’ being made. Societal factors have also played a huge part in the number of contacts received, as well as referrals to social care, however some of the factors that contributed to referrals to social care were present two years ago, yet the conversion rate doubled in 2022/23 (see table below), compared to the two previous years. Whilst the pandemic and issues such as poverty and mental health certainly need to be given weight in relation to any rationale for such an increase, we need to look at adapting the way we work and look more to our partners to help provide a more proportionate response to meet the needs of our children and their families in a way that during lockdown had not always been achieved.

	Number of Referrals	Contacts to Referral Conversion	Rate of Referrals per 10,000
2019/20	529	12.8%	440.8
2020/21	413	8.9%	330.5
2021/22	514	8.7%	448.0
2022/23	902	16.6%	713.6

Our referral rate per 10,000 has seen a sharp increase in 2022/23, for the last 5 reporting years we have been consistently below all benchmarking measures but the North-East rate of referrals at the end of 2022/23 (664.8) is 3.2% higher than in 2021/22. The regional rate of referrals was 4.2% higher than in pre-Covid 2019/20 (638.2). Darlington sits at 4<sup>th</sup> highest out of the 12 authorities for 2022/23, although physically we have received the least number of referrals. 7 of the 12 authorities have seen an increase compared with 2019/20.

Darlington has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest percentage of referrals being received from the Police, with only Durham above us. Both areas are covered by Durham Constabulary. A review is being carried out to establish what we might be doing differently to other local authorities, and whether this is another driver in the increase in referrals to social care.

What we know is that since moving out of the pandemic the primary drivers for the increase in referrals remain as poverty, domestic abuse/offending/violence, substance misuse and mental health. These issues are in the main impacting on our families and bringing about more involvement from Children’s Services. As we and partner agencies are feeling the pressure of increased workloads and stretched funding, along with staff retention and recruitment, it is vital that partnership working improves. This is an area of focus for Darlington; work is underway to further strengthen our partnerships and challenge one another on what more we can do individually and together.

It is evident that the success of the Front Door has improved relationships with partners and that continued success is reliant on this partnership. However, we have seen a decrease in external led early help and reduced involvement from universal services taking on Early Help Assessments and targeted work. This year we will draw on our strong partnerships to refresh our approach and the model used at the Front Door, this will revitalize the way in which we work. We will include partners in our vision to share the load and empower them to work with us to ensure that the right service at the right time is being provided; this should be the least intrusive and most proportionate.

In response to the above the Front Door team have invested in re-training the team in the conversational approach and relational methodology to better understand and implement the



model in the context of the increasing challenges to children and their families and the capacity and complexity issues faced by partner agencies.

We see the formulating of our Strategic Early Help Board as pivotal in setting the scene for how we want to work moving forward, with our strong Front Door service we will always ensure that first and foremost children are safe but wherever possible we will always make sure early intervention, whether this be provided by way of universal services, single external/internal agency or our Building Stronger Families team reaches families in a way that means families are strong, resilient, empowered and that any future harm and the need for statutory intervention is reduced.

We have seen an increase in re-referrals, 17.7% compared to 10.9% the previous year, and in response there is a monthly deep dive activity focused on each re-referral to establish the rationale and establish findings with an analytical and action-based approach taken. The deep dive is led by the Service Manager at the Children's Front Door but is an activity that includes other relevant members of SLT to ensure that findings are linked to learning in practice and focuses on decision making. Re-referrals with the same presenting issue are analysed in terms of the timescale within which they have been re-referred and analysis of patterns for individual teams and workers has also proved useful for targeted work around development and improvements in practice and management oversight and decision making. The previous C and F is also quality assured to check the purpose of assessment and content to ensure that the presenting issue was addressed. Any areas that were not addressed are highlighted between CIAT and A and S. Allocation to the previous worker is attempted in every re-referral as those established relationships are already there and this prevents the family having to repeat their story and journey.

## Making good decisions and providing effective help

A key element of our "Right Service at the Right time" approach is our strong Early Help offer via Building Stronger Families. In last year's ILACS it was noted that

*"Children and their families benefit from a well-designed early help offer. Children benefit from a wide range of interventions from the 'Building Stronger Families' early help service. Workers build effective relationships with children and families and have a wide range of experience and skills."*

Throughout 2022/23 there were 1,650 Early Help Assessments (EHA) started, 13.5% (223) of which were initiated by external agencies. This is an increase on 2021/22 (839 EHA's) but with a decrease on the proportion of externally started EHA's (19.2%). Recognition of the decrease in external EHAs, together with an increase in work in Building Stronger Families has brought this area of work into sharp focus and a clear understanding of where we are, together with working theories on why, are able to be well articulated by SLT, as well as the teams. Importantly, action is in place to address this, and it is very much a whole service approach to ensure that the right service is provided to families and at times this is via Universal services and lead professionals from external agencies. Prior to the pandemic partners were more likely to instigate and lead on EHAs but throughout the pandemic this became less likely, in part it can be understood as schools were not operating in the same way, health professionals were not engaging with families in the same way and other agencies

were working remotely, lessening the opportunity for these pieces of work to be identified as appropriate for families, and lessening the opportunities for discussions to take place between partners and families. The Front Door Service fell into a pattern whereby the outcome of a contact enquiry often considered only three options, 1, Building Stronger Families, 2 social care or 3 providing advice and recording the information. A lack of consideration for Universal services or external EHAs meant the discussions were not held with partners and this contributed to lower numbers. Due to this the Front Door Service and Building Stronger Families are now working together to ensure they continually question what the right service is, widening the options and working with partners to explore options. The development of the Early Help and Prevention Strategic Board will assist greatly with this, as will the Early Help Strategy currently being devised.

In 2022/23 there have been 879 individual children and 179 individual adults confirmed as receiving direct work by a BSF worker. They have conducted a total of 2,016 sessions with them this reporting year. The BSF workers have also worked with children open to social care with a total of 283 sessions. Our vision for joined up working as one service works well in these situations and we are working hard to improve on this further by looking at moving to a locality based offer for Early Help that fits with the locality based work carried out in social care team, this will assist with relational working with partners, families and across services and teams.

For children and families require statutory support, we have continued to see an increase in the number of referrals during 2023, with a 50% increase on 2022 numbers. This has also translated into an increase in assessments, strategy meetings and section 47 enquiries started. There is an actual and percentage decrease in the number of strategies concluding with a request for ICPC and a decrease in children becoming subject to a child protection plan.

*“When children need protection, strategy meetings take place swiftly and these are well attended by partner agencies. Information-sharing is detailed, and decision-making is appropriate”*

*“Resultant child protection enquiries are thorough, with a clear assessment of risk, followed by appropriate actions to safeguard children.”*

The conversion rate from strategy meeting to Section 47 inquiry, and onto ICPC is monitored the management team. Any significant deviations from historic or geographic norms are scrutinised to ensure that changes are positive for families. In order to strengthen oversight further, managers receive a report on the reasons for the outcomes of section 47 investigations. Scrutiny of these outcomes will feed into the quality improvement work that is ongoing for strategy meetings. The intention of the work is to ensure that we work with families at the lowest appropriate level and are not subjecting families to intrusive assessments or interventions that are not necessary.

Regional data indicates that Darlington’s section 47 investigations are not only above the regional rate but have increased by 38.3% on pre-Covid figures. This is the second highest increase in the region. Conversely the numbers of children progressing to an ICPC are lower than the regional rate and have reduced by 15.5% from pre-covid figures.

In response to the outlying data and performance in this area we have been successful in securing some support via the Sector Led Improvement small supports funds for some focused peer challenge around our approach to strategy and section 47s and this will report back later this year and be incorporated into our practice development.

Where children are subject to a child protection plan, the length of time spent on a plan is closely monitored. With work ongoing to reduce the number of children being on a child protection plan for less than 6 months and, conversely, more than 2 years. All children who become subject to child protection procedures for a second or subsequent time are reviewed by senior managers.

Assessment numbers have also increased with the increase in referrals with 1,461 assessments being completed in 2022/23. The equates to a near doubling of the rate per 10,000 child population to 645.5. While children and families assessments remain of good quality, with the quality and audit findings indicating the “the direction on assessments has continued to improve with evidence of some good quality analysis”; the timeliness of assessment completion has been impacted. Only 18.7% of assessments were completed in less than 25 working days in 2022/23, with 30.7 % taking over the timescale of 45 working days. An action plan has been put in place to offer social workers an agreed amount of overtime each month to complete tasks and support from managers across the service to identify and facilitate case closures and transfers.

*“Assessments provide evidence of how historical factors about children, and their families, are taken into account and how they are fully analysed to understand families’ strengths and risks. Social workers seek to understand the context in which children are living, the strengths of the family and their protective factors, as well as the risks children might be facing. When appropriate, the voice of the child is clear, and it informs assessments. The early and appropriate identification of the needs of unborn babies has been enhanced by increased management oversight and through well-embedded tracking and monitoring mechanisms.”*

## Management Oversight of Frontline Practice

There is a solid grip and effective oversight of the Front Door in terms of practice and decision making. We have a committed, stable and experienced management team; and have built strong relationships with our partners.

Our weekly review meeting (WRM) is a well-embedded, highly effective forum where senior leaders and the quality team review contacts and referrals that come through the Front Door each week. The forum allows senior leaders to understand problems families are facing in the ‘here and now’ and helps gain an accurate picture of what children and families are experiencing. WRM is a safeguarding check point and integral to helping senior leaders know what practice is like and have oversight, and accountability, ensuring children are safeguarded with proportionate and appropriate response to risk and need. It helps us to identify any emerging issues in real time, and to take remedial actions to support practitioners and managers to address these. Senior leaders now provide better support

those involved directly with the child, understanding and appreciating the hard work and commitment from the many professionals who are already, or may become, involved in working with our families.

We rely on great relationships with both internal and external partners. Some of our partners have attended our WRM to observe. They have found this useful in identifying good practice and highlighting areas they look to improve in their own organisations. For example, promoting relational practice across their services.

*Practice Review Meetings* allow us to understand that all our social workers receive regular reflective supervision from their team manager, with investment in supervision training and a revised supervision policy in place.

*“Practice review meetings provide a detailed insight into the quality of social work practice and have informed senior leaders’ understanding about the quality of service and they help in identifying the challenges to the service. Inspection of Darlington local authority children’s services 10 October to 21 October 2022 10 Leaders undertake regular case file audits to ensure that they are focused on the quality of social work practice.”*

*“While most social workers report that they find supervision helpful and an opportunity for reflection and task-setting, written supervision records do not always reflect the richness of discussions and often contain actions that are process-driven.”*

However, there remain some inconsistencies in ensuring this is recorded onto the child’s file in a timely manner. Work has been undertaken to amend our Supervision policy to develop a RAG rating system for the frequency of supervision of individual children, allowing managers to focus on high quality reflection and management guidance. Changes have been made to the recording system and piloted with selected teams. This remains a focus for improvement and was referenced in the most recent Focused Visit by Ofsted. Service managers, Team managers and Advanced practitioners have all attended development sessions on reflective, relational & restorative supervision. This is helping to ensure that children and families are receiving proactive, evidence-based services while avoiding drift and delay in care planning.

Management oversight and grip is evident on most children’s records. Management direction at allocation is reviewed as part of the WRM and is of good quality. When a contact is received on an open family the Team Manager or Advanced Practitioner routinely records their analysis of the information received and any required actions on the child’s file. Further work is required to improve management direction throughout our involvement with our families, ensuring that plans are progressed effectively and that social workers are supported in the decision making, again this was referenced in the most recent Focused Visit.

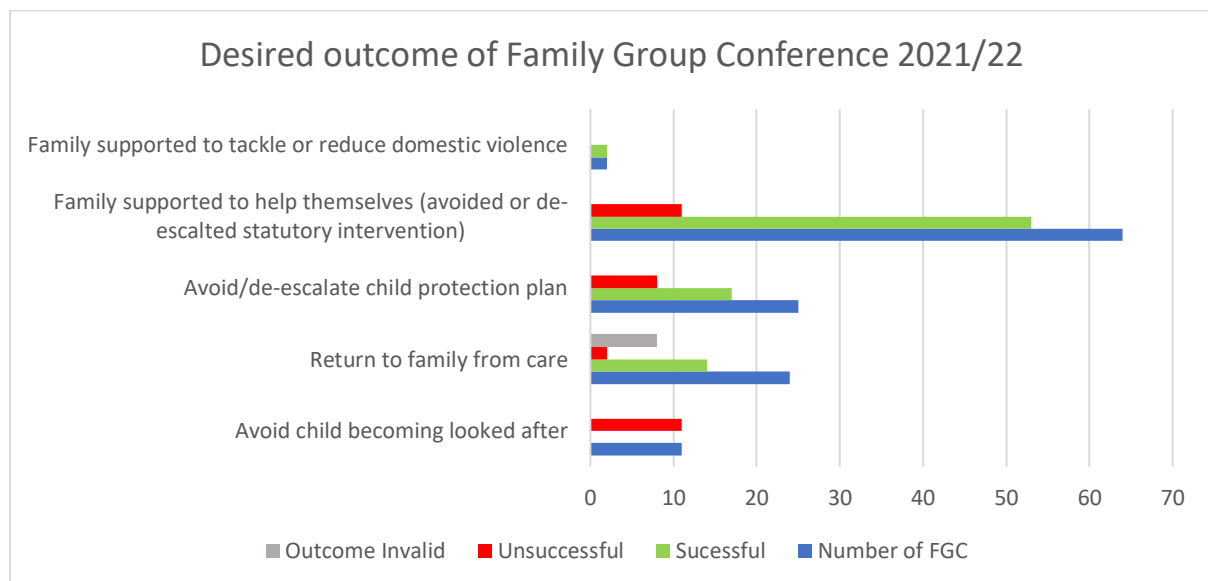
*“Well-developed senior manager-led panel arrangements are providing effective oversight of children’s plans. This provides direction and guidance to managers and social workers in their work with children and families and is helping to reduce drift and delay.”*

## Participation and direct work with children and families

*“A relationship-based model of assessment and care planning is being developed and is embedding in social work practice. A strong emphasis is placed on workers building trusting relationships with children, their families and support networks. This is evident in some very effective early help interventions, child in need and child protection services. Workers maximise the use of local strengths and resources, including parents, extended family, family friends and community networks. Relationship-building is at the core of the current service design and is developing in service delivery.”*

The development of our Family Group Conference offer is key to further improving the participation of children and families in the co-production of plans and delivery of services. An FGC duty worker is co-located with the Assessment and Safeguarding duty team, to promote increased understanding of the FGC process and to allow dynamic discussions regarding the appropriateness of Family Group Conferencing at the earliest opportunity. Recommendations for an FGC are routinely included in management direction at allocation and reviewed in supervision.

115 Family Group Conferences were held in 2022/23, an increase from 92 the previous year and 56 reviews were held, an increase from 49 the previous year. We review 12 months after the FGC it’s effectiveness so we can see the long-term benefits of FGC. The below data shows the impact of 2021/2022 FGC’s when reviewed in April 2023.



Note - We will review 2022/2023 FGC’s in April 2024.

In relation to the lack of successful in preventing children becoming looked after we identified, following a deep dive audit, that these referrals were coming into FGC too late meaning we didn't have a chance to work with the family to prevent an escalation. This has been the focus of our work over the last 12 months, we are now seeing referrals come at an earlier stage, which should ensure we see an improvement in this area.

Social workers and family workers in the assessment and safeguarding teams regularly undertake direct work with children and families, however the timely recording of this work needs to be strengthened.

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

At the Front Door we have specialist teams, SWITCH who work with children and young people with issues in relation to substance misuse and Missing and Exploited Team (MET). The Missing and Exploited Team has been recently created strengthened Darlington's response and commitment to 'Harm Away from Home' by offering a dedicated response. MET is working across all services, and external partners, to develop a shared vision for addressing the needs of children being exploited and prevention for others being harmed and drawn into criminal activity. This area of work is already proving successful with a focus on intervention, plans and action, changing the way in which we think and act.

Children who go missing from home are supported by a Missing from Home Worker, commissioned from Barnardo's. The worker offers a Return Home Interview (RHI) and engages the young person in discussion around their missing episodes. This helps them to develop insight into the risks associated with going missing and identify strategies to prevent this happening again. The recommendations made by the worker are well thought out but do not always inform social care assessments and plans. They can remain as stand-alone vitally important pieces of work. Further work is being done to support workers to ensure that assessments are informed further by RHIs. We were able to offer 84.6% of RHI within 72 hours, an improvement from 75.8% the previous year, and were able to engage 59.1% of young people with an RHI, an improvement from 51.2% the previous year.

Managers in Assessment and Safeguarding (A&S) are working closely with colleagues in the Missing and Exploited Team to improve and develop our adolescent safeguarding offer. This is to share best practice and support improvement of young person's care planning, including further training and support for social workers as well as awareness raising sessions.

We are currently supporting 13 children and young people who identify their ethnicity as Gypsy Romany Traveller, and tailor our approaches in accordance with their cultural values and beliefs.

Our Children with Disabilities Service is now fully integrated and co-located with our locality assessment and safeguarding teams. Providing a specialist service to those children and families who require their direct support, as well as acting as a resource for the wider social work team,

often coming alongside colleagues from A&S to advise and support with children and young people whose needs may be complex but unassessed.

*“Social workers complete good-quality assessments with disabled children and their families. This informs appropriate service and support delivery, including good-quality short-break provision and access to direct payments. Children are visited frequently, and their wishes are heard, acted on and understood by social workers who have well-established relationships with them and their families.”*

### Areas of Strength and Areas for Development

<b><u>Areas of Strength</u></b>	<b><u>Areas for Development</u></b>
<b>Assessments and risk assessments are strong, considering the child’s history in context and clearly articulating risk</b>	Improve the evidence of relational practice in all recording including direct work, the “voice of the child”, in chronologies, case files and plans
<b>Weekly Referral Meeting – giving clear oversight, Strong Challenge and Strong Support</b>	Proportionate and timely assessments, directed by management at allocation. Reviewed throughout the assessment process to prevent delay.
<b>Relational Practice embedding across whole service</b>	Improve understanding of reasons for “No further action” outcomes to assessment, particularly in relation to children and families who have been subject to section 47 investigations
<b>Increasing level of Family Group Conferencing</b>	Increase the use and understanding of contingency planning for children, including encouraging families to do so within their FGC
<b>Robust oversight of legal and permanence tracking</b>	Increase the use of relational language in all written communications with families and letters before proceedings in particular
	Improve the timeliness and recording of management supervision. Ensure that supervision clearly gives direction and drives progress on children’s plans

# The Experience and Progress in Care and Care Leavers

## Making good decisions

Senior Management oversight and approval is in place for all requests for a child to become looked after, high support and high challenge supports scrutiny of work undertaken. In most families input from Keeping Families Together and/or Family Group Conferencing is recommended where this has not already happened. This ensures that in most families decisions made for children to come into care are timely, proportionate and based upon a clear, recorded understanding of the issues and risks.

Numbers of Children in Care has increased, with 322 Children in Care at the end of 2022/23, compared to 273 the previous year. It is recognised that this increase is within the context of significant increases in referrals for statutory support for children and families.

Legal gateway meetings are held for all children where consideration is being given to commencing Public Law Outline or Care Proceedings. Senior managers chair these meetings and legal advice is taken to ensure that only those children and families that require this level of intervention receive it. Following on from this initial meeting, Permanence Planning and Tracking Panel (PPTP) meetings are scheduled in on a regular basis to ensure that PLO and Court proceeding progress without drift or delay. The introduction of a social work information proforma, and the improved use of analysis, is evidencing decision making more clearly.

*There is rigorous management oversight of pre-proceedings under the Public Law Outline through a range of senior management panels. This means that when risk to children escalates, children's plans do not drift. Letters to parents before proceedings are swiftly completed and set out in detail what is expected of them. However, letters use language that does not reflect the local authority's relational approach.*

*When care proceedings are initiated, a range of panels provide effective senior management oversight of social work practice so that children's plans progress at pace, and within their timescales. These arrangements provide robust scrutiny and ensure a strong focus to support effective and timely permanence planning. Knowledgeable social workers complete detailed assessments and good-quality court reports. This assists the court in making well-informed permanence decisions for children. Care proceedings progress in a timely way.*

Following on from this initial meeting, Permanence Planning and Tracking Panel (PPTP) meetings are scheduled in on a regular basis to ensure that PLO and Court proceeding progress without drift or delay. Our aspiration is that all recording of legal processes should be relational, specifically written with the idea that the child will read it, if not now, then at some point in the future, supporting young people to understand their history and the decisions made in a way that can support any ongoing recovery from trauma.

A review of the wording of our 'Letter before proceedings' is being undertaken by the management team with support from our legal colleagues. The aim of this review is to make the LBP more



accessible in terms of readability and more relational in language, thus improving understanding and engagement from parents. Children and their families are held at the centre of our planning for children; and exploration of family placement options via FGC and viability assessments is the first consideration for a child being removed from parental care.

Well-informed and timely viability assessments of family members are completed, which inform children's long-term living arrangements. This means that children benefit from living with their own family and with their siblings when this is in their best interests.

Once a permanent plan is identified, Permanence Planning Panel meetings take place. Meetings are chaired by a senior manager who provides scrutiny and ensures focus on understanding the child's journey in care, this supports effective permanence decision making. They consider the appropriateness of any use of Section 20 for Children Looked After and the rationale; and that where Care Orders are in place they are regularly reviewed with clear actions and timescales. Permanence Tracking panel meetings also take place with relevant operational managers and the Principal Solicitor to ensure a focus on permanence planning, with the view to prevent drift and delay for children.

*Well-developed senior manager-led panel arrangements are providing effective oversight of children's plans. This provides direction and guidance to managers and social workers in their work with children and families and is helping to reduce drift and delay.*

*Early permanence planning is well considered by social workers, and management oversight of permanence decisions is robust. Timely and good quality viability assessments of connected carers ensure that arrangements for children are safe and appropriate.*

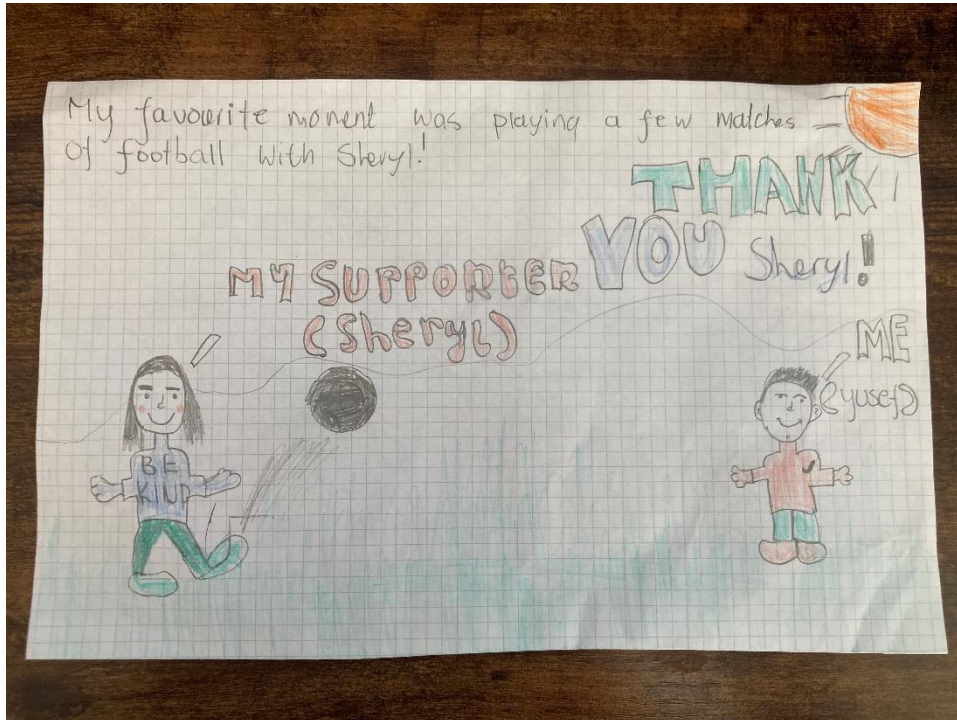
*A strong emphasis is placed on securing legal permanence for children through the making of special guardianship orders. Special guardianship is seen as an immensely important permanence option for children. The preparation, advice and support which are provided for special guardians is matched to the preparation, advice and support which are available to foster carers and adopters.*

Discharge of Care Orders and reunification to parent's care or Placement with Parents regulation arrangements take place are carefully planned and managed. A reunification pathway has been produced for the Looked After Through Care team which identifies the role of KFT, FGC and the IRO. Decisions to reunify children to their family's care are made following robust assessment and overseen by a senior management at a Placement Planning Meeting and subsequently reviewed to ensure Care Orders are discharged at an appropriate point.

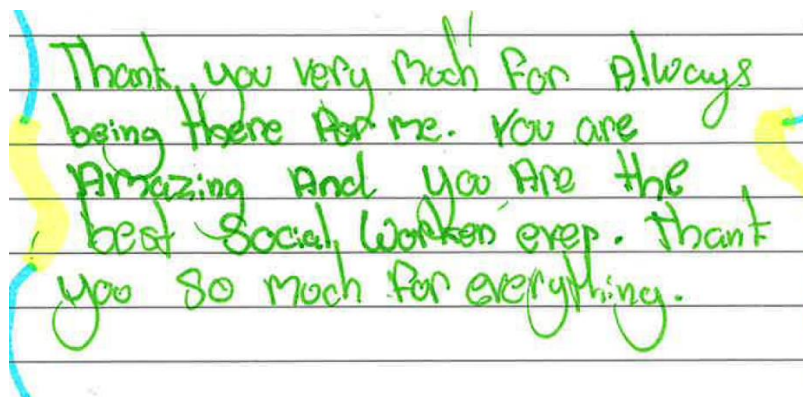
We are undertaking collaborative audits with Cafcass to understand why we are seeing an increase in Care Orders at home with parents. This will lead into wider development work across the service including collaborative focus groups with Cafcass and social care to explore and address this. We have completed audits of all Care Orders at home in February 2023 to explore some of the themes which include helping our Social Workers understand the wider impact of Care Orders at home, the law in relation to this and how to better use Supervision Orders. We plan to see a reduction in this over the year.

### Participation and direct work with children in care and care leavers

Children are regularly visited and seen alone by their social worker. This is a strength, as it gives children stability and helps them to feel valued. Social workers ensure that the views of children are regularly sought, they are incorporated into assessments and reviews, and inform their plans. Children report having good relationships with their social workers and IRO's. IRO's visit children at their homes and ensure that children are listened to.



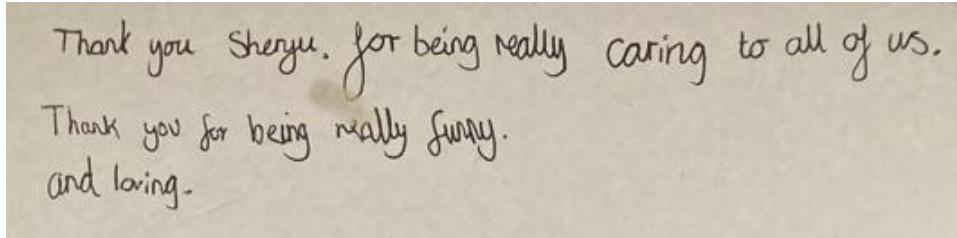
Social workers engage children in direct work to help understand how they feel and what their views are.



Children are also encouraged to communicate via the "Mind of my Own" app. There is training for staff on the app and training for foster carers to support children to use the app.

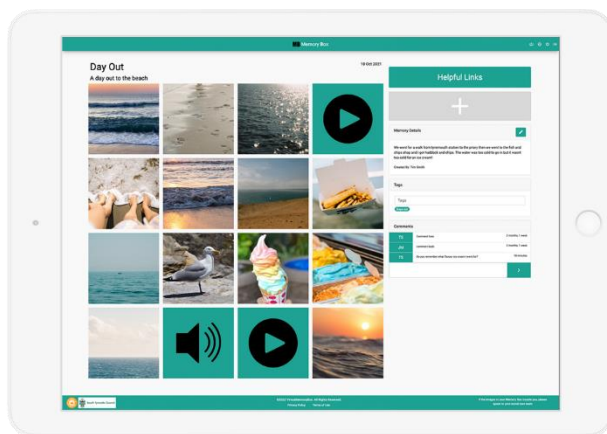
3286 statutory visits for Children in Care (CIC) were carried out during 22/23, 83.4% (2741) were within timescale.

Social workers are proud of the achievements of children, and we provide regular updates to Corporate Parenting Panel about achievements of cared for children and care leavers.



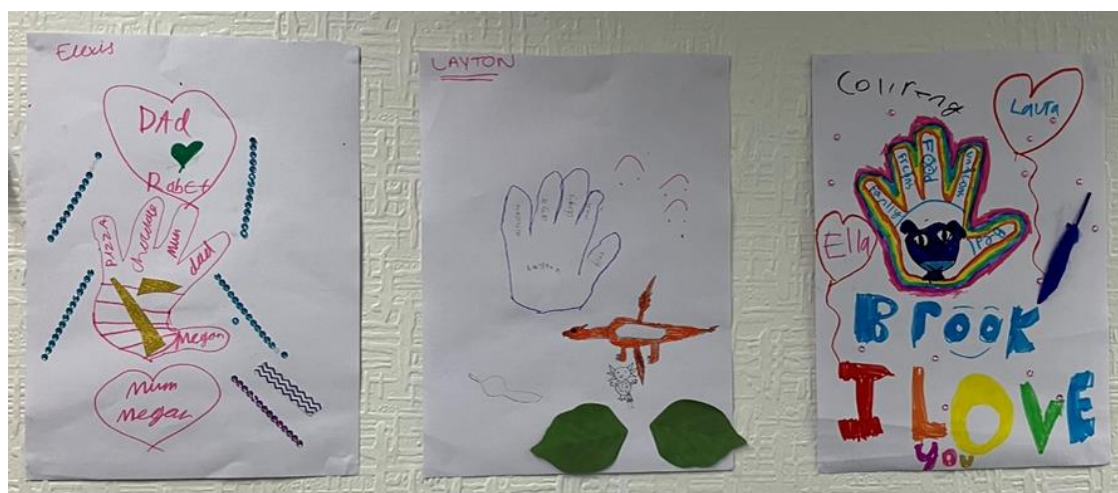
Our Corporate Parenting Panel grows from strength to strength. Young people attend Corporate Parenting Panel and share their views to help influence change. These meetings take place face to face. The relationship between young people and panel members continues to thrive and develop, young people are sharing their views and challenging the Service appropriately. Their views influence the plans of the service, for example through the Promises Tree and Care Leavers Covenant.

Throughout 2022-2023 work has been ongoing with Blue Cabin, North Tyneside, and Gateshead Councils to develop a Creative Life Story model of practice. Children have engaged in "All about me", "More about me" and Therapeutic Life story work. Staff have had access to extensive training and resources. Funding was initially provided via the DfE "What Works" programme, we have secured additional funding for this valuable work to continue in 2022-2023. 65 looked after children have benefitted from this work to date and this has led to increased understanding of their history, key decisions made and help them move forward and recover. The funding will include music sessions for foster carers and babies.



We are in the process of securing a virtual memory box to assist in our delivery of life story work. This will be a confidentially secure virtual space which parents, children, carers, teachers and social workers can all feed in to by storing memories, photographs and video/audio recordings. These can also all be printed and captured in a hard copy.

The Children in Care Council (the Darlo Care Crew) ensures that children and young people can influence service development and practice. Our Darlo Care Crew recently looked at what the Promise Tree meant to them.



Children value being able to participate on staff interview panels and have supported with the recruitment of the Assistant Director, Heads of Service, Team Managers and Social Workers.

We have an active Care Leavers Forum who contribute to service development. They have recently been involved in developing a poster/leaflet explaining 'Staying Close' and came up with a proposed name of 'Here 4 You' which is currently under wider consultation with the young people.

Children and young people are currently involved in developing a new name for the Looked After Through Care team.

## Helping and Protecting

### Missing and Exploited

Our work with children who go missing and who are vulnerable to exploitation, or who are being exploited is evolving and improving at pace. A review of the Missing and Exploited Operational Meeting is underway to ensure this is the most effective arena for sharing information and that action planning is in place.

A deep dive review of C and F assessments has helped us understand that that harm away from home is not always a feature within the assessment and a working group is being established to work across all teams to improve this area of practice.

## Health

72.4% of Initial Health Assessments completed in 2022/23 were requested within 7 days, this is a drop of almost 10% from 2022/23. Managers attend a fortnightly tracking meeting with colleagues from both relevant health trusts, alongside DBC colleagues from our Performance and Business Support teams to identify and address any delay. Performance colleagues have attended a workshop run by Health partners to explore any issues further. Feedback received from our health colleagues has been positive

90.5% of required health assessment reviews completed by end 2021/22 . Of the 18 children and young people who did not have a health review 7 of them (3.7%) are refusing to have one currently. We continue to emphasise the benefits of having a check-up with Young People

Delays in adoption medicals related to the Somerset judgment have now all been addressed. Further issues with delay (due to sickness absence of our medical advisor) were identified and quickly addressed by appointing additional medical advisors for Darlington. This also builds resilience into the process for the future. We have worked proactively with our Regional Adoption Agency to progress children, where appropriate, into foster to adopt arrangements, thus avoiding delays for them.

*Adoption is considered for those children unable to live with their birth parents. Timely decisions are informed by comprehensive social work assessments to match adopters to children effectively. Detailed child permanence reports provide information to support children in understanding the reason for their plan. Adopters report that they receive effective training and support to prepare them to adopt their child. Life-story work, including later life letters for children, are sensitively completed to a very high standard by social workers who use creative tools with children to inform their life-story work.*

Care leavers have a 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. 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.

Development is underway to focus our therapeutic offer for children and young people. There are three therapeutic practitioners who will now support all children who have a social worker. The offer is being developed to include a thinking space for foster carers, regular support for children's homes, PACE training and DDP therapy.

From September 2023 all care leavers have access to 'Ask Jan' which is a support offer designed specifically for care experienced young people. Ask Jan Membership includes ALL of the following services:

- A 24-hour counselling helpline with access to a BACP accredited counsellor
- Up to 8 face to face counselling sessions if assessed and agreed by the counsellor
- Personal finance advice – mortgages, pensions, insurance, debt, and savings

- Nutrition, exercise, stress and wellbeing advice
- Specialist advice helplines including housing, legal and citizens advice 8am to 8pm
- Access to an enhanced wellbeing App My Possible Self
- Cognitive behavioural therapy – available online or via the App
- Discounts and special offers on days out and activities with The Max Card
- Access to all other Rees Foundation projects

## Learning and Development

### Attendance of Vulnerable Pupils

Suspensions for pupils in both primary and secondary phases are above national average. The local authority has taken a pro-active multi-agency response to school attendance. Working alongside a DFE advisor, focussed work has been undertaken to identify and address key issues impacting attendance. Recently the local authority has installed liquid Logic EYES and all local schools have agreed to supply live attendance feeds. The system integrates with the social care MIS.

The Educational psychology service has provided schools with a toolkit to support children with EBSA. The Virtual School has supported social care colleagues in promoting the attendance of children with a social worker.

These actions have had a positive impact and though absence levels are above the pre-pandemic levels, Darlington is slightly above national average attendance for all pupils. When Disadvantaged groups are compared Darlington is 0.7% better than national which is significant for this cohort. Similarly, Darlington is in line with national average or better than national average for Persistent and Severely Persistently absent disadvantaged pupils.

### Fair Access and Elective Home Education

Fair Access in Darlington is undertaken by the multi-agency Vulnerable Pupil Panel. A small number of children are considered through fair access each year, with the vast majority of pupils securing places through normal admissions procedures.

There is a full-time EHE Advisor who work with schools and families who are considering EHE. A significant proportion of Darlington's EHE pupils are from our GRT community. The GRT community are supported with an education service

## Stability and Permanence

Where a decision is made that a child needs to come into care there is a focus on identifying the most appropriate family member who could provide care and a viability assessment is undertaken, to provide the basis for a regulation 24 placement. The fostering team become involved to commence the connected care fostering assessment, and to supervise and support the carer. On occasions more than one family member will be identified and assessed, to assist in determining the most suitable family member to provide care. When children are with fully approved connected foster carers and subject of care orders there is an ongoing focus on achieving permanence via an alternative legal order including SGO or CAO. This focus is maintained via case supervision, LAC reviews, Permanence Planning Panels and the Permanence Tracking Panel.

In January 2022 we had 14% of our children in care within Kinship placements, and this is 17% as of June 2023 and including children placed with parents we currently have 34% of our children in care living with family members compared to 26% in January 2022

For those children who are in mainstream foster care placements, there is a focus on achieving a long-term fostering match to secure permanence, and Children and Families assessments are undertaken to identify the child's needs and establish whether the foster carer can meet need. If the placement is positive and the carer can meet long term need to adulthood and potentially into Staying Put arrangements a long-term matching report will be produced and presented to the Fostering Panel for their consideration. Development is underway for a training session to be delivered in partnership with care experienced young people to strengthen what it means to be long-term matched and to think about the long-term challenges that may present in later years for children. This has been identified as part of our ongoing focus on improving stability for our children.

Children live in safe and secure placements. Wherever possible, children only move in line with their care plan. When children do move to another placement, careful planning takes place. We are continuing to increase the numbers of children in care who live with extended family members in well assessed and supported kinship care arrangements.

The last year has seen significant challenges to placement sufficiency, which in turn has led to deterioration in placement stability. We have seen our short-term placement instability rise to 13.7% from 11% the previous year, and our long-term stability deteriorate to 58.7% from 74% the previous year. This is a priority area of focus in the forthcoming year. Analysis of all children who have experienced instability has been undertaken and this has identified clear themes. To improve this, training is being developed with lived experience trainers in relation to caring for looked after teenagers.

Sourcing placements for children is a continuing challenge and for some children they may need to stay in short term 'bridging' placement until an appropriate placement is sourced.

At this time, we have one child who is in an unregulated placement. This young person has complex mental health needs which mean finding a placement who can 'match' him with other young people

is challenging. This young person's plan is reviewed weekly, risk assessed and there is a high level of oversight.

Sufficiency remains a challenge for Darlington. Our Sufficiency Statement demonstrates a clear understanding of the needs of Darlington children and young people and outlines our priorities for service development.

There is a programme of incremental replacement of the existing three directly provided children's homes and repurposing the existing residential accommodation to maximise the range and volume of directly provided Ofsted registered accommodation. One of the children's homes has moved to a new build property, and the previous accommodation is being repurposed into a short breaks service providing in reach, outreach and overnight accommodation. This will support prevention and escalation avoidance; will help to address bridging placements which will further improving placement stability.

A strong and effective partnership approach is in place between commissioners, operational colleagues and providers. We have been successful in developing bespoke arrangements with local providers including a bed reservation arrangement in a new step down to fostering residential care home, and with IFAs whereby they provide advance notice when a new foster carer is recruited in Darlington or a child is leaving a placement in Darlington.

We take a proactive approach through our placement tracker meeting where all external placements are reviewed to ensure continued appropriateness and positive outcomes for the child/young person.

Low incidence complex care needs remain a significant sufficiency challenge, and Darlington is proactively involved in subregional work with health colleagues to develop a joint service focused on positive behaviour and trauma informed support.

We currently have a bespoke transition to adulthood placement (court ordered with DOLS) for a young person with extremely complex learning difficulties and mental health needs. They are currently being supported in their own accommodation with care provided through a CQC registered provider commissioned by health colleagues.

Children maintain meaningful relationships with their foster carers into adulthood through "Staying Put" arrangements. At the end of March 2022 there were 9 young people in Staying Put arrangements with their previous Darlington Borough Council Foster Carer, and 3 young people with their IFA carer. This is an increase of one young person since March 2021

When placements are under pressure, placement stability meetings take place at the earliest opportunity and support is offered to help maintain the placement. Where appropriate children and young people can have planned respite care, giving their main carer some time out to recharge. Foster carers are encouraged to develop good support networks, so that they feel supported by their own families and friends.



In November 2022 we launched a Fostering Network Mockingbird constellation, where a “hub” foster carer supports a constellation of 6 other foster carers and develop a community of foster carers and children which will enhance placement stability and reduce changes of placement for children. This is working well and carers involved have spoken positively about the support it has brought them.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are welcomed and are well supported by the Looked After Through Care Team. Following referral via the National Transfer Scheme, suitable accommodation is identified, enabling young people to begin to feel safe. Children are provided with access to an interpreter and legal advice to support their status applications. They are given opportunities to learn English, practise their religion and to develop their friendship networks with connections to neighbouring local authorities.

As of April 2023, we have supported and found age-appropriate accommodation for 17 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. This has been a fantastic achievement and would not have been possible without a support from colleagues across commissioning, Virtual Head of School team, Looked after through care and Leaving care colleagues. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children have access to a drop-in specifically for them and a Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme supported by our Youth Justice team.

### Care leavers and transitions

The team have continued to work hard to ensure that care leavers up to the age of 25 years have been well supported in their understanding of finances, accommodation, education, and employment. This has been demonstrated in strong transition and pathway planning.

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.

#### Leaving Care Offer

There is a comprehensive local offer, combined with a plethora of creative and generous opportunities from the wider council and its partners, and is contributing to the positive outcomes for care leavers. This offer was further been strengthened in 2022 when Darlington Borough Council made the commitment to sign the Care leaver Covenant and is now actively working with private businesses in the local area to support in continuing with the positive outcome for care leavers in Darlington.

Care leavers regularly engage with their PA and other staff within the team. There are regular activities for care leavers to come together.



Thank you for an amazing day, I actually felt like I fitted in for once and I felt normal, it was amazing experience, such lovely memories

Quote from a young person

The care leaver base is a hive of activity from cookery classes, mother and baby groups, budgeting workshops, drops ins, leaving care forums and access to the 'leaving care larder' Care leavers are offered lots of opportunities for to new things and socialising through regular day trips.

The team has strong working relationships with the Job Centre in Darlington and in 2022 the joint protocol was updated and strengthen to ensure that they receive an enhanced service. 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).

For those not in Education, Training and Employment (NEET) the team hold a monthly NEET reduction group comprising of Personal Advisor's, the virtual school, Keeping In Touch Workers, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and training providers with the focus on get those young people re-engaged with some form of education training and employment.

Opportunities are improving in the Darlington Borough Council '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. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> young person to have been given this opportunity since the programme was launched. We currently have a care leaver employed within the Looked After Throughcare Team on a Participation Apprenticeship, again this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> care leaver who has benefitted from this role within the team since the role was created.

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 Mental Health Nurse on a weekly basis with no waiting times. 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 remains stable, with 7 in Staying Put arrangements. 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. This Taster Flat support has been further enhanced in April 2022 with additional floating support commissioned. 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.

In May 2023 we secured funding from the DfE for 'Staying Close'. Our young people have identified they'd like this to be called 'Here for You'. This will enhance our existing offer for young people leaving care with dedicated Personal Advisors who work across 7 days, access to Lifelong Links and 24-hour mental health support.



what they would like to see change in the future.

In July 2023 we successfully saw being care experienced made a protected characteristic in Darlington and this makes Darlington just the third council in the region to make this move. Four care experienced young people spoke directly at the council meeting about the discrimination they face and

## Areas of Strength and Areas for Development

<b><u>Areas of Strength</u></b>	<b><u>Areas for Development</u></b>
Excellent and aspirational support for care leavers including the addition of 'Staying Close'	Children are experiencing instability in relation to their placements which is linked to placement sufficiency
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children are well supported, have access to an interpreter and tailored activities to meet their needs	Embedding Staying Close and evaluating its effectiveness
The Mockingbird constellation is working well and supporting foster carer retention.	Focus on ensuring children placed at home are only subject to a Care Order only for as long as necessary and their plans are progressed in line with their needs
Children are known and understood by their social worker and/or Personal Advisor and they are engaging in their plans.	Develop the therapeutic offer for children with a clear programme of intervention and support
Participation of young people is embedded at all levels with a strong Corporate Parenting panel and engagement in interviews/service development.	

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

The service has continued to receive strong support Corporately and Strategically over the past year, despite some significant changes in the Leadership. A newly elected Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Children and Young People are now in place and are very well engaged with the priorities of the Service and complement the support we have continued to receive from the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors.

We continue to encourage and embrace a High Support, High Challenge approach within Children’s Scrutiny and Corporate Parenting Panel, with the items and topics focused on improving outcomes and having the most positive impact on residents of the Borough.

As Senior Leaders we continue to have the highest aspirations for our children, young people and families. As part of a People’s Directorate, led by a Director for Children and Adults, we recognise the benefits of a whole family approach and our Relational Practice model drives the work we do with Children and their families. We have this year completed Restorative Leadership training with the Senior Leadership Team, with the intention of this providing the platform to provide to support our Team Managers to further develop their own relational practice and thus empowering front line workers to mirror this approach with their families. It was extremely pleasing and satisfying to see that this approach was being seen during last year’s ILACS.

Despite the positive OFSTED ILACS outcome last year, we are not complacent and are hugely ambitious for our services. We have reflected on areas identified for development, particularly in relation to Management Oversight and our approach to Strategies and Section 47 Investigations. We are utilising our Restorative Leadership work to support Team Managers to improve management oversight and the level of reflection within supervision. We have also developed “Xtra Space” which is a dynamic approach to peer support, training and reflection to enhance the offer to front lone workers. When looking at our approaches to Strategies and Section 47 Investigations we recognise that performance data has us as outliers. We have been successful in securing a Sector Led Improvement small bid which will focus on an analysis of our practice in this area and provide some critical oversight and challenge.

Whilst we completed the DfE Supported Strengthening Families Programme some time ago, the impact of its principles on our practice and plans for development continue to be significant. We are currently in the next phase of our Strengthening Families Plan and through this process have built upon the previous progress to develop the following:

Strengthening Families 2023 -24	
Principles	Strategic Priorities
Great Social Work Practice	Embed a Restorative Culture
	Grow how we learn and improve
Family First	More Solutions through FGC
Business Efficient	Better Capability to Support Children
	Best Use of resources

## Learning Culture

As described within our Strategic Priorities, the development of the learning culture across the service is a key priority for the coming year. Over the past year we have continued with the Experts in Practice program, which is supporting 3 practitioners to develop their knowledge and skills in 3 key priority areas; Harm Away from Home, Trauma Informed Practice and Creative Life Story Work. The aim of this is to allow individual workers to develop their skills, knowledge and practice and to share their learning with the wider workforce to build our overall knowledge and skills in these areas.

We have also developed Xtra Space over the past year, which is a drop in learning, development and peer support facility to complement the direct supervision and management oversight that front line workers receive. Coordinated by our Workforce Development Team, Xtra Space utilises our own internal staff in a Peer Support/Mentoring capacity, facilitating and delivering briefing and training sessions, while offering bespoke confidential space for staff to ask questions, talk about areas they may be finding difficult and have 'Xtra Space' to reflect and learn.

*I previously found it difficult to see how we link models to practice, and work in Xtra Space made it very easy today to understand. The support materials, handouts and explanations were great.*

*I learn by doing and the facilitator created a safe space to give examples to help me understand how the theory is put into practice.*

Staff and learner feedback on Xtra Space

*It helped to form links between Children's Services and Adult Services. This made me feel more able to contact colleagues across the directorate if we are co-working a family.*

We will continue to enhance the concept of Xtra Space across the service to support staff development.

We have commissioned Restorative Leadership Training to all Senior Leadership Team members, to provide the skills and knowledge to lead practice and development in their respective service areas.

## Workforce

We continue to have a stable and experienced leadership Team, led by a Director of Children Services and Lead Member who are invested in and understand the service aims and priorities.

There continues to be challenges in terms of stability of the wider workforce, which mirror the challenges being seen regionally and nationally. Our vacancy rate (March 2023) is 14.27% which shows an increase on the previous year (8.4%) and is consistent with an increase in the national average (21%). Our agency rates are 15% which is an increase on the previous year and similarly

reflects an increase in the national average (17.6%). Recruitment remains a key priority with ongoing targeted activity, and the vacancy rate for June shows a decrease to 11.4%.

We continue to invest in “growing our own” and invest in our Academy model accordingly, with our Workforce Development Team coordinating ASYE/Apprenticeship/Student/Step Up to Social Work programmes across the borough, which has supported more than 45% of the current Directorate workforce into employment in Darlington.

The impact of the significant increases in demand for services and the recruitment and retention challenges has created some workforce challenges. We have experienced caseloads higher than we would have liked at times, exceeding our preferred capped number of 22. Where caseloads have been higher, management grip and oversight has been consistent and strong, and the impact of children and families has been well understood. Workers continue to be positive about working for Darlington and recognise that there are national challenges in the workforce at present. Where caseloads have exceeded our preferred levels, overtime payments have been provided to workers to recognise the impact of this upon them and their workload.

An enhanced recruitment and retention support package has remained in place for front line workers and Assistant Director led engagement sessions have taken place to understand front line practitioners experiences, their wishes and feelings and to work proactively with them to maintain Darlington as a positive place to work. We have completed bespoke, in person recruitment events to allow prospective new workers to understand the benefits and strengths of working in Darlington.

Regular Staff and leadership Forums are facilitated, which provides a visibility of senior leaders and allows the vision and strategic aims of the service to be clearly shared and understood by the rest of the service but equally invites the opportunity for front line workers to engage and contribute and this shape the direction of the service.

We have now completed an agile working pilot programme which has led to a confirmed agile working offer for all staff. This offer seeks to empower and enable front line practitioners to fully embrace a hybrid approach to working. This supports access to office and peer-based working environment when needed but allows this to be mixed with home working as is most appropriate. This continues to be carefully monitored to understand the impact on the workforce as well as the children and families we support.

### Areas of Strength and Areas for Development

Areas of Strength	Areas for Development
Relational and Restorative culture well embedded within Senior Leadership Team and strong evidence in wider service	Further development of the Quality Assurance process to ensure that audits are collaborative and that they identify clear action plans for improvement.
Strong, stable and consistent Leadership Team	Placement Sufficiency Plans being developed to seek to expand and develop in house resources for Children in Care
Increased stability in Workforce	Retained focus on recruitment and retention of staff

# What are our plans for the next 12 months?

After a busy and productive year our overall aim for the next year is to continue to develop our relational approach in a way that supports us to respond to the challenging demands that we are anticipating will continue from the previous year.

- We intend to respond to the increases in need and demand through a whole service approach – reviewing and refreshing our approaches and methodology at the Front Door, in Early Help, within our Assessment and Safeguarding and our Looked After Teams.
- We will retain a strong focus on recruitment and retention of skilled practitioners, building upon our strong support offer for staff and further embracing innovative approaches to recruitment to maximise the skills and expertise of our workforce
- Further develop our placement sufficiency through planned and focused engagement with Corporate and Political leaders to develop and enhance our cohort of in-house placements for those children who require our Care
- Engage with national improvement and development work through our involvement in the Regional Fostering Pathfinder work

These approaches and development will be underpinned by our Strengthening Families Programme and in accordance with our Strategic Priorities

## Strengthening Families 2023-24

Our principles								
Great social work practice so children are safe and families supported to find their own solutions			Family first helping them stay together and, where that isn't possible, working with families to return children home			Business efficient making the best use of the resources we have		
Strategic Priorities 2023-24								
<b>Embed a restorative culture</b>			<b>More solutions through Family Group Conferencing (FGC)</b>			<b>Better capability to support children</b>		
<b>Key work</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Key work</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Key work</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Measures</b>
Strengthen leadership / build on management relationships across services.	One Service; restorative and relational practice.	We work together connecting across cross functional boundaries; Our practice model is understood & is how we work in Darlington.	Work with services to further increase engagement with Family Group Conferencing to enable solutions for families	More families are supported to find their own solutions.	We engage families earlier and they progress to FGC where one is offered.  Families achieve the planned outcomes of their FGC.  Families are less likely to step up through services and / or be re-referred to services after being supported through FGC.	Repurpose of accommodation to Cedars emergency / short term break accommodation.	Placement stability, positive financial impact.	Emergency placement costs; placement stability; less children becoming looked after.
Implement new approach to practice supervision.		Practice supervision is effective, influencing great social work practice to improve the lives of families.				Introduce 'Staying Close' for young people leaving residential care.	Care leavers transition to independence successfully.	Improved indicators across education, emp. or trig; independent living; health and wellbeing.
Review how we capture & use the voice of children & families to develop services.		We listen to the views of children and families, working with them and involving them in service changes / development.				Introduce the new supported accommodation regulations / quality standards.	Legislative compliance with new supported accommodation regulations.	Young people are accommodated in registered supported accommodation.
Review forms in LCS / how we record case information.		Processes enable our relational practice model.				Improve our support offer to in house carers.	Better placement capability; positive financial impact.	Better recruitment process; more in house carers recruited; better carer retention; more in house placements; lower placement costs.
Review locality model & continue to develop this approach to work with families.	Families get the right help at the right time.	Resources organised to respond to service demand; Assessments completed on time; Smooth case transfer process.				Improve carer recruitment process, Regional Recruitment and Retention pilot.		
Review our Front Door, including how we engage partner agencies.		More Early Help assessments, less referrals to social care. (Q4 onwards.).						
<b>Grow how we learn and improve</b>			<b>Less families need support from Children's Services. Other measures under discussion</b>			<b>Best Use of resources</b>		
<b>Key work</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Key work</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Key work</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Measures</b>
Develop our restorative practice umbrella of knowledge, skills & practice learning.	A learning & improvement environment that promotes & embeds our practice model.	Accessible development offer promoting restorative practice meeting the needs of all audiences (students, practitioners, new employees, enabling functions, internal & external partners); Good practice is recognised and celebrated.	Pilot use of Family Group Conferencing in schools.	Schools equipped to help Families resolve problems at the outset, reducing likelihood of escalation. Care leavers make positive connections with family & extended network.	Measures under discussion	Review how we work service wide / role of panels.	Families get the right help at the right time.	Measures to accurately reflect financial impact under discussion
						Review Business Support requirements / service delivery.	Service meets needs in the blended working environment & IT maximised.	To be finalised - Revised Service Level Agreement; reduction in off system processes / associated business risks.
Review our approach to service quality.		To be developed with new Principal Social Worker / Head of Quality.				Placement sufficiency / creative alternatives.	Better placement sufficiency; positive financial impact.	More placement options available; more in house placements; lower placement costs.
						Children's Social Care Framework & Dashboard.	Monitor & report performance to national outcome indicators.	To be confirmed - in consultation phase.



**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
8 JANUARY 2024**

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**SEND RESOURCE BASE REMODELLING AT HEATHFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an overview of the work being undertaken to remodel the existing Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) resource base at Heathfield Primary School.

**Summary**

2. The resource base at Heathfield Primary School, which is part of Lingfield Academy Trust, has been in its current configuration for a number of years. The Lingfield Academy Trust has worked in partnership with Darlington Borough Council to explore how the resource base can be remodelled effective from September 2024 to be more reflective of and responsive to the needs of Darlington children and young people with SEND. The remodelling would see the base change to have a primary remit of support for communication and interaction needs which is aligned with the presenting need of Darlington children and young people with SEND. The base would be incrementally filled over a 3-year period supporting children from Reception to Year 2.
3. This remodelling proposal falls within the DfE significant change process for Academies and therefore requires a period of open consultation. Following which a business case can be submitted to DfE for review and determination.

**Recommendation**

4. It is recommended that the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee note the work being undertaken to remodel the existing resource base at Heathfield Primary to align with and respond to the presenting needs of Darlington children with SEND.

**Tony Murphy**  
**Assistant Director Education and Inclusion**

## Background Papers

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

Helen Watson : Extension 5866

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no impact on Crime and Disorder
Health and Wellbeing	This report has a positive impact on children's health and wellbeing.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	This report has no impact on Carbon and Climate Change
Diversity	This report has a positive impact on inclusion
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	Children and Parents/Carers of children with SEND will be positively impacted
Budget and Policy Framework	This report ensures that the resource base is efficient and effectively aligned to presenting need in Darlington.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report has a positive impact on the Children and Young People's priorities in the Council's plan.
Efficiency	This report has a positive impact on efficiency ensuring resources are aligned to have a positive impact on children's outcomes.
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

5. The resource base at Heathfield currently has 16 places with a specific remit to provide individualised learning support to children with cognition and learning needs. An analysis of the needs of Darlington children has not identified cognition and learning as an area of where there is a continued requirement for a designated resource base. Communication and interaction needs now represents a growing proportion of presenting need within Darlington, increasingly identified in early years settings. There is one primary school resource base currently with a remit of social communication and interaction needs and demand for places in this resource base is significantly outstripping capacity. It has been oversubscribed for a 3-year period and is expected to be in the same position of oversubscription in September 2024.
6. In response to this oversubscription position, it is proposed that the resource base at Heathfield will be remodelled to respond to the growing need for individualised learning support to children with communication and interaction needs. The resource base will focus on children in their early years of primary education and therefore will be for children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. The resource base will develop as part of a 3-year programme. The base will initially commence with 8 places and gradually build to a 24-place provision. The incremental growth in the resource base place numbers will continue to remain under review to ensure it is at a level and rate to ensure continued quality and success of the provision.
7. The remodelling of the Heathfield resource base also presents the opportunity to ensure resources to meet the holistic needs of children are co-located and can operate on a needs-led basis and as a hub of support. It is therefore, also proposed, that the Speech and Language resource currently located at Northwood School (also part of the Lingfield Academy Trust) transfers into Heathfield to coincide with the opening of the remodelled base. There will be no impact on current support levels for children in either setting.
8. The remodelling of a resource base falls within the DfE significant change process and therefore a period of statutory consultation is required on these remodelling proposals. **Appendix 1** provides an overview of the consultation documentation. The statutory consultation will run for a period of six weeks commencing on 8 January 2024 and concluding on 18 February 2024. The consultation will be open to Darlington residents through the Council's website and supplemented by focused engagement sessions with key stakeholders.
9. Following the conclusion of the statutory consultation Lingfield Academy Trust will be able to submit a Business Case to the DfE to through the significant change process to change the primary designation of the resource base, following which DfE will make a determination if the proposed changes can take place.

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**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
8 JANUARY 2024**

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**INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23  
CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE CHAIR ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The Annual Independent Reviewing Officer report is produced by the Service Manager of the Children's Safeguarding Unit. The report includes an overview of the work undertaken by Independent Reviewing Officers, who, in Darlington, provide independent reviewing and associated functions in relation to both:
  - (a) Children who are Looked After.
  - (b) Children who are the subject of Child Protection Conferences and / or multi-agency Child Protection Plans.

**Summary**

2. The report provides an overview of performance, activity, and areas for development.
  - (a) Part 1 is the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2022/23. The production of this report is a requirement under the statutory guidance. This covers the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer which is a defined role that relates to Children Looked After. This statutory function is set out in the IRO Handbook (2010), and links to the revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance (2011).
  - (b) Part 2 is the Child Protection Conference Chair Annual Report 2022/23. This covers the role of the conference chair in relation to children who are in need of safeguarding. The statutory requirements are set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (July 2018), which stipulates that the chair of a Child Protection Conference needs to be accountable to the Director of Children's Services, and should be a professional, independent of operational and / or line management responsibilities for the case.
3. For the period April 2022– March 2023, due to the roll out of the Agile Working programme and post-Covid working arrangements across agencies, formal meetings, which in previous years would have been face to face, have in the main been conducted using virtual platforms. This applies to Child Protection Conferences and Child Looked After Reviews.

## Recommendation

4. It is recommended that Members note the content of this annual report.

**Chris Bell**

**Assistant Director of Children's Services**

## Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

Author: Martin Graham - Service Manager Independent Review & Safeguarding Partnership

S17 Crime and Disorder	N/A
Health and Wellbeing	Supports improved outcomes for children and young people
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	No implications arising from this report
Diversity	No implications arising from this report
Wards Affected	All wards are affected
Groups Affected	Young people 0-25 with Special Educational Needs
Budget and Policy Framework	Children and Young People
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Council Plan	Supports efficient use of resources and service improvement
Efficiency	Supports efficient use of resources and service improvement
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report relates to Looked After Children

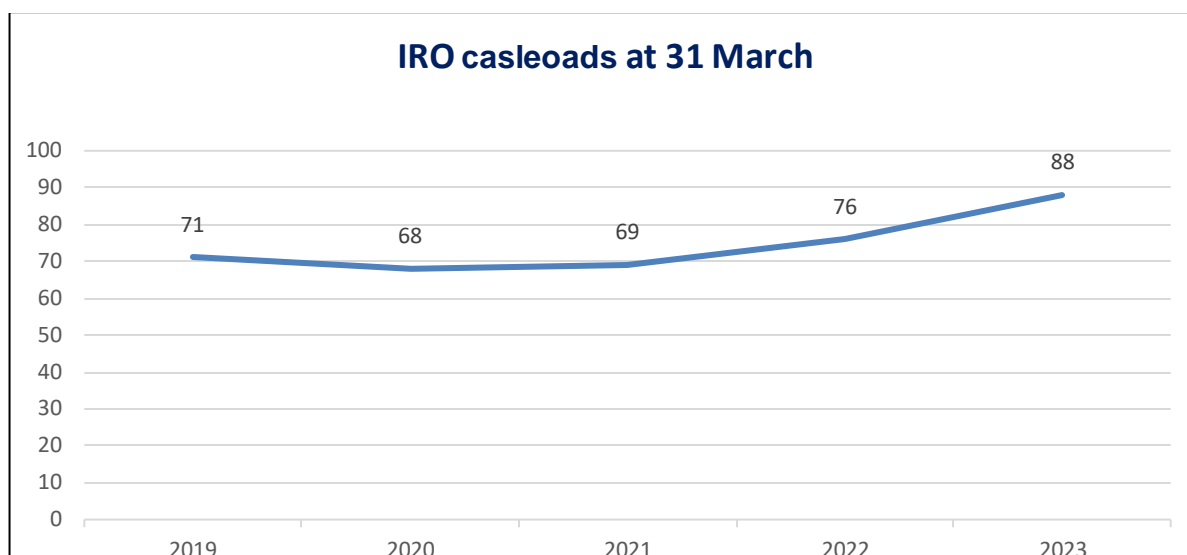
## MAIN REPORT

### Role of independent Reviewing Officers

5. The Independent Reviewing Officers are committed to achieving the best outcomes for children and young people in Darlington who are Looked After and those subject to Child Protection Plans.
6. The Service is responsible for the following statutory functions:
  - (a) Initial child protection conferences.
  - (b) Child Protection Review Conferences.
  - (c) Child Looked After Reviews.
  - (d) Annual Foster Carer Reviews.
  - (e) Adoption Reviews.
  - (f) Disruption Meetings.
  - (g) Reviews of children placed in secure Accommodation.
7. In Darlington, Independent Reviewing Officers undertake a range of non-statutory functions including, providing advice and guidance, child protection training and are members of formal panels.

### Staffing Levels and caseloads

8. Responsibility for the operational management, performance and development of the Service lies with the Service Manager for Quality Assurance and Independent Review, who reports to the Head of Children's Front Door and Early Intervention.
9. During 2022-23 a 1.0 (FTE) vacancy was covered by an agency appointment, the remainder of the posts are permanent appointments; at 31 March 2023 there were 5.0 (FTE) Independent Reviewing Officers in post. In addition, there was a 0.4 (FTE) agency post to undertake Annual Foster Carer Reviews.
10. The statutory guidance in the IRO Handbook (2010) recommends that caseloads for Independent Reviewing Officer need to be between 50 and 70 LAC children.
11. Annual Foster Carer Reviews continued to be undertaken by a part-time contracted Reviewing Officer (to the end of December 2022) and subsequently by an agency IRO, to ensure independence and avoid any conflict of interest.
12. Over the last 12 months, the size of caseloads for Independent Reviewing Officers in Darlington has risen from an average of 76 children to 88 children. This therefore remains higher than the level set in the statutory guidance.



13. This figure does not include the additional tasks undertaken by Independent Reviewing Officers.
14. When caseloads are manageable it allows Independent Reviewing Officers to have sufficient time to provide a quality service to each Child Looked After including meeting with the child before the review to ensure that their views are clearly understood, consulting with Social Workers following significant changes, monitoring drift and where appropriate, ensuring that a challenge is made.
15. There is a statutory requirement in the IRO Handbook to ensure sufficient administrative support to Independent Reviewing Officers in relation to Looked After Reviews. Current responsibilities include the administering and producing a record of Child Protection Conferences as well as the administrative function in relation to Children Looked After. Regular meetings are held with the Business Support Team leader to agree how the team can best support the Independent Reviewing Officers / Child Protection Conference Chairs.

### Quality Assurance

16. To ensure that the effectiveness of the Unit and ability to provide a key Quality Assurance function, it is essential that the Independent Review Team have the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding.
17. The quality and effectiveness of the Children's Safeguarding Unit is ensured through:
  - (a) Workload Allocation.
  - (b) Supervision and annual Personal Development Review (PDR).
  - (c) Team Meetings.
  - (d) Audit / Direct Observations of practice.
  - (e) Training and Development.



- (f) Annual registration and accreditation through Social Work England.

### **Workload Allocation**

- 18. All Children Looked After and / or children subject to Child Protection Plans are allocated a designated Independent Reviewing Officer with the intention that where possible the allocation will remain consistent, until the child is no longer Looked After or no longer subject to a Child Protection Plan.
- 19. Allocations are monitored regularly and form part of the discussion in monthly supervision sessions.

### **Training and Development**

- 20. Individual training requirements for Independent Reviewing Officers are identified through supervision and annual appraisals.
- 21. This year the Independent Reviewing Officers have participated in Relational Practice sessions developing how we use the restorative approach that is part of the Strengthening Families Programme.
- 22. Outside of this Independent Reviewing Officers complete training in line with corporate requirements (i.e., mandatory Academy 10 Training modules).

### **Registration and accreditation**

- 23. All Independent Reviewing Officers are registered with Social Work England and have completed the required annual Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and evidenced this as part of their continued registration as Social Work practitioners.

### **Next steps for 2023/24**

- 24. The following are scheduled for action in 2022/23.

- (a) As Independent Reviewing Officers:

- (i) To work in partnership with Social Workers, Foster Carers and Residential staff to increase the number of children who attend their Child Looked After Review as opposed to sending their views to the meeting.

- (ii) Ensuring the Independent Reviewing Officer footprint continues to be an area of focus. This needs to be evident on the child's record:

- 1. Case notes (IRO midway Review / IRO notes).
- 2. IRO contact with child forms.
- 3. Independent Reviewing Officer disputes (in line with statutory guidance).

- (b) As Child Protection Chairs:

- (i) To secure suitable accommodation that will facilitate a hybrid model for Child Protection Conferences that allows for agency representatives to contribute virtually while allowing Social Workers and families to attend the meeting in person with the Child Protection Conference Chair.
- (ii) To work in partnership with Social Workers, Advanced Practitioners and Team Managers to encourage the uptake of advocacy services for children & young people who are the subject of Child Protection Conferences.

### **Comparator Data**

- 25. Please note that in the following reports the most recent published national, regional, and statistical neighbours' data is as of 31 March 2022.
- 26. The new comparator figures for 31 March 2023 will be published in the autumn.

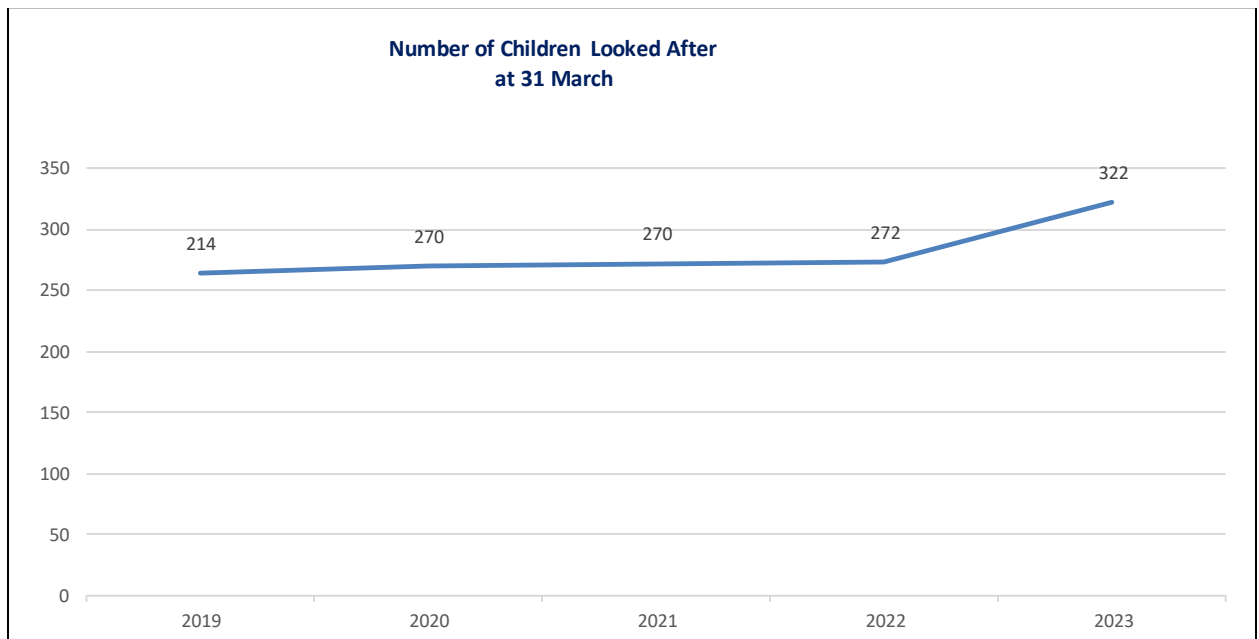
## Part 1: INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

### Statutory Framework

27. The Independent Review Officer (IRO) has a statutory responsibility in relation to Children Looked After. This is set out within the statutory framework of the IRO Handbook (2010) which is linked to the revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance (2011). The responsibility of the Independent Reviewing Officer changed from the management of the Review process to a wider overview of the child's case including regular monitoring and follow-up between Reviews. The Independent Reviewing Officer has a key role in relation to the improvement of Care Planning for Children Looked After (CLA) and for challenging drift and delay.

### Children looked after

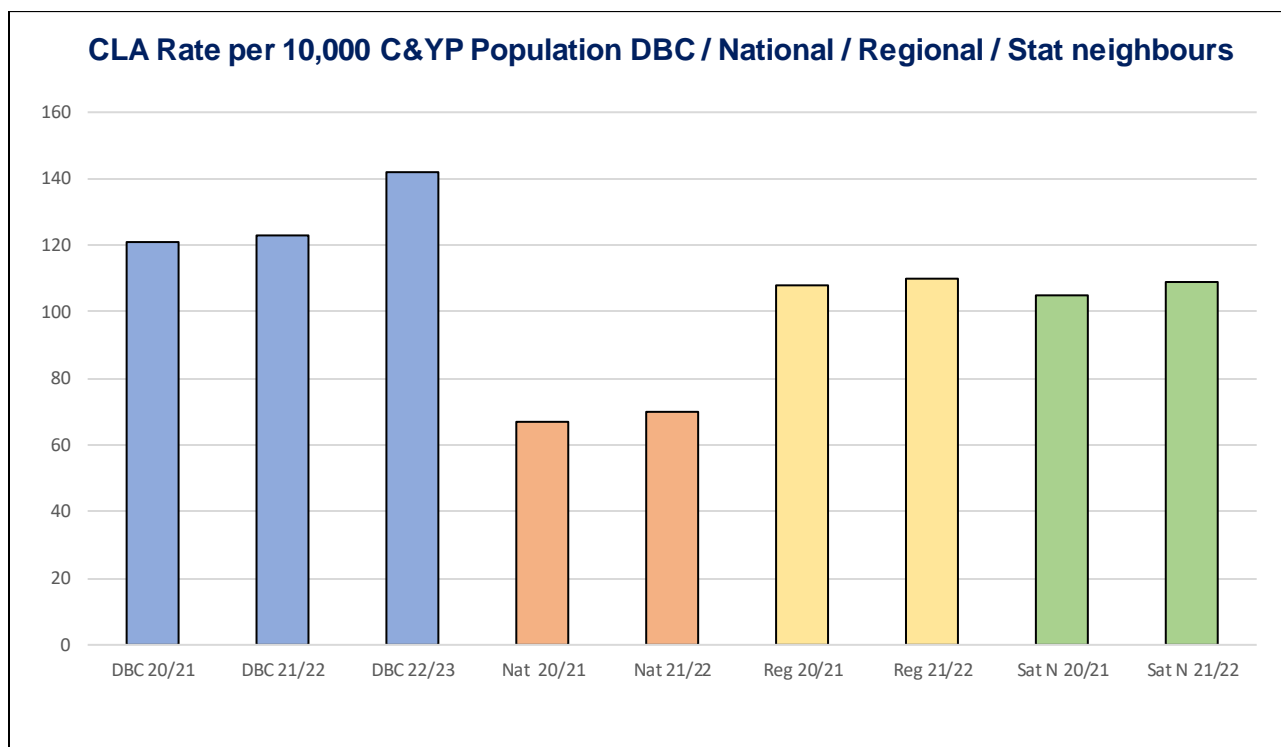
28. At the end of March 2023 there were 322 Children Looked After in Darlington, an increase from the previous year (273). The chart below shows the end of year number of Children Looked After over the last 5 years.



29. The rate of Looked After Children in Darlington has remained high; there was a significant increase during 2018, since then, the position is not necessarily as stable as it appears; the number went above 300 during the period August - November 2020, however this reduced and stabilised in 2021-22. Over the year 2022-23 the number of Children Looked After steadily increased.

### Rate per 10,000

30. The table below is expressed as the rate per 10,000, which allows benchmarking with other councils (the most recent published data on National (England) and comparator groups of Regional (north-east) authorities and statistical neighbours.



31. At the end of March 2023, 322 children were looked after by Darlington a rate of 142 per 10,000, which is an increase since 2021-22.
32. Darlington continues to have a significantly higher rate of Children Looked After than the National, Regional, and Statistical Neighbours averages. It should be noted the most recent published data is as of 31 March 2022 and there has again been a national increase in Children Looked After over the year.

### Child Looked After Demographics

Age (at 31 March)	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
Under 1	8%	15	6%	11	4%	25	9%	11	3%	
1-4	16%	51	19%	56	21%	53	19%	60	19%	
5-9	26%	71	26%	68	25%	63	23%	77	24%	
10-15	39%	100	37%	100	37%	100	37%	127	39%	
16-17	12%	33	12%	37	14%	32	12%	47	15%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>322</b>					

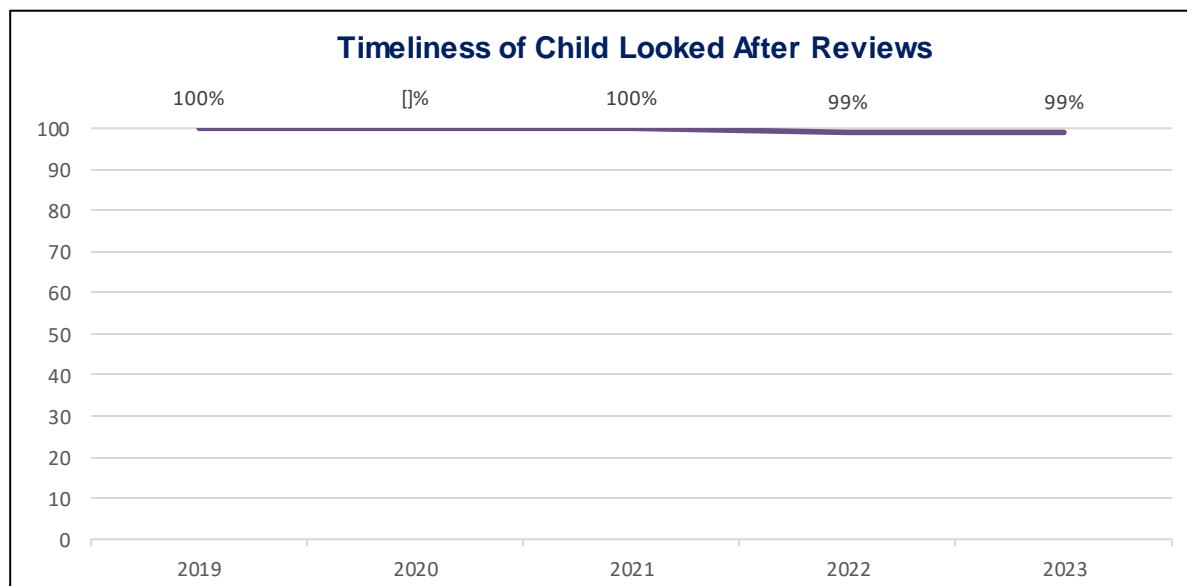
33. The age profile of Darlington’s Looked After population has remained stable over the last 4 years. The largest proportion of Children Looked After in Darlington continue to be between 10 and 15 years old which matches to the distribution nationally.

Ethnicity (at 31 March)	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
White	91%	244	90%	250	92%	249	91%	274	85%	
Mixed	5%	12	4%	10	4%	14	5%	24	7%	
Asian or Asian British	3%	9	3%	7	3%	6	2%	6	2%	
Black or Black British	1%	5	2%	4	2%	1	<1%	5	2%	
Other	0%	0	0%	1	<1%	3	1%	13	4%	

Total	264	270	272	273	322
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34. The ethnic population of Children Looked After in Darlington has remained stable over the last 5 years. This is predictable due to the continued, comparative, lack of ethnic diversity within the Darlington population, when compared to the national position.

**Looked After Review Timescales**



35. The above chart shows that during 2022-23 performance in relation to the percentage of Children’s reviews which were completed within statutory timescales was 99%, matching the performance of recent years.

**Children’s Participation**

36. Participation is based on one of the following methods of participation:

- (a) Attending their Review and speaking on their own behalf.
- (b) Attending their Review but having another person speak for them.
- (c) Not attending the Review but providing their views in a written form or through another facilitative medium.
- (d) Not attending the Review but briefing an advocate to represent their views.

37. Children’s participation in their Looked After Review looks at those children over the age of 4 years who participate in their statutory review through attending or other form of contribution (via advocate, written submission etc.). At the end of this reporting year, 883 individual Looked After Reviews were held, which is significantly higher than last year at 747.

C&YP Participation in Reviews (over the age of 4 years)	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
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Participated	90%	96%	94%	93%	91%

38. The aim will be to increase the proportion of children and young people over the age of 4 that attend their review meeting, and to reduce the number of meetings where there are no views expressed.
39. When a child becomes Looked After, their Independent Reviewing Officer will contact them, if aged 4 or over, and arrange to meet them prior to their Child Looked After Review. Since Covid and the roll out of agile working, these have been a mixture of virtual and face to face contacts.
40. The IRO Handbook recommends the Independent Reviewing Officer meets with the child / young person within their placement, prior to their meeting or as part of the review process. Despite the increase in Independent Reviewing Officer caseloads over the last year, this contact with young people between reviews has been maintained.
41. Independent Reviewing Officers record on the Liquid Logic case management system when they visit, have a virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams, telephone, text conversation, or other form communication, with a child or young person.

### **Permanence Planning and Adoption**

42. At the second Child Looked After Review scheduled within 4 months of a child or young person becoming Looked After, the Permanence Plan should be agreed. The Independent Reviewing Officer will then actively monitor the care planning process to minimize any drift or delay. In 2020/21, all children had their permanency plan discussed at their 4-month review.
43. Additional Children Looked After Reviews are required when the decision is taken that a child is to be adopted. When a child becomes the subject of a Placement Order an Adoption Review is required. For children moving into an adoption placement, additional reviews are held within 28 days and at 3 months regardless of when the last looked after review was held. It is therefore possible for individual children to have up to four Looked After Reviews within a twelve-month period.

### **Dispute Resolution Process**

44. One of the key functions of the Independent Reviewing Officer is to resolve problems arising out of the Care Planning process. The Dispute Resolution process reinforces the authority of the Independent Reviewing Officer and their accountability for decisions made at reviews. Independent Reviewing Officers will refer to the process when they feel that is appropriate to follow up on recommendations that have not been actioned or where the implementation of a Care Plan is delayed. Independent Reviewing Officers will in the first instance use informal negotiation to resolve issues, and only where this is not successful will a formal challenge be made by instigating the Dispute Resolution Process.
45. There continues to be good evidence of the 'IRO footprint' in children's records. They appropriately challenge Social Workers and Team Managers to help progress plans and

reduce delay for children. Evidence of Independent Reviewing Officer involvement in cases is checked via audits, dip sampling and through regular case supervision.

### Annual Foster Carer Reviews

46. Local Authorities are required by Regulation 29 (The Fostering Services Regulations 2001) to review the approval of foster carers at least once a year. The additional part-time contracted Reviewing Officer continued in post until the end of December 2022. The role has subsequently been undertaken by an agency IRO. Ofsted, during their previous inspection commented that it was good practice to have someone other than an Independent Reviewing Officer undertaking this role due to possible conflicts of interest. A one-year post to cover this function, has been agreed and recruitment to this post is taking place at the time of writing this report. Once recruited to, the twelve months that follow will allow time for a business case to be put forward.
47. All Darlington Borough Foster Carers and Connected Carers should receive an annual review.
48. In the year (2022-23); 84% of Annual Foster Carer Reviews were completed. Where annual reviews were not completed in the year this was due to Foster Carers being on hold due to personal circumstances or awaiting completion of checks. There are a small number of new carers, approved in the year, who are not yet due their annual Review.
49. In the year, all recommendations made were for Foster Carer re-approval, no recommendations were in relation to de-registration. If there had been any significant changes to circumstances, or concerns raised at the Annual Review, these would be referred to the Children’s Placement Service Panel.

Annual Foster Carer Reviews (as of 31 March)	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of Foster Carers	51	55	45
Number of Connected Carers	19	20	16
Total number of carers	70	75	61
Percentage completed in year	95%	86%	84%

### Secure Reviews

50. In the year, one young person was subject to a Secure Accommodation Order that required a Secure Accommodation Review.

## **Ofsted Inspection**

51. The Inspection of Darlington local authority children's services was undertaken in October 2022. The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers, was judged as "Outstanding" by Ofsted.
52. In the report, the Lead Inspector states:
- (a) Child focused care plans are reviewed by a consistent Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).
  - (b) When required, IROs challenge professionals effectively on behalf of children to ensure they receive the right support.
  - (c) Children are actively encouraged to access advocacy services.
  - (d) Time is taken to support children to attend their review meetings.
  - (e) This ensures that they have some say in their care and support, wherever possible.

## **Quality Assurance**

53. To ensure that quality of practice each year a programme of audits and observations of Independent Reviewing Officer practice is undertaken by the line manager. This is a statutory requirement.
54. In addition to the Ofsted findings this has identified:
- (a) Evidence that mid-term reviews are taking place and that there is meaningful contact with young people prior to their Child Looked After Review meeting.
  - (b) Independent Reviewing Officer recording of what has been discussed with the child / young person prior to the Child's Looked After Review was not always entered in case notes but is evident in the record of the Looked After Review meeting.
  - (c) When children / young people attend their review meetings, they feel able to contribute and to raise their own issues.
55. For associated actions from either Ofsted or quality assurance activities, please refer to paragraph 20.



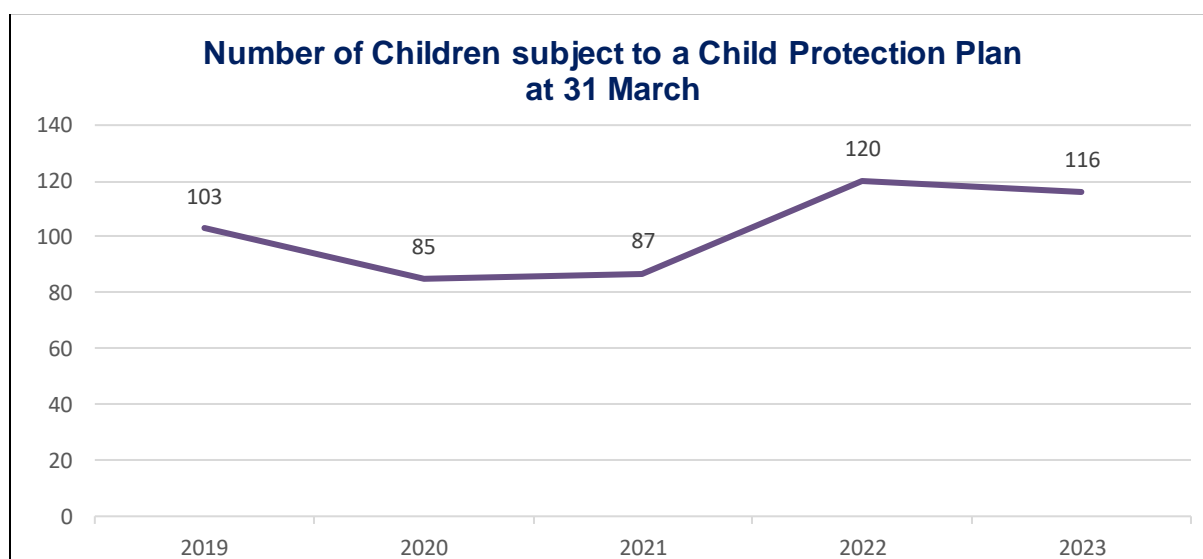
## Part 2: CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

### Statutory Framework

56. The statutory requirements for individual services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children are set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children, A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (July 2018).
57. Working Together stipulates that the chair of a Child Protection Conference needs to be accountable to the Director of Children's Services, and should be a professional, independent of operational and / or line management responsibilities for the case. In Darlington this function is undertaken by Independent Reviewing Officers.

### Number of Children subject to Child Protection Plans

58. The total number of children with a Child Protection Plan on 31 March 2023 was 116; a rate of 51.3 per 10,000 children under the age of 18 years. This is similar to the position at the end of March 2022, when the figure stood at 120 (a rate of 53.3 per 10,000). The chart below shows the number of Children subject to Child Protection Plans over 5 years.



59. This rate remains below statistical neighbours (55.8) and north-east region (62.6), but higher than the National average at 31 March 2022. During the previous year nationally, the rate increased (41.4 to 42.1).

### Child Protection by Category

60. At the end March 2023, 116 children were subject to a Child Protection Plan. In the tables, please note that percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding. In line with national guidance, Darlington does not use multiple categories, but as this continues to be used by some authorities, it reported on nationally.

Category of Abuse	DBC 2022	National 2022	DBC 2023
Neglect	47%	48%	47%
Physical	21%	38%	36%
Sexual	9%	7%	16 %
Emotional	23%	4%	1%
Multiple		3%	
Total	120		116

61. The proportion of children subject to Child Protection Plan where the risk is Neglect or Physical Abuse remains in line with the national position. Due to the relatively small size of the population in the borough, local percentages relating to categories can be impacted by one or two families either becoming, to or ceasing to be subject to a Child Protection Plan.

### Child Protection Activity

62. On 31 March 2022 there were 120 children subject to Child Protection Plans; over the 12 months to 31 March 2023 this has been relatively stable and is now 116 children. 135 Children had Plans removed and 131 new Plans were made.

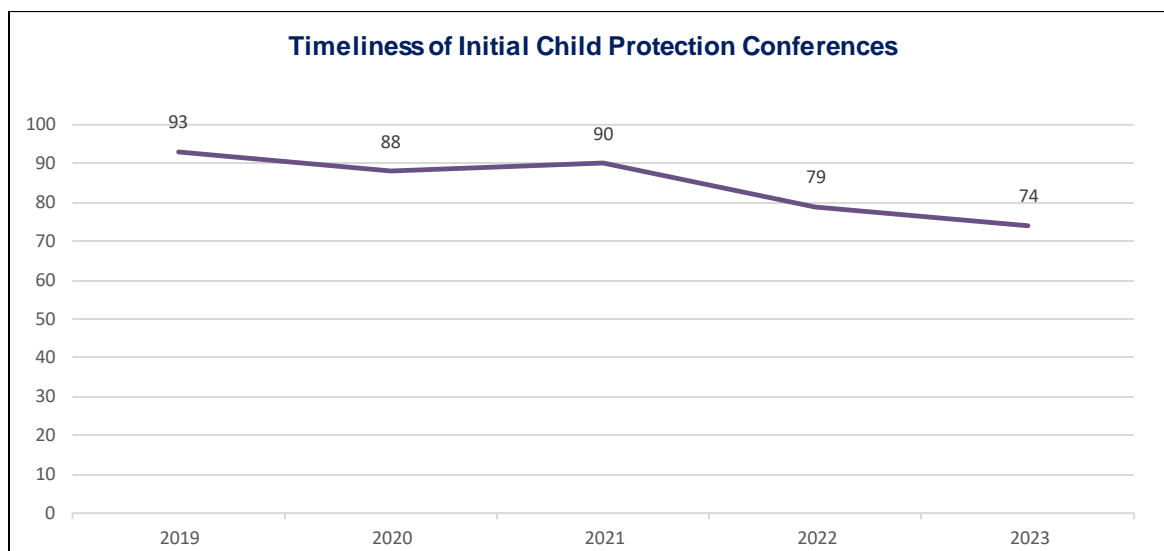
Activity					
Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
New CP Plan	180	155	117	154	131
CP Plan ceased	192	173	115	121	135
Change	-12	-18	+2	+33	-4

63. Over the year, 85 Initial Child Protection Conferences or Transfer Conferences (where a child who is subject to a protection plan in another local authority moves to Darlington) were held [combined total of 161 children]. In addition, 156 Child Protection Review Conferences were held [where 210 individual children were discussed].

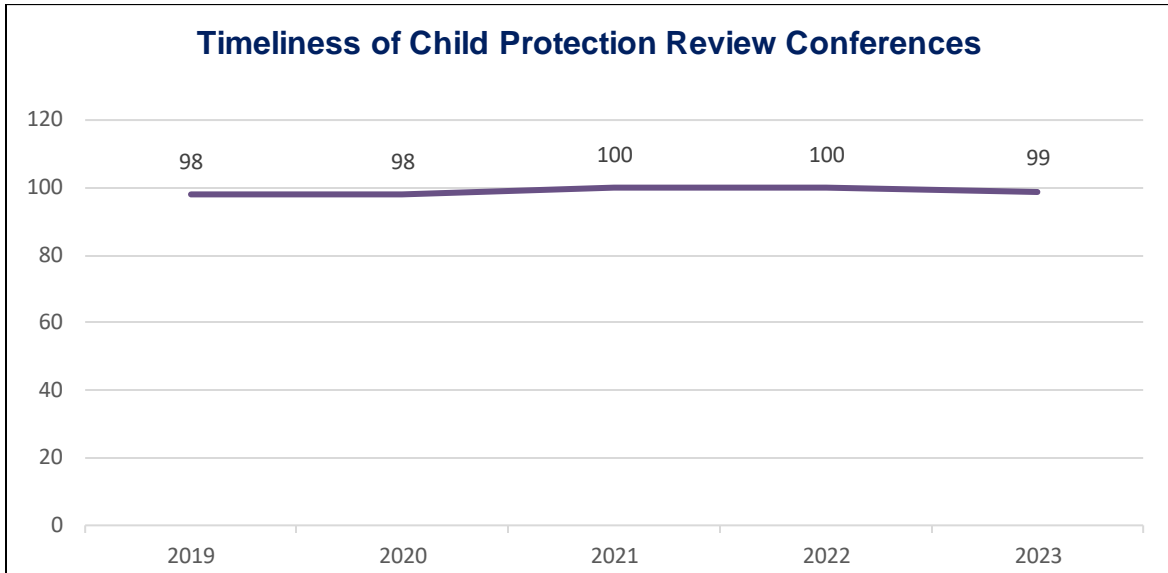
64. The corresponding figures for the previous year were 89 Initial Child Protection Conferences [178 children] and 146 Child Protection Review Conferences [263 children]

65. In the year, the proportion of children subject to Initial Child Protection Conferences who were not made subject to a Child Protection Plan was 18.6% this is above the figures for the previous two years; [16.6% & 13.5%]. Although it is appropriate for some children to be considered at an Initial Child Protection Conference where no Child Protection Plan is made, it is important that children and families are not subjected to this process unnecessarily.

66. In Darlington at the end of March there were 2 children with a disability who were subject to a Child Protection Plan, the figure was 3 the previous year. This information is not currently part of the nationally published data, so no comparison is available.



67. The chart above tracks the Initial Child Protection Conferences held within the year and records the percentage that are held within 15 working days of the multi-agency Strategy Meeting that agreed the section 47 enquiry.
68. For the year to 31 March 2023, 116 (74%) of children were subject to an Initial Child Protection Conference (this excludes transfer conferences) held within 15 working days of the Strategy Meeting. Performance this year has dropped and is now below the latest regional [81%], but still better than the latest national benchmark [71%] figures.
69. Forty children from 19 families had their Initial Child Protection Conference delayed for the following reasons:
  - (a) Delay in the conference being requested by Social Work Team (84% / 16 out of the 19 meetings)
  - (b) Other reasons for delay were to allow for attendance of family members and negotiation with another local authority as to who was responsible.
70. In each case an interim plan was in place to ensure that the children were safeguarded. Last year the figures were 35 children from 15 families.
71. The Working Together guidance requires that the first review should be within 3 months of the Initial Child Protection Conference and thereafter at intervals of no more than 6 months.

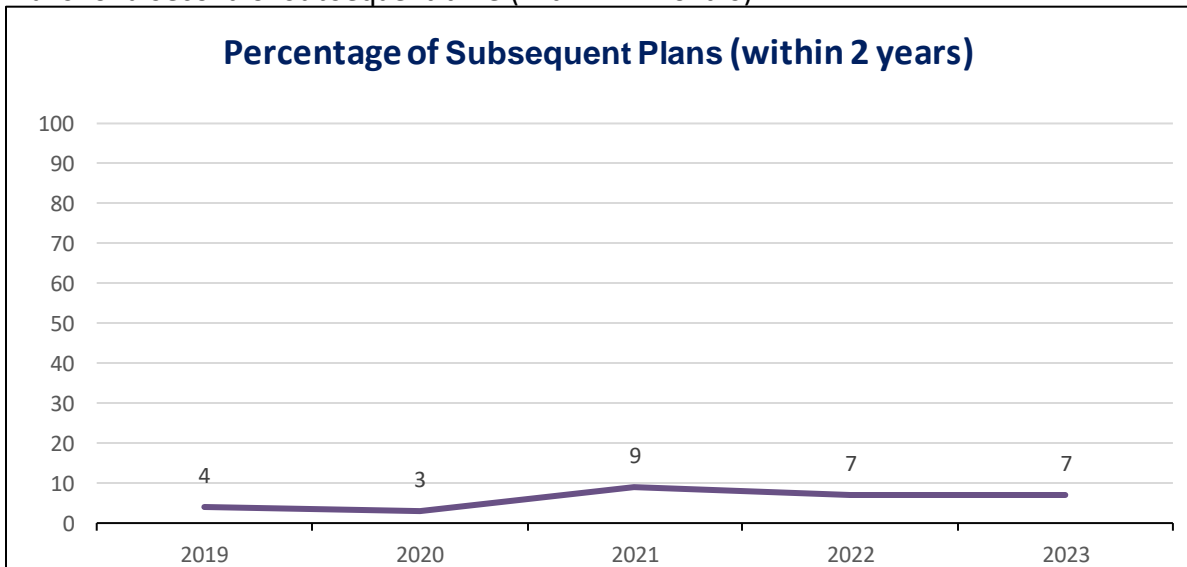


72. The above chart tracks the percentage of Child Protection cases which were reviewed within statutory timescales in the year. Good performance for this indicator is typified by a higher percentage, ideally 100%. In recent years this has been an area of excellent performance.
73. For the year to 31 March 2023, 99% of children had their Child Protection Review Conferences within timescales. One meeting was rearranged to ensure that key agencies were able to attend. Again, performance in this area remains higher than Regional [90%], National [89%] figures (most recent published data).

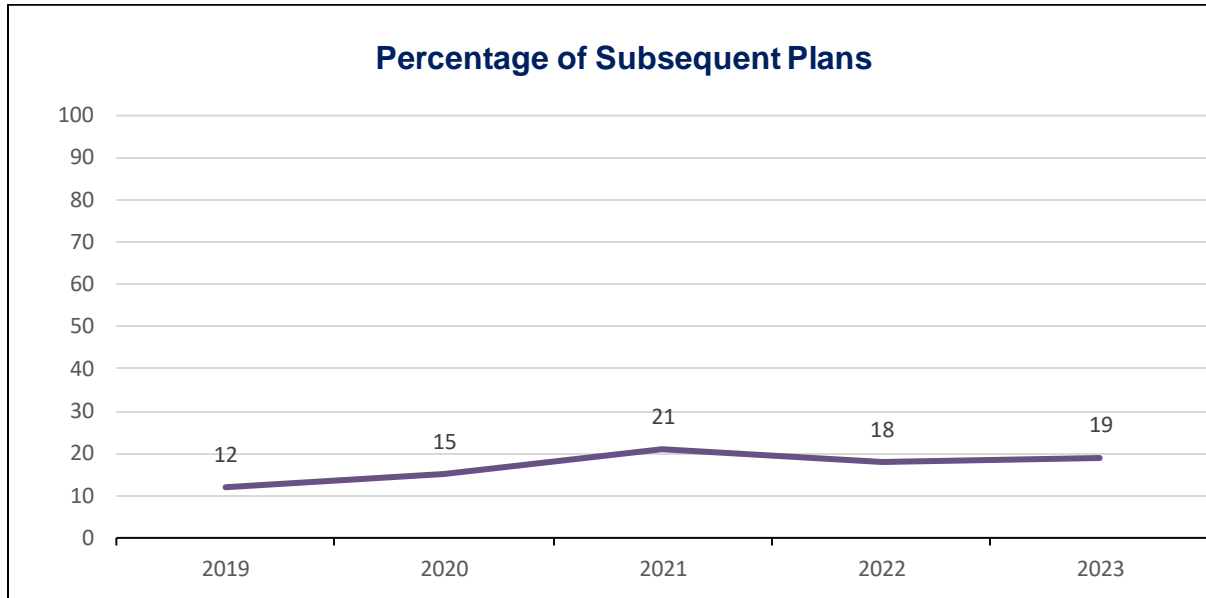
Child Protection Review Conferences within timescales	2021/2022			2022/23
	Darlington	North-East	England	Darlington
	100%	90%	89%	99%

**Second or Subsequent Plans**

74. The chart below shows the percentage of children becoming the subject of Child Protection Plans for a second or subsequent time (within 24 months).

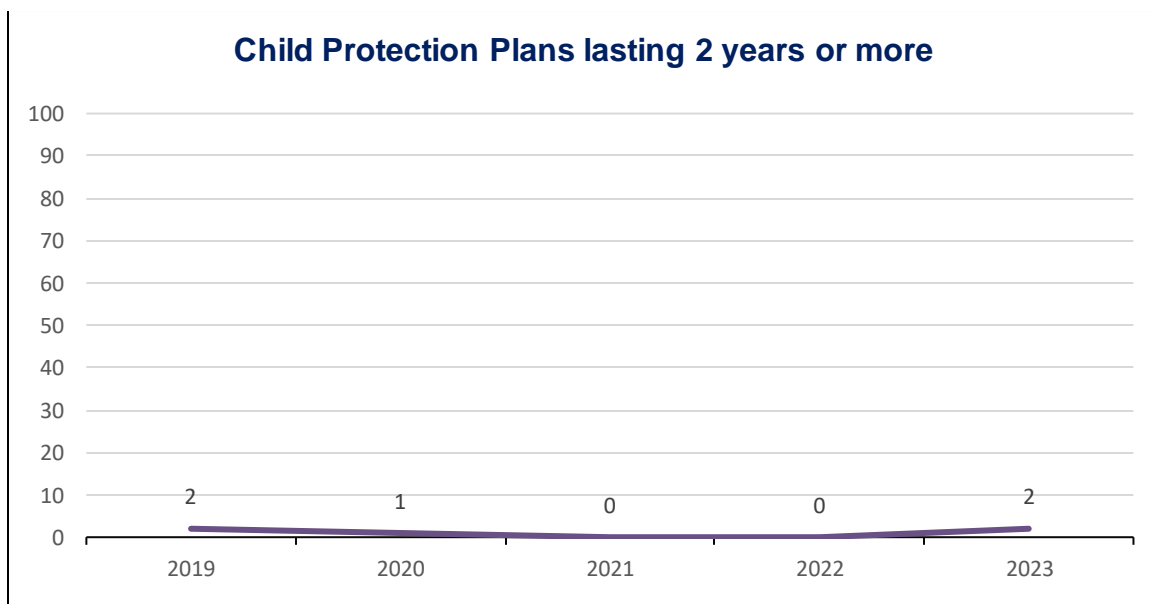


75. This indicator is a proxy for the level and quality of service a child receives. Its purpose is to monitor whether Children's Social Care Services devise and implement a Child Protection Plan which leads to lasting improvement in a child's safety and overall well-being. Good performance for this indicator is typified by a lower figure. However, it is acknowledged that a second or subsequent Child Protection Plan will sometimes be necessary to deal with adverse changes to the child's circumstances.



76. National benchmarked data is based on a second or subsequent plan being agreed at any time after a previous plan. Our rate for 2022-23 was 19%, a slight increase over the year and is slightly better than the National average of 23%, regional average 21% (most recent published data).

### Length of Child Protection Plan



77. The above chart tracks the number of children who had been the subject of a Child

Protection Plan continuously for two years or longer against the number of children ceasing to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan during the year, expressed as percentage.

- 78. This indicator reflects the underlying principle that professionals should be working towards specified outcomes which, if implemented effectively, should lead to most children not needing to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan for longer than two years. It is however recognised that some children will need Child Protection Plans for longer. Good performance is therefore typified by a lower percentage.
- 79. The percentage of children ceasing to be the subject of a Child Protection Plan who had been the subject of a Child Protection Plan continuously for two years or longer was 2% during the year to 31 March 2023.
- 80. The percentage of Child Protection Plans ceasing where the plan had lasted more than 2 years in Darlington [2%] is similar to the regional average [1.5%] and national [2.5%] at 31 March 2022.

**Family attendance at Conference**

- 81. In the year parental involvement was 94% for Initial Child Protection Conferences and 92% for Child Protection Review Conferences. Generally, the rate for Child Protection Reviews tends to be lower by a few percentage points. This remains in-line with the rate in recent years.

Year	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
ICPCs attended by parent	94%	92%	92%	94%	94%
CPRCs attended by parent	91%	89%	95%	92%	92%

- 82. Over the year to 31 March 2022, no family members with parental responsibility were excluded from attending child protection conferences.
- 83. A draft Child Protection Plan is produced at the end of the Initial Child Protection Conference. The plan is therefore available to professionals and family members at the first Core Group which is held within 10 working days of the Initial Child Protection Conference.
- 84. The Unit is committed to promoting independent advocacy for children and young people. The Council has a contract with the National Youth Advocacy Service which provides an independent and confidential service. If the young person is not in attendance at the Child Protection Conference, the Independent Reviewing Officer should ensure that there is an agreed action for the Core Group regarding how the advocacy role will be communicated to the child or young person. The team had a session looking at advocacy with the NYAS manager in May 2023.

## **Ofsted Inspection**

85. The Inspection of Darlington local authority children's services was undertaken in October 2022. The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection, was judged as "Good" by Ofsted.
86. In the report, the Lead Inspector states:
- (a) Children benefit from well-reviewed multi-agency plans that are specific to their needs.
  - (b) Initial Child Protection Conferences are timely and are well attended by partner agencies.
  - (c) Families are meaningfully engaged through the relational practice model, and their views inform the decision-making where appropriate.
  - (d) Independent advocacy services are not consistently offered to all children who are subject to child protection processes.
87. For actions arising please refer to paragraph 24.

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**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
8 JANUARY 2024**

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**YOUNG PEOPLE SEND ENGAGEMENT**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide the Scrutiny Committee with an overview of how Council services engage with young people regarding the issues relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

**Summary**

2. The Council undertakes various activities to ensure that young people with SEND are able to co-produce plans affecting them and contribute to wider strategic work.

**Recommendation**

3. It is recommended that the Scrutiny Committee notes the actions outlined and progress made to date.

**Tony Murphy**  
**Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion**

**Background Papers**

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

Author: TonyMurphy - Extension 5637

S17 Crime and Disorder	N/A
Health and Wellbeing	Supports improved outcomes for children and young people
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	No implications arising from this report
Diversity	No implications arising from this report
Wards Affected	All wards are affected
Groups Affected	Young people 0-25 with Special Educational Needs
Budget and Policy Framework	Dedicated School Block
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	No
Council Plan	Supports SEND priorities in the Council Plan
Efficiency	Supports efficient use of resources and service improvement
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Impacts on Looked After Children or Care Leavers with Special Education Needs

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

4. It is important that children and young people with SEND have the chance to contribute and have their say about their own lives, such as being part of the review of their education, health and care plan, and their adult care and support plan.
5. The right of a child or young person to be heard is included in the UN Convention of Rights Article 12 – a right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously.
6. The Children’s Act 2004 emphasises the importance of speaking to the child or young person as part of any assessment.
7. The importance of speaking to children and young people and their families and gathering their views has been consistently highlighted in lessons learned from serious case reviews.
8. The principles that the Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice works to ensure that SEND provision has regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person and their parent/carers, the importance of the child or young person participating as fully as possible in decisions, and the need to support the child or young person and their parent/carers to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes.
9. Many young people with SEND are supported by an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The SEND service in Darlington is responsible for the assessment and finalisation of EHCPs. Young People’s voice is central to their individual EHCP, and the service ensures that preparation for adulthood aspirations is captured in each EHCP. A deep dive audit process is undertaken on a termly basis to ensure that plans remain relevant and up to date. A quality assurance review is undertaken on all plans from year 9 of a young person’s life to ensure that aspirations are captured at future transition points.

10. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support (SENDIAS) services provide free, impartial advice on matters relating to SEND. SENDIAS services can support children, young people and their families on a range of issues including school exclusions; EHCP Assessments; supporting conversations with a school or local authority; representation at SEND tribunals.
11. Darlington has a dedicated SENDIAS Young Person's Officer in place working directly with young people to ensure their views are captured as part of the ECHP assessment process.
12. 21.2% of Looked After Children in Darlington have an EHCP. Darlo Care Crew are Darlington Children in Care Council, a group of young people in care who come together regularly, to look at issues that affect children in the care of Darlington Borough Council.
13. Darlington's Children and Young People's Plan outlines how we the Council focusses the collective effort of Darlington's partner organisations to make a difference to the lives of our children and young people. Young people with SEND are contributing to the review of the plan by way of focus groups and other engagement activities.
14. The local area SEND strategy is also currently being reviewed. Young People's voices will be a key element of the revised strategy and the Council is working with Darlington Association on Disability Young Leaders Group as part of the development of the new strategy.

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# Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report 2022-2023



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## **Introduction**

### **1. Executive Summary**

This annual report of the Regional Adoption Agency business covers the period 1.4.22-31.3.23.

This year has been one of building on partnerships, and existing practice to strengthen and improve adoption in Tees Valley. There has been more work with regional partner RAA 's, and the regional VAA 's, on collaborative projects which are detailed later in this report. Work has continued with the 5 partner Local Authorities to continue to strengthen early twin track care planning for adoption.

The adoption team have been working on trauma informed practice within this year, inspired by one of the presentations at the national RAA Adoption Support Conference in September 22. ATV has now implemented a model of the Trauma Timeline, and use of the trauma tree in assessments of adopters, and in preparation for matching children. Staff, adopters, partner Local Authorities and Panel are reporting very positively on this practice, which is helping to focus on the long term needs of the child, arising from early trauma.

ATV continues to work within the overall framework of the National Adoption Strategy. This year has seen significant focus on early permanence, including the launch of the National Early Permanence Practice Standards. <https://earlypermanence.org.uk/resources/>. While there have been the same number of EP placements as in the previous year, more prospective adopters have been approved for early permanence, however, we continue to aim for greater numbers. The focus has also continued on adoption support, including on the long term identity needs of adopted children and adults. With more early permanence for children, and continuous development of the framework for these placements, more adoptive parents are meeting with the parents of the child from the outset, and we see a national move towards long term maintenance of significant relationships, enacted through direct and indirect ways of keeping in touch, including "letterbox" contact. Research, including the latest Adoption Barometer Report (PAC UK) continues to tell us that many adopted people want to have some form of contact with their birth relatives, and as a whole system we need to continue to review how we move in this direction.

This year followed the "tail" of the Somerset judgement, and its repercussions for children in the adoption system across England. A small number of children in Teesside had delayed adoption orders, and there were some delayed placements due to the legal implications of Somerset in the previous year: for this reason, we see a small number of children who have gone on to

be adopted, or even placed for adoption within this period, who might otherwise have had that part of their adoption journey in the previous year.

Adoption Orders are higher than the last year, while children placed for adoption remains the same as in the previous year. This level of placement activity is at a lower level than has been the case, which follows the national trend, where adoptions from care have reduced over the last 2 years. Of Significance in this region is the increase in numbers of Placement Orders granted within this year – 87 which is the highest level in the previous 4 years. Similarly, ADM best interests' decisions have risen significantly - 100 in this year, a 28% increase on the previous year, also the highest for the previous 4 years.

This shows Local Authorities are planning for adoption for more children, and these care plans are being authorised through Court, indicating that adoption is the right plan for the child.

ATV continues to perform well in timeliness of adoption for children. Many children are being placed within government set timescales for placement once the Placement Order is granted. Timescales (PO to match) have improved this year, from 174 to 146 days and ATV continues to perform better than the England average by some 50 days, although remains over the government target. The time from a child starting their first care placement to moving in with adoptive parents has increased, with average days being 411 across the Tees Valley, which is lower than the national target (421 days) and 70 days lower than the England average.

The number of families approved over the past year has risen from the previous year, with 55 families having been assessed and approved to adopt. While this increase is welcomed, ATV continues to need more families for siblings, for older children up to the age of 5, and for children who may have some uncertainty in relation to developmental delay.

As part of this annual report, I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution of "Lesley" (name changed) a Mum who has had 5 children leave her care, and one adopted, and who makes an important contribution to prospective adopter preparation training within this region. She talks at every preparation training group, about the perspective of birth parents and why keeping in touch matters. "Lesley" is truly exceptional. She has had the courage to talk to hundreds of prospective adopters over the years, and she makes a real and tangible difference to their views and feelings about birth parents, which then goes on to translate into a more informed understanding around keeping in touch.



## **2. Governance**

ATV is governed by the Board of Directors which comprise the DCS's for the 5 partner Local Authorities. There are additionally 2 non-executive directors who are adoptive parents.

In this year, the ATV Board was chaired by the Middlesbrough DCS, Sue Butcher, who has now left post. In February 2023 Sally Robinson, DCS in Hartlepool took over as chair.

Sally has significant operational experience in adoption. she is the ADM for Hartlepool and chairs the regional ASGLB until its decommissioning in 2022. Sally remains as chair of the NE regional adoption network meeting, involving LA's, VAA's and CAFCASS.

The ATV Board meets 4 times each year, and considers performance information, finance, and adoption operational and strategic issues within the region.

## **3. National Adoption – National Strategy**

Adoption Tees Valley works within the wider sector forum of the national Regional Adoption Agencies group, which is linked to ADCS, CVAA, DfE and a wide range of stakeholder committees and groups. The RAA leaders group works with a strategic plan, closely aligned to the National Adoption Strategy, Achieving Excellence Everywhere (2021). Through the RAA leader's forum, the DfE has made available national funding to support strategic delivery against the national priorities. The Service Manager at ATV chairs the national Early Permanence Working Group. Managers and practitioners in ATV have access to forums and training opportunities that are delivered through the RAA Leaders network.

This year has seen stronger pan regional working together across the 3 RAA's of Adoption Tees Valley, Adopt North East, and Adopt Coast to Coast. The 3 RAA's cover the 12 Local Authority areas of the North East, and through collaborative working we have together set an agenda for greater consistency of delivery in this "pan region".

We have secured funding for 2 significant projects pan regionally to offer improved services, and greater consistency of delivery in adoption across the NE region.

### **NE and Cumbria Early Permanence Project**

This is a 2 ½ year funded project to increase the number of children who have access to early permanence, and to develop a range of placements including more concurrent planning placements. The funding is £330,000, funded until April 2025, and has been secured and managed through the support of Stockton BC Procurement Team.

The project has recruited a lead consultant who is Kate Knowles, a manager from the North West Concurrency Project –which has strong experience and expertise in concurrent planning placements. Each RAA has seconded at least one social worker into the project, and one regional VAA, Arc Adoption, is also involved as a partner. The aim is to achieve regional sufficiency of EP carers, and more children having the opportunity for a single placement, without moves around the system, until a Court decision is made on the final care plan.

Adoption Tees Valley has been an active contributor to the Project, with 2 social workers, Angela Simmons, and Kirsty Taylor, being seconded for 1 day per week, to strengthen practice and delivery of EP placements.

### **North East Multi-Disciplinary Adoption Support Service**

This is a 2 year funded project to set up and establish a multi-agency adoption support service for the NE region. It is a pilot project testing out a model of adoption support for any child within the age range of 7-11, who it is considered would benefit from a multi-disciplinary assessment and intervention. The project has a clear ethos that to support children, parents must also be supported, and is seeking to test and refine a model which will be available for ASF funding in the long term.

A strength of the project is the partnership that has been achieved with the 3 RAA's and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) for the NE region, bringing social care and health together in this developing service.

The project has secured £950,000 funding over 2 years and will run until April 2025.

## **4. Partnership Working**

Following the Review of ATV in 2021, the service has strengthened its focus on partnership working, a theme which is also evident in national strategy.

Working in partnership is one of the key elements of the service plan 2023-25, and new ways of working together are continually being tested in the maturation of the RAA. The 2 projects highlighted above reflect a stronger regional partnership, where we are achieving more together than would have been achieved by any single agency.

ATV works together with Local Authorities, through strategic and practice working arrangements. This year has seen a strengthened approach to

working with LA Fostering Services, for early permanence. Also, a shared adoption support process, and a new approach whereby ATV will attend Legal Gateway meetings in the LA.

Work with VAA's has been strengthened through the early permanence project above. This builds on ATV regular working together with regional VAA's to secure regional placements for children where no in house option is available. Working relationships are positive although challenges exist in the increasing costs of VAA placements, while funding to LA's and the RAA is not increased.

ATV works with health predominantly around provision of the Medical Advisor role. This has been an area of significant challenge within the year, especially within the South Tees Trust, affecting Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland. There have been pressures in achieving timely adoption medicals, and adult adopter health appointments. To address this, there has been a lot of collaborative working between Local Authorities, ATV, South Tees Trust and the ICB. Significant management and practitioner time in all agencies is dedicated to addressing how children can progress without delay. ATV remains appreciative of the Medical Advisors, who's expertise and commitment are valued, in helping to ensure that children's health needs are fully understood, and that adoptive parents are given high quality information about the child's health, prior to matching.

Pan regional partnership working has been positive in the year, reflected in the 2 projects highlighted above.

ATV has valued the continued support of the Virtual schools, in helping to understand and promote the needs of adopted children who can be "hidden" if schools are unaware that the child or young person is adopted. Working together is supported by tri-annual meetings and the partners virtual schools' collaborative funding of the ATV Education support worker. See section 13 for details of education support in this year.

ATV works with commissioned providers of services including multiple therapy providers via a commissioned framework, and a VAA providing independent support services to birth parents, and access to adoption records.

## **5. Benchmarking – Key Performance Data**

The key performance data is presented in summary in this section. More detailed performance information, presented by local authority is detailed in section 8.

Data is presented for ATV for the year 2022-23, at the end of quarter 4, and for the previous year 2021-22 for comparison.

Key Indicator	ATV 2021-22	ATV 2022-23	Current c/w previous	National Govt Target where applicable
Adopter Approvals	46	55	Inc 19%	N/A
Children referred to ATV	179	223	Inc 25%	N/A
Children with ADM -BID (Best interests' decision)	78	100	Inc 28%	N/A
PO	74	87	Inc 18%	N/A
Matches	79	81	Inc 1%	
Placed	77	77	No Change	N/A
Early Permanence	11	11	No Change	
Adoption Orders	78	84	Inc 8%	N/A
Disruptions – pre order	0	1		N/A
Timescale – A2 (PO to match)	174	146 days	Dec 16%	121 days
Timescale A10 – BLA- Moved in with Adopters	383	411	Inc 7%	421 days

## 6. Marketing and Recruitment

ATV marketing aims to promote awareness of the need for more people to consider adopting. ATV also seeks to increase awareness of the role of ATV in providing support to adoptive families including children and adoptive parents. ATV has a multi-channel approach to marketing, using social media including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and also commissioning support to digital marketing campaigns during key campaign periods. It can be difficult to evaluate the impact of any particular campaign, other than numbers of enquiries received. However, it is recognised that the consideration of adoption is a major life decision and there is a pre-contemplative period for adults in deciding to go on an enquiry about adoption. As a result, we use social media reach, and engagement, enquiry numbers and approval numbers to indicate whether marketing is being effective. However, it is not an exact science, due to the time period that people may require, either before enquiring, or following enquiry, before commencing the “adopter journey”.

ATV is seeking to reach out to prospective adopters who can offer the family homes to children in the region where their needs are more complex arising from the child's needs or being part of a sibling group. Marketing has therefore been targeted to people who are interested in older children (age 4+) children with additional needs, and siblings.

Activity	ATV 2021-22	ATV 2022-23
Number of ATV recruitment campaigns year to date	3	5
Number of all Adopter enquiries year to date (all methods )	287	309
Number of ATV enquiries converted to ROI	61	73
% of ATV enquiries converted to ROI	22%	24%
Number of adoptive families attending information events	123	131
Social media followers	11,724	11,751
Website visits	16,819	17,422

#### What has gone well?

- Greater numbers of enquiries, and adopter approvals
- Attendance at Pride at Newcastle- the major LFJB event in the North
- Introduction of blogs on the ATV website written by adoptive parents
- Press and media presence with coverage on ITV Tyne Tees twice in the last 12 months, interviews on BBC radio Tees and press releases local news outlets including the Gazette and Northern Echo.
- Conversion rate of enquiries to ROI increasing, and numbers increasing.

#### Challenges?

- The service continues to need more enquirers and adoptive parents for siblings and for older children, and those with more complex needs.

### **7. Preparation, Assessment and Approval of Adoptive Parents**

	Total 2021-22	Total 2022-23	Current c/w previous
<b>Initial Visits to prospective Adopters</b>	71	106	Inc 35%
<b>Stage 1 Starts</b>	46	58	Inc 26%
<b>Stage 2 Starts</b>	52	51	Dec 2%
<b>Adopter Approvals</b>	46	55	Inc 20%
<b>Numbers in assessment at the end of the period</b>	39	38	Dec 2%
<b>Numbers waiting to be matched at end of period</b>	29	29	No change

<b>Timescale S1 (Govt target 60 days)</b>	106	239	
<b>Timescale S2 (Govt target 121 days)</b>	146	156	

ATV has increased numbers of initial visits to prospective adopters and has focussed in this year on the Enquiry to Registration of Interest (ROI) timeline and experience. ATV has created a new role for enquiries management, and through this role, we have seen conversion from enquiry to ROI increase by 2%, however rising well beyond this in the current year, and we expect to see significant improvement in 2023-24.

ATV has partnered in with Redcar and Cleveland, and Darlington Virtual Schools, to share the new Virtual Reality Video headsets adopted by both agencies. These headsets are now being used in all preparation groups, to enable adoptive parents to experience the world of the child in a range of scenarios that a child may have experienced, for example- where domestic violence has taken place around the child. The headsets are aimed at helping prospective adopters have a better understanding of the trauma a child has experienced, and feedback so far is that they are powerful, impactful, and helpful.

ATV has incorporated learning from a national Child Safeguarding Review of a child placed for adoption (LJC case) and has progressed to a trauma informed approach across the service. The team now use the Trauma Timeline approach in assessment work with families, and then through the matching work for a child, helping prospective adopters and all professionals understand the lived trauma of the child. The Trauma Tree is a tool used within the direct work with families, and in preparing to care for a particular child.

ATV is now requiring all family and friends' networks to be involved during the assessment process. The aim is to raise the profile of the role of support networks in any potential safeguarding matters, and to help them be better prepared to support the child and family, with more awareness of the impact of trauma and attachment disruption for children.

All adoptive parents undertaking their first approval are required to complete the 4 day preparation training course, which is underpinned by the Secure Base Model (Schofield and Beek), the Trauma Timeline, and PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) parenting.

Families are all asked to register with CATCH (commissioned from PACT) which is an on line learning and support forum, and which is integrated into the ATV adopter journey, from assessment onwards.

Timescales for assessments have been challenging in this year (239 days on average with a target of 182 days), and the explanation is largely due to delays in medicals being completed in full during stage 1. This may be with either the GP practice, or with the Medical Advisor providing a summary of the adopter health and advice to the agency.

To address challenges around Medical Advisor capacity, ATV Service Manager has negotiated extensively with partners in the ICB, and Foundation Trusts and fed back to the ATV Board on this key challenge. As the year closes, the ATV Board and ICB have agreed to fund a dedicated “Adult Adopter” Medical Advisor (MA) for ATV to relieve pressure on the paediatricians carrying out adoption health assessments of children, through provision of a MA who will consider all adult health reports. This MA will also have a role in supporting GP awareness of the safeguarding nature of adopter medicals, and in improving GP returns in an improved timescale, through dedicated awareness raising sessions.

What has gone well?

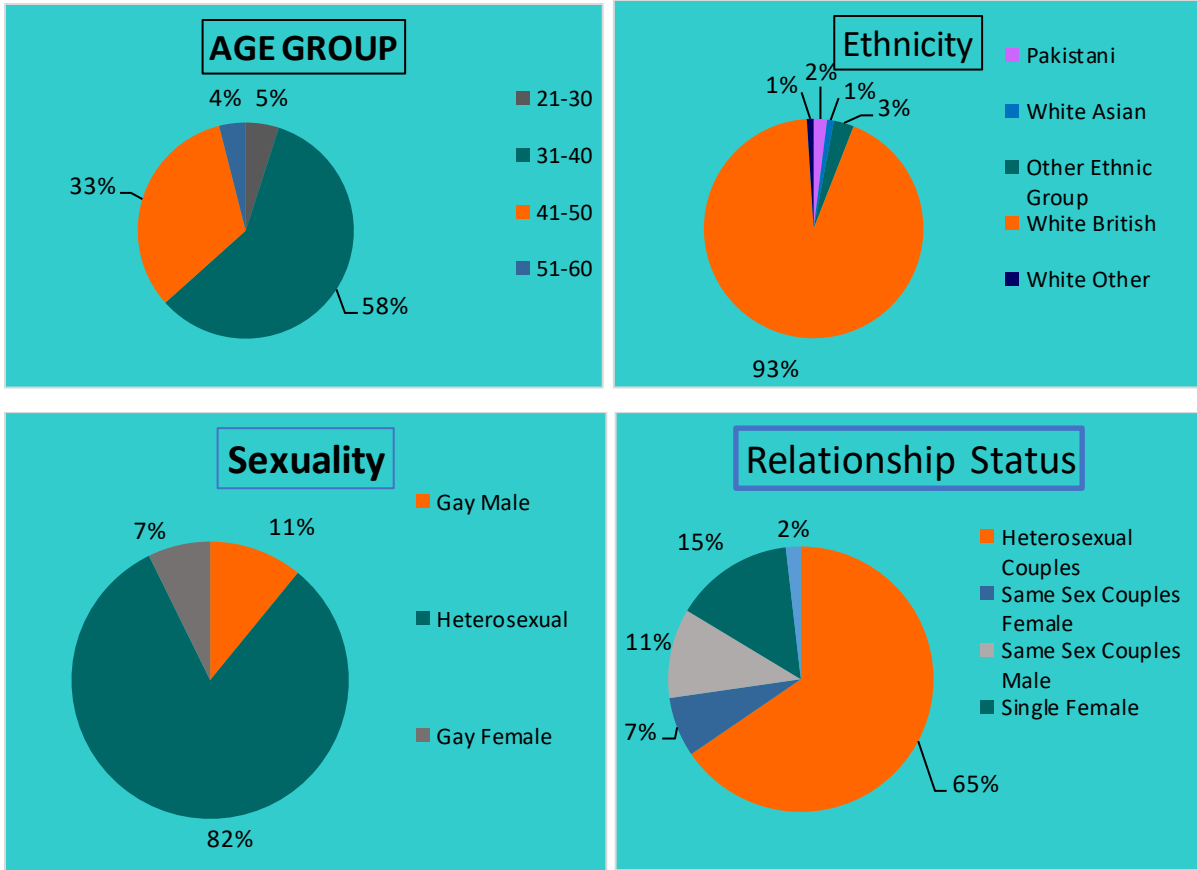
- Strengthening of work around trauma informed practice, and positive partnerships with LA 's, enabling shared resources.
- Increased numbers of adopter approvals in 2022-23
- Improvement in the enquiry to ROI conversion
- Improved timescale from enquiry to ROI
- Response to the LJC safeguarding review- continued review on safeguarding and trauma informed practice.
- Collaborative response to medical advisor pressures.

Challenges?

- Not enough adoptive families for children who have more complex needs.
- Timescales for stage 1 are longer than wished for, and the key reason is delays in health information, either from GP, or from Medical Advisors.

*7.1 Who did ATV approve?*

Total approvals: 55 families: 99 individuals



Sexuality/relationship status: 35 heterosexual couples; 10 same sex couples; 8 single women and 1 single man.

Prospective Adopters approved for early permanence: 10 (18%)

Age- 92 % of all adopters are aged between 30 and 50 years old.

Ethnicity- most of all adoptive parents are white British, with 93 % in this category.

Timeliness of matching adoptive parents: of the adopters approved and matched within the period, 23 were matched with a child within 3 months of approval, and 28 were matched more than 3 months following approval. 4 were not matched within this period.

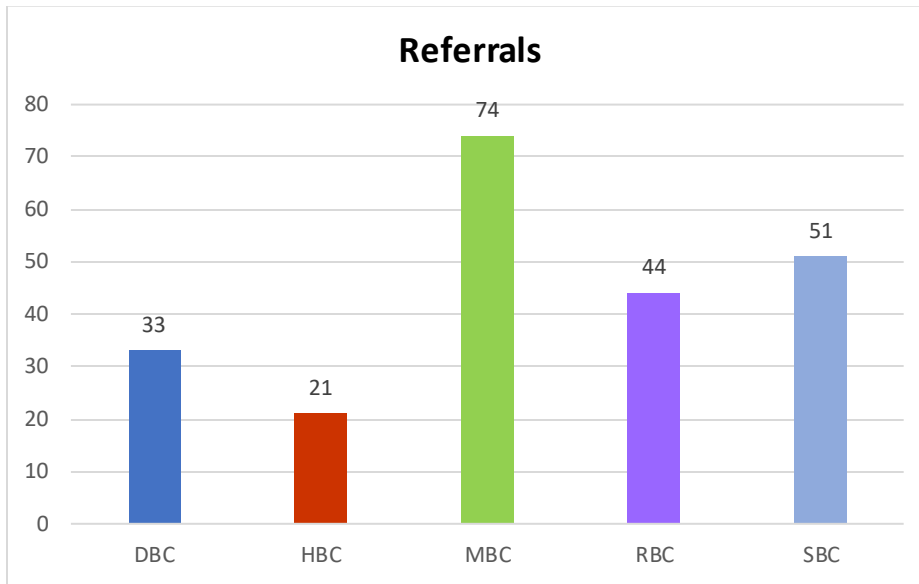
**8. Referrals of children**

There has been an increase overall in referrals of children who may require an adoptive family in this year. This has translated into higher numbers of ADM's and POs, although placements remain the same as in the last year.

Data is provided below on the number and timescales by Local Authority

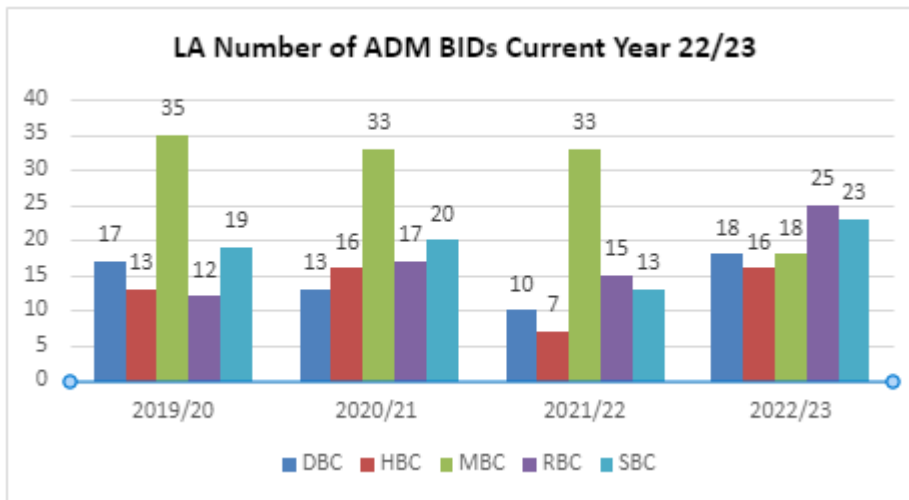


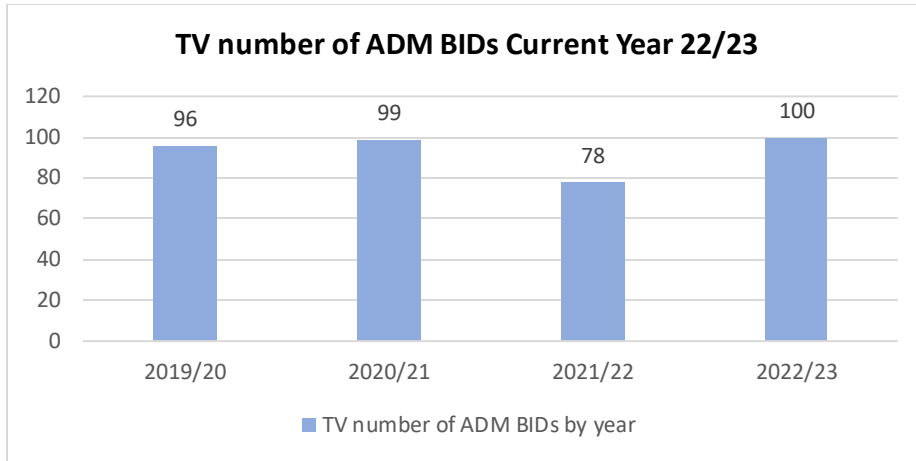
### 8.1 Referrals – Early Notifications by Local Authority



223 were referred in total. ATV asks for referrals of children at the earliest point they may have an ADM. Not all children progress to a plan of adoption. Middlesbrough are the highest referring LA, followed by Stockton.

### 8.2 ADM- “Best Interests Decision” by Local Authority



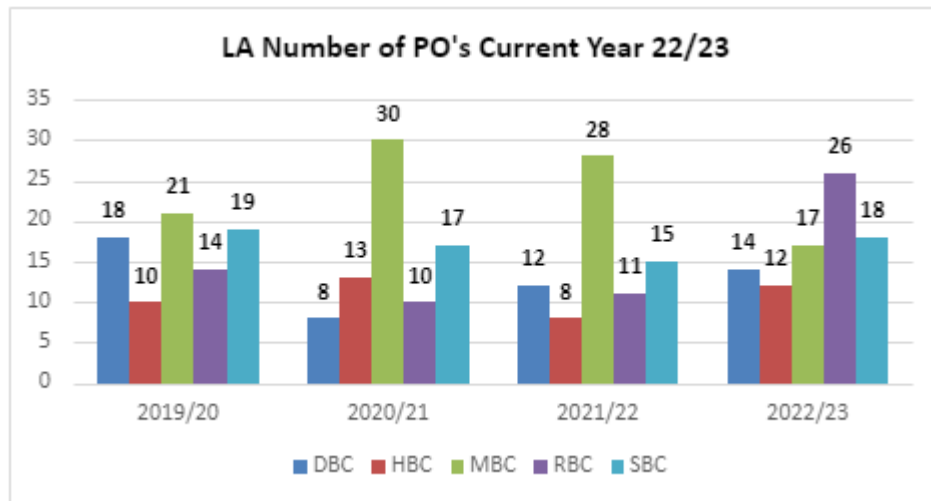


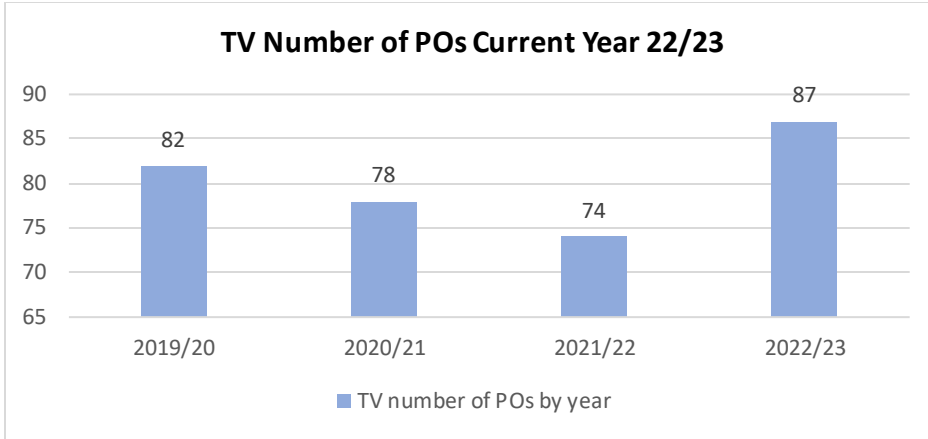
*Change by LA on Previous Year*

- Darlington increase by 8- 80%
- Hartlepool increase by 9- 128%
- Middlesbrough decrease by 15- 45%
- Redcar and Cleveland increase by 10 – 66%
- Stockton increase by 10- 77%

4 of the 5 LA's have seen a significant rise in the numbers of children for whom they are planning for adoption. Middlesbrough is the outlier with a considerable decrease in numbers of children with an adoption plan.

*8.3 Placement Orders- by Local Authority*



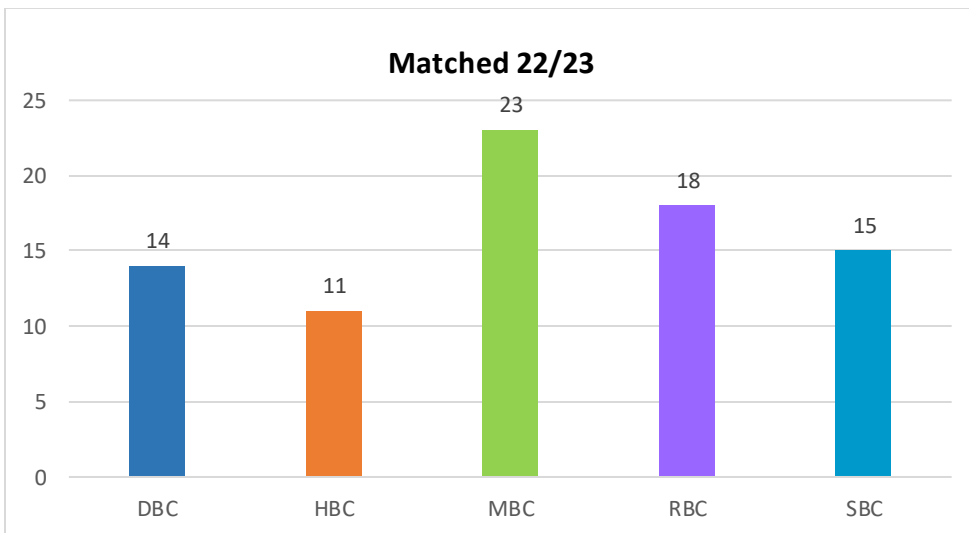


*Change by LA on Previous Year*

- Darlington increase by 2- 17%
- Hartlepool increase by 4- 50%
- Middlesbrough decrease by 11- 39%
- Redcar and Cleveland increase by 15- 136%
- Stockton increase by 3- 20%

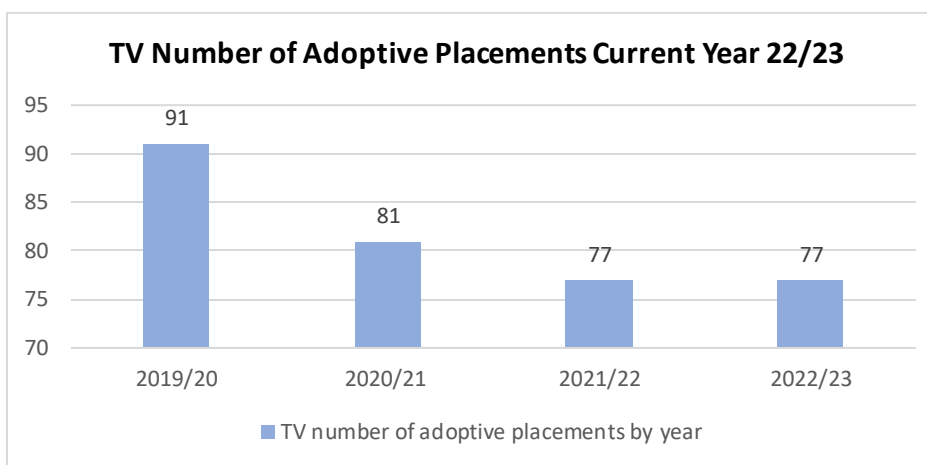
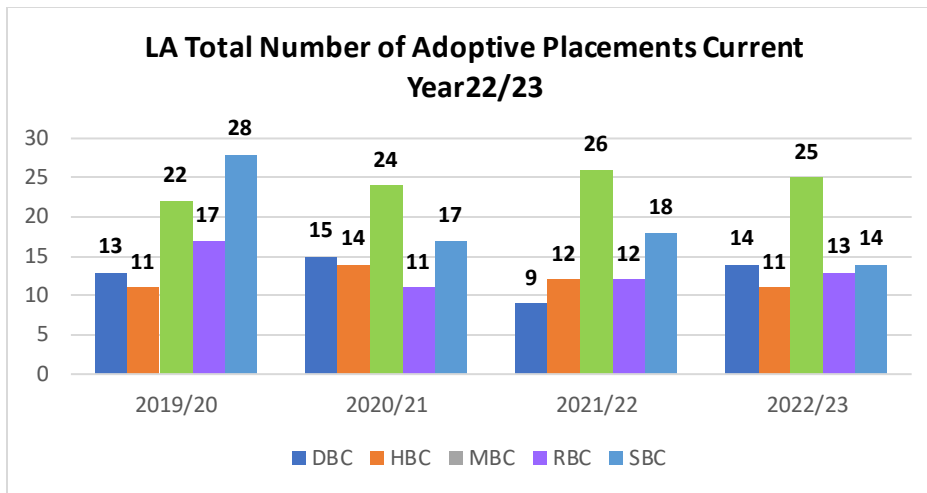
Again 4 LA's have increased the numbers of children for whom a PO has been granted, giving the LA Court authority to place for adoption. Redcar have seen an exceptional increase in numbers on previous years, and Hartlepool have returned to a similar number seen across a number of years, where 2021-22 was an exceptionally low number. Middlesbrough is an outlier with a significant reduction on previous years.

*8.4 Matches by Local Authority*



The numbers of children matched for adoption will reflect the numbers placed. Slight differences re due to timing within the year period under review.

*8.5 Placements of children for adoption by Local Authority*



*Change by LA on Previous Year*

- Darlington increase by 5- 55%
- Hartlepool decrease by 1 – 8%
- Middlesbrough decrease by 1- 4%
- Redcar and Cleveland increase by 1- 8%
- Stockton decrease by 4- 22%

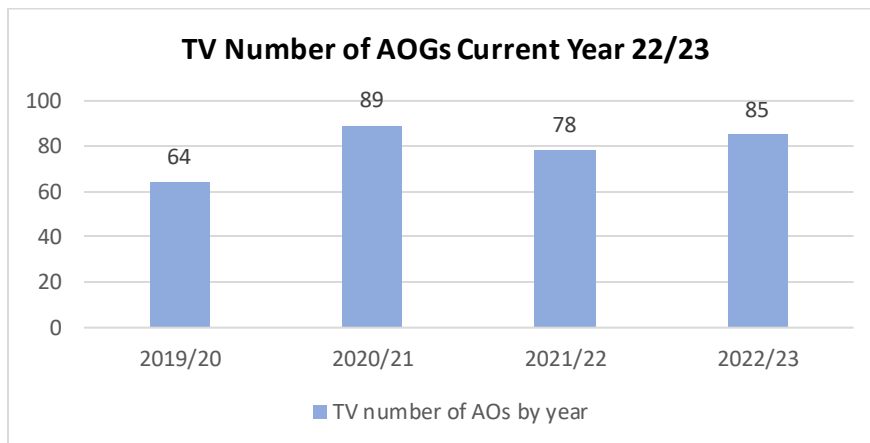
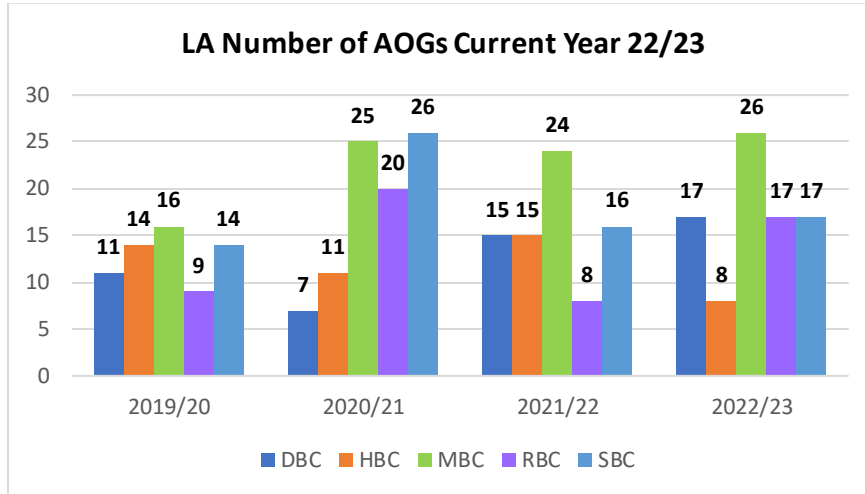
Placement numbers have remained the same over the last 2 years. Reviewing the increase in numbers of PO and ADM BIDs overall, it is identified that there was a rise in rate of PO during Q4 2022-23 and these children will be progressing to match and placement in the forthcoming months.

Although placement numbers remain the same, it is reasonable to evaluate that there is an overall increase in the numbers of children progressing for adoption in this region, due to ADM and PO activity.

Middlesbrough is the outlier. There has been a turnover of workforce, including Agency Advisor and ADM in Middlesbrough and this LA has been impacted by capacity in the Medical Advisor role, which is required for ADM to take place. Work is underway, including in partnership between the LA,

ATV and the South Tees Acute Trust to improve and address capacity issues for MA time.

### 8.6 Adoption Orders Granted by Local Authority



#### Change by LA on Previous Year

- Darlington increase by 2- 13%
- Hartlepool decrease by 8- 53%
- Middlesbrough increase by 2- 8%
- Redcar and Cleveland increase by 9- 112%
- Stockton increase by 1 – 6%

Hartlepool decrease reflects a lower number of placements in the previous year.

### 8.7 Timescales for Children Matched and moving in with Adoptive Parents

The headline measures for timeliness of adoption are:

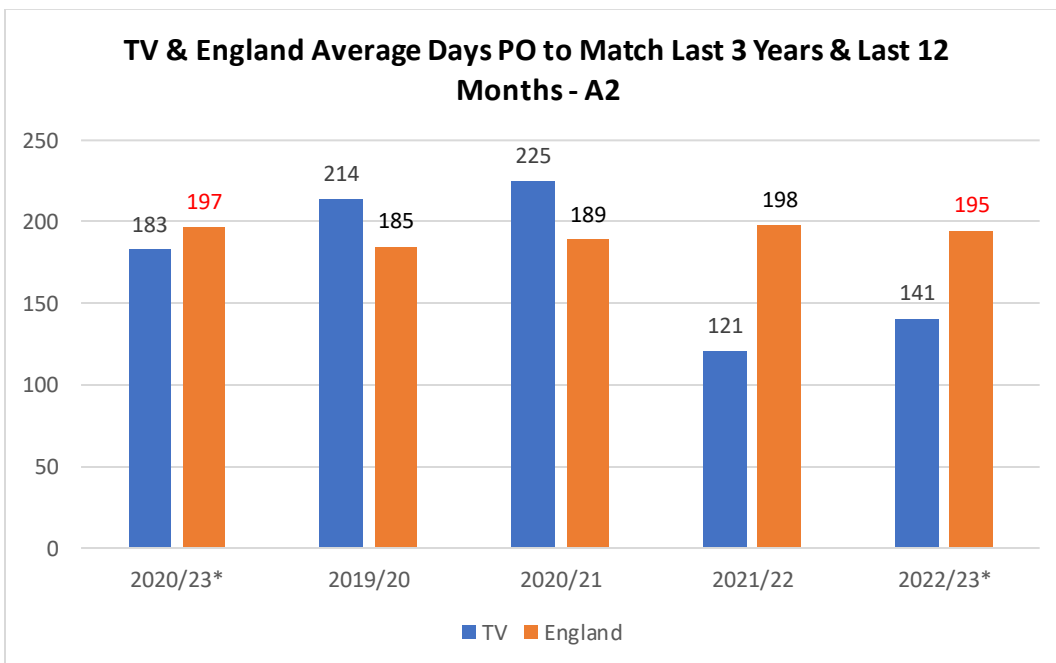
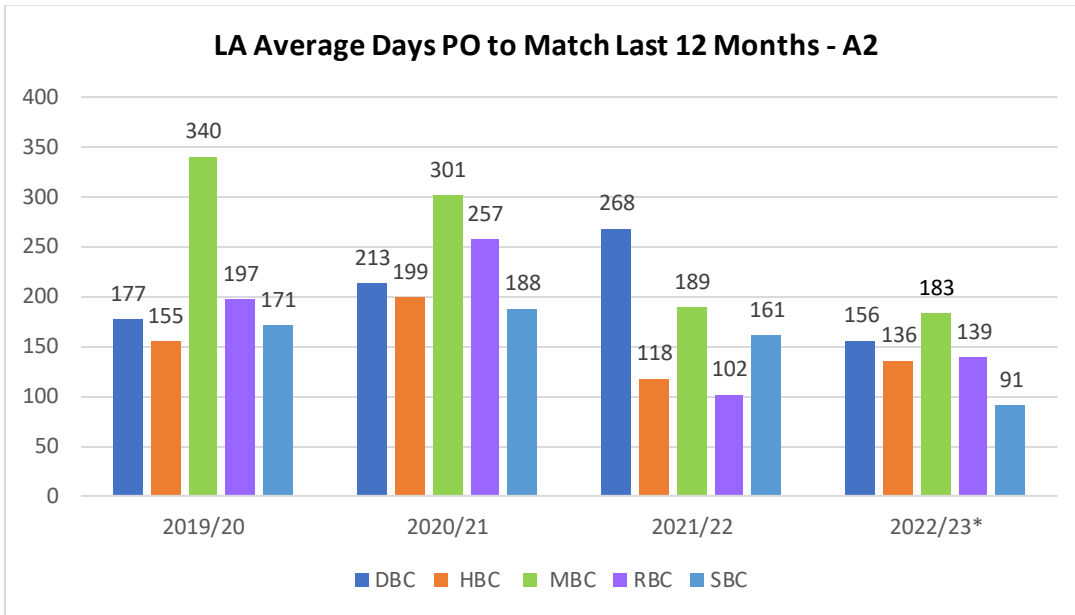
- Adoption scorecard indicator A2- Placement Order to match timescales

- Adoption Scorecard Indicator A10- date child became looked after, to date moved in with adoptive parents

All are based on the timescales of children who have been adopted in the year and are an average of those children. As numbers are low, children with exceptionally high timescales can distort figures.

### 8.8 A2 – PO to Match by Local Authority

The government target is 121 days



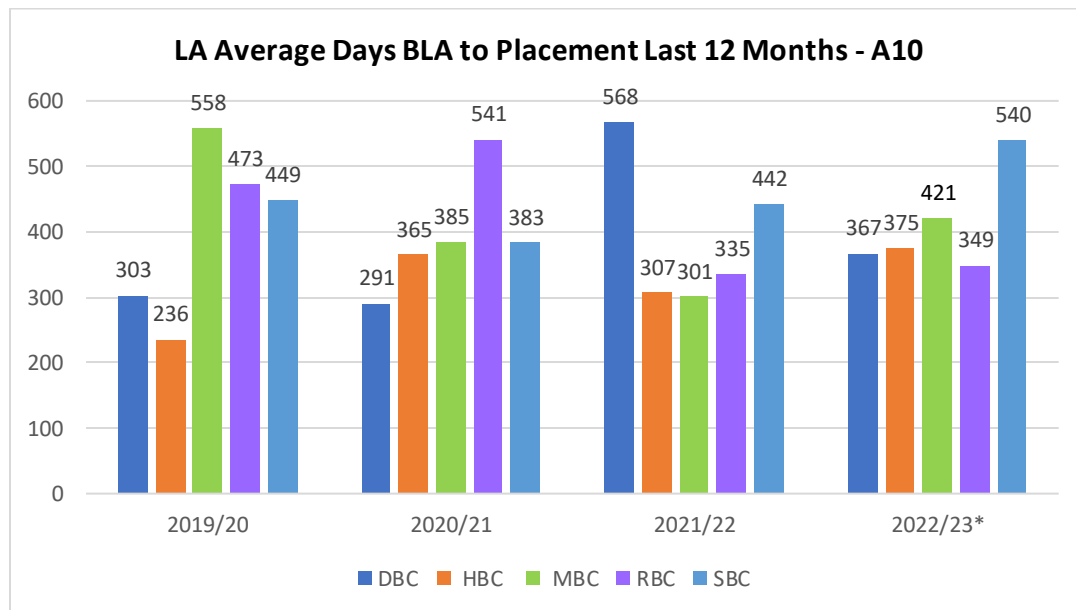
Change by LA on Previous Year

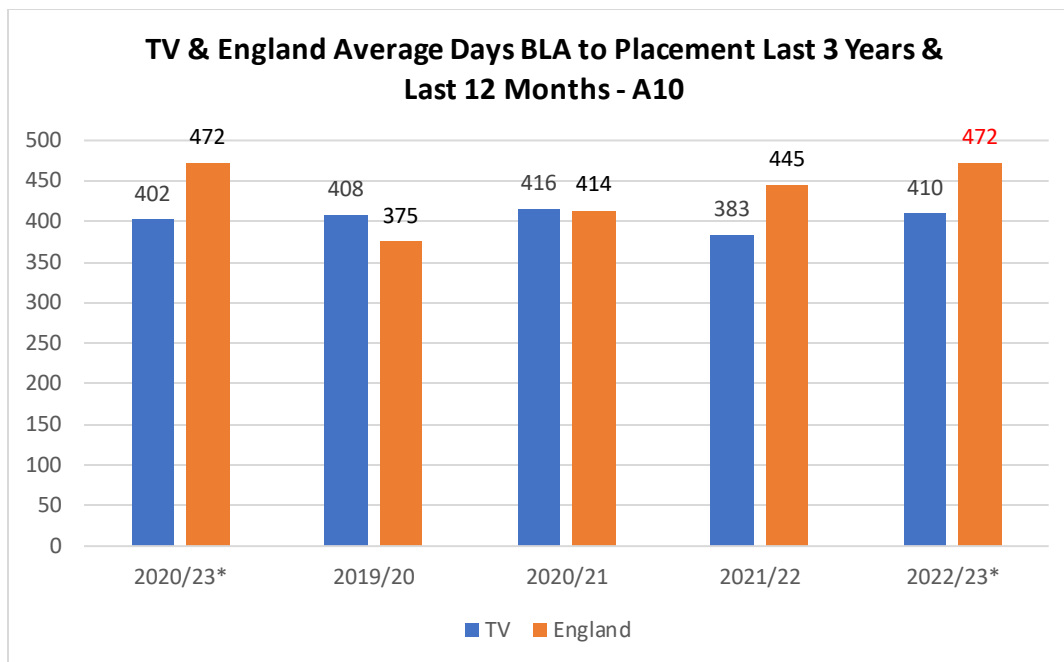
- Darlington reduced PO to match by 112 days, which is positive. The LA remains over the target time, but a reduction by 42 % in average timescale is positive.
- Hartlepool increase by 18 days, an increase of 15%
- Middlesbrough have reduced by 20 days, a decrease of 11%
- Redcar and Cleveland have increased by 37 days, an increase of 36%
- Stockton have reduced by 70 days, which is a decrease of 43%, which is extremely positive.

PO to match timescale is dependent on finding the right family for the child, and having good quality information on which to seek a family who is well positioned to meet the needs of the child. Family finding is most effective where there is an up to date good quality child permanence report, a good quality profile of the child, with high quality photographs and video imagery. Where social workers know the child well and consider the profiles and prospective adopter reports offered in a timely way, linking is effective, and centred around children’s needs. Where children are to be placed alongside siblings, have more complex needs, or need to have contact with family members, it is important to have a good, well evidenced and up to date assessment of needs, as this is critical for successful matching.

8.9 A10- Became a child in our care, to moving in with adoptive parents, by Local Authority

The government target is 421 days.





*Change by LA on Previous Year*

- Darlington reduced by 201 days, and 35% overall. Darlington has significantly reduced timescales for the children adopted, which is extremely positive.
- Hartlepool has increased by 95 days, which is 31%, Hartlepool remains on average within the government target timescale. 3 children had timescales which were higher than expected. As only 8 children were adopted in the year, these 3 children have increased overall average.
- Middlesbrough increase by 90 days, an increase of 30%
- Redcar and Cleveland increase by 14 days, and increase of 4%
- Stockton have increased by 98 days, an increase of 22%

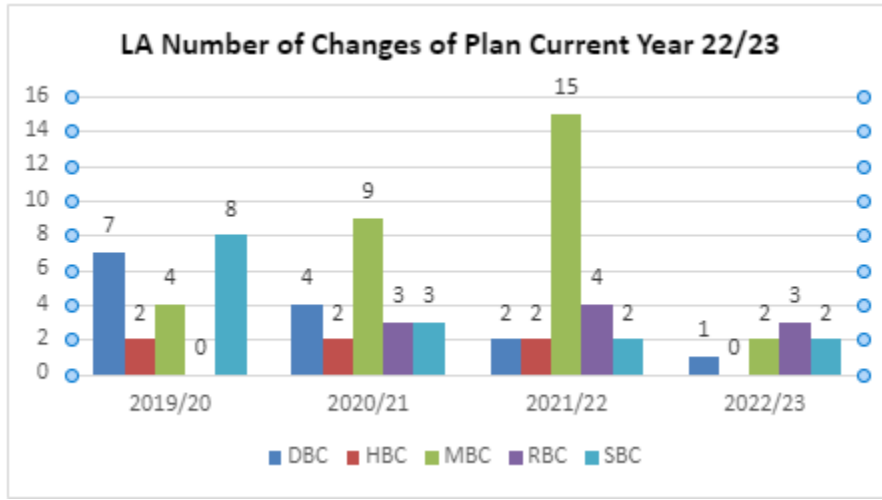
Only Stockton have an average timescale which is over the government target timescale for children in this year, although 4 of the 5 LA's have increased overall timescale averages.

The analysis of timescales for Adoption Tees Valley shows that the average timescale overall for Placement Order to match has increased and is slightly above the government target. However, compared with the England average ATV continues to perform well, and there are generally few children waiting with a PO.

The timescales from a child entering care (CIOC) to moving in have increased for 4 out of the 5 Local Authorities. 4 remain within government target timescales on average, while one LA has a significantly higher average timescale, which is accounted for by a number of children. A theme is a child returning home on a care order, then coming back into care, and going on to be placed for adoption.



### 8.10 Changes of plan away from adoption by Local Authority



The total numbers of children for whom there is a change of plan away from adoption has reduced year on year, with a significant decrease in this year, which is largely accounted for by Middlesbrough continuing with a plan of adoption for more children (following ADM BID). Changes of plan can arise for a number of reasons, which can include the RAA being unable to find an adoptive family, the needs of children changing, or family members being identified at a late stage during care proceedings.

### 8.11 Interruptions

There were 2 children who had an interruption to their planned placement. This is where the child is in introductions to their new family, and the plan does not proceed to placement. The 2 children were siblings.

### 8.12 Disruption

One child has had a disrupted placement. A disruption is where the child leaves the family prior to the granting of an adoption order.

A disruption meeting has taken place, independently chaired, and learning disseminated, and considered by the ATV team, and panel.

### 8.13 Children Returned to Care, post Adoption Order

6 Children are identified as having returned to care post adoption order, all being in the teenage age range.

## 9. Children Matched and Placed 2022-23

### 9.1 *Internal- External Families*

	Totals 2021-22	2022-23 Q1 and Q2	2022-23 Q2 and Q3	2022-23 Totals
ATV children placed with ATV adopters	58	31	21	52
ATV Children placed with external adopters	19	15	10	25
External children placed with ATV adopters	0	0	0	0
Total ATV children placed	77	46	31	77
Total placements	77	46	31	77

52 of the children were placed with ATV families, and 25 with external agencies.

17 of the 25 (68%) children placed with external agencies were placed with the regional VAA's, with whom ATV works in partnership.

Of the 7 children being placed away from the region, 4 were placed with RAA's, in the North region.

ATV continues to strive for sufficiency of adoptive parents. The gap for ATV is adopters who can take siblings, and older children or children with additional needs, including needs arising from maternal alcohol consumption in pregnancy, and significant attachment difficulties.

### 9.2 *Children waiting with PO – not linked at the year end*

On 31.3.23 there were 5 children with a PO not linked or matched.

Of these children, 2 were siblings, and there were 3 single children.

No child had a PO for over 7 months, and 4 of the 5 had PO for less than 3 months.

The single children were aged 4, 2 and 1.

One child was of mixed ethnicity, Asian- White British.

### 9.3 *Demographics of Children*

Of the 85 children adopted in the last 12 months:

<b>Aged under 5 years</b>	73	<b>Aged over 5 years</b>	12 (14%)
<b>Female</b>	39	<b>Male</b>	46
<b>Minority ethnic background</b>	10 (12%)	<b>White British</b>	75
<b>Disabled</b>	0	<b>Part of Sibling Group</b>	27
<b>“Harder to Place”</b>	37 (44%)		

#### 9.4 Matching and Family Finding Developments

The first option for considering families for ATV children will always be with ATV approved adopters, and all children with an ADM, or progressing to ADM are considered for available ATV families. Children are placed with families who match their needs, and if no internal family is a suitable match, the agency will seek external families approved to adopt.

ATV has a developed process for family finding regionally, through regular VAA meetings with ATV Family Finding managers. 8 children were linked through these meetings in the reporting period.

Any child not linked by the time of PO is placed on Linkmaker, the national portal for linking children to the right family. In the reporting period 16 children were linked through Linkmaker to external adopters.

There have been 3 funded activity days for children, through the national RAA programme. 1 child has been linked through the Activity Days programme.

ATV has commissioned a professional photographer, to do high quality photos where these are not available, showing children in a positive, and playful light.

### **10. Early Permanence**

#### *Key developments and Vision*

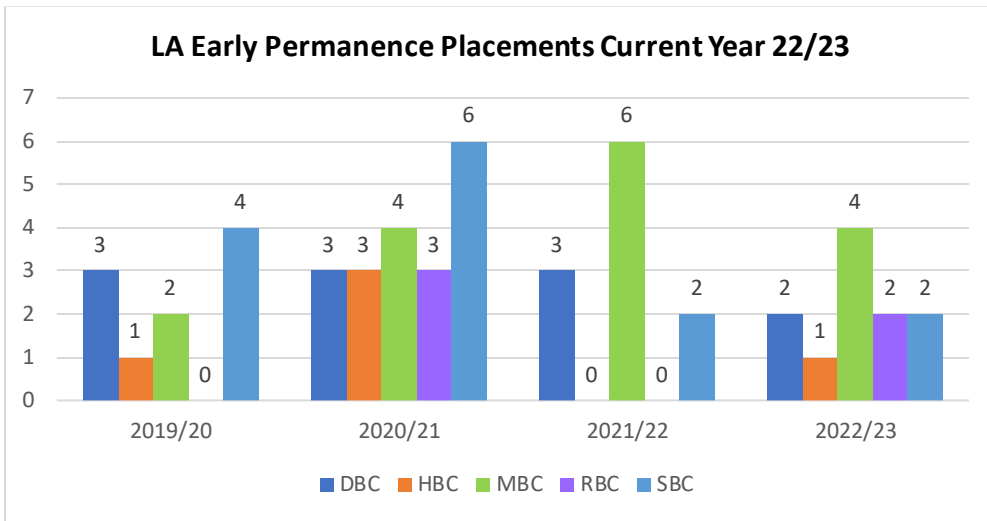
Early Permanence is a key strategic priority for ATV. The reason is that this reduces moves for children, while care plans are being developed, provides the potential for earlier secure attachments, but is not a pre-emptive placement prior to final Court decision making. The service has continued to practice a dedicated early permanence approach for children. Close monitoring of all new referrals by Permanence Champions enables early consideration of those children for whom early permanence may be an option to be considered.

ATV sets out what early permanence means from an early stage with all people approaching the RAA to adopt. This starts with the Information Events, and is followed through initial visits, preparation training and assessments.

Learning from practice, ATV has:

- Moved to a dedicated 2 day preparation programme for all carers wishing to undertake early permanence, following the Coram BAAF EP training programme for carers. The focus is on the fostering role, and working with the wider system, and with birth parents.
- Started a support group for EP carers which is facilitated by one of the senior social workers in the team.
- Commenced wider system engagement through working with Fostering Managers and Fostering Supervising Social Workers, to increase working together. Each Fostering service has a named EP Champion who will promote knowledge and awareness of EP in the LA Fostering team.
- Continued with workforce development of LA social workers by delivering training to LA staff and managers.
- Worked across the regional Sufficiency and EP Placement Project footprint to develop more consistent practice in the North East, and to secure more availability of EP placements.
- Following learning from the National EP Conference, is now moving to attend Legal Gateway meetings in all LA 's, where earlier knowledge of children during PLO enables active consideration of EP for more children.
- Has a suite of leaflets available for various parties, including birth parents.
- ATV now has experience of returning children to parents' care. It is viewed as a positive option where this is safe and right for the child, and the RAA is confident and experienced in promoting a better understanding of this with staff and EP carers.
- ATV will in 2023-24 create a dedicated EP team, to increase sufficiency of carers and promote more children having access to EP.

### 10.1 Early Permanence in Local Authorities



There have been 11 EP placements made this year. The distribution is shown across the partner Local Authorities.

11 adoptive families have been approved who can undertake EP.

The service will aim to increase the numbers of children who have access to EP and are placed through this route, and the numbers of adopters approved who can also undertake this placement type.

### 11. Adoption Support

Adoption Support continues to be a key focus for ATV and as a national priority. We know that adopted children and their families need every bit as much consideration for support as foster carers. The child is no longer in the care system, but their needs associated with early adversity, and identity with a birth **and** adoptive family do not change because they are adopted. Adoption is a good outcome for children where no family members can provide the assurance of permanence for the duration of childhood and beyond. We know adoptive families accept, love and care for their children, and relatively few return to Local Authority care. However, many children and families need support to help them thrive and ATV continues to develop its support to adoptive parents and children, aiming to create a community of adoption, and early support for all children and families as they start their lives together.

#### Tier 1

Support made available and provided for all adoptive families:

- Access to ATV closed Facebook group
- Monthly newsletter
- Face to face Stay and Play weekly- a facilitated support group where adoptive parents come, make friends, talk about parenting and the

children play. This also enables an early help offer where more support is required.

- Loud and Clear music group, facilitated by the Sage, Gateshead. A music group encouraging relationships, bonding and fun, through the sensory world of music.
- ATV events available to all adoptive families, subject to numbers- events such as Christmas party, art days, etc... which engage children and families with ATV.
- Letterbox contact arrangements to support keeping in touch and maintaining significant relationships moving forward. Includes direct support to birth family members where needed.

In this year, 21 children and 23 parents have joined the weekly Loud and Clear music group, bringing opportunity for bonding, sensory development and building relationships between families for the future.

## Tier 2

Focussed groups, to support children and adoptive parents, according to needs.

These are:

- Children's Groups, ages 7-11, and 11-16. See below
- Nurturing Attachments- a therapeutic parenting training programme
- Talking about Adoption- a life story course to help parents talk about adoption as their child grows up
- Future Stars- a sensory therapeutic parenting programme for adoptive parents and children
- Non Violent Resistance- a 10 week programme for parents of children who are violent to parents/carers
- STEP group- a 6 weekly support group for adoptive parents undertaking early permanence placements, at any stage of that journey
- Education support provided by ATV dedicated Education Support Worker (ESW) . In many cases, the ESW works alongside an allocated social worker, to provide a multi-disciplinary approach to adoption support, according to the needs of the child.

**Partnership work with Virtual Schools**

ATV continues to work closely in partnership with the 5 LA Virtual Schools who co-fund the Education Support Worker in ATV. Additionally, VS Heads, and ATV Managers and ESW meet termly to work together to develop a comprehensive education support service developing in partnership with local and regional priorities and changes.

This year, Darlington and Redcar and Cleveland VS's have collaborated to share their virtual reality headsets with ATV, enabling prospective adoptive parents to gain this realistic and experiential insight into the early experiences of children placed for adoption.

Jo Johnson, Redcar and Cleveland Virtual School Head said:

*“It is fantastic that partners are so supportive of each other, focusing on the issues that are imperative to strengthening our offer to children and families. ATV have embraced the VR headsets, trained staff and are beginning to deliver headset sessions advocating a trauma based approach to the wider audience of our adopters, early permanence carers and the impact that this undoubtedly has upon our previously looked after cohort of children. This develops what the Virtual Schools are working on within schools and education providers across the Tees Valley.”*

In this year, 15 parents have attended Nurturing Attachments to develop therapeutic parenting approaches and skills.

7 families/7 children have joined the Future Stars programme, benefiting from a therapeutic sensory programme for children.

13 families have attended the “Talking About Adoption” workshops, aimed at supporting adoptive parents to talk about adoption as their child grows up.

**Tier 3**

A dedicated specialist adoption support service, with an allocated social worker from the ATV adoption support team. The adoption support assessment will have indicated a need for a specific adoption support intervention, provided through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF), or for more specialist intervention from a partner agency. ATV has expanded its work with Local Authority early help and assessment teams, to create a shared understanding of adoption support needs, and a shared responsibility for provision of advice, supports and services, including financial support packages.

The service has in this year changed the way in which adoption support assessments are responded to, with a shorter 1 hour telephone assessment

within 10 days, enabling parents to feel confident there is access to support and therapy more quickly. Although delivery of therapy remains within timescale of the Adoption Support Fund (28 days application agreement process) this early response is better for adoptive parents and children and is reflected in a better response on the adopter survey – see below. The early duty response to requests for assessment involves:

- A social work response to requests for an adoption support assessment, either for a specific identified support, or a more comprehensive assessment of support needs.
- An offer of services available under tiers 1 and 2
- Therapeutic support provided by one of the commissioned therapy providers who have been agreed to join the ATV providers framework.

Currently, the gap is a more joined up approach with health services, provided via TEWV and CNTW mental health specialist services. It is planned that this will be improved through the new partnership model for adoption support, outlined in the introduction to this report.

In this period, work has been undertaken to agree shared Adoption Support procedures across all 5 Local Authorities, and ATV. These detail the responsibilities of ATV, the local authority and how the agencies work together in respect of statutory responsibilities for assessment and provision of adoption support.

## **12. Commissioned Services**

### *12.1 Independent Birth Parent Support and Access to Adoption Records*

Adoption Tees Valley commissions independent birth parent support, and an access to adoption records service from a regional VAA.

In this year, the contract for these services was re-tendered, and was awarded to Arc Adoption, having previously been awarded to Adoption Matters.

The transitional arrangements have been supported by Stockton Procurement, as the host Authority for the RAA. The transition of the contract has been smooth and well managed, and recognition is given to both VAA's for the work that they have/are undertaking for the support of birth parents and adopted adults.

### *12.2 Framework of Therapeutic Providers*

ATV has operated a Framework of Therapeutic Providers for delivery of adoption support therapeutic services for children and families. The framework has been in operation since 2018 and has been fully retendered



within this period. The funding for therapies for children is drawn down from the Adoption Support Fund.

Assessment is undertaken by the adoption support social work service as detailed above, and application is made in each case for the most appropriate therapeutic intervention based on the assessment, and in some cases, specialist assessment- also a commissioned service, through the Framework.

There are a total of 20 providers on the framework, who are awarded the contract for specific therapeutic input, as detailed within each aspect of the framework, dependent on their successful application. The providers are a mix of small and larger local and regional therapy providers, and the range of providers is valued, giving a range of options for therapy for children and families. Therapeutic approaches include: theraplay, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), play therapy, family therapy, sensory integration, therapeutic life story work.

The new multi-disciplinary adoption support service under development (MDASS) will bring the added benefit of a partnership with health, enabling more clinical oversight of assessments and of commissioned services.

### 12.3 ASF Applications

The value of applications to the ASF is set out below. A new process is in place, whereby invoices are paid once the therapy has been completed, and so actual payments are less than the value of applications.

The numbers of referrals and assessments, including cases with education support is set out below.

	2021-22	2022-23	
Number of adoption support referrals	106	126	Inc 19%
Access to Files requests/completed	40	45	Inc 12.5 %
Adoption Support Assessments completed	106 +94 repeated assessments	126 + 163 repeated assessments	Inc 19 % inc 74% repeated assessments

Successful application to ASF	200	289	Inc 44 %
Unsuccessful application to ASF	0	0	0
Value of applications to ASF	£718,302	£1,060,651	Inc £342,349
Education Support Cases during year	77	32 new 114 total	

The information shows an increase in adoption support activity during the year.

ATV makes group applications to fund the Tier 2 therapeutic programmes, and the increase in Tier 2 supports accounts for some of the increase in funding applied for, and assessments.

It is planned that ATV will trial a new outcomes framework- measuring the outcomes of adoption support and therapeutic intervention during 2023-24. This is a national pilot, and a voluntary arrangement. However, ATV will be progressing to develop an outcomes framework, in line with national development moving forward.

### **13. Involving Children and Adults in ATV**

ATV has made good progress in working together with adopted children, and with adoptive parents, to help the service be shaped and informed through the voices of people with lived experience. This year has seen a resumption of groups for children, and of the adopter partnership forum, following the pandemic.

#### *13.1 Children's involvement – Childrens Groups*

There has been a full resumption and development of work with children and young people who are adopted, following the pandemic. In April 2022 ATV recommenced the children's groups, which are face to face groups led by one social worker, 2 adoption support workers, and the Education Support Worker.

There are 2 groups in place, each of which meets monthly.

There is a group for 7-11 year olds, and a group for 11-16's.

The groups have been well attended and are very valued by adopted children and their parents. Activities are collective, and promote adopted children meeting with each other, forming friendships, and getting more comfortable with their identity as adopted young people.

### *13.2 Voice and Influence – Children and Young People*

The service has started a dedicated Voice and Influence Group, and development of this is underway within the reporting period, and into this new reporting year ( 2023-24).

The team have been supported in the development of this group through specialist training: they have learned that it's important to take time to develop the confidence of young people and seek their involvement in having a voice in service development as a separate activity to the focus of the young people's groups. With support from the National RAA project team, ATV has commenced its journey of development of our own Voice and Influence group.

There are 9 young people who have begun involvement, ranging from age 11 to 17, and the group has started to form its aims, and goals, which will include presenting to the ATV Board its ideas.

Young people have been involved in interviews for staff and have begun exploring their big issues which they feel need better understanding for adopted children, including education, and life story work.

### *13.3 Adoptive Parents- the Adopter Partnership Forum*

The Adopter Partnership Forum has recommenced following covid. A survey via the ATV newsletter was sent to adoptive parents to seek expressions of interest for the forum, and a good response was received. The forum has now reconvened, with a monthly meeting, joined by the Service Manager and one of the Team Managers. Attendance is still relatively low, however, is increasing gradually, and the group is forming ideas for involvement of more adopters, and how the voice of adoptive parents can influence the service delivery.

The forum has considered the adopter survey (see below) feedback, and some changes have been made as a result of the feedback and discussion. For example, a new matching agreement, to enable newly approved adoptive parents to tell the service how they want to be kept informed of potential matches.

The ATV Board has decided that the Adopter Forum will be asked to select the next ATV Non-Executive Director for the ATV Board. This has been discussed and will be progressed in the next 3 month period.

A further benefit of the Forum is that one adoptive parent has been able to generate positive links with the Tees Valley museums, who are now considering ways in which adoption and adopted people can be given support through the Museums network.

ATV Board continues to hold 2 Non-Executive Director seats for Adoptive parents in the ATV community. Currently, Pete Kirby Bowstead holds one position. Pete is also a headteacher in a primary school in the region and has been a voice and support of adoptive parents in Tees Valley. Pippa Turner has decided to step down from her position as NED after 3 years on the board. ATV is grateful to Pippa for her contribution on behalf of adoptive parents.

#### 13.4 Adopter Survey

An adopter survey was undertaken with adoptive parents, circulated through the ATV mailing list. There were 44 respondents- all adoptive parents at different stages of their journey.

The survey mirrored a previous adopter survey undertaken at the end of 2021, and much of the feedback is encouraging.

87% were satisfied or very satisfied with ATV response to their initial enquiry.

87% were satisfied or very satisfied with the adoption process through ATV.

88% were satisfied or extremely satisfied with their preparation training.

81% were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the linking and matching process.

90% were satisfied or highly satisfied with the plan of introductions to their child.

72 % were extremely satisfied or satisfied with the adoption support provided in the last 18 months, and 79% were satisfied or extremely satisfied that adoption support was offered in a timely manner. This is a huge and positive development with this figure being much lower at the last survey. As detailed above, ATV has restructured how adoption support initial contacts and assessments are undertaken, and the improved adopter satisfaction is encouraging.

Similarly, the survey tells us that many adopters are aware of the Adoption Support Fund, that they find the CATCH on line training platform valuable, and that they value the monthly ATV newsletter.

*Where do we need to pay most attention?*

58 % were satisfied or very satisfied with the education support offered, which appears lower than expected. We believe this may reflect some families who

have not needed or taken this up, and therefore are not providing a positive response.

29% of those replying said that they experienced some mental health problems, sadness and/or depression following the child joining their family.

Taking these issues forward, all of the areas for reflection and improvement are tabled for discussion, or have been discussed with the adopter forum, and have been included in the ATV 2023-25 Service Plan.

#### **14. Adoption Panel**

Within this year ATV Board has agreed additional funding for a 3 day per week Panel Manager and Agency Advisor to the adoption panel. This has enabled improved performance, quality assurance and consistency in relation to all panel matters and has brought a dedicated focus to panel from one single panel manager. This has brought an improved quality assurance feedback process, with Local Authorities and ATV receiving evidence based quality feedback in a more focussed way. The Panel Manager has provided training on key aspects of adoption panel related work, including production of quality Child Permanence Reports (CPR's).

Panel Business meetings with panel chairs and the Agency Service Manager, who is also ADM for adopter approvals have continued, and are now convened by the Panel Manager. These are supported by 6 weekly business meetings between the Panel manager, Chair, and vice Chairs. The panel now has an improved QA function in relation to feedback forms for applicants, attending social workers, and panel members, and feedback is acted on.

The panel members have all undertaken annual appraisal, using a new more efficient and effective 360 approach, which has been positively welcomed. Panel members have undertaken training on a number of key aspects of adoption related business including early permanence. Panel chairs, vice chairs and the panel manager have undertaken training on Cultural humilities, and a session for all panel members is planned.

The panel chairs 6 monthly reports have been produced and presented to the ATV Board. This details in full the work of panel, including timescales, and quality issues and themes.

In this year, there have been:

- 56 adoption panels convened.
- 71 matches presented, including 79 children.
- 9 cases presented where the child was already placed in an early permanence placement.
- 1 consensual adoption case (previously known as relinquished)

- 55 approvals presented.
- 1 brief report presented.

Panels have remained largely virtual in this year. A survey has been undertaken with all parties to seek views on the question of virtual or face to face panel meetings. The feedback received indicated that a significant minority would value some opportunity for face to face panels again. This has been incorporated into a new plan, with one face to face panel per month, which any applicant who wishes for it can ask to be booked on to.

The agency continues to seek to increase diversity into the Central List, and this year a new panel member who is a young adult with lived experience of being adopted has joined. There are now more male members of panel also. The agency continues to strive to find more panel members from ethnic minority communities, with the aim of having at least one non white panel member wherever a child or family from a minority ethnic background is presented. We have heard nationally from black adoptive parents who feel very disempowered when an all-white panel hears their case, and ATV is placing a priority on this issue. Currently there are 2 black central list members, however, the service is currently seeking to increase this number.

Feedback from panel:

- Quality of matching documentation good
- Child's trauma timeline is appearing in most matching documentation
- Number of children having life appreciation days is increasing
- Quality of CPR's is improving
- The need for continual workforce training in LA's is noted
- PARs are generally good quality.

As part of their role, all 5 Local Authority ADM's have now observed the adoption panel, to be assured of the practice and approach of the RAA adoption panel. Feedback from ADM's has been positive.

The ATV Board has considered the full Panel Chairs report.

### **15. Staffing**

As noted above, the service has appointed a 0.6 FTE Panel manager and Agency Advisor, which is a new post. 2 further social workers (2FTE) have been agreed and are now in post.

The service has 18.85 FTE Social Workers, which includes 12.85 in recruitment, assessment and Family Finding and 5 in Adoption Support. 1 FTE is dedicated to partner adoption assessments.

Within the current year, the service will be undergoing a temporary change in structure, for succession planning for the future. The current Service Manager will be reducing to 3 days per week, a new temporary post of Deputy Service Manager has been created, which is now recruited to, and the service has moved from 2 Team managers, and 2 Assistant Team managers, to a 3 Team manager structure. All appointments are temporary secondments and have been internal.

This will be further reported on in the Bi Annual report, 2023-24.

Overall staff retention remains good. In this year, 1 permanent part time business support staff member retired. This post has been filled by the apprentice, who was successful in gaining a position.

### **16. Quality Assurance**

ATV operates from a position of continuous improvement, across all areas of the work. The service continually develops and seeks to improve through alignment with wider sector influences, changes, and developments; its own feedback mechanisms; audit; research; inspection; self-assessment.

Quality assurance is carried out through a variety of mechanisms. Key means of assuring quality are outlined below, and the service plan 2023-25 is underpinned by a cross cutting platform of continuous improvement and quality assurance.

The ATV Board has a role in being assured of quality of the service delivery, and a risk register is in place around key areas of risk for delivery, and/or quality concerns.

- *Service Plan*

There is an updated service plan, which has been developed through work with managers and staff, and is reflective of local development, and the national strategy and agenda on adoption. This plan will be updated quarterly and presented to the ATV Board with monitoring of progress against target measures, and outcomes.

- *Practice Model*

The service adopts elements of several key practice models in delivery of the adoption service.

The **Secure Base Model** (Schofield and Beek) is an operational model of attachment for children placed with alternative care givers and is used in preparation training and in assessment of adopters, and adoption support.

The **UEA Moving on to Adoption** is adopted in practice in many cases and is adapted dependent on the needs of the child, and family.

As detailed above, the service has adopted the **Trauma Timeline**, and is promoting trauma informed practice, within the RAA's own work, and across partner agencies.

Aspects of **Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy and Practice (DDP)** ( Dan Hughes) are supported through the service delivery, including PACE parenting.

The Education Support worker is trained in the **Thrive** approach and adopts this within work with families and across schools.

ATV adopts a relational based approach throughout its work, both with families and children, and with staff in the service.

- *Performance Monitoring*

The RAA collates detailed adoption performance data, as required by the (former) ASGLB for quarterly returns. ATV has a key role in co-ordinating with partner LAs on adoption performance data. A quarterly balanced scorecard (BSC) is produced, which details performance measures, as set out within this annual report. There is a quarterly meeting with each Local Authority adoption service lead, to review each individual LA performance, key practice themes, and also for the LA to be assured about the adoption service. The BSC is presented quarterly to the ATV Board.

- *Panel*

Panel forms a key QA function for the work of ATV and partner agencies. In this year a separate Panel Quality Assurance Action plan has been developed, which is shared and reviewed by the Panel manager, Service Manager, and panel chairs.

- *Surveys and Feedback*

An adopter survey has been undertaken, as reported on above. Changes have been made as a result of feedback and will continue to be made.

Children and Young people have fed back on the groups that have been run. The voice and Influence group will have a role in seeking children and young people's views more widely.

- *Policies*

ATV policies are in a process of review. These are being reviewed to ensure that they reflect current and most up to date practice and expectations. The Adoption Support procedure has been implemented to reflect the shared responsibilities across all 5 agencies with respect to assessment and support of adoptive children and their families.

Policies will be available on the ATV website.



- *Supervision*

All staff receive monthly supervision in ATV, which includes reflective practice.

All staff have an annual appraisal which sets out their further personal development plan for the year ahead, aligned to their own career and role, and service planning.

- *Workforce development*

The service offers and supports workforce development, aligned to service and sector development, and learning needs of staff. Workforce development may be through attending a training event, shadowing, or through group reflective sessions.

Examples within this year are:

- Early permanence training-national
- Whole team reflection on the LJC Safeguarding review.
- ADM training day facilitated by RAA leaders/Coram BAAF.
- National Adoption Support Conference, focussing on trauma informed practice.
- Team day -developing trauma informed practice and the trauma timeline.

3 managers are currently undertaking level 5 management qualification. This will strengthen the management capacity in ATV and support overall succession planning.

- *Audit*

Audits have been regularly carried out with staff involved in individual cases. The audit process has been LA specific in this year, due to a number of partner LA's undergoing full ILACS inspections by Ofsted. The ATV Board has had one overview report presented, following audits within the service. A further overview report is planned.

Audit has helped the service reflect on quality of case records and ensuring that records reflect what an adopted person may need in the future. It has also informed practice standards and implementing these within the team.

- *Ofsted*

4 of the 5 partner LA's have been inspected by Ofsted, which includes inspection of the RAA- Adoption Tees Valley, through the lens of the Local Authority. These are- Redcar and Cleveland; Darlington; Stockton; Middlesbrough.

While a lot of preparation goes into being ready for each Ofsted inspection, reports only include a single short paragraph on the Adoption Agency. In

each Ofsted inspection, the report on ATV was positive, with strengths being the experience of adoptive parents, timeliness of adoption, and the adoption panel.

Ofsted is planning for inspection of RAA's as a single inspection in 2023-25.

## 17. Finance

Adoption Tees Valley is joint funded as a shared service under the Education and Adoption Act (2016) and is a joint funded on a shared basis, with the allocations of funding per LA as detailed below.

### 17.1 General Running Costs

Expenditure	Budget 2022/23	Outturn 2022/23	Variance 2022/23
Employees	1,640,000	1,596,000	(44,000)
Running Costs	244,000	377,000	116,000
Support Service Costs	113,000	114,000	1,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1,997,000</b>	<b>2,087,000</b>	<b>73,000</b>
Interagency Fees	500,000	652,000	152,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,497,000</b>	<b>2,739,000</b>	<b>225,000</b>

Employee costs underspent due to delays filling vacant posts in year and savings in staff mileage.

Running costs overspent due to additional utility costs of premises and additional adoption support and post adoption costs.

Excluding interagency fees, additional contributions from each Local Authority are:

	New % contributions	Additional 22/23
Darlington	14.6%	11,000
Hartlepool	14.9%	11,000
Middlesbrough	28.1%	20,000
Redcar & Cleveland	15.5%	11,000
Stockton	26.9%	20,000
		<b>73,000</b>

### 17.2 Interagency Fees

Interagency fees exceeded the budget figure by £152,000. Additional contributions from each Local Authority are as follows as follows:

	Percentage	Budget 22/23	Actual 22/23	Additional 22/23
Darlington	15.95%	80,000	104,000	24,000

Hartlepool	14.22%	71,000	93,000	22,000
Middlesbrough	27.16%	136,000	177,000	41,000
Redcar & Cleveland	15.95%	80,000	104,000	24,000
Stockton	26.72%	133,000	174,000	41,000
	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>500,000</b>	<b>652,000</b>	<b>152,000</b>

## 18. Service Development Plan

The service developments planned at the end of 2021-22 were:

Development Planned	Progress	Forward Plan
Strengthening voice and involvement of adopted children in ATV	Positive progress- V&I group in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop the group, with dedicated staff to support</li> </ul>
Strengthening preparation and assessment of adopters, to support more adopters taking more children with additional needs	Preparation strengthened through the Trauma Timeline – trauma Informed Practice, and addition of virtual reality headsets. Challenges remain in ATV adopters providing sufficiency for children with additional needs	Strengthening: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopters waiting group.</li> <li>Ongoing training and support to adopters waiting.</li> <li>Clear information on profile of children from the outset of the adopter journey</li> </ul>
Strengthening sufficiency of adopters, through increased marketing	More adopters approved in 2022-23.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to focus marketing on the needs of children ATV needs to find families for</li> </ul>
Taking early permanence strategy to the next stage – phase 2	Pan regional Project-funded for 2 years in place. 2 ATV social workers dedicated to EP lead roles Work ongoing with fostering services LFJB discussions on EP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicated recruitment plan for EP carers- Autumn 2023</li> <li>Full range of information for all stakeholders about EP</li> <li>LFJB development session on adoption to include EP</li> <li>Target increase of 20% EP carers, and 20% more children accessing EP</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attendance at legal gateway- all LA's, to jointly plan for early permanence</li> </ul>
Strengthen partnership working, including with early help, to strengthen support to adopters when they need it.	<p>New model of assessment has significantly reduced waiting times.</p> <p>Ongoing work with early help/CHUBs across TV to strengthen understanding of adoptive families, and challenges.</p> <p>MDASS team is in progress for more multi-disciplinary adoption support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wider multi-agency representation on ATV Board</li> <li>Develop shared approach of ATV involvement with any child referred to LA CHUB, to prevent child/YP prematurely leaving the family home/return to care.</li> </ul>
Continuing to address life story book model.	Now with LA SW's LA's are responding to any LSB's identified as not being completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor for completion of LSB's and liaise where not provided to plan for completion</li> </ul>
Continuing to address timescales for adoption support assessments	New model embedded, and survey indicates more satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New staff to be trained in early response, and assessment</li> </ul>
Taking forward Panel improvements to maintain a streamlined approach to panel, and quality CPR's	Achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diversify membership of Panel</li> <li>Quality feedback to individual LA's.</li> </ul>
Continue to develop a focus on children's diversity needs, and welcoming/increasing prospective adopters from ethnic minority backgrounds	More adopters have been recruited. Children from minority ethnic backgrounds are placed with ethnically and culturally matched adopters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Embed a dedicated focus on ATV approach to valuing and strengthening diversity including access to adopting for adults and understanding children's racial, religious, cultural and ethnicity needs for the future, and in matching</li> </ul>
<b>2023-25 – Key new Developments Planned</b>		
Planned Development		Target timescale

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restructure for future resilience in adoption activity, and for succession planning.</li> </ul>	September 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a dedicated EP team.</li> <li>ATV attendance at Legal Gateway - more children identified for potential EP, reducing moves for children, and releasing pressure on fostering resources.</li> <li>Recruit more carers for EP</li> </ul>	October 2023 – March 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase sufficiency of adopters, able to take ATV children, including siblings and children who have more complex health and development needs.</li> </ul>	April 2023-March 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen adopters' family and friendship network support</li> </ul>	By December 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve access to early medical assessments for adoption for children, and for adult health reports by appointment of dedicated adult health Medical Advisor</li> </ul>	By October 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workforce development across Tees Valley on adoption, early permanence, and CPR</li> </ul>	By December 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement and test new outcomes framework in adoption support</li> </ul>	By March 2024
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on developing post adoption direct and indirect contact plans to maintain relationships, and promote life long identity and connections</li> </ul>	By March 2024

Vicky Davidson Boyd

Service Manager Adoption Tees Valley

July 2023

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## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY 8 JANUARY 2024**

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### **DARLINGTON SAFEGUARDING PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT – 2022/2023**

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#### **SUMMARY REPORT**

##### **Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to enable the Children and Young People Scrutiny to receive and comment upon the Annual Report of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) for the period 2022/23.

##### **Summary**

2. Local Safeguarding Partnerships are required to produce an Annual Report to account for the Partnerships achievements over the previous year and make an assessment of the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements within the local area.
3. The Annual Report summarises and reflects on the work of the Partnership over the period 2022/23, drawing upon a range of data and information, to outline the progress made and to illustrate the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding partnership arrangements across Darlington.
4. The year continued to be shaped by the impact of COVID-19 and the national safeguarding context has been an evolving landscape as services continued to adapt, many organisations facing national recruitment challenges. The current landscape is challenging and likely to remain so, impacting on the children, young people and adults we work with. There was significant organisational change during the year with the introduction nationally of Integrated Care Boards and much change ahead with a new iteration of Working Together to Safeguard Children along with the implementation of Local Authority Adult Regulatory inspections
4. It is recommended that:
  - (a) The Children and Young People Scrutiny note and comment on the DSP Annual Report for 2022/23 which will be published on the DSP website.

##### **Reasons**

6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:

- (a) Children and Young People Scrutiny have an understanding of the Partnership's work to date.
- (b) To challenge and scrutinise the work of the DSP and raise any challenges as appropriate with the Independent Scrutineer / Chair.
- (c) To have assurance that the Safeguarding Partnership is effectively coordinating multi-agency safeguarding practice in Darlington and promoting the welfare of children and adults with needs for care and support.

**Chris Bell**  
**Assistant Director of Childrens Services**

### **Background Papers**

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report – 2022/2023



S17 Crime and Disorder	All children at risk of crime and disorder are a priority within this report. DSP works alongside the Young People Engagement and Justice Service to help reduce crime and first time entrants into the criminal justice system.
Health and Well Being	The health and wellbeing of all children in Darlington are a priority within this report. DSP works alongside all organisations to promote the health and wellbeing of children and their families.
Carbon Impact	There are no implications arising from this report.
Diversity	DSP works to ensure that all groups are considered within their safeguarding agenda.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	N/A
Key Decision	N/A
Urgent Decision	N/A
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The work of the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership complements the priorities in One Darlington Perfectly placed.
Efficiency	N/A
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has not impacted on Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

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**Darlington  
Safeguarding  
Partnership**

Protecting Children and Adults

# Annual Report

2022-2023



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# 1. Introduction

## Foreword by Statutory Safeguarding Partners and Independent Scrutineer

Welcome to our annual report covering the work of Darlington Safeguarding Partnership for the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. The report provides an overview of the year's multi-agency safeguarding activity and reflects the hard work and dedication of all our partner agencies as they've worked together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, young people and adults with care and support needs across Darlington.

The year continued to be shaped by the impact of COVID-19 and the national safeguarding context has been an evolving landscape as services continue to adapt with many organisations facing national recruitment challenges. The lasting legacy of lockdown continues to affect the lived experiences of our children, young people and vulnerable adults in Darlington, with greater numbers of adults finding themselves in hardship as the cost-of-living crisis continues. The current landscape is challenging, and is likely to remain so, impacting on the children, young people and adults we work with, as well as practitioners who provide support and services.

There was significant organisational change during the year with the introduction nationally of Integrated Care Boards in September 2022. During this time, health agencies continued to maintain their commitment to both regional and local partnership working.

We saw a positive Local Authority Ofsted inspection in October 2022 which highlighted that children in need of help and protection in Darlington receive a good service. The inspection highlighted multi-agency Strategic Partnerships are highly effective with a strong multi-agency response being delivered to children through well-established and effective relationships with key agencies. The inspection highlighted that the quality of the support and care provided to children in care and care leavers is outstanding.

There is much change ahead as we move through consultations in response to the government's Stable Homes, Built on Love publication and a new iteration of Working Together to Safeguard Children along with the implementation of Local Authority Adult Regulatory Inspections. We will continue to remain focused on ensuring local multi-agency safeguarding practice remains effective for our children, young people and adults with care and support needs during any changes that may result from new legislation.


We consider the Partnership to be a mature and effective safeguarding partnership but recognise the many challenges we face and will strive to ensure we provide support and guidance and ensure that agencies continue to work together to keep children, young people and adults with care and support needs safe in Darlington.

Finally, we recognise the work of colleagues across our partners agencies and beyond, who work tirelessly to help keep children, young people and adults with needs for care and support safe from abuse and neglect. Working together effectively is the real strength of the partnership.

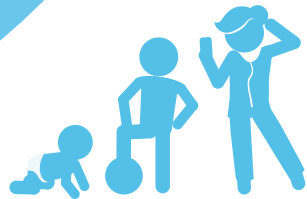
<b>Ann Baxter</b> Independent Scrutineer	<b>James Stroyan</b> Group Director for People Darlington Borough Council	<b>David Ashton</b> Detective Chief Superintendent Durham Constabulary	<b>Jean Golightly</b> Director of Nursing and Quality North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board Tees Valley
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## 2. Local Picture

Darlington Borough Council is a Unitary Authority in the North East of England which covers 76.3 square miles. Darlington is part of the Tees Valley city region.



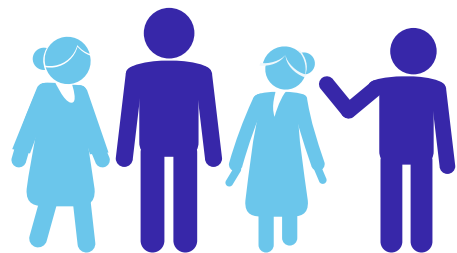
As of 2021 Darlington has a population in excess of **107,000** individuals who live in around **45,475** households.



Children and young people under the age of 25 years make up **28%** of the population, the number of children and young people under the age of 18 living in Darlington is **22,627** which equates to **21%** of the current population.



The number of people aged over 65 years old in Darlington is estimated at **21,700**



In terms of ethnicity, the 2021 Census reported 94.4% of Darlington's population as White and **5.6%** from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups.

The Health of People in Darlington is varied compared with the England average and **20%** of children live in low income families.



In County Durham and Darlington the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) community form the largest single ethnic minority group, the proportion of Darlington residents who identify themselves as GRT (2021 census) is **0.3%** which is three times higher than the national average.

Overall, comparing local indicators with England averages, life expectancy for both men and women is lower. The health of people in Darlington is varied, about 20% of children live in low income families.

# 3. How we have worked this year?

Whilst this report covers the period from April 2022 to March 2023, it includes some references to work already started which continued into the year under review, along with the new work which has commenced and which will continue beyond April 2023.

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to have a lasting effect, bringing challenges for services both in terms of maintaining frontline workforces along with significant financial pressures. Despite this, the Partnership maintained a relentless focus on protecting vulnerable children, families and adults across Darlington.

Poverty and the cost of living crisis continues to be a challenge for children and families living in Darlington, which can impact significantly on their wellbeing. These additional pressures may increase the risk of abuse, homelessness, mental health problems, domestic abuse, neglect, self-neglect and substance misuse and all partner agencies have a role to play in ensuring children, young people and vulnerable adults continue to be safeguarded.

The Partnership's vision is for 'Darlington to be a place where children and adults can live their lives safely' and its aim is to understand what is working well in its collective safeguarding practice and identify what needs further development to ensure arrangements are effective and coordinated.

New governance arrangements have been developed with a focus on reflection and practice improvement and the Statutory Safeguarding Partners now meet three times a year to ensure they have a collective oversight of safeguarding arrangements. The Chairs of the subgroups submit executive reports to the Statutory Safeguarding Partners on the key themes, practice issues and actions along with the narrative needed to ensure the Statutory Safeguarding Partners are provided with the oversight and assurance required.

The Partnership re-established the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group, which had not met since the start of the Pandemic. The group consists of the key strategic safeguarding leads from a wide range of agencies and the first meeting focussed on the successes and challenges in safeguarding the Darlington population throughout the pandemic, some of those challenges included recruitment and retention, the impact of new regulatory inspections and how to address groups such as organised crime groups which have a significant impact on services.

The sub-groups continue to drive forward the work of the partnership and through understanding those themes and trends we are better able to understand the priority areas of focus and details of the work outlined below.



## Snapshot of activity from Sub-Groups

- **Children’s MASH Operational Group**

This sub-group continued to have oversight on Front Door practice and a number key themes were identified including complex mental health, domestic abuse and harmful sexual behaviour. The group developed Harmful Sexual Behaviour Guidance to support professionals to approach and respond to this area of safeguarding confidently.

The group continues to discuss specific multi-agency practice issues raised by agencies or identified in the weekly referral meetings to determine how they can be addressed collectively. The group spends time focussing on key learning points from national reviews including the Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson reviews, to understand whether Darlington is compliant with the learning and recommendations.

- **Adult Operational Group**

The group continues to have oversight of performance data to obtain an understanding of the changing landscape and key themes coming through contacts and referrals. The group highlighted an increase in the incidence of adult self-neglect in this period through performance data and following learning identified through learning requests into the Partnership. The group is taking forward key pieces of work through a multi-agency task and finish group to look at the self-neglect issues and will be reviewing its practice guidance and developing tools and pathways to aid practitioners.

The group continues to monitor those settings in the Executive Strategy Process and discuss significant provider concerns and has revised its guidance in relation to the Process to provide professionals with a framework for dealing with serious safeguarding concerns on a multi-agency level.

- **Learning and Development Group**

The group continued to receive referrals for learning requests which do not meet the criteria for a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) or Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR). there were five learning request referrals received during the year (4 adult and 1 child). Details of these are outlined in section 8 of the report.

During this period the group continued to address work which had continued from the previous reporting year, including the development of briefing documents following the learning from reviews undertaken in the previous year relating to child criminal exploitation/harm away from home, parental mental health and complex mental health issues; these are outlined in section 8 of the report.

The sub-group set up a task and finish group following findings from two adult reviews in response to the increasing concerns involving self-neglect. Self-neglect and hoarding can be complex and challenging areas for practitioners. A task and finish group was established to understand what is needed to support practitioners, including a revision of the self-neglect practice guidance; developing a risk assessment tool and self-neglect pathway and determining the training and resources needed to support frontline practitioners. This work will progress into the next reporting year.



- **Quality Assurance and Performance Management Group**

The group continues to have oversight of multi-agency performance data and operational information. Robust data and operational oversight of Children's multi agency performance is well embedded, however there is a considerable amount of work to be done with regards to Adult Safeguarding. This will be a priority for the QAPM group into the next reporting period.

The two operational groups (Child and Adult), provide an overview of any emerging trends and patterns to ensure that any themes or emerging risks can be identified at an early stage and reported accurately to the Statutory Safeguarding Partners.

The group had oversight of the mapping exercise undertaken to understand service provision in Darlington following the national review of Star Hobson and Arthur Labinjo-Hughes. The group was assured that Darlington is in a good position and already compliant with the recommendations of the review, but it was recognised there are areas of practice that need strengthening.

Towards the end of the year the group proposed a time limited task and finish group should review the Organisational Safeguarding Self-Assessment Audit (Section 11) arrangements, this work will carry over into the next reporting period.

- **Strategic Child Exploitation Group**

The group continued to monitor the strategic response of partner agencies in tackling the incidence of children missing from home, care and education and the reduction of child exploitation in Darlington and County Durham.

It was assured, following the local authority Ofsted Inspection in October that Darlington children identified as missing and exploited are well supported and robust risk assessments are reviewed through multi-agency meetings.

The group was sighted on the learning points from a review the Partnership undertook in 2021/22 in relation to criminal exploitation and harm away from home. The review focussed on how agencies could work differently and highlighted the need to look outside the traditional core group of partners to strengthen partnership working and the involvement of parents and identified a number of measures to address this which will be monitored by the group.

- **Child Death Overview Panel**

Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) oversees all deaths of children under the age of 18. There have been 8 deaths in this reporting period and all of these were subject to a Child Death Review. CDOP works closely with the Partnership to highlight any emerging themes and issues and learning from child death reviews that require further consideration. CDOP completes a Bi-Annual Report which provides a summary of activity carried over a two-year period, the report will be published in the next reporting period.

Partners are mindful of how the groups have evolved over the year, implementing innovative and new ways of working as a result of which the Partnership developed its Strategic Plan. Work is progressing and the plan will be finalised and published in the new reporting year with a focus on the following safeguarding principles:

- Partners work collaboratively to ensure effective safeguarding arrangements are in place
- Partners achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and adults with needs for care and support
- Partners work collaboratively to strengthen existing practice with a focus on a 'whole family approach'
- Partners challenge and hold one another to account effectively
- Partners improve safeguarding practice
- Learning is promoted and embedded across the partnership
- Information is shared effectively to ensure timely decision making
- Early identification of 'new' safeguarding issues and emerging threats

## Priorities for 2023-23

National and local reports identified the significant increase in child exploitation as communities emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns which were still in place at the beginning this reporting period. National reports also identified the impact the Pandemic had on the care and support of older people, including those with needs arising from self-neglect and hoarding. As a result, these two areas became the main priority and focus throughout 2022-23.

### What we did/are going to do:

#### Exploitation

- Committed to improve awareness to obtain a better understanding of how young people become involved in exploitation in the first instance
- Agreed to look beyond the usual core group of practitioners to strengthen partnership working and consider the role community safety and enforcement services have in identifying young people who may be at risk
- Implemented daily multi-agency missing meetings to discuss those children missing from home over past 24 hours
- Implemented twice weekly check in meetings to respond to current issues and opportunity to share information
- Involve parents at the earliest opportunity if willing to engage, if not adapt a different approach to intervention
- Agree to review the Child Exploitation Matrix to remove victim blaming language
- Launched the Early Intervention Exploitation Panel which will focus on places and potential forming of groups who may be at risk of being drawn into criminal exploitation

#### Self-neglect

- Established a task and finish group to take forward key pieces of work
- Revise current practice guidance to include examples of positive, flexible approaches of engaging people who are self-neglecting
- Consider the development of Mental Capacity Act Guidance to support practitioners working with individuals who are reluctant to engage with services
- Consider the development of risk assessment tool and self-neglect pathway
- Consider establishing a multi-agency risk escalation meeting to manage complex cases
- Training - consider what learning needs to feed into multi-agency training

## The Independent Scrutineer and Chair

The independent scrutineer/chair continues to ensure there is a clear focus on seeking assurance on the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and ensures safeguarding partners and relevant agencies are challenged and supported in their roles to work collaboratively to meet the safeguarding priorities identified by the partnership.

The independent scrutineer chairs meetings of the Statutory Safeguarding Partners and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group and encourages and facilitates an open culture of mutual, respectful challenge and support.

# 4. Partnership Governance and Structure

The Partnership revised its governance arrangements in 2022/23 and set out the role and responsibilities of the sub-groups. The sub-groups engage in the safeguarding priorities and explore the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements. The groups continue to review their work including reviewing terms of reference, membership and roles and responsibilities of members. A wide range of organisations are represented on the Partnership groups and includes senior lead, details are outlined in Appendix 2.

<p><b>Statutory Safeguarding Partners Group - Chaired by Independent Scrutineer</b></p>	<p>The Statutory Safeguarding Partners and Independent Scrutineer meet three times a year and have a strong collective oversight of all safeguarding arrangements to ensure fulfilment of statutory obligations.</p> <p>The Partners commission the strategic and operational groups to ensure the priority areas of the Strategic Plan are delivered and ensure effective scrutiny arrangements are in place. The Chairs of the groups provide an overview on progress and evidence that multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are effective.</p>
<p><b>Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group - Chaired by Independent Scrutineer</b></p>	<p>This multi-agency group meets three times a year and has a wide membership of key strategic leads from agencies.</p> <p>Meetings are themed and focus on local and national safeguarding priorities and areas identified through data, audits and reviews. The Chairs of the Strategic sub-groups provide an overview of current priorities and ongoing activity to inform the discussion.</p>
<p><b>Quality Assurance and Performance Group (QAPM) - Chaired by Head of Service, Darlington Borough Council</b></p>	<p>This is a strategic group which meets four times per year and is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding work across partner agencies and commissioned organisations.</p> <p>The group has responsibility for audits and monitoring safeguarding data to be assured that both child and adult safeguarding systems are robust, effective and identifies areas for improvement to share with the Learning &amp; Development Group.</p>
<p><b>Learning and Development Group (L&amp;D) - Chaired by Detective Inspector, Durham Constabulary</b></p>	<p>This is a strategic group which meets four times per year and is responsible for oversight of learning and improvement, multi-agency training and learning opportunities, policy and procedure to improve outcomes for children and adults.</p> <p>It has governance responsibility for all reviews undertaken, reviewing the learning outcomes and suggested recommendations for improvement. It establishes process for dissemination of learning and identifies any training need requirements.</p> <p>Any improvements identified through reviews are taken forward and shared with the Quality Assurance &amp; Performance Management Group.</p>

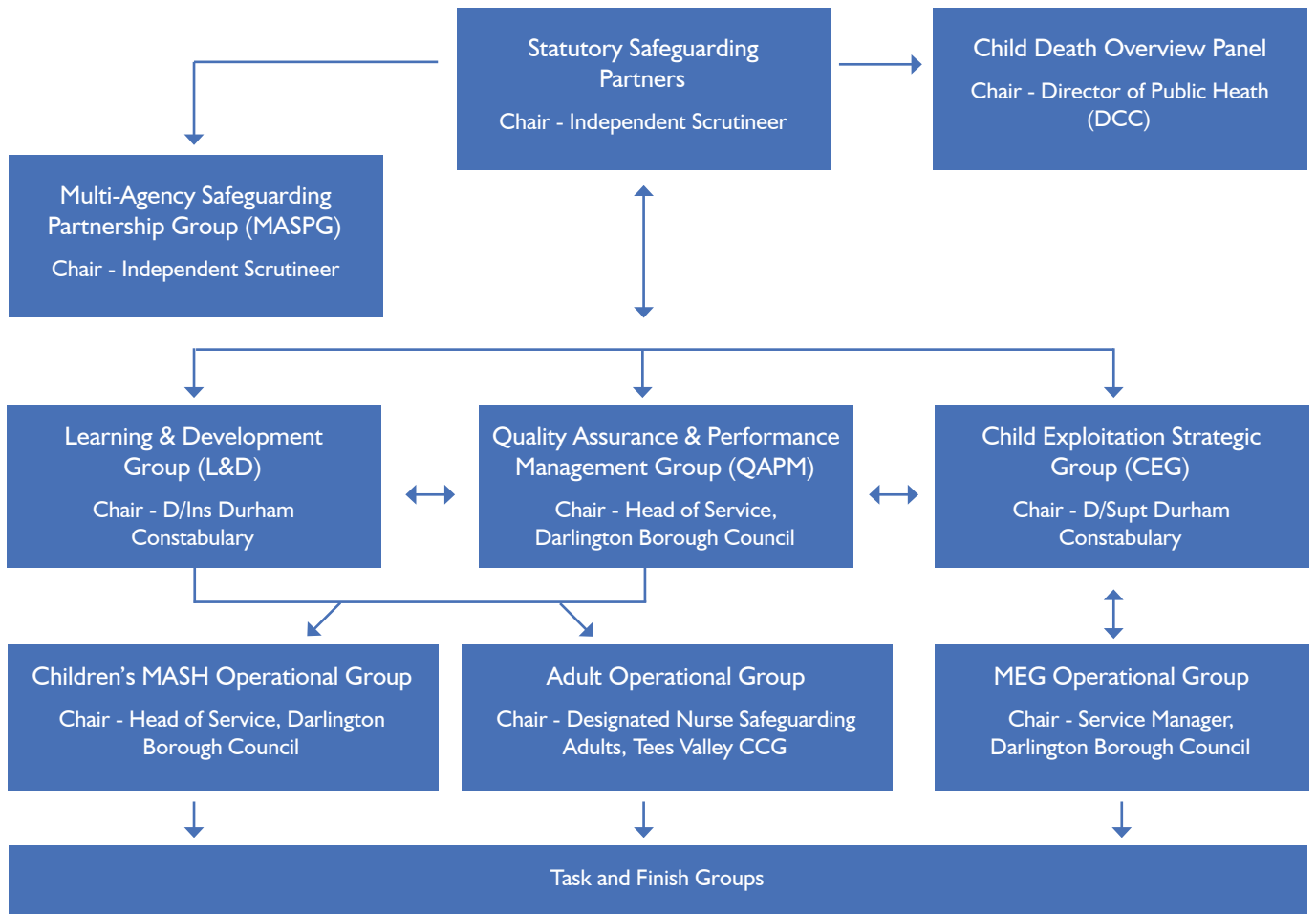
<p><b>Child Exploitation Group (CEG) - Chaired by Detective Chief Superintendent, Durham Constabulary</b></p>	<p>This is a strategic group which meets four times per year and is responsible for overseeing, monitoring, evaluating and improving responses to tackle children missing from home, care and education and for the reduction of child exploitation across County Durham and Darlington.</p> <p>The group ensures the action plan is delivered and monitors data and intelligence to better understand the picture of exploitation across County Durham and Darlington</p> <p>It directs the multi-agency response towards prevention, early identification and intervention.</p> <p>An operational group oversees individual cases of children at risk of exploitation in Darlington with a purpose to prevent, disrupt and deter individuals or groups who seek to exploit, abuse and harm children.</p>
<p><b>Adult Operational Group - Chaired by Designated Nurse for Safeguarding, Local Commissioning Group (Interim basis)</b></p>	<p>This is an operational group that meets eight times per year and is a multi-agency group with shared responsibility for safeguarding service delivery to safeguard adults with needs for care and support.</p> <p>The group's purpose is to ensure all agencies are able to fully contribute and fulfil their safeguarding roles and responsibilities and that any barriers to this are identified and actions taken to resolve any issues.</p> <p>The group will identify key themes or practice challenges through monitoring performance data and operational practice issues and develop appropriate actions to respond to them.</p> <p>Any trends or areas of concern will be shared with the Quality Assurance &amp; Performance Management and Learning &amp; Development Groups by exception.</p> <p>The Group has responsibility for issues relating to provider concerns and those settings who are in the Executive Strategy Process and monitor responsiveness to any identified issues and actions.</p>
<p><b>Children's MASH Operational Group - Chaired by Head of Service, Darlington Borough Council</b></p>	<p>This is an operational group that meets monthly and is a multi-agency group with shared responsibility for safeguarding service delivery to safeguard children and young people. The group promotes effective communication between all partner agencies contributing to operational management and functioning of the Children's Front Door.</p> <p>The group's purpose is to ensure all agencies are able to fully contribute and fulfil their operational safeguarding roles and responsibilities and that any barriers to this are identified and actions taken to resolve any issues.</p> <p>The group will identify key themes or practice challenges through monitoring performance data and operational practice issues and take them forward within multi-agency focussed sessions and develop appropriate actions to respond to them.</p> <p>Any trends or areas of concern will be shared with the Quality Assurance &amp; Performance Management and Learning &amp; Development Groups by exception.</p>

**Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) - Chaired by Director of Public Health**

Child Death Overview Panel arrangements are undertaken cross border with Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership. The Panel continues to review all deaths of children as required in Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory Guidance (2018) with an aim to identify learning to prevent future deaths.

The National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) gathers information on all children who die in England and shares the learning so that improvements can be made to save children's lives in the future.

**Partnership Governance Structure**



# 5. Partnership Activities and Interventions

## Safeguarding Children

In terms of safeguarding children, there was a 24.6% increase on contacts into the Children's Door compared to the previous period. In terms of safeguarding concerns, significantly more contacts were made by hospitals, the Building Stronger Families Service and relatives than in the previous reporting year.

There have been many more complex issues and referrals of a complex nature made to Children's Social Care due to issues such as parental mental health and substance misuse, which are impacting on children. There was an increase in repeat referrals, mainly involving children's mental health and family dysfunction. It has been found that there is often a lack of joined up working between partner agencies in such instances, and if the assessment does result in Child in Need Plan or Child Protection Plan, then the opportunities to work with partners and parents and children is often missed.

Other themes which have been identified in 2022/23 include an increase in Early Help Assessments in comparison to the previous year. School nurses also identified an increase in issues related to Type 1 diabetes in children, which can be problematic for children looked after in the care system at the point of transition to adulthood.

Harm outside the family home continues to be an increasing concern. Following the remodelling of the Children's Front Door in 2020, to ensure the right service is provided swiftly to children and their families, it was recognised there was need to improve support for children who go missing and are at risk of exploitation and as a result the Missing and Exploitation Team was formed and now sits within the Front Door service.

The Children's Social Care weekly review meetings continue to provide a high level of management oversight and challenge to decision making at the Front Door and is the mechanism for highlighting emerging themes and trends. This is about 'shared ownership' of the data to get to the crux of safeguarding issues and also focus on safeguarding data in 'live time'; whilst this was initially set up in house within the local authority it was recognised there are significant benefits in extending this to partner agencies to help them see what is done with the referrals and how decisions are made along with providing some understanding of the themes and trends to take learning back to their own organisations.

## Safeguarding Adults

In terms of adult safeguarding there has been a significant increase in the total number of reported concerns that progressed to a strategy meeting in this reporting period. The areas of abuse remain consistent with Neglect & Acts of Omission, Physical Abuse and Emotional and Psychological abuse being the highest categories.

There are some specific pressures and gaps in the understanding of safeguarding procedures with some providers, particularly private hospitals which apply their own policy and procedures when making referrals. The local authority has implemented proactive engagement to support these providers and meet with them to discuss threshold criteria.

There continues to be an increase in self-neglect as a reported category of abuse, this is being seen as a national issue and is a consistent theme in many Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) and can often be linked to alcohol and substance misuse. Self-neglect and hoarding can be complex and challenging areas for practitioners. An adult who self-neglects may not always be at a level of risk which warrants adult safeguarding arrangements to be initiated and it is therefore imperative that agencies work with the adult and each other to try and prevent individuals who self-neglect from getting to a point where it is deemed that safeguarding processes or a type of enforcement required to protect them.

The Local Authority commenced a safeguarding project to review adult safeguarding processes and approaches and how data is collated and reported into the partnership.

The project is also reviewing how referrals are submitted and the local authority is considering moving to a telephone referral system which is a more efficient way of taking and screening referrals; this would also mirror the system operated by Children Services. This should help identify themes, patterns and safeguarding issues which cut across both children and adults safeguarding, improving the 'whole family' focus in Darlington, looking at early identification and prevention in terms of issues relating to adults to prevent an adverse impact on children further down the line.

Work is also ongoing to improve the quality of professional safeguarding practice in order to further embed 'Making Safeguarding Personal' and to make sure that the voice of the person is captured and that safeguarding processes ensure that a person feels safe, is listened to and placed at the heart of decision-making.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is implementing regulatory inspections of local authorities in the provision of adult social care in the next reporting period. A peer review of adult social care was conducted which looked at performance data and a number of recommendations for multi-agency adult safeguarding were identified to support the local authority in being inspection ready.

## **Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Network**

The Durham and Darlington Anti-Slavery network was established in April 2022 and is funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner. Its purpose is to coordinate a response to modern slavery and human trafficking and increase support for victims. The group meets monthly and includes representatives from the Darlington network. Whilst numbers in Darlington appear to be very small, it was agreed data needs to be collated to have a full understanding of this issue in the Darlington locality.

## **North East Region SAR Champions Network:**

Darlington participates in the North East Regional SAR Champions Network, which meets quarterly. The purpose of the network is to identify regional and national themes, develop good practice in the submission of Safeguarding Adult Referrals (SARs) maintain a regional SAR library and share learning from SARs.

In 2022/23 the network developed the North East regional SAR library and developed a quality marker checklist for the completion of SARs to improve the quality of submissions and information sharing to assist decision making.

The network monitors regional and national SARs to identify themes, for example fire deaths and the deaths of care experienced young people up to the age of twenty-six years, to identify specific learning and good practice and share the learning by means of the SAR reports and briefing documents.

## **North East Regional Fire Task and Finish Group**

Darlington has joined the regional Fire Task and Finish Group which has an action plan with aims to increase fire risk awareness and partner referrals to the fire service and increase awareness of risk factors including mobility issues, memory problems clutter, hoarding and emollient cream. They are also looking providing information leaflets, to influence reviews on fire safety and look at national initiatives. County Durham & Darlington Fire and Rescue Service has rolled out the "eyes wide open" training to partner agencies for staff who go into peoples' homes who may be able to spot risks relating to fire.



## Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse concerns continue to be one of the top five reasons for contacts into the Children's Front Door. During the period April 2022 to March 2023 305 children had been affected by domestic abuse in the family home.

To understand the local picture, the Partnership has oversight of the Operation Encompass Protocol which addresses shortcomings in the early sharing of information with schools to enable them to provide proactive support to children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse.

The Partnership has oversight of the 4Kids project, which was launched in response to a concerning rise in numbers of children becoming looked after where the main causal factor was a background of parental domestic abuse. The service, which sits in the children's front door, supports families who would not ordinarily be visible to services through other processes, as they fall outside the usual thresholds and criteria of statutory involvement and may have declined consent to offers of support.

In relation to adult safeguarding, there were 50 reported concerns where domestic abuse was the reported category of abuse for the 2022-23 period, 12 progressed to a strategy meeting.

The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and Darlington Safeguarding Partnership continue to work together to raise awareness and reduce the prevalence of domestic abuse across the Darlington locality. There are a number of multi-agency groups which support operational services and oversee Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence. The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Abuse Network (DASAN) is a frontline, operational network with wide representation and local knowledge of service users views and experiences. The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group (DASVEG) is a multi-agency strategic group with responsibility for supporting Durham and Darlington local authorities in meeting their duty under Part 4 of Domestic Abuse Act 2021, ensuring victims of domestic abuse have access to adequate and appropriate support within safe accommodation and wider domestic abuse services. Work is ongoing to forge better links into the Safeguarding Partnership.

## Violence Against Women and Girls

The Partnership is aware of the measures in place to address the violence against women and girls agenda. Darlington was successful in obtaining funding to support this agenda to help women and girls feel safe on the streets of Darlington. Durham Constabulary undertook a survey which found that women felt significantly less safe in the evening when out in their neighbourhood or town centre. The funding has been used to fund a range of projects to increase safety in public spaces and raise awareness within schools and community groups.

## Housing and Homelessness

2022/23 continued to be a challenging and busy year for Darlington Borough Council housing teams and partner agencies. The service has seen an 84.5% increase in people being accommodated in emergency accommodation. The local authority continued to carry out the monthly and annual rough sleeper counts with colleagues across the region to ascertain how many individuals were sleeping rough through the North East on a specific night. In 2022-23 35 rough sleepers were identified.

In 2022/23 1842 individuals presented to the Housing Options Service for advice regarding homelessness, 74 were victims of domestic abuse. There has been an increase in victims of domestic abuse and people with mental health needs requesting housing, along with people who have multiple complex needs and dual diagnosis, but who are nevertheless deemed to have capacity. As a consequence two practitioners have been appointed within the housing options team to support these individuals.





# 6. Snapshot of effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in Darlington

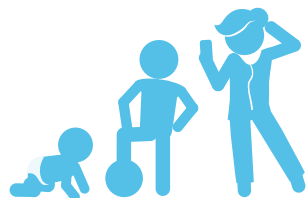
## Ofsted Inspection

In October 2022 Ofsted carried out a full inspection of Local Authority Childrens Social Care, which highlighted that children in need of help and protection in Darlington receive a good service. The inspection highlighted that multi-agency Strategic Partnerships are highly effective, with a strong multi-agency response being delivered to children through well-established and effective relationships with key agencies. The inspection highlighted that the quality of the support and care provided to children in care and care leavers is outstanding and this is reflected in the extent to which they feel cared about, valued, listened to and taken seriously. The Ofsted inspectors reported that children's experiences of social care have improved significantly since the last inspection in 2018.

## Child Safeguarding

The multi-agency Child Protection Procedures and Practice Guidance provide a framework for all organisations to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Darlington.

The below provides a snapshot of safeguarding concerns and the outcomes achieved during the year;



**8393** contacts into the

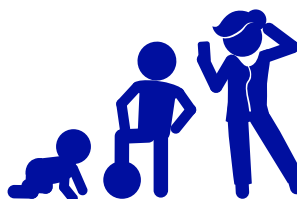
Childrens Front Door.

Of these, **820** were

referred to Building Stronger

Family Service and **1033**

referred to children's social care



**265**

Children in need

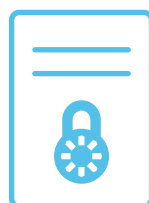


**478** (917 children)

Strategy Discussions started

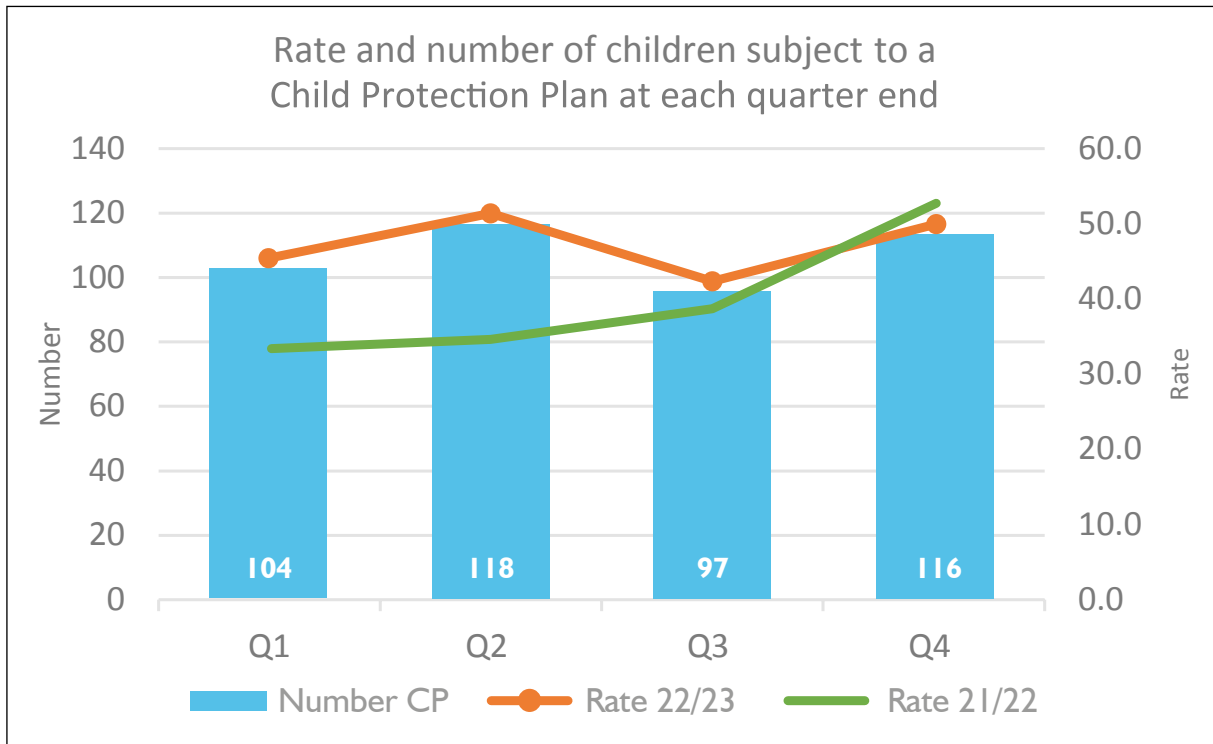
**74.7%** progressed

to a section 47 enquiry



**131** children had a child protection plan started.

**116** subject to a child protection plan at end of March 2023



Risk Factors associated with Child Protection were due to:			
Neglect	Emotional Abuse	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse
52%	27%	17%	3%

## Building Stronger Families

The Early Help Service, now known as Building Stronger Families (BSF), provides coordinated help for children and families with a range of needs through an early help assessment or targeted programmes. There were 1650 Early Help Assessments opened in this year, of these 223 were initiated by an external agency.

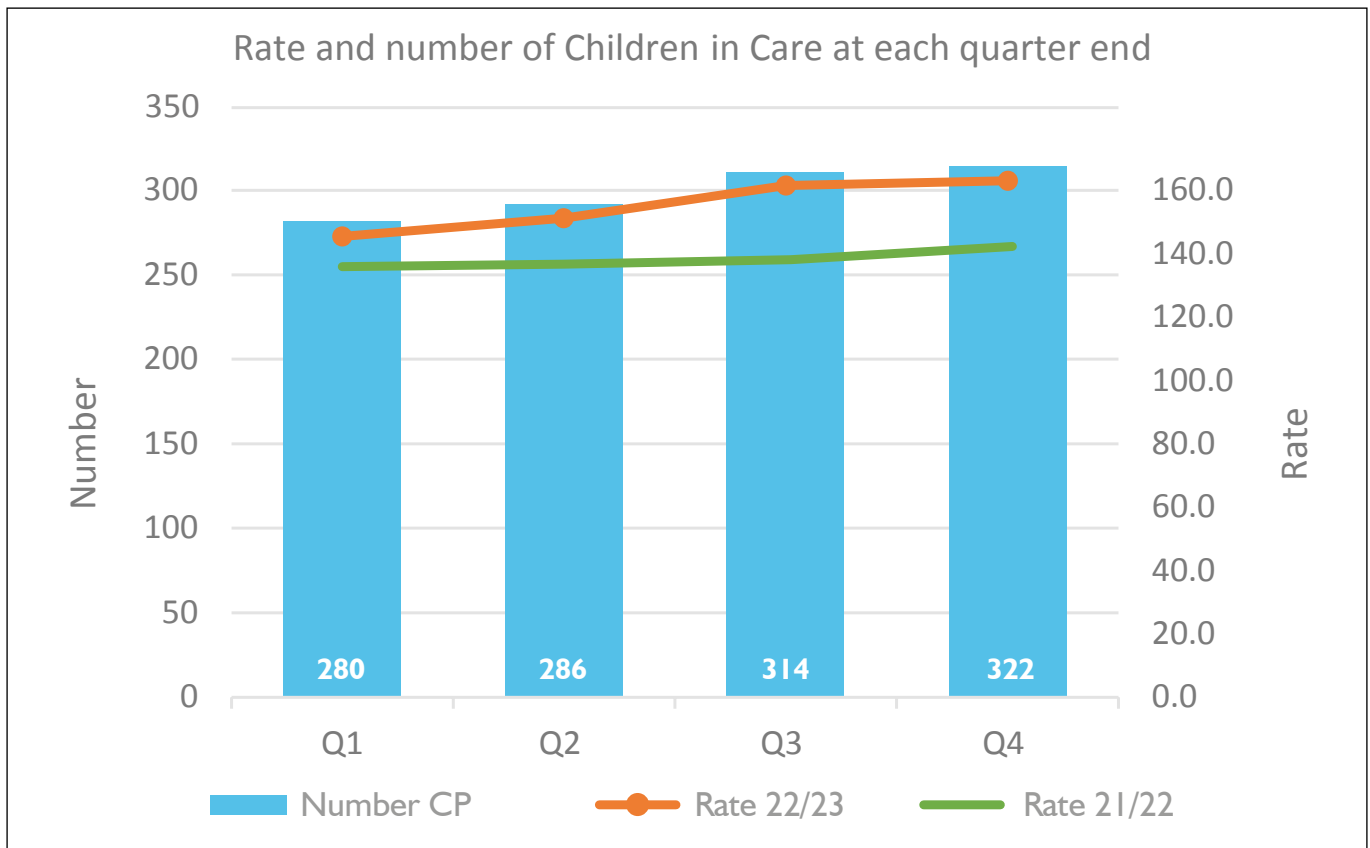
## Keeping Families Together

The Keeping Families Together team works with young people aged 10-16, their aim is to support children and families to remain at home, while it is safe to do so. At the end of March 2023, there were 14 families open to the Keeping Families Together (KFT) team, involving 27 individual children.



## Children Looked After

Children Looked After and Care Leavers are recognised nationally as one of the most vulnerable groups. The number of Looked After Children (LAC) by the local authority at the end of March 2023 was 322 (142.3 per 10,000), of these 17 were unaccompanied asylum seekers.



## Care Leavers

The Local Authority has a 'Staying Put' policy and there are currently 11 young people accommodated under this arrangement. In Darlington 96% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation by the end of 2022-23 and the percentage of care leavers (aged 19-21) who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) was 20%.

## Young People Engagement and Justice Service (YPEJS)

The number of young people identified as First Time Entrants (FTE) being referred to the YPEJS increased from the previous year. At the end of March 2023 there were 34 young people (29 Males and 5 Females) who were FTEs.

The YPEJS had 61 young people (46 Males and 15 Females) referred to the service for pre-caution disposals, there has been a 90% success rate in terms of young people not reoffending.

## Transition to Adulthood

When a young person reaches the age of 18 they are legally an adult under SEND and Leaving Care statutory guidance, however children's services continue to retain responsibility to ensure the right package of care is provided through the transition to adulthood.

## Education attendance

Spring data indicated there was a 7.2% overall absence across all education settings, compared with 7.3% nationally. The estimated absence rate was highest in secondary schools (14.7%), followed by special schools (14.2%), and primary schools recorded the lowest absence rate (7.5%). In 2022/23, 22.3% of pupils were estimated to be “persistently absent” (defined by the Department for Education as missing 10% or more of possible school sessions or around 19 days per academic year).

The Vulnerable Pupil Panel is a multi-agency panel the aim of which is to avoid children disengaging from education due to any cause. Since the Panel was created in 2019 to respond to an increase in rates of exclusion, the Panel has seen a reduction in permanent exclusion and persistent absences.

## Elective Home Education (EHE)

There are effective measures in place for the monitoring children who are in Elective Home Education. A full time EHE Advisor is responsible for maintaining the EHE database, supporting parents and ensuring evidence of suitable education is being provided. The number of children EHE remains fluid and the EHE advisor continues to support schools when children don't return at the start of the new academic term.

Home visits continue to take place and those children who are identified as not receiving appropriate education receive a visit every 3 months. As of 31 March 2023 there were 253 children registered on the EHE database, of these 103 were from GRT community, Darlington has a higher than average GRT population, the EHE advisor works closely with the GRT Education Service.

## Children Missing from Home, Care and Education

The total number of children who went missing from home or care during 2022/23 was 246 with 90.7% of these children being offered a return home interview (RHI) and 51.2% of children engaged in their RHI. Of these young people, Children in Care (CiC) continue to dominate the number of missing episodes.

The total number of children missing from education (CME) for 2022/23 were 72, three of these children left the UK and have not been traced, although Border Force confirmed they have left the Country.



## Exploitation of children and young people

Multi-agency work around child exploitation continues to be coordinated through the Missing and Exploited Operational Group and Strategic Child Exploitation Group (CEG). The partnership continues to obtain an understanding of the risks posed to young people as they grow and become influenced by a whole range of environments and people outside the family home such as, their community, peer groups or online.

A multi-agency Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker (CEVT) continues to be used across Darlington and County Durham to track and identify those children at high risk of exploitation. Children are scored based on the level of risk and continues to be monitored by the CEG. The average score was 71.5, with a range of 50 to 90, which is a decrease on the same period last year, across Durham and Darlington. Of those children on the tracker in May 2023, (numbers are fluid), 15 children were linked to a Child Sexual Exploitation crime and 9 linked to a Child Criminal Exploitation crime and 5 linked to county lines.

## Designated Officer and Managing Allegations

The Designated Officer is employed by the Local Authority and is responsible for the oversight of the management of allegations against employees who work with children and may have harmed or pose a risk of harm to children. In 2022/23 the Designated Officer service received a total of 273 contacts in respect of potential allegations. This represents a 15% increase on the number of contacts received in 2021/22 and is the highest number of yearly contacts ever recorded. Of the 273 contacts, the main category for referral was allegations of physical abuse and the largest referring group and largest allegation by staff group is Education. This is in line with the data from previous years and is reflected regionally and nationally.

## Adult Safeguarding

The multi-agency safeguarding adult procedures and guidance provide a framework for all organisations to work together with the person at risk, to support them to be safe from abuse, neglect or self-neglect and is underpinned by the six Care Act Principles. The below provides a summary of safeguarding concerns and the outcomes achieved.

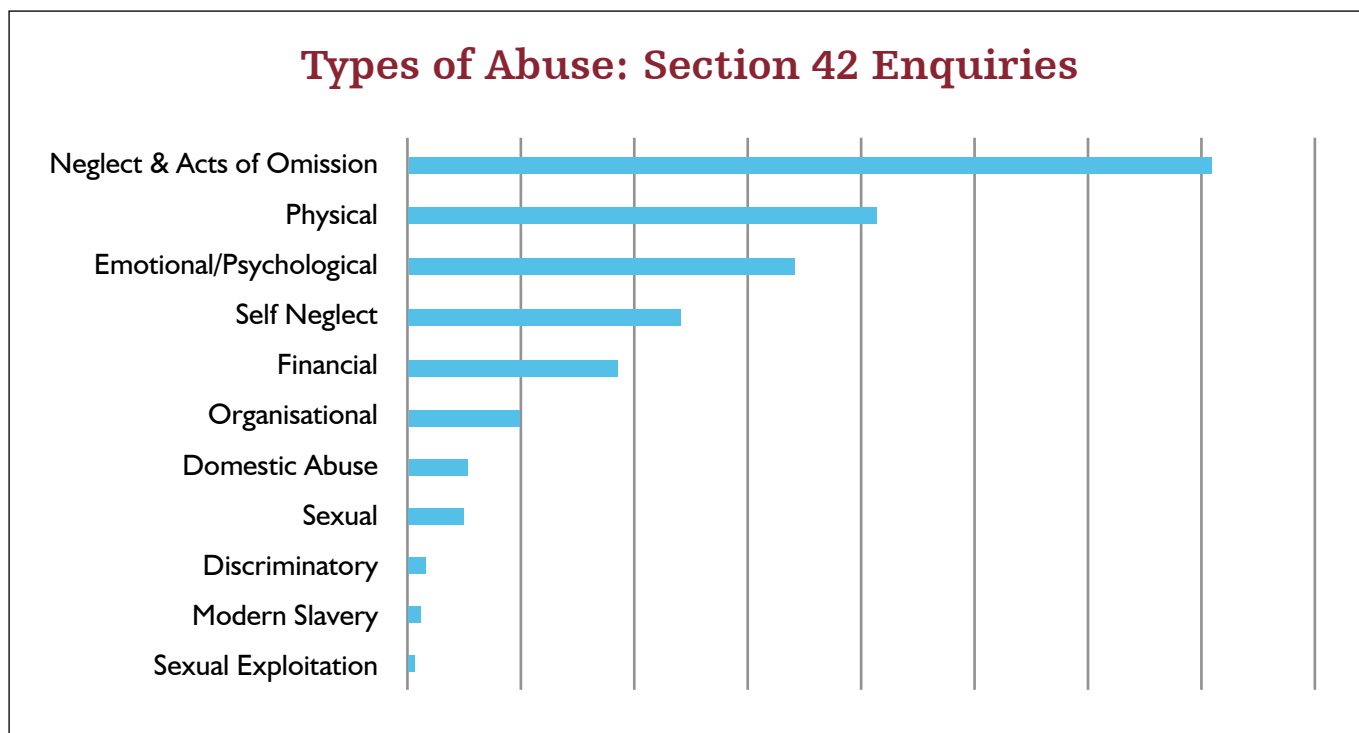
<p><b>What is a Safeguarding Concern?</b></p> <p>A report made to the lead agency for the safeguarding process to raise a concern of adult abuse and neglect</p>	<p><b>What is a S42 Enquiry?</b></p> <p>The Care Act 2014 (Section 42) requires that each Local Authority must make enquiries, or cause others to do so, if it believes an adult is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse and or neglect</p>
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**69%** of individual, family representative or advocate involved at point of referral

**45%** of individuals providing own view

## Types of Abuse: Section 42 Enquiries



The top areas of abuse for S42 enquiries continue to be neglect & Acts of Omission (27%), Physical (22%), Emotional (14%) and Financial and Self Neglect (11%)

### Location of abuse:

Own home	In the Community	Supported accommodation	Care Home Nursing	Care Home residential	Hospital Acute	Hospital Mental Health	Hospital Community	Public Place
32.4%	0.8%	2.5%	4.09%	32%	7%	11.1%	0.82%	1.6%

### Person or organisation alleged to have caused harm



## Executive Strategy Process

Executive Strategy processes are held to address all concerns and issues relating to suspected organised or institutional abuse or neglect of adults.

	Number of settings
2021-22	3
2022-233	4

All four of the settings in Executive Strategy Process in 2022-23 were removed during this period as assurance was provided that they had made improvements and had safe practices in place and all regulatory action had been completed. The Partnership's Adult Operational Group has responsibility of monitoring those settings who are in the Executive Strategy Process.

# 7. Continuous improvement and raising awareness of safeguarding

## Communication and Engagement

The voice of children, young people and adults with needs for care and support and their families is at the heart of all partnership activity. The Partnership recognises it is a constant challenge and that practitioners need to understand the lived experiences of children and young people, adults and their families. Where possible the Partnership will involve families in learning reviews and information and from such engagement it is possible to develop best practice.

## Making Safeguarding Personal

Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP) is applicable to all agencies and aims to develop a person centred and outcomes focussed approach to adult safeguarding. In Darlington MSP and the involvement of service users or their representative in safeguarding enquiries is measured from the outset and is evaluated as part of the safeguarding process. In 2022/2023, 70% of cases consistently involved the individual (or their representative or advocate) in the safeguarding enquiry. The partnership continues to seek assurances that the principles of MSP are embedded within partner agencies and continues to develop customer engagement processes to help inform the Partnership's work.

## Independent Chair Engagement

The Independent Scrutineer continues to meet with relevant agencies of the Partnership and attend meetings such as primary and secondary education forums, Child and Adult Scrutiny Committees, Health and Wellbeing Board and Community Safety Partnership to talk about current issues and themes and what is working well and what needs to change relating to current safeguarding arrangements.

## Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) website, briefings and newsletters

The DSP continues to use a variety of communication methods to share information to a wide range of different audiences. The Partnership website continues to be a key forum to provide key safeguarding messages to practitioners and to the wider public as well as useful information and resources to support those working with children and adults.

Partnership website - [www.darlington-safeguarding-partnership.co.uk](http://www.darlington-safeguarding-partnership.co.uk)

The partnerships quarterly newsletter continues to communicate and raise awareness of safeguarding and helps to keep in touch with all our agencies to provide information, signposting and guidance to those working across child and adult services.



## Social Media

Whilst the Partnership does not have its own social media platforms, it regularly requests partner agencies promote key safeguarding campaigns throughout the year on their own social media platforms. Awareness of key safeguarding campaigns

The partnership continues to raise awareness of safeguarding issues by sharing details of key national safeguarding campaigns throughout the year which included, Safer Internet Day in February and National Child Sexual Exploitation Awareness Day in March along with Safeguarding Adult Week in November where it offered a programme of events to raise awareness of safeguarding issues.

## Learning and Development

A key priority is to ensure that safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults at risk of abuse remains the focus of learning and development activity. Practitioners working in both universal and specialist services have a responsibility to identify the symptoms and triggers of abuse and neglect and to share that information and provide children and adults with the help they need. To be effective, practitioners need to continually develop their knowledge and skills. The Partnership is committed to delivering a high quality inter-agency training programme to support professionals, volunteers and the independent sector.

The standards are monitored through the Learning and Development sub-group and this ensures there is quality and consistency of single and multi-agency training through initiatives such as training needs analysis (TNA), peer evaluation, quality assurance and the pre and post course evaluation process. The programme is updated to ensure the lessons from learning reviews are reflected as well as identifying the local needs of the multi-agency workforce.

Following a change to the delivery of training during the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact this had on face to face training, a programme of e-learning and virtual training has been developed and embedded.

## What did we achieve?

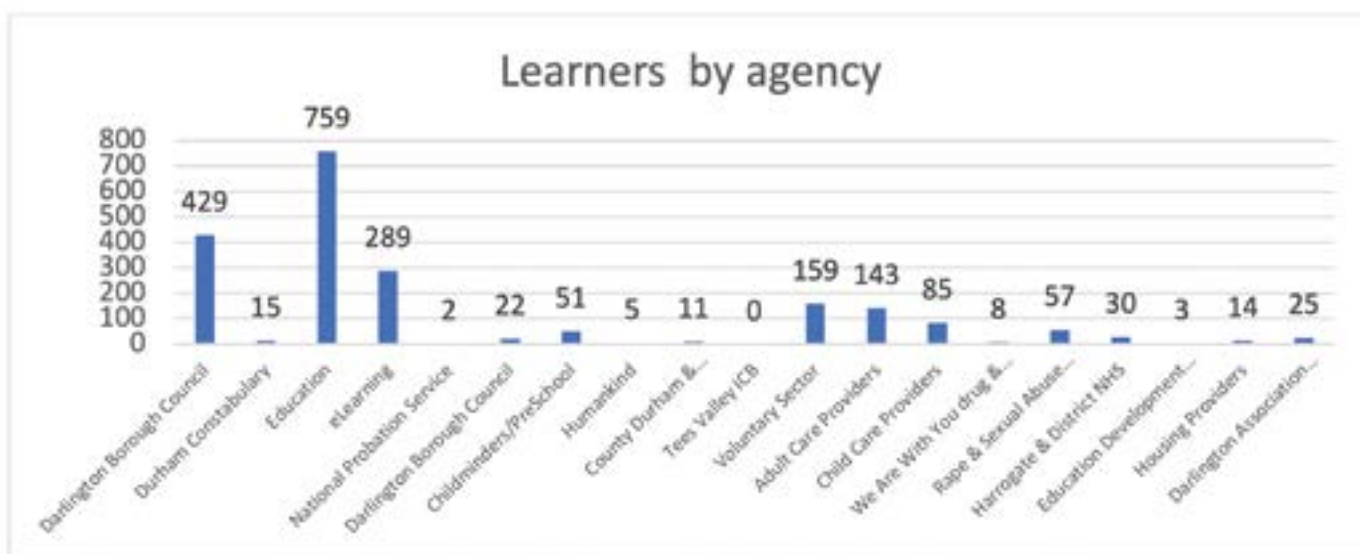
- The Partnership continued to provide an extensive multi - agency programme of virtual courses delivered via Teams and bespoke face to face sessions:
  - o Core courses for Safeguarding Adults and Children at Levels 1 (awareness) and 2 (Managing concerns) which are in line with the Care Act 2014, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022.
  - o Level 3 specialist courses to reflect national and local priorities
  - o A variety of E-Learning and workbook options to compliment the virtual training offer.
- 116 virtual courses were delivered via Microsoft Teams.
- There was an even split between Adult and Children's Safeguarding training.
- There were 1,822 attendances recorded for the training.
- 318 people completed E-Learning workbooks
- Development of new courses to reflect the impact of the Domestic abuse Act 2021 and Keeping children Safe in Education 2022.
- Development of podcasts to provide information around key messages in respect of Safeguarding Children and Adults.





## Evaluation and Assessment

It is recognised that assessment of learning is necessary to measure both the quality of training and to evidence the impact on practice and how the training is contributing to improving the knowledge and skills of the workforce. The trainer continues to request delegate feedback on the quality of training and feedback continues to be positive. The chart below outlines the attendance by partner agencies during the period April 2022 - March 2023.



## Development of Policy and Procedure

Enabling continual improvement and learning for partners and practitioners is important to the Partnership. The ongoing review of policies, procedures and practice guidance documents is essential to support front line practitioners with both prevention, early intervention and awareness raising. There is a clear timeline for the revision of policy and procedure, which is monitored through a policy revision schedule.

The Learning and Development sub-group continues to provide a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to safeguarding practice through the development, review and updating of policies and procedures for use by professionals across the partnership. All revisions are undertaken in consultation with partner agencies and who are expected to disseminate and implement within their own organisations. All documents are published on the DSP website.

During 2022/23 the following were developed, reviewed and revised by the Partnership:

- Revision to Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Serious Child Safeguarding Incident Procedures
- Revision to Safeguarding Adult Review Procedure and referral form.
- Development of Harmful Sexual Behaviour Practice Guidance and Protocol
- Revision to the Adult Executive Strategy Process - Responding to serious concerns
- Supported the launch across the region of a short film to raise public awareness of self-neglect and what can be done to support those experiencing self-neglect.
- Developed an organisation directory of key safeguarding contacts across child and adult services working in Darlington to support practitioners in understanding who to contact.
- Refreshed the Information Sharing Protocol.

# 8. Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Safeguarding Adult Reviews

During 2022/23 period, the Partnership received its first serious incident notification (March 2023) which is being taken forward as a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR); the findings and learning from this review will be published in the next reporting period. The Partnership did not undertake any formal Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SAR) in this reporting period.

The Partnership recognises there is a continual need to improve and raise awareness of processes to clearly set out organisational responsibilities for dealing and responding to serious incidents. Both the LCSPR and SAR Procedures were revised to enable agencies to not only submit a referral if they believed the criteria for a LCSPR or SAR were met, but also to refer a Learning Request, when it was felt there was specific learning to be explored in how agencies worked together, but the circumstances did not meet criteria for a formal review.

The number of Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) or Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) in Darlington continues to remain low, it is recognised Darlington is a very small local authority area. The Partnership has however, seen an increase in the submission of learning request referrals, which may be as a consequence of the revision to procedures.

There were six referrals received during the reporting year a slight decrease on the seven referred in the previous year. They included the LCSPR as outlined above, three were deemed to meet the criteria for a learning request (2 Adult and 1 Child) and referred into the Learning & Development Group, two taken forward as Local Learning Reviews (LLR) (1 child and 1 adult), one adult case as an audit and the remaining two addressed through other processes.

## Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Serious Child Safeguarding Incident Procedure and Safeguarding Adult Review Procedure

There were a number of local learning reviews ongoing from the previous reporting period which were carried over to enable the learning to be disseminated, these included:

- **Mental Health** - A themed learning review following three cases where parental mental health was identified as a significant factor and there appeared to be no recognition of the impact or risk this had on the children in the family home. The review highlighted the absence of a 'whole family approach' including consideration of wider family issues. A further case which highlighted concerns in how agencies responded to a child who had complex mental health needs and the challenge in finding suitable accommodation due to her needs.
- **Child Criminal Exploitation/ Harm away from home** - the review highlighted that practitioners sometime failed to recognise harm which occurred away from the home and there were issues in respect of information sharing, agencies failing to work together, poor use of language, failure to engage parents and a lack of professional curiosity.
- **Adult Self Neglect** - two reviews, following two separate incidents which identified two individuals with needs for care and support who died and self-neglect was subsequently highlighted as an issue. The findings relate to mental health and the adults' reluctance/non-compliance with services offered over a period of time. There was a presumption of capacity however lack of any formal capacity assessments being undertaken in respect of care and support and treatment along with a lack of legal oversight relating to capacity and Court of Protection.

## Parental Mental Health and Safeguarding



### Learning Lessons Review Briefing Parental Mental Health and Safeguarding

#### Parental Mental Health and Safeguarding

Living in a household where parents or carers have mental health problems does not necessarily mean a child will experience abuse or negative consequences. Many children whose parents have mental health problems go on to achieve their full potential in life, particularly if their parents receive the right support at the right time.



However, there is a risk that parental mental health problems can impact negatively on children. All types of mental health problems can vary in severity. The impact on children depends on the parent or carer, their circumstances and the support they receive.

Babies of mothers who experience perinatal mental illness are at an increased risk of being born prematurely with a low birth weight. Post-natal depression can affect parents and carers bonding with the baby and can have a negative impact on the baby's intellectual, emotional, social and psychological development.

In older children the impact of parental mental health problems include a risk of developing behavioural problems, being required to take on a caring role and increased stress and anxiety. In the most serious cases children may suffer abuse or neglect from a parent or carer with a mental health problem and parental mental health problems are frequently present in cases of abuse and neglect. The risks to children are greater when parental mental health problems exist alongside domestic abuse and parental substance misuse.

For further information and guidance see [NICE: Parental Mental Health](#).

#### The Background of the Review

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership undertook a review in 2022 to understand and develop learning from three child safeguarding cases, two came in as learning request referrals to the Learning and Development Group, the third case was highlighted through a multi-agency audit undertaken by the Children's MASH Operational Group. Whilst none met the criteria for a Child Safeguarding Practice Review, it was evident that there was learning to explore.

In all three cases, parental mental health was a significant factor and there appeared to be no recognition of the impact or risk this had on the children in the family home. The reviews highlighted the absence of a 'whole family approach' including consideration of wider family issues. Agencies appeared instead to focus on the concern of the moment and did not always consider the daily lived experience of the children. Whilst agencies received information, there was a lack of information sharing and there was not a holistic response.

1

## Child Criminal Exploitation/ Harm away from home



### Learning Lessons Review Briefing Child Criminal Exploitation/ Contextual Safeguarding

#### What is Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)?

Criminal Exploitation is abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes. Coercions may take the form of debt bondage, physical or sexual violence, grooming, and other forms of intimidation. Individuals may not know they are being exploited but the presence of power imbalance and disadvantage weighted against the individual, highlights the risk.



#### What is County Lines?

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in transporting illegal drugs from one area to another, using dedicated mobile phones. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons.

#### What is Contextual Safeguarding/Harm Away from Home

Contextual Safeguarding seeks to identify and respond to harm and abuse posed to young people outside their home, either from adults or other young people.

Contextual Safeguarding, which has been developed by Dr. Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire's *Contextual Safeguarding Institute*, recognises that as young people grow and develop they are influenced by a whole range of environments and people outside of their family. For example in school or college, in the local community, in their peer groups or online. Contextual Safeguarding looks at how we can best understand these risks, engage with children and young people and help to keep them safe.

#### The Background of the Review

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP) undertook a learning lessons review (LLR) following an incident in June 2021, the incident did not meet the criteria for a Child Safeguarding Practice Review.

The LLR was undertaken to explore lessons to be learnt to help understand how agencies can learn and adapt from this incident. Whilst it was determined the incident was significant it did not fit the usual parameters of a traditional review, traditional approaches have focused on the risk of violence and abuse from inside the home. It was recognised there was a real opportunity to look at this incident through the lens of both safeguarding and community safety and to address the time that children and young people spend outside the home to understand the impact that organised crime, county lines and criminal exploitation is having on young people in Darlington and how agencies can work together to address and manage the risks going forward.

The focus of the review was not specifically on the incident but as a consequence of it, to understand how agencies could work differently as current services were not aligned to situations such as this case presented and a requirement to look outside the traditional core group of safeguarding practitioners.

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## Adult Self Neglect



### Learning Lessons Review Briefing Self-Neglect

#### What is Self-Neglect?

Self-neglect is defined as covering a wide range of behaviours. A person may not be keeping themselves clean, neglecting to care for their own health or their surroundings, may refuse care or treatment for health and care needs, or could be hoarding various types of possessions to the point of being a risk. Self-neglect is a continuum of behaviours ranging from moderate to severe. It may be unintentional, such as not eating due to memory issues. Where self-neglect gets out of control, including an inability to avoid or control self-harm, it can lead to a high risk of death or serious harm to the adult involved and to others' health and safety. There is no standard definition of self-neglect, but the Care Act 2014 Statutory Guidance provides the following definition: "Self-neglect covers a wide range of behaviour neglecting to care for one's personal hygiene, health or surroundings and includes behaviour such as hoarding".



Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) provides additional guidance on self-neglect  
[Self-neglect as a sign](#)

#### Understanding Self-Neglect

Self-neglect is often defined across three domains:

- neglect of self and lack of self-care
- neglect of the environment
- refusal to accept help and support

#### What are the signs to look out for?

Neglect of self may include:

- poor personal hygiene/ dirty or inappropriate clothing/poor hair care
- poor diet leading to malnutrition or dehydration
- medical or health needs disregarded (for example refusing medication or treatment/refusing to allow access to health/and or social care staff in relation to personal hygiene and care
- alcohol or substance misuse

Neglect of Environment may include:

- unsanitary or dirty conditions which could result in serious harm to the individual or others
- hoarding
- situations which create a fire risk (for example hoarding)
- poor maintenance of property
- keeping lots of animals which are neglected
- vermin
- lack of heating
- no running water or sanitation
- poor management of finances (leading to utilities being cut off)



1

The key learning points and multi-agency actions and recommendations for learning have been incorporated into 7-minute briefings which have shared across the Partnership and will be covered within multi-agency training.

The themes from the two local learning reviews undertaken in this period include issues relating to multi-agency safeguarding processes and decision making, along with adult mental health and adult self-neglect, which has been a recurring theme. Key learning points were identified and several single and multi-agency actions and recommendations for learning were identified which are being addressed by the Learning and Development Group. Learning from good practice has also been embedded in the review process.

The Learning & Development Group commissioned a self-neglect task and finish group to take forward key pieces of work at the end of this reporting period. As a partnership we need to consider whether practitioners are recognising self-neglect and help understand what is currently in place and what are the gaps to support them in their work.

Expectations will be to:

- consider a revision to the self-neglect practice guidance, to include examples of positive, flexible and creative approaches to support practitioners in engaging with people who are self-neglecting
- to help understand the barriers organisations pose for those who consistently refuse support.
- the development of a self-neglect pathway and risk assessment tool to support decision making.
- to obtain a better understanding of when formal capacity assessments are undertaken and establish if a need to develop Mental Capacity Guidance.
- consider what training and awareness is needed and be included within multi-agency training provision.

This work will continue into the next reporting period.



## What did we learn:

### Safeguarding Practice Issues

The review highlighted child protection procedures are being followed which provides some assurance on multi-agency practice

The importance of ensuring GP information is available at strategy meetings when parental mental health is a concern

Improvements to information sharing - had appropriate information and timeline of events been available, this may have supported decision making

Practitioners demonstrated good professional curiosity

Home Environment Assessment Tool (HEAT) assessments are now completed and used by all 0-19 practitioners to identify early signs of neglect

Escalation processes to be addressed through supervision and training opportunities

Maternity Services - to ensure specialist safeguarding representation is available for multi-agency forums and maternity recording systems to be improved

### Adult Self Neglect

The importance of conducting detailed mental capacity assessments of both decision making and executive functioning skills

Importance of effective multi-agency information sharing and joined up working - not working in silos

Enabling practitioners, by ensuring they have the skills and tools, to effectively manage and challenge individuals who may be reluctant to engage

Ensuring there is a good understanding of escalation processes

Importance of professional curiosity when working with individuals who are reluctant to engage in support to understand the reasons why

The importance of relationship building and gaining trust

Ensuring practitioners have a full understanding of the history behind the self-neglect

Practitioners to build relationships and consult with those who have good relationships with the adult

As a result of the learning from these reviews, the following guidance and tools were developed:

- Revision of Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Serious Incident Notification procedure.
- Revision of the SAR referral form to support Statutory Safeguarding Partners and the Learning and Development Group to make informed decision on type of review to be taken forward.
- Development of an organisation directory of key safeguarding contacts across child and adult services working in Darlington to support practitioners in understanding who to contact within agencies.

The Learning & Development and Quality Assurance & Performance Management Groups continue to work closely to ensure effective learning and change is embedded into frontline practice.

In October 2022, the Partnership shared a briefing around the learning from the National Reviews 'Star and Arthur'. The Children's MASH Operational Group agreed there was an opportunity to measure where the Partnership is with current service provision against the relevant local recommendations identified to understand if there are any gaps. The group was assured appropriate measures were in place and shared the findings with the Quality Assurance & Performance Management and Learning & Development groups which were satisfied with current service provision.



## 9. Looking Ahead

Looking forward to 2023/24 we will continue to develop our local response to the changes anticipated in Working Together to Safeguard Children statutory guidance and from the government response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the national Child Safeguarding Practice along with the implementation of Local Authority Adult Regulatory Inspections.

The Partnership has identified a number of key areas of focus which it will set out in its Strategic plan to help keep children, young people, and adults with needs for care and support safe and protected from abuse and neglect and will be taken forward in 2023-24. The strategic priority areas of focus will include:

- Communication and involvement - Making safeguarding everybody's business and improving awareness of safeguarding across all communities and partner organisations
- Prevention and Early Intervention - enabling partners to work together to act early to protect those at risk of abuse or neglect
- Joint Working - ensure effective arrangements are in place to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from abuse and neglect
- Exploitation - ensuring effective multi-agency response and intervention to protect those at risk of exploitation, in all its forms
- Adult Self-Neglect - ensure all partner agencies improve awareness and understanding of adult self-neglect to ensure early identification can be achieved

# Appendix 1

## Staffing and Budget

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership is supported by the following staff within the Business Unit:

- Business Manager
- Development Officer/Designated Officer
- Multi-Agency Trainer
- Business Support Officer
- Part-time Analyst (seconded from Durham Constabulary)
- Part-time Information Officer

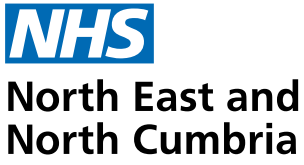
Contributions from Partner Agencies for 2021-22 period	
Darlington Borough Council	£115,493
North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (Tees Valley)	£41,310
Durham Constabulary	£34,404
Schools Forum	£10,000
Darlington College	£1,600
County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust	£16,973
Queen Elizabeth 6th Form College	£1,515
Probation Service North East	£1,846
Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust	£2,000
Training Income	£1,230
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>£226,371</b>

# Appendix 2

## Relevant agencies over and above Statutory Safeguarding Partner Organisations

- Darlington Local Authority - Housing, Public Health, Young Peoples' Engagement and Justice Service
- Health agencies - County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT), Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV), Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust (HDFT), North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (NEAS)
- Children and Families Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)
- Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (DDFRS)
- Early Years Settings
- Education (Primary, Secondary, Further Education, SEN)
- Support organisations for issues such as Substance Misuse / Domestic Abuse / Sexual Exploitation / Sexual Abuse (SARC)
- Family Justice Board (FJB)
- Probation Service North East
- Voluntary and third sector organisations (including Healthwatch)
- Darlington Primary Care General Practices
- Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group
- NHS England (pharmacy, dentist and optometrists)
- Independent providers including private hospitals, children's homes, nursing and care homes, domiciliary providers
- Youth groups - e.g. sport, scouts, brownies
- Faith settings
- Minority Communities
- British Transport Police (BTP)
- Chairs of other key local boards
- Representatives of other National Partners
- Darlington Partnership - which includes business and community organisations
- Coroner

This list is not exhaustive









**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
8 JANUARY 2024**

**WORK PROGRAMME 2023-2024**

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To consider the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the 2023/24 Municipal Year and to consider any additional areas which Members would like to suggest should be included.

**Summary**

2. Members are requested to consider the attached draft work programme (**Appendix 1**) for the 2023/24 Municipal Year which has been prepared based on Officers recommendations and recommendations previously agreed by this Scrutiny Committee in the last Municipal Year.
3. 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**

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

**Luke Swinhoe  
Assistant Director Law and Governance**

**Background Papers**

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

Author: Paul Dalton

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 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	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

5. 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.
6. The Council Plan sets the vision and strategic direction for the Council, with its overarching focus being 'Delivering success for Darlington'.
7. In approving the Council Plan, Members have agreed to a 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.

### 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. **Appendix 2**
9. A copy of the Forward Plan has been attached at **Appendix 3** for information.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Topic	Timescale	Lead Officer	Link to PMF (metrics)	Scrutiny's Role
<b>Performance Management and Regulation</b>	Q3 19 June 2023 Q4 23 Oct <i>(Deferred to 23 Oct from 21 Aug)</i> Q1 23 Oct Q2 8 Jan 2024 Q3 15 Apr 2024	Sharon Raine	Agreed set of indicators	To receive quarterly monitoring reports and undertake any further detailed work into particular outcomes if necessary
<b>Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report 2022/23</b>	8 January 2024	Vicky Davidson-Boyd, Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley		Annual monitoring  <i>(Item scheduled for 23 October 2023. Deferred to 8 January 2024 due to non-attendance)</i>
<b>Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2022/23</b>	8 January 2024	Martin Graham	CSC201	To examine the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer produced by the Children's Safeguarding Unit.  <i>(Item scheduled for 23 October 2023. Deferred to 8 January 2024 per Officer Request – Agreed by Chair.)</i>
<b>Children's Services Self-Assessment - Overview</b>	8 January 2024	Chris Bell		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  <i>(Item scheduled for 23 October 2023.)</i>

Topic	Timescale	Lead Officer	Link to PMF (metrics)	Scrutiny's Role
				<i>Deferred to 8 January 2024 per Officer Request – Agreed by Chair.)</i>
<b>Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report</b>	8 January 2024	Ann Baxter, Independent Chair		Annual monitoring
<b>Youth Engagement / Communication Strategy</b>	8 January 2024	Tony Murphy		To undertake a review of the Youth Engagement / Communication Strategy, with an additional focus on SEND.
<b>SEND Resource Base Remodelling at Heathfield Primary School</b>	8 January 2024	Tony Murphy / Helen Watson		To enable the Committee to participate in the consultation on the SEND Resource Base Remodelling at Heathfield Primary School.
<b>Transitional Services (SEND) for 16 – 25 year olds</b>	<b>To be addressed in a Member Briefing on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024</b>	Tony Murphy / Joss Harbron		To provide Scrutiny with an opportunity to examine the Transitional Services for 16-25 year olds.
<b>2023/24 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment</b>	19 February 2024	Tony Murphy/Nicola Davies		Annual Report
<b>School Transport and the Associated Services</b>	19 February 2024	Tony Murphy		To provide Scrutiny with the opportunity to examine the School Transport provision, and associated services.
<b>Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education</b>	15 April 2024	Tony Murphy		To provide Scrutiny with the opportunity to examine the delivery of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education within schools.
<b>Refreshed Children and</b>	June 2024	Christine Shields		To update Members on the refreshed

Topic	Timescale	Lead Officer	Link to PMF (metrics)	Scrutiny's Role
Young Peoples Plan				Children and Young Peoples Plan

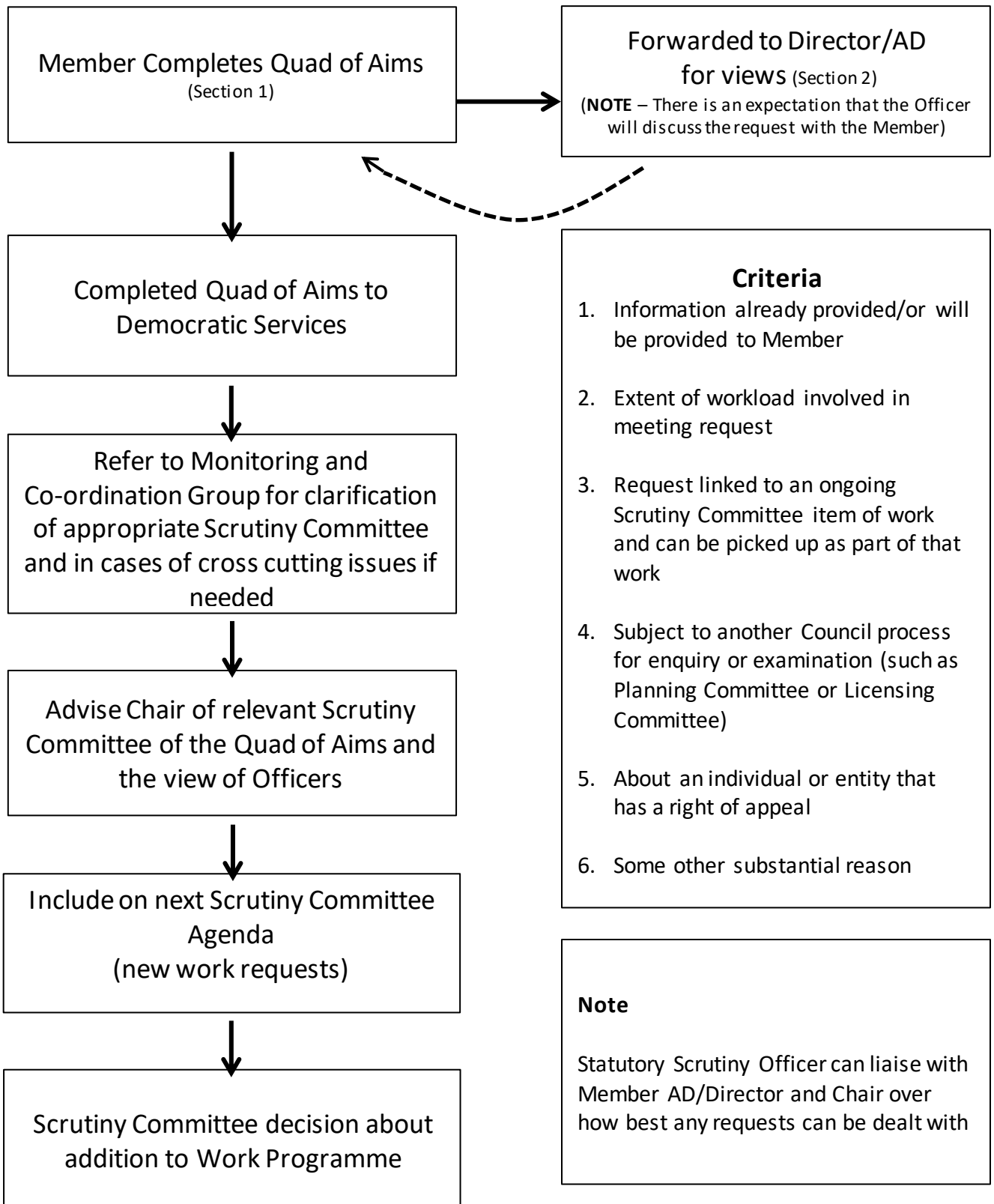
**JOINT WORKING**

<b>Cross Party Autism Working Group</b>	<p>Final Report of the Autism Provision Review Group to Health and Housing Scrutiny on 14 April 2021.</p> <p>Recommendation to establish a Joint Working Group - ongoing</p>	Christine Shields	To progress the key themes of training and awareness, support, diagnosis and employment, as identified by the Joint Autism Review Group.
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### PROCESS FOR ADDING AN ITEM TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE'S PREVIOUSLY APPROVED WORK PROGRAMME



## 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?

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)**

	<b>Criteria</b>
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 .....**

**DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL  
FORWARD PLAN**

**APPENDIX 3**



**FORWARD PLAN  
FOR THE PERIOD: 6 DECEMBER 2023 - 30 APRIL 2024**

Title	Decision Maker and Date
Council Tax and Business Rates Debt Recovery Strategy 2024/29	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Council Tax and Business Rates Discretionary Relief Policy 2024/29	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Delivery of New Homes at Blackwell - Joint Venture Proposal	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Discretionary Housing Payment Policy 2024/29	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Housing Services Climate Change Strategy	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Land at Central Park – Sale to Network Rail	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Maintained Schools Capital Programme - Summer 2024 and High Needs Capital	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Northern Echo Redevelopment	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Proposed Acquisition of former Wilkos, East Street, Darlington	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Revised Climate Change Action Plan	Council 25 Jan 2024 Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Revised Climate Change Strategy	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Schedule of Transactions - January 2024	Cabinet 9 Jan 2024
Calendar of Council and Committee Meetings 2024/25	Cabinet 6 Feb 2024
Housing Revenue Account - Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/28	Council 15 Feb 2024  Cabinet 6 Feb 2024
Land at Faverdale - Burtree Garden Village - Proposed Infrastructure Development Agreement (IDA)	Cabinet 6 Feb 2024
Local Development Scheme (LDS)	Cabinet 6 Feb 2024
Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/25 to 2027/28	Council 15 Feb 2024 Cabinet 6 Feb 2024
Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring - Quarter 3	Cabinet 6 Feb 2024
Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy	Council 15 Feb 2024 Cabinet 6 Feb 2024
Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 3	Cabinet 6 Feb 2024
Schools Admissions 2025/26	Cabinet 6 Feb 2024
Council Plan	Council 21 Mar 2024 Cabinet 5 Mar 2024
Local Transport Plan	Cabinet 5 Mar 2024
Offset Strategy	Cabinet 5 Mar 2024
Regulatory Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)	Cabinet 5 Mar 2024
Annual Procurement Plan	Cabinet 9 Apr 2024

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