



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Agenda

9.30 am

Monday, 20 October 2025

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 1 September 2025 (Pages 3 - 4)
4. Appointment of Co-opted Member –
Report of the Assistant Director Law and Governance
(Pages 5 - 6)
5. Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report –
Report of representatives of Adoption Tees Valley
(Pages 7 - 38)
6. Learning and Skills Annual Report 2024-25 –
Report of the Assistant Director Education and Inclusion
(Pages 39 - 44)
7. Children's Services Self Assessment 2024-25 –
Report of the Assistant Director of Children's Services
(Pages 45 - 86)

8. Performance Indicators Quarter 1 2025-26 –
Report of the Assistant Director of Children's Services
(Pages 87 - 122)
9. Work Programme –
Report of the Assistant Director Law and Governance
(Pages 123 - 134)
10. SUPPLEMENTARY ITEM(S) (if any) which in the opinion of the Chair of this Committee are
of an urgent nature and can be discussed at this meeting
11. Questions

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'A. Wennington', with a horizontal line underneath.

Amy Wennington
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Friday, 10 October 2025

Town Hall
Darlington.

Membership

Councillors Ali, Allen, Crudass, Johnson, Layton, Marshall, Renton, Dr. Riley, Storr and Toms

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 Michael Conway, Mayoral and Democratic 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: Michael.Conway@darlington.gov.uk or telephone 01325 406309

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 1 September 2025

PRESENT – Councillors Allen (Chair), Crudass, Johnson, Layton, Marshall and Toms

APOLOGIES – Councillors Ali, Renton, Dr. Riley and Storr

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Chris Bell (Assistant Director of Children's Services) and Tony Murphy (Assistant Director Education and Inclusion)

CYP5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at this meeting.

CYP6 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON 16 JUNE 2025

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 16 June 2025

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of this Scrutiny Committee held on 16 June 2025 be approved as a correct record.

CYP7 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 4 2024-25

The Assistant Director Children's Services provided members with performance information for quarter 4 2024-25 in line with an indicator set agreed by Monitoring and Coordination Group on 2 July 2018, and subsequently by Scrutiny Committee Chairs.

Points of note were provided to members which included the overall reduction in admissions of children to Children's Social Care alongside a reduction in Child Protection Plan numbers and fewer children overall requiring statutory social care aid.

The numbers of children reported missing has also shown noticeable reductions and has been a subject of targeted work previously.

Areas for development were also highlighted which included Child Protection Investigation timeframes and continued work on improving placement stability.

Questions were raised which included the definition of "external agencies", being full trained members of partner agencies such as those working in education settings.

It was also asked whether the timeframes for Child Protection Investigations can be adjusted with officers confirming that timeframes are not set on a local level.

A member also asked for information on current staff retention with the response that recruitment and retention is currently at its most positive level for a number of years with the numbers of agency staff reducing as a result.

RESOLVED – That the performance information provided be noted and members agreed to raise any queries with the relevant Assistant Directors.

CYP8 WORK PROGRAMME

The Group Director of Operations 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
20 OCTOBER 2025

APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBER

Matter for Consideration

1. To advise Members of an appointment of a co-opted representative on this Scrutiny Committee.

Background

2. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee maintains a cohort of co-opted non-voting members representing schools in the Borough.
3. The previous representative, Carly Stonier, Headteacher of Heighington Church of England Primary School informed Democratic services of her intention to step down from her role as co-opted member of this Committee on Wednesday 1 October 2025.
4. Following the Primary Heads Forum meeting on Friday 3 October 2025, Jonathon Bull, Headteacher of Bishopton Redmarshall Church of England Primary School was nominated to take the vacant non-voting co-opted membership.

Recommendation

5. Members are requested to note the appointment of Jonathon Bull as Non-Voting Co-opted Member of this Scrutiny Committee representing the Primary School Forum and Church of England schools in the Borough.

Amy Wennington
Assistant Director Law and Governance

Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the compilation of this report.

Michael Conway: Extension 6309

Council Plan	No significant effect from the Council Plan.
Addressing Inequalities	The service actively supports the diversity agenda
Tackling Climate Change	No significant effect on the Climate Change Strategy
Efficient and effective use of resources	No significant impact on resources
Health and Wellbeing	No significant impact on Health and Wellbeing
S17 Crime and Disorder	No significant impact on the Council's Crime and Disorder responsibilities.
Wards Affected	None directly
Groups Affected	Representative of Primary Schools and Church of England Schools.
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not impact on the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	No significant impact



Annual Report

2024-2025



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1. Executive Summary

Adoption Tees Valley has continued to thrive and develop as a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), with this year seeing a greater degree of pan-regional partnership working with our neighbouring North East RAA's- Adopt Coast to Coast and Adopt North East. Regional partnership working has enabled the RAA to draw funding from Adoption England for development and positive impact, aligned to the objectives in the National Adoption Strategy.

1.1 Adoption Nationally

Nationally, the numbers of children being placed for adoption and numbers adopted have been falling and adopter sufficiency remains a challenge. The numbers of adopters recruited in ATV has increased by 28% which has been very encouraging. We know nationally that adoption provides a stable and secure childhood for many children, however, there is an increasing awareness that adopted children have many complex long-term emotional, social, learning and health needs arising from early trauma, neglect, and harm. Their needs must be understood in the context of early care experience, and their adoptive parents need support to meet these needs and provide nurturing family life. Adoptive parents, and young people themselves, tell us they need services to provide continuing support, available as and when needed throughout childhood and into adulthood.

1.2 Culture Change in Adoption

Work has been underway to raise awareness of the need to modernize adoption practice across the Tees Valley. In November 2024 the Public Law Working Group published guidance based on Sir Andrew McFarlane's speech around the importance of maintaining lifelong links for adopted children. The report made numerous recommendations which has caused an impact on how contact plans are being considered and formulated.

We recognise the continued importance of the need to remain open to birth family contact, and investing our professional care, effort and resources into maintaining those relationships, whether directly, or indirectly. Through the research undertaken by UEA, and the Adoption Barometer (Adoption UK) we know that for adopted adults and young people there is a huge importance in understanding their families of origin, reasons for being adopted, and maintaining those lifelong links. ATV has engaged with the national programme and through discussion with the Board and partners, will be developing ethos

and culture which promotes a greater understanding and opportunity for maintaining significant relationships. ATV are working closely with its Local Authorities to consider the whole system change and identify workforce development needs.

1.3 Early Permanence

Early permanence in adoption continues to be a key priority nationally, and for the region and ATV. The EP project came to an end in March, however plans to continue the regional work are in place. ATV were proud to report a significant rise in EP placements across the year and reported a significant increase on the previous year's data from 8 to 27 placements. Work will continue to ensure the opportunity is created for more children to access an early permanence placement, however, there is good evidence over this year of significant strengthening of practice and understanding

1.4 Voice and Influence

The Voice and Influence group continues to build momentum and membership is consistent. The Adoptbats group held a movie premiere in November to launch their film *Its My Story*, aimed at helping adults and education staff understand what it is like to be adopted. Adoption England invited the group to open the annual adoption conference in April to showcase the work and to assist ATV social workers in running workshops as part of the event. This has been a landmark event for ATV and plans continue to evolve and strengthen the voice of young people.

1.5 Multi-Disciplinary Support to adopted children and families- MDASS

During this period Adoption Tees Valley has worked closely with Adopt North East, Adopt Coast to Coast and the NHS Integrated Care Board (ICB) to establish the MDASS service, across the NE region. The model of support is Dyadic Developmental Psychology (DDP) which focusses on attachment, for children who have had early experience of trauma, neglect and harm.

The aim of MDASS will be to significantly strengthen the support to families, from a multi-disciplinary therapeutic perspective, providing access to psychological consultation, assessment and intervention, for children with multiple and complex needs. This service will be aimed at getting more quicker to deliver a therapeutic plan which will help children. It will aim to reduce the pressures of

children's needs, improve quality of family life and outcomes, and prevent family breakdown.

1.6 The work of ATV

Recruitment of prospective adopters has been a challenge for the agency over this year, a challenge also for many other regional and national RAA's. It is thought that the cost-of-living crisis, alongside the effects of the pandemic seeing a rise in adult mental ill health and increasing awareness of the complex needs of adopted children has impacted on the numbers of people wanting to consider adoption. We want to continue to show the public that ATV, and partners are there to support children and families in the short and longer term.

Adoption England released a mystery shopper report during this period. Adoption Tees Valley were cited in the report as an example of providing exceptional customer service and were ranked second in the country based on the criteria used breaking it down into key areas.

The numbers of children placed has been largely stable over this past year and is comparable with the previous year. However, we have seen a significant rise in the number of children who were placed with early permanence carers.

During this year, ATV has continued to develop specialist areas within the service which offers consistency and efficiency. Introducing an enquiry team model has assisted with the rise in adopter recruitment and the number of EP carers. Building on the success of the enquiry team there are plans to develop this team to incorporate all adoption related enquiries including adoption support, maintaining relationships, partner adoptions and duty. The fourth team will become the ATV Adoption Hub.

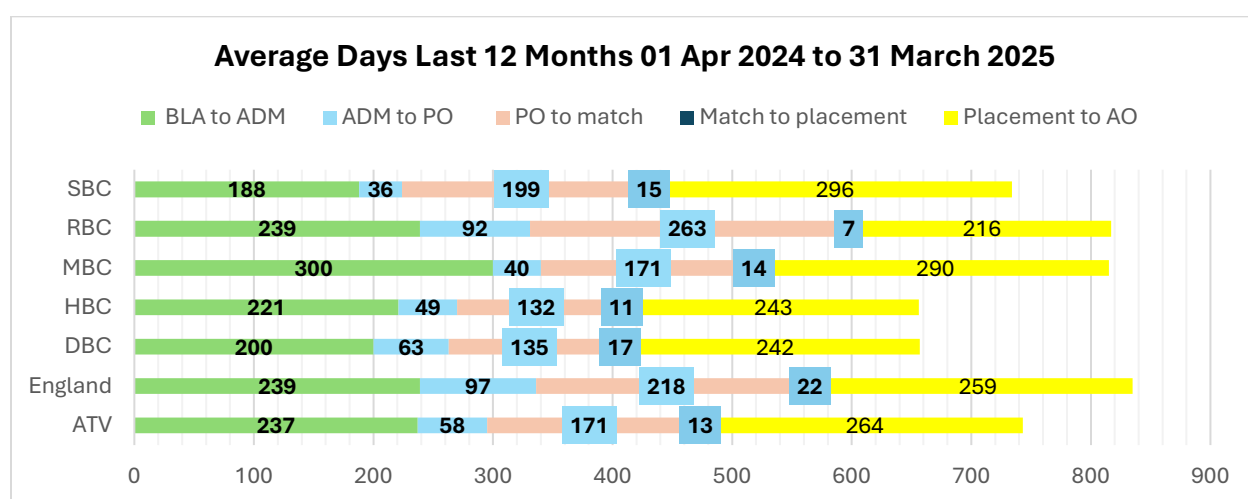
2. Governance

Adoption Tees Valley is overseen by the Board of Directors, which is comprised of Directors, or Assistant Directors of the 5 Local Authorities; an adoptive parent; a Virtual School Head. The ATV Service Manager attends all Board meetings. The ATV Board provides strategic direction, oversee finance and overall governance of the RAA.

Each LA Council oversees the work of the RAA through presentation of the Annual and Bi Annual reports at Scrutiny, and/or Corporate Parenting Boards, and in some cases, representation of elected members on the ATV Panel.

3. Key Performance Indicators for the period 1.4.24-31.3.25

Key Indicator	ATV 2022-23	ATV 2023-24	ATV 2024 -25	Current c/w previous	National Govt Target where applicable
Adopter Approvals	55	38	44	Inc 16%	N/A
Children referred to ATV	223	138	99	Dec 28%	N/A
Children with ADM -BID (Best interests' decision)	100	87	83	Dec 5%	N/A
PO	87	79	66	Dec 16%	N/A
Matches	81	75	67	Dec 11%	
Placed	76	78	65	Dec 16%	N/A
Early Permanence	11	8	27	Inc 237%	
Adoption Orders	84	76	64	Dec 16%	N/A
Disruptions – pre order	1	12	0	Improved	N/A
Timescale – A2 (PO to match)	146 days	130 days	171days	Inc 30%	121 days
Timescale A10 – BLA-Moved in with Adopters	411 days	392 days	385 days	Improved	421 days



The above data will be referred to in each section, to provide a base line for discussion and review of the year's performance.

Where applicable, data for each Local Authority will be detailed within the report.

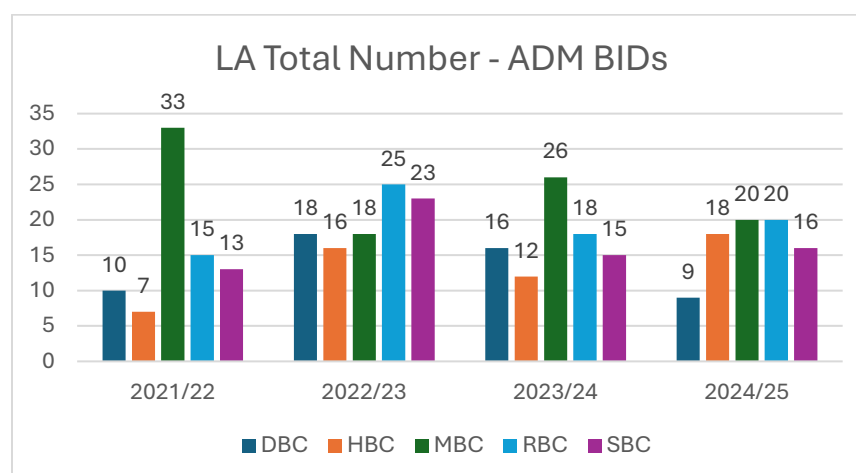
4. Children Referred, Permanence Planning, Matching and Placements

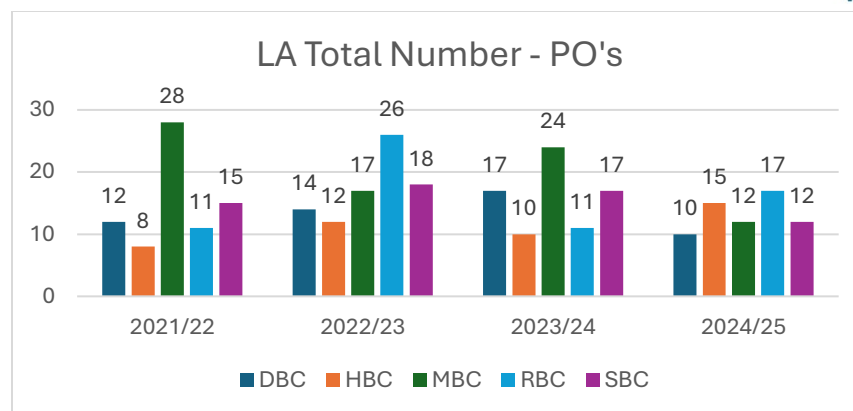
4.1 ATV and Local Authority Data

The numbers of children referred to ATV has continued to decrease within this period. The data does suggest that the LA's may be improving the earlier planning and referring children who are more likely to go on to an adoption plan.

In the previous year the conversion from referral to ADM was 63%, while in this year the conversion rate was 83%. This means the children referred are more likely to go on to have an adoption plan.

The numbers of children where the Local Authority has made a Best Interests plan of adoption (ADM BID) has decreased slightly to 83, and the numbers of children who have gone on to Placement Order (PO) is 66, a decrease of 16% on the previous year.



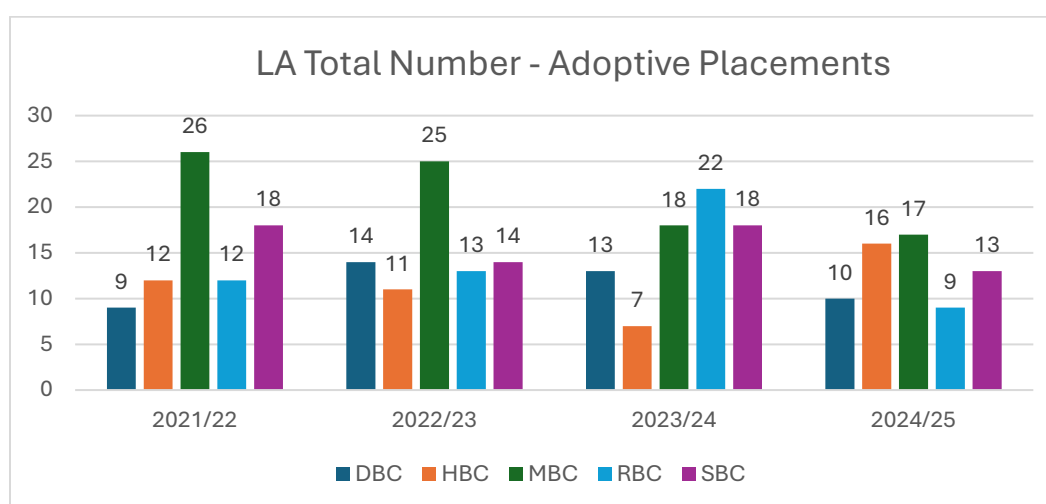


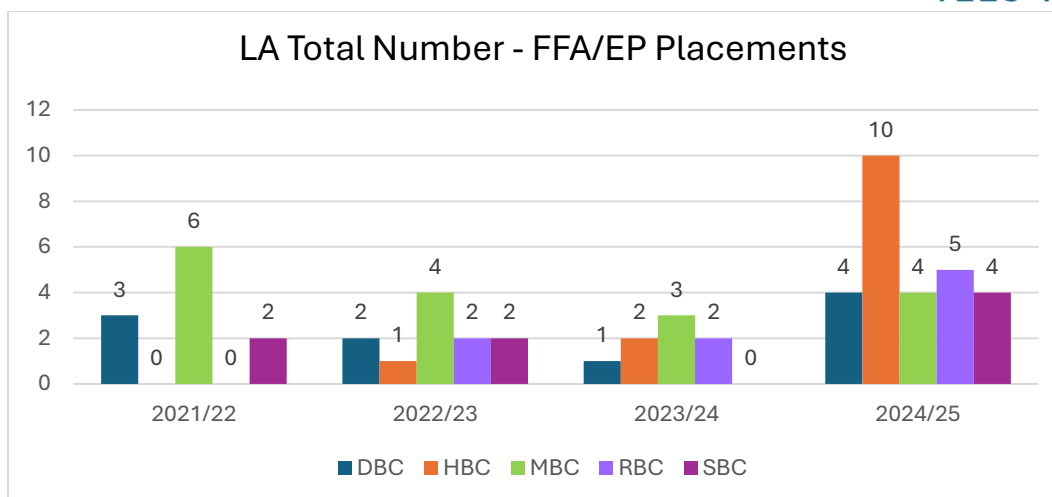
For individual Local Authorities, Middlesbrough has returned to the numbers of ADM's that is more consistent with previous years but had a significant drop in PO on previous years.

Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton have had marginal change to the numbers of ADM's compared with the previous year, and Redcar and Cleveland had a significant rise in Placement Orders, from 11, to 17.

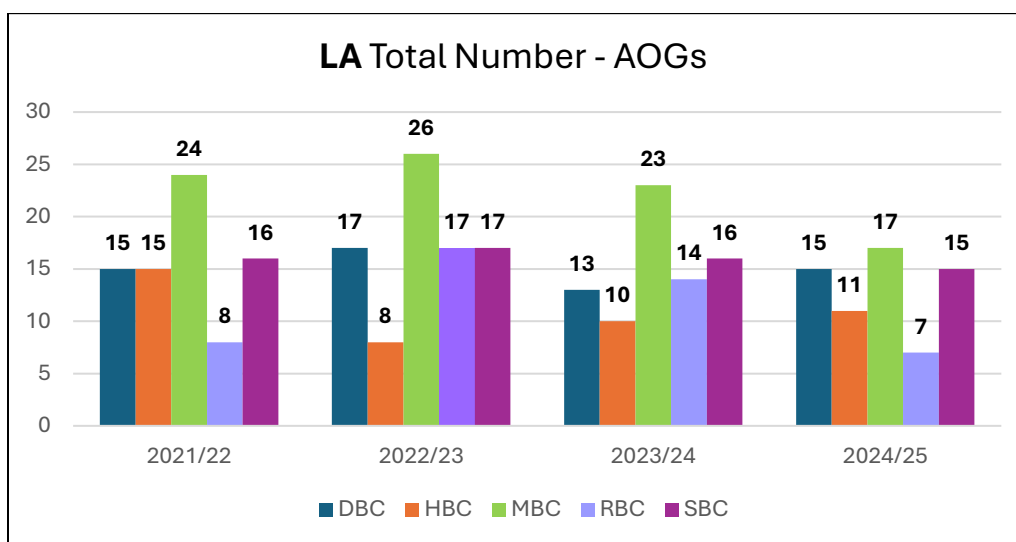
Hartlepool is seeing a year on year rise in the numbers of children with PO. Darlington is seeing a reduction in ADM's and PO which is in line with national trends.

The number of children placed for adoption has reduced, however, placements through early permanence have risen significantly from 8 to 27 since last year.





The numbers of adoption orders have decreased by 16% compared with the previous year.



4.2 Disrupted Placements prior to the Adoption Order

It is reassuring to report that the number of placement disruptions in this period was 0, which is significantly lower than the 12 placements reported in the previous year.

The ATV Board's agreement that increased access to assessment of children's therapeutic needs is required, when planning for adoption, and it is agreed that

such specialist assessments will be resourced in more cases, and especially for older children and sibling placements. Therefore having a greater understanding of children's needs ensures effective family finding and matching success.

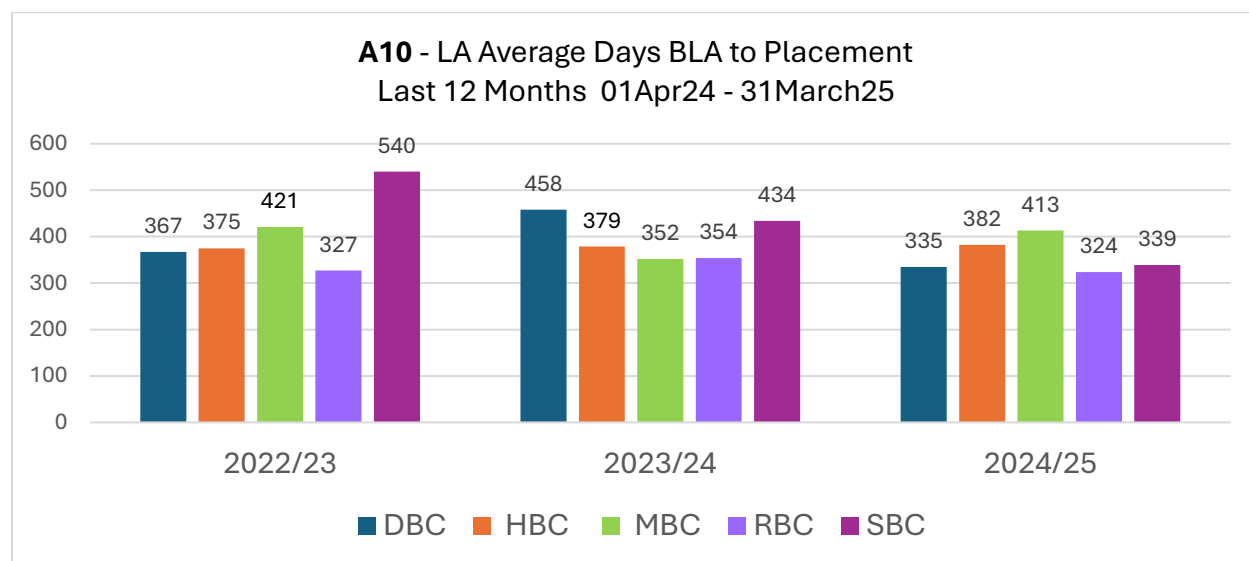
ATV are undertaking additional measures prior to placement to ensure the learning from previous years is embedded in the family finding practice. Additional scrutiny of external prospective adopters reports in relation to the agency, ensures all adopters considered for our children have experienced the same level of preparation as ATV's current practice.

4.3 Timescales for children for matching and moving in with their adoptive family

On average the timeliness of adoption for children has improved compared with the previous year, and ATV continues to find families and progress them to match and placement in good time, on average.

A10- became Child in Our care, to Moving in with Adopter

In adoption we focus most significantly on the time between the child becoming a child in our care and moving in with adoptive parents. This is the A10 timescale, and the government sets 421 days as its target.

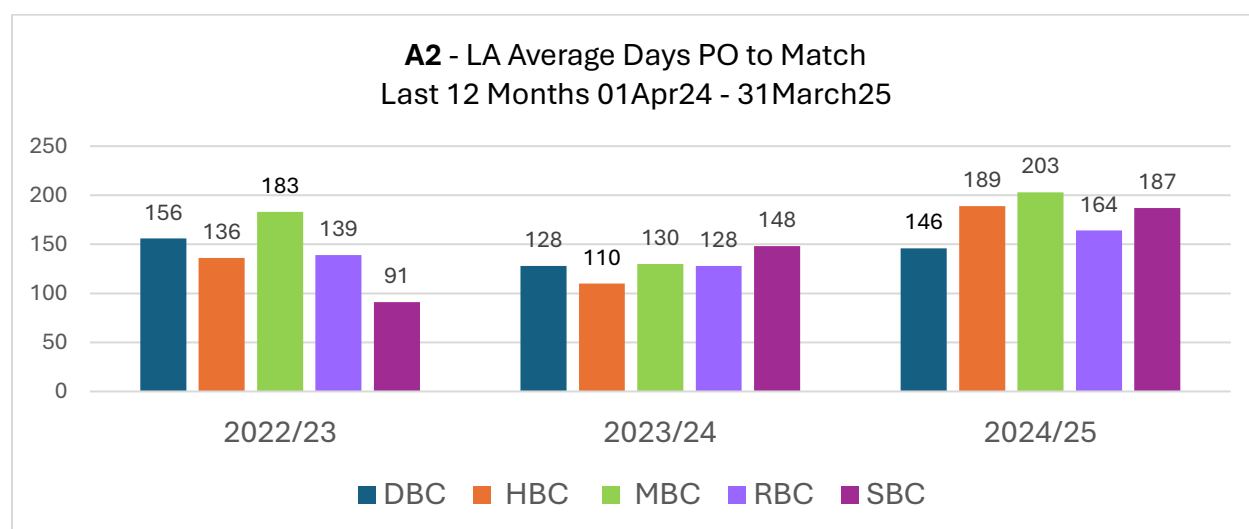


(Data based on children who have been adopted in this year).

ATV continues to perform well against national comparisons and has improved this year. There is an embedded process for early referral of children, and early consideration of potential families who may be linked to the child, in advance of the Placement Order being granted. It's important therefore to monitor the numbers of referrals to ensure that all children are considered at an early stage, even where adoption does not go on to be the final plan.

A2- Placement Order to Match

ATV also measures the time between Placement Order (PO) and matching a child for adoption, this being the time beyond Court decision to award a PO to confirming the match with a family. This is the A2 figure, and the government target timescale is 121 days.



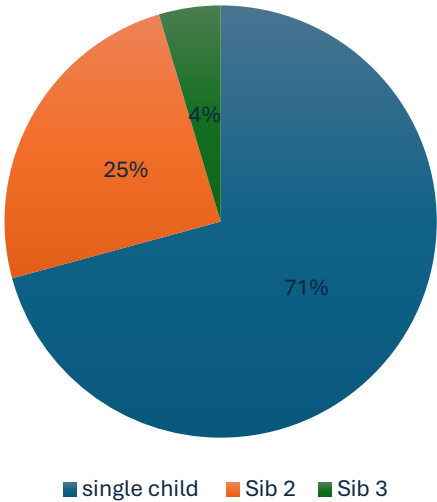
There is variation in the Local Authority performance around timescale over this year, and caution should be noted in that numbers in adoption are relatively small, therefore small changes in numbers can affect averages. The rise in A2 data is understood due to more children being placed initially through EP and the need for more specialist understanding of children's needs.

The data is based on the timescales for children who have been adopted in the year.

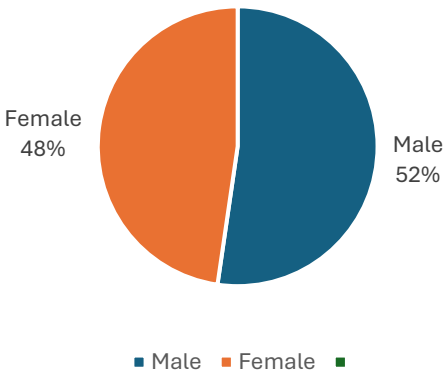
4.4 Needs of Children Placed and Children Waiting with Placement Order

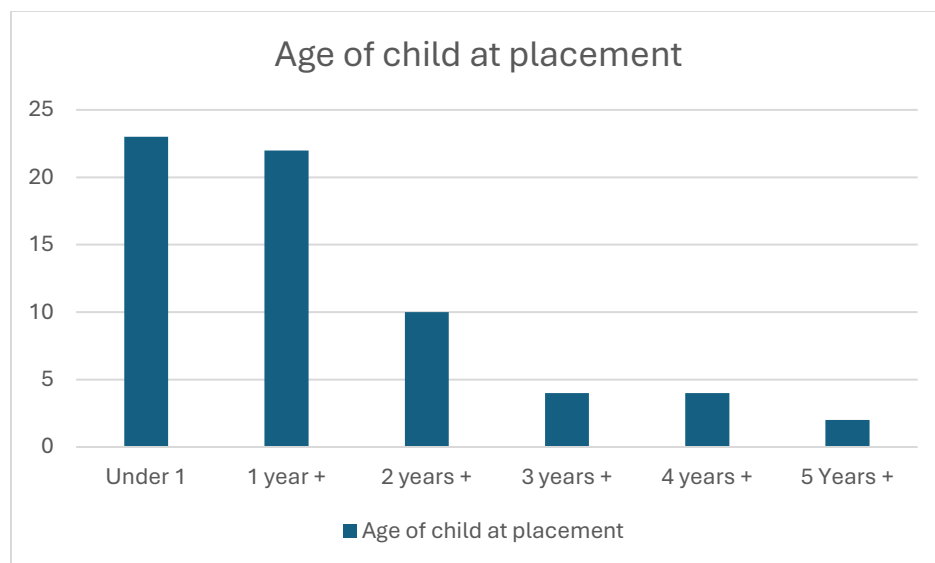
Children Placed

Children placed



Gender





While it continues to be the case that most children placed for adoption are aged under 1 year and aged 1-2 years the data shows that in this year 10 children were over 3 years. ATV has therefore been seeking to find suitable families for a high number of children who are considered harder to match due to age, and factoring in the older children in sibling groups, shows how there are greater risks of disruption, or of not finding suitable families.

The significant majority of children placed within this year have been of White British background. There were 9 children of White European, Asian ethnicity and dual heritage.

Children waiting with a Placement Order, not yet placed as of 31.3.25

There were 46 children with a Placement Order not yet formally placed for adoption on 31.3.25.

22 had active plans progressing to be adopted by an identified linked family, 15 had no link at that time, and a further 9 were children for whom the Local Authority had ceased active family finding, including children who had had a disruption.

4.5 Summary of the priority needs for children requiring adoption in Tees Valley

In summary, ATV is currently identifying a high number of children who have a plan of adoption, and with a Placement Order who:

- Are in sibling groups
- Are older children, aged 4 +
- Have additional complex needs associated with early health (FASD), trauma, attachment difficulties, and neurodivergent conditions.

Many of the older children have experience of living in harmful environments, with poor care, and have moved around the foster care system, prior to coming for a plan of adoption.

The implications for strategic planning, and assessment of these children's needs will be part of the forward planning priorities, and vision for ATV moving forward.

4.6 Finding Families for Tees Valley Children

The priority for seeking suitable families for Tees Valley children is internally approved ATV adopters.

Where it is clear no suitable family is available for a child with a progressing adoption plan, ATV uses the strong links established with regional Voluntary Adoption Agencies to seek a placement. The agency also seeks placement with other RAA's in the region.

Children are placed on Linkmaker, the data system for sharing details nationally of children needing families, and of approved adoptive families. Through Linkmaker families are identified across England who wish to express an interest in children waiting.

ATV has promoted children for adoption through Activity Days, funded nationally, and Activity Days held within the RAA's own centre. ATV have launched a new online family finding event. The event is hosted by the ATV website which provides secure access to adopters for a time-limited period of 3 days. This method is an alternative to the live Activity Days. Family Finders produce a profile on each child with video clips and voice over describing the individual needs and characteristics of children. The unique offer in this method is that adopters can take their time exploring and considering children from their own home without the pressures some describe attending the live events. The online events will continue to take place throughout the next year.

4.7 Internal – External Placements

Year	Internal ATV	External	Total
2021-22	58 (75%)	19 (25%)	77
2022-23	52 (67%)	25 (33%)	77
2023-24	51 (65%)	27 (35%)	78
2024-25	41 (62%)	25 (38%)	66

There has been an increased reliance on external VAA's for ATV placements over this year. This is due to lower numbers of approvals, and ATV adopters being unwilling to consider older children and older children in sibling groups. Adoption England recognize that the North East has challenges in recruitment of adopters and have offered funding to pilot an initiative to trial offering adoption grants. This pilot is expected to be launched late 2025.

5. Recruiting, Preparing and Approving Adopters

Recruitment of adopters has been challenging in this period, for reasons outlined in the Executive Summary.

Additionally, there have been some challenges with timescales for assessment, with stage 1 timescales having met significant delays in some cases due to a small number of factors:

- Delays associated with medical checks. There have been some delays in awaiting the Medical Advisor summary, and in turn the MA's awaiting GP reports. Where prospective adopters (PA) complex health needs, these require further understanding by the MA in stage 1, and this can take time, as the PA consultant is required to provide their opinion.

To address delays, ATV has now worked with the ICB to introduce an additional MA, who will have responsibility for all adult health reports and working with regional GP's.

- Delays associated with worker absence or change of worker.

	Total 2022-23	Total 2023-24	Total 2024-25	Current c/w previous	England 2023-24 where applicable

Initial contacts/enquiries	309	232	282	Inc 22%	
Initial Visits to prospective Adopters	106	92	90	Dec 2%	
Stage 1 Starts	58	60	50	Dec 16%	
Stage 2 Starts	51	50	46	Dec 8%	
Adopter Approvals	55	38	44	Inc 16%	
Carers approved who can do early permanence	10	6	20	increase	
Numbers in assessment at the end of the period	38	41	39	Dec 5%	
Numbers waiting to be matched at end of period	29	22	26	Inc 18%	
Timescale S1 (Govt target 60 days)		101	124	Improved	134
Timescale S2 (Govt target 121 days)	156	139	143	Improved	150

The key challenge is achieving adoptive parents in this region for the needs of children who require adoption. The high numbers of children who have had a disruption to placements, almost all of which were out of area, indicates that we need to find more people in this region who can offer permanence via adoption to our children.

The numbers of prospective adopters who want to do early permanence has reduced this year, which is a downturn from the previous year, and goes against the national trend, which is an increase.

6. Early Permanence

6.1 Support to Early Permanence carers.

The following supports are available to early permanence carers:

- Dedicated adoption social workers throughout the process
- Training and preparation for early permanence- a 2 day course
- Social Worker led EP support group- STEP
- Additional training and preparation around the fostering role.
- Peer buddy system
- Allocated supervising social worker from the Fostering Service
- Fostering allowance during the fostering period

6.2 EP Children's Care Plan Outcomes

In this period 3 of the children were reunified to a birth family member, and 24 children placed under early permanence have continued with an adoption plan.

6.3 Working in Partnership with LAs and other agencies

Following national learning, ATV has worked with the 5 LA's to implement the practice of an ATV worker attending all Legal Gateway meetings. This means early permanence is discussed before the LA initiates care proceedings.

We know we need to influence wider stakeholders to understand and feel confident in planning for early permanence, including understanding it is not a plan of adoption until the PO is granted, and that EP carers are well prepared for this.

A pan regional conference was held in October 2024, aimed at wider stakeholders in LA's, CAFCASS and the Judiciary to promote a shared understanding of EP. The event was successful in relation to promoting the key messages of the benefits EP placements offer children. In addition to this the Adoption Subcommittee of the Local Family Justice Board has been created, to ensure wider stakeholder engagement with early permanence.

7. Adoption Support

Adoption Tees Valley continues to offer a 3 tier Adoption Support Offer.

Tier 1 Universal
• Allocated Social Worker until 12 months post adoption order • Adoption Support Plan in all cases • Young People's Group, exclusively for adopted children within a local youth club venue (age 7-16) • Play and Stay group weekly in ATV, providing support and relationships for adoptive parents and younger children (age up to 5) • Access to CATCH • Loud and Clear music group, run by the Sage within ATV • Family and Friends Network training • Parties and activity days within ATV • Support to Keep In Touch (formally Letterbox) – for children, birth parents, and adoptive parents.
Tier 2 Targeted
• Therapeutic parenting support training • Future Stars • Nurturing Attachments • Non-Violent Resistance • Education Support from ATV Education Support Worker
Tier 3 Therapy
• Therapeutic services provided commissioned services, and funded through the Adoption Support Fund and MDASS. • Specialist assessment, where needed, through commissioned services • Allocated social worker, for assessment of adoption support needs, and development of an adoption support plan to meet needs.

7.1 Assessment of Adoption Support Needs

ATV has implemented a different process for beginning the assessment of adoption support needs when this is requested by an adoptive parent. There is now an early duty response and a booked telephone session to commence the assessment.

In this period, there were 162 assessments of adoption support needs completed, compared with 127 in 2023-24.

The average timescale from enquiry to allocation to a social worker was 11 days.

The number of applications to the Adoption Support Fund was 255. In many cases the applications are repeated applications and have not had a new assessment of adoption support needs. In 2023-24, this was 289.

The value of applications submitted was £930,116 compared with £943,112.35 in the previous year.

While there were many positive examples of how adoption support assessments have helped children and families, we know some families still feel they wait too long. We aim to increase early access to a social worker where needed and reduce waiting times. The case allocation system has been reviewed and the creation of the 4th Enquiry Hub Team will ensure families are receiving the right support at the earliest point possible.

We are introducing a new set of national measures through our case management system to help us improve the quality of data and management oversight of cases, and of timeliness of completion of assessments.

7.2 Stay and Play

The group continues to run weekly within ATV and is well attended by adoptive parents and children in the pre school years. The groups tend to be attended while parents are on adoption leave.

On average 8 parents and their children attend the Play and Stay group each week.

21 families have accessed this support group over the year.

We will continue to run our weekly Stay and Play sessions, which we know is great source of peer support, and early help for families.

7.3 Education Support

Post-adoption education support continues to be funded via the partnership of the Virtual Schools within the 5 Local Authorities of ATV. The current Education Support Worker (ESW) joined ATV in January 2025 and has previously worked for

25 years in a range of senior leadership roles within schools including being a qualified SENCO. The ESW works with both families and schools to ensure that the needs of adopted children are met within the education environment. This can range from supporting in school meetings, advising on the content of personal education plans, supporting EHCP and funding applications, guidance on effective use of Pupil Premium budgets, to providing in school coaching and training. The ESW delivers bespoke training in schools to meet the training needs of staff on topics such as; Attachment and Developmental Trauma, PACE, Theraplay Theory, and Basic Sensory Integration for the Classroom. The ESW also provides facts sheets and recorded presentations for adoptive parents on key educational 'pinch points' such as transition between key stages and is aiming to further develop this into more formal training modules in the near future. This is in line with a redesign of the education pages on the ATV website that will provide enhanced signposting for both parents and schools to supporting organisations and resources. The ESW works closely with Local Authority SEND Teams and takes advantage of SEND CPD offered to ensure their personal knowledge base is consistent and up to date.

The dedicated Education Support Worker within ATV since January 2025 has worked with 101 children.

The breakdown by the Local Authority is set out below.

DBC	21	HBC	7	MBC	17	R&CBC	25	SBC	31
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Parent Feedback

'Thank you for yesterday, you were brilliant and really got across how complex things are for X. It's just really helpful having the teachers understand her more.'

'.....massive thanks to you too, for supporting me, preparing me and speaking up about the post 16 issues I'd not even considered.'

School Feedback

'Thank you so much for coming in yesterday; the session was very informative and the teachers all commented on how engaged they were and how interesting it was. Thank you for the resources, I will share these with the teachers.'

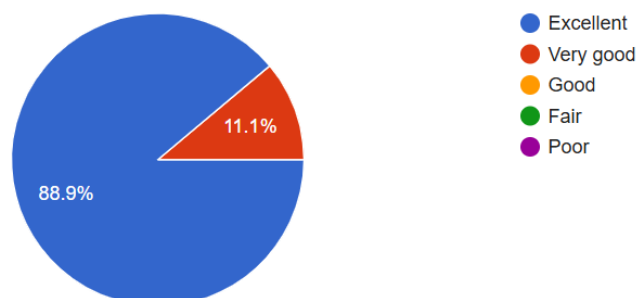
'Today's training was extremely informative and ESW gave us lots of strategies to use within class. The training was engaging and lots of staff commented on how interesting it was. Thank you'

'Thank you for your time after the session and for providing some practical ideas to support me with a new LAC child who has joined my class.'

'Great training, dynamic delivery'

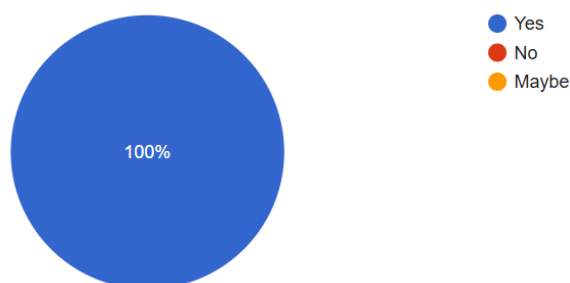
How would you rate the quality of the training today?

9 responses



Do you feel that today's session will have an impact on your approach to adopted children going forward?

9 responses



7.5 Birth Parent Support and Access to Records

ATV has commenced a new contract for these 2 elements of adoption support, following a re-tendering process, supported by Stockton BC Procurement team.

The contract was awarded to Arc Adoption NE, having previously been delivered by Adoption Matters. Arc Adoption NE provided the best value in tendering and offers significant expertise in the specialist adoption arena.

The contract commenced on 1.4.23 and is a 2 year contract.

Birth Parent Support

Arc Adoption NE provides the statutory independent birth parent support through counselling advice and information, from the time at which adoption is the local Authority plan for the child. This service is complemented by ATV who can offer support to birth parents, in setting up Keep In Touch arrangements, and with ongoing Keep In Touch.

There were 96 new birth parents referred to the service within this period.

At the yearend, 74 birth parents were "active" to the service, i.e. actively engaged with receiving a service from Arc Adoption NE in respect of support around their child's adoption.

Access to Adoption Records

Arc Adoption provides the statutory service to adult adoptees and their birth relatives in respect of accessing birth records around adoption. The service requires sensitive and experienced counselling, redaction of records as required, and provision of a report for the adult adoptees. The service interfaces with each of the 5 Local Authorities in the partnership, who continue to hold children's adoption records.

44 individuals accessed their birth records in this period.

Overall, Arc Adoption NE have worked closely with ATV to take on the existing cases, and new referrals, ensuring a smooth transfer of responsibility for this sensitive area of the work. ATV and Arc meet quarterly to review the contract and ensure any anomalies are given due focus.

8. Voice and Influence of Young People, and Adoptive Parents

The Voice and influence Group and has a clear focus on enabling children and young people to have a voice and influence ATV practice and that beyond. As previously mentioned in the Executive Summary the group have premiered their short film, This is Our Story and opened the annual Adoption England conference with the film.

8.1 Young People's Group

In ATV we are proud that we now have an established group for adopted young people and have directed its development with the feedback received from young people and their parents. We have brought together adopted children from age 7-16 to meet monthly, with the aim of promoting a positive identity for young people around adoption and enabling them to build friendships and confidence through the group.

Young people fed back last year that they would like more opportunity for activities and a more "young person" focused setting. Previously the group ran in the ATV Centre, however, now runs in a local youth club, with dedicated access only to ATV for that evening session. This means that ATV can offer the opportunity for young people with a wide range of needs and preferences to meet and use the facilities and activities on offer, while building friendships and relationships. Activities such as table football, crafts, and games consoles are taken up by the young people. The young people wanted to have a tuck shop available which is now running, and there is also a sensory room for young people who need a calmer environment.

Feedback is positive from children and parents, with many parents also taking the opportunity to meet with other adopters and build their own networks too.

Feedback through the Adopter Survey indicated that there is a gap for children aged 5-7 as children pre-school can access the Play and Stay Group and aged over 7 can access the Youth Group. ATV have plans in place to run a summer activity group in 2025 which will be offered to children aged 7+ with further plans to develop for all age groups.

8.2 Voice and Influence

The ATV Voice and Influence group has been running now for around 2 years. 4 young people are active members. ATV reached out to all families in regular contact, however, this small group are the pioneers of Voice and Influence in

ATV. The group have named themselves AdoptBats, and they meet monthly with 2 staff from ATV.

Feedback from the conference...

The video and workshop was the highlight of the conference and the part of it that had impacted her the most.

It was a great session, and the young people were fab!

I thought that it was very powerful!



8.3 ATV Adopter Forum runs monthly and is a small group of adoptive parents who meet with managers from ATV to review agency practice with adopters' views in mind. The group is currently under development to encourage more adopter engagement. The plan for doing so is to make the forum more accessible to more parents. Plans are in place to trail existing forums where parents meet such as the ATV Stay and Play group and the Youth Club group.

9. Panel

The Adoption panel sits weekly and is now held once per month as a face to face panel, with all other panels being virtual. Due to pressure on panel, it has been operation practice to schedule 5 panels per month.

There have been 52 panel meetings in the year.

There are 2 Independent Chairs of Panel, and 2 vice chairs of panel, 3 of whom are social workers, with significant senior management experience in adoption work, and one who is an adoptive parent with significant panel experience. There are 32 central list members, and 5 Medical Advisors. Diversity of adoption panel members has increased over the last year in respect of more males, and a member with lived experience of being adopted. Despite significant efforts it has not been possible to recruit a more ethnically diverse panel to date.

Panel is managed and led by a manager within ATV, who also acts as the Agency Advisor to Panel.

The panel manager has developed a stronger quality assurance (QA) mechanism, with QA feedback from all people who are involved in panel helping to improve quality, consistency and the experience of adopters and others attending. There is a quarterly quality assurance report which is provided to Local Authority senior managers to provide feedback on the quality of reports presented.

Central list members have a programme of training and engagement, with quarterly newsletters providing feedback on the outcomes of panel, and updates on relevant agency or legislative matters.

Panel members have undertaken training within this year on:

- Cultural Humilities
- Trauma Timeline, and trauma informed practice
- Early permanence
- Culture change in adoption

A full report on panel business and quality of practice is provided to the ATV Board on a 6 monthly basis.

10. 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. At a recent Board Away day it was decided that we will work together to review the vision for ATV moving forward.

Service Plan

There is a 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 Models

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. Learning from our disruptions indicates we have more work to do within the wider system to understand the core principles of this model and implementation in practice. Moves due to foster carer circumstances remain a stubborn issue in this region. 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. 8 staff have now received level 1 training in DDP and it is planned for more to undertake this.

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 Review 2024

ATV policies have been reviewed to ensure that they reflect current and most up to date practice and expectations.

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:

- Culture Change in Adoption
- DDP training – level 1
- DDP training level 2
- Matching Standards Training
- EP Practice Standards

3 managers have undertaken 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.

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

One of the partner LA's, Hartlepool, has been inspected by Ofsted, which includes inspection of the RAA- Adoption Tees Valley, through the lens of the Local Authority. Hartlepool received an Outstanding grading, and ATV was positively recognised within the report.

11. Finance

11.1 2024/25 Financial Year End Position

The year end position for the Adoption Tees Valley budget is presented below:

Expenditure	Budget 2024/25	Outturn 2024/25	Variance 2024/25
Employees	1,855,000	1,718,000	(137,000)
Running Costs	264,000	381,000	117,000
Support Service Costs	113,000	118,000	5,000
Interagency Fees	500,000	721,000	221,000
Total	2,732,000	2,955,000	(223,000)

11.2 Interagency Fees

Interagency fees exceeded the budget figure by £220,694. Additional contributions from each Local Authority are as follows:

Interagency Contributions (to be invoiced based on actuals after year end)	Percentage split	Budget	24/25 Actual	24/25 Additional
Darlington	15.95%	£79,741	£114,938	£35,197
Hartlepool	14.22%	£71,121	£102,513	£31,392
Middlesbrough	27.16%	£135,776	£195,706	£59,930
Redcar & Cleveland	15.95%	£79,741	£114,938	£35,197
Stockton	26.72%	£133,621	£192,599	£58,978
	100.00%	£500,000	£720,694	£220,694

11.2 Contributions for 2025/28

The ATV Board has commenced a review of the financial contribution percentage from partner local Authorities, to ensure that there is an equitable and fair allocation of costs, commencing 2025-28.

Darlington		16.6%
Hartlepool		13.2%

Middlesbrough		29.8%
Redcar & Cleveland		19.7%
Stockton		20.7%

12. Priorities for Forward Planning

The annual report and review provide the data evidence, linked to the wider national adoption strategy, for setting priorities for ATV for the forthcoming year. As detailed in the Executive Summary, ATV Board have established a Vision for ATV for the next 3 years, based on national adoption developments, and learning from practice through independently chaired disruption meetings. What is clear is that children's long-term outcomes, and the wellbeing of adoptive and birth families is a high priority for ATV, and its partner agencies. The priorities for the forthcoming year are:

1. Recruiting more adoptive parents locally, who can take the children we need to find families for.

We will strengthen marketing, and the first contact enquiry process, to reduce delays, and strengthen a consistent approach from a small dedicated and experienced team.

We will promote the offer of the settling in allowance for ATV adopters who can take siblings.

We will continue to review the core "offer" for adopters for more complex children with our partner LA's and Board.

We will work together with partner LAs to ensure that there is an adoption experienced, ATV led consideration of local adopters, for children, when planning for permanence.

2. Children's voices will be heard, and young people will have an influence in how adoption services and wider services consider the needs of adopted people.

We will ensure that the Adoptbats films is used for wider stakeholder awareness raising.

We will hold an event for Board and stakeholders, with Adoptbats, to share young people's views on what needs to change.

We will ask Adoptbats to help achieve the engagement and views of more adopted young people, to make sure we are listening to, and involving adopted children in having their say.

3. Early Permanence Planning will continue to be a priority

We will review the balance of key messaging around what early permanence is for adoptive parents in the early stages of their journey with ATV.

We will work with all 5 LA's to ensure EP is considered at every opportunity.

We will involve ADM's in the LA where there is a difference of view between ATV and the LA around an EP plan for the child.

We will contribute to an LFJB plan for early permanence and be part of a wider Adoption Sub Committee on Adoption.

4. Culture change in adoption practice will be promoted through ATV and partner agency practice and development

We will hold a team event on Culture Change in Adoption.

We will promote learning and awareness through workforce development in partner LA's and wider stakeholders.

The ATV Board will provide leadership on Culture Change through their role in ATV and in partner agencies, and through a shared vision statement.

Maintaining relationships is a key priority for ATV. Processes will be developed to manage the direct keeping in touch arrangements.

5. Access to Adoption Support – the right help at the right time.

We will work with the pan regional MDASS service, and with the pan regional commissioning project, to seek to implement new and better ways of allocating the right assessment and support to families.

We will implement the new data reporting measures in the AS system, to ensure we can deliver the new national AS data reports.

We will continue with our 3 tier adoption support system, encouraging take up and access to all tiers, by children and parents.

We will continue to work pan regionally in line with Adoption England's innovation projects.

6. Retaining a high-quality staffing team

We will work to ensure that staff have access to high quality training and supervision that gives high job satisfaction and maintains skills and motivation.

We will create opportunities for progression and development wherever possible.

We will creatively use the skills and experience of ATV staff to help ATV development, and to develop the workforce in wider partner agencies.

Louise Addison

July 2025

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 OCTOBER 2025**

LEARNING & SKILLS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with an update on the performance of the Learning & Skills Service for academic year 2024/25.
2. To allow Scrutiny members oversight of, and an opportunity to challenge, the performance of this externally funded service

Summary

3. Learner numbers and performance remain high but the service faces continues to face a number of challenges going forward.
4. The service is growing provision whilst continuing to respond to employer and community need.
5. The service was inspected by Ofsted in June 2022, retaining its assessment of 'Good' overall. Providers rated Good normally receive an Ofsted inspection every five years

Recommendation

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

**James Stroyan
Executive Director People**

Background Papers

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

Paul Richardson: Mobile 0794 724 7224

Council Plan	The service contributes to the priorities in the Council Plan allowing people to develop their potential, improve their skills and help improve their employment opportunities
Addressing Inequalities	The service actively supports the diversity agenda
Tackling Climate Change	The service promotes sustainability
Efficient and effective use of resources	Scrutiny of performance is integral to optimising outcomes
Health and Wellbeing	The service actively promotes health and wellbeing
S17 Crime and Disorder	The service supports the Council's crime and disorder responsibilities, young people engaged in learning are less likely to engage in anti-social behaviour
Wards Affected	The service offers provision across all of Darlington
Groups Affected	The service offers learning for 16–18-year-olds and adults
Budget and Policy Framework	The service is externally funded. This report does not impact on the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	Looked After Children or Care Leavers may access the service offer

MAIN REPORT

The Learning & Skills Service

7. The Learning & Skills Service is the external training arm of the Council and is funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) to provide learning and skills provision for the local community. The service has been an Ofsted 'Good' provider since 2004.
8. The service provides a range of training from Pre-entry Level to Level 5, including:
 - 16-18 Study Programme and diploma courses
 - Adult Education, including basic skills such as English, maths, ICT/Digital
 - Learning for Inclusion
 - Bespoke Employer Led Programmes (BELPs)
 - Family Learning
 - Intensive Support
 - Distance Learning
 - English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
 - Apprenticeships
9. Learning & Skills supports some of the most disadvantaged adults, young people and families in Darlington and contributes to the priorities of both the Children and Young People's Plan and the Council Plan. Often the provision delivered provides a stepping-stone to those taking their first steps back into learning and a number of past learners have moved on to higher level learning at Darlington College and other providers.
10. Teaching takes places across three main sites: the Coleridge Centre, Bennet House and the units at Lingfield Way, as well as in a number of school and community settings.
11. Apprenticeship provision includes Health and Social Care, Business Administration, Site Joinery and Leadership and Management.

Learner Numbers

12. In 2024/25 the service had 1,334 (1,537) enrolments (previous year's numbers in brackets) across a wide range of programmes, including:
 - 91 (46) 16–18-year-olds on Study Programme (the service has had a significant increase in the number of young people with EHCPs)
 - 1,188 (1,444) people on Adult Skills courses
 - 55 (47) Apprenticeship starts

Funding

11. The service is totally externally funded. The overall funding generated from the DfE and TVCA for the Learning & Skills Service in 2024/25 was £1,278,454 (£1,126,252). This was split as follows:
 - £528,553 (£370,245) 16-18 Study Programme (ESFA)

- £412,537 (£396,408) - Adult Skills Fund (TVCA)
- £3,200 (£33,521) - Adult Skills Fund (DfE)
- £311,531 (£300,183) - Apprenticeships (DfE / Employers)
- £22,633 (£25,895) – Level 3 Funding (TVCA)

Performance

12. Provisional achievement rates are given below. Final achievement rates for 2024/25, with national benchmarks will be published in March 2026. Apprenticeship achievement rates have improved significantly following a dip in 2023/24.

	Overall Achievement Rate		
Provision Type	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 (Provisional)
16-18	82.6%	80.0%	88.7%
Adult Skills	93.4%	94.5%	93.1%
Learning for Inclusion	99.0%	99.8%	99.5%
Apprenticeships	66.7%	62.1%	78.6%

13. The achievement rate percentage is calculated by multiplying the number of learners who complete their course by the percentage of those that sat their exams / assessments and passed.

Learner Progression

14. Learner progression, or the positive destination rate, measures the percentage of learner who move into education, employment or training after completing a course with Learning & Skills. Positive destinations for 16-18 year olds have dropped with the significant increase in young people with EHCPs. These young people often have complex needs and may not be ready to go into employment of leaving the service.

	Positive Destination Rate		
Provision Type	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 (Provisional)
16-18	97.8%	84.2%	76.9%
Adult Skills	85.8%	88.0%	84.7%
Learning for Inclusion	68.9%	64.1%	72.6%
Apprenticeships	87.9%	86.1%	86.6%

Learner Satisfaction

15. Learner satisfaction (those rating the service good or above) has risen from 91% in 2022/23 to 95% in 2024/25.

Employer Satisfaction

16. Employer Satisfaction (those rating the service good or above) rose from 96.3% in 2022/23 to 100% in 2024/25.

Ofsted Inspection Outcome

17. The service was inspected in June 2022 and retained its overall grade of 'Good'. The inspectors looked at eight discrete areas;

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Provision for learners with high needs	Good

18. Only three areas for improvement were identified, all of which have been addressed.

- Ensure that all tutors use information about learners' starting points to effectively plan learning that meets individual needs
- Ensure that all learners benefit from a range of work experience opportunities
- Ensure that tutors receive appropriate training to enable them to continue to develop their teaching skills

19. The report highlighted the fact that the service is meeting the needs of the local community and local businesses, learners were well supported and that the service was well led.

20. A new Ofsted framework is being implemented from November 2025 and the service is expecting an inspection sometime in 2026 or early 2027.

Challenges Ahead

21. Changes in the skills agenda, including; the development of Skills England, the very recent move of the skills brief away from the DfE, the proposed changes to apprenticeship assessments, as well as further devolution have the potential to impact on service delivery. These changes will be monitored closely and delivery adapted as required.

22. Following devolution of the adult skills fund in the surrounding localities the service will no longer receive Adult Skills Funding direct from the DfE. The service has managed to secure funding from the York & North Yorkshire Combined Authority for 2025/26 and hopes to attract some funding from the North-East Combined Authority from 2026/27. This means that in 2025/26 the service will not be able to provide learning opportunities to anyone who resides in the County Durham area.

23. At the end of December 2025 the service will vacate the Coleridge Centre, handing it over to the academy trust, and move to the new Adult Skills Centre in the old Northern Echo building. Moving delivery to the town centre will hopefully have a positive impact on recruitment.

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CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 20 OCTOBER 2025

SELF ASSESSMENT - OVERVIEW

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

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

Summary

2. Darlington Children's Services update each quarter an assessment of social work practice, inclusive of Early Help, based on changes in performance data. To bring the information into a stand-a-lone easy read document an annual self-assessment overview document is completed.
3. The self-assessment draws on existing documentation and activity and reflects the local authority's business for children's services. It identifies what leaders are doing to maintain or improve good practice for children and their families, demonstrating the effectiveness of our actions and address weaknesses in practice, with clear, appropriate plans to improve services.
4. The self-evaluation should answer three questions:
 - What do we know about the quality and impact of social work practice in our local authority?
 - How do we know it?
 - What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
5. The self-assessment is used as part of our engagement with Ofsted and plays an important role in their understanding of local authorities and how they work. It helps them see assess if leaders and managers have a grip on practice and are taking suitable action.
6. Following our last Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting we were advised by Ofsted to expect our next Inspection of Local Authority Childrens Services (ILACS) between 1 April 2025 and 1 April 2026, and therefore our next Inspection is imminent and the Self Assessment will form a key part of our preparation for the Inspection and the evidence we will submit to that inspection.

Recommendation

7. It is recommended that the contents of the report are considered in terms of Children's Services role and functions and critical challenge is afforded to improve outcomes for children and their families.

Chris Bell
Assistant Director of Children's Services

Background Papers

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

Sharon Raine - Head of Performance and Transformation

Council Plan	This report contributes to the Council Plan by involving Members in the scrutiny of practice relating to the delivery of key outcomes with regards to Children and Young People
Addressing inequalities	This report involves members in the scrutiny of the level to which Children's Services contributes to ensuring that opportunities are accessible to everyone, with a focus on ensuring a good job, home and/or social connections for all.
Tackling Climate Change	This report does not identify any issued relating to climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report allows for the scrutiny of practice which is integral to optimising outcomes and ensuring efficient use of resources.
Health and Wellbeing	This report supports practice improvement relating to improving the health and wellbeing of residents.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report supports the Councils Crime and Disorder responsibilities.
Wards Affected	This report supports improvement across all Wards.
Groups Affected	This report supports 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.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report may have an <i>impact</i> on their emotional and physical health, social development, education, and future employment.

MAIN REPORT

See attached Self – Assessment Document



Darlington Children's Services

Self-Assessment 2024-25



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

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Introduction and Overview

This document reflects the journey of Darlington Borough Council's Children's Services within 2024-25, reflecting the performance data, qualitative information, and evidence of impact during this period of time, considering the areas of strength, areas of challenge and developments to the service in response to these.

This past year has coincided with the Area SEND Inspection in November 2024, whereby the overall findings found that outcomes are not consistent, but some areas of real strength were identified, including;

"most children and young people receive timely and effective support from early help or children's social care. Their voices are clearly incorporated into their social care assessments and this informs children and young people's plans. Children and young people's social care plans are child-centred and identify multidisciplinary actions to improve the child's lived experience."

Area SEND Inspection, November 2024

Our ongoing progress is within the context of the outcome and findings of our other most recent Inspection findings, with our last ILACS which took place in October 2022 finding that the service was Good overall with Outstanding services for Children in Care, recognising the significant work that has been undertaken to improve outcomes for Children and Families in Darlington and reaffirming 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.

October 2023 also saw a Focused Visit to consider arrangements for Children in Need and Children subject of a Protection Plan. The visit recognised continuous progress within services since the time of the ILACS and in particular found relationships to be a particular strength.

"Senior leaders have ensured a relentless focus on continuing to improve the experiences of children who need help and protection in Darlington. Leaders have developed a workforce culture that is helping to develop and sustain high-quality social work practice."

OFSTED, December 2023

"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."

OFSTED, December 2022



In the context of this the past year has seen the service have a continued and relentless focus on ongoing development and improvement of services to Children and Families, with an intense focus on maintaining workforce stability, improving performance and quality of practice, and subsequently outcomes for Children and Families.

Our ongoing progress has been achieved through the lens of our Strengthening Families Plan, which is our One Service Plan, and is a continuation of the work initiated through our partnership work with the Department for Education and Leeds City Council which commenced in 2019 and formally concluded in 2022. Following the success of the program we ensured that the positive foundations were built upon through the development of our own internal plan.

The Plan for 2024-25 had 3 key Principles, underpinned by our 5 Strategic Priorities;

Strengthening Families 2023 -24	
Principles	Strategic Priorities
Great Social Work Practice so children are safe, and families supported to find their own solutions	Embed a restorative culture
	Grow how we learn and improve
Family First Helping them stay together and, where that isn't possible, working with families to return children home	More solutions through Family Group Conferences
Business Efficient making the best use of the resources we have	Better capability to support children
	Best use of resources

Through this work we have delivered on a number of key projects during 2024/25 including;

- Implementation of a Strategic Early Help Board to oversee our approach to Early Help Assessments and increase the number of external EHA's, and thus ensuring families receive the right service at the right time from a professional best known to them
- Increases to foster carer recruitment following the revision of foster carer offer
- Development of the Life Long Links Project
- Implementation of Care Experienced Peer Mentoring for Children in Care

These key service developments have taken place within a context of continued high levels of demand for services, and we remain ambitious and committed to ensuring that the needs of children and families in Darlington are well met and high quality services are provided.



Chris Bell
Assistant Director,
Children's Services



James Stroyan
Executive Director of People
(DCS)

Darlington Context

The past year's progress has been in the context of key challenges in terms of demand, workforce stability and placement sufficiency.

In terms of demand for services, our number of contacts to the Front Door has continued to rise year on year with a 46% increase overall in contacts since the new Front Door arrangements were embedded in 2020. Whilst this trend was predicted and to be expected following our move in 2020 to a relational, conversational style, the complexity of need in referrals has also increased, and so, the contact to referral conversion rate increasing. The past year has seen the result of focused and targeted work at the Front Door to expand upon the Early Help offer to result in fewer children requiring referrals to social care. This is reflected below which highlights that whilst the number of contacts has increased by 5.5%, the number of referrals has reduced by almost 30%.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Contacts (children)	8,182	9,910	10,736	11,324	11,948
Referrals (children)	748	1,014	1,613	1,374	962
Conversion %	9.1	10.2	15.0	12.1	8

The changes to numbers of social care referrals is the result of focused work across services. There has been a continual emphasis placed on providing the "Right Service at the Right Time", this has been complemented by a relentless focus on quality and outcomes of assessments to reduce the number of No Further Action (NFA) assessments and re-referrals. This has allowed statutory services to focus on the right interventions and with a reduced number of children requiring statutory interventions through Child Protection Plans or coming in to our Care. This has resulted in the numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans reducing by almost 24% and Children in Care reducing by over 11%, when compared with the previous year. During the same period, Early Help Assessments increased by 5% and Externally Led Early Help Assessments increased by 16%.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Child Protection Plans	87	120	116	146	111
Children in Care	272	273	322	300	265
Early Help Assessments	253	411	490	423	443
External EH Assessments	93	73	125	125	145

These factors have resulted in reduced caseloads for workers, with average caseloads below 18 for all case holding social work teams. This subsequently had a positive impact upon a number of key areas of performance with Child and Family Assessment timeliness increasing to 89.4%, compared with 62.7% in 2024. We have also overseen reductions in the rate of "No Further Action" Assessments, down to 49% from 58% and a reduction in re-referrals to 12.9% from 23.1%. This fits strongly with our ethos of ensuring that families receive the right support at the right time.

Alongside the monitoring of performance, we have continued to develop our quality assurance functions and processes, with a focus on increasing the levels of collaboration in quality assurance, both with practitioners and with children and families. The analysis of our quality assurance activity and the impact upon children and families is detailed later in the report. We have a good understanding of the areas of challenge within the service and practice; we work proactively with the service to understand and develop these.

Our approach to missing, and the links to exploitation, has been an area of focus with our percentage of RTHIs offered reduced to 74.3% from 87% and the number completed reduced to 51.4% from 76.9%. In response we have commissioned an independent review of our response to children who are missing or at risk of exploitation and a new delivery model for these services is being developed and implemented over the coming year.

Placement stability for Children in Care has continued to be a significant challenge over the past year. Our response to the placement stability and sufficiency challenges has been a further focus on the development and maintenance of our own in-house resources. Over the past 3 years we have continued to develop new children’s homes, with our own homes increasing from 4 homes to 6 homes and an increased focus on foster carer recruitment has seen the number of new carers recruited over the past year, with 11 new carers recruited during 2024/25 compared with 5 in 2023 and 7 in 2022. This will take some time to fully impact upon placement stability and whilst some improvements in short-term stability have been observed, further improvement is needed leading to impact being felt in terms of long-term stability.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
ST Stability (% with 3+ moves)	11.0	13.7	17.0	13.3
LT Stability (placement >2yr for age 16yr)	74.0	58.7	61.1	53.3



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

We have retained a clear focus on continuous improvement over the past year, working closely with practitioners and managers to ensure that families receive an appropriate and proportionate service, and that workloads are manageable. This has seen a greater emphasis on Early Help leading to reductions in statutory workloads, as well as drive and focus on improving performance.

We have maintained regular and robust performance management and oversight to understand the impact that these changes have had on service delivery and on the quality of practice in Darlington.

Through performance management we developed a clear understanding that the timeliness of our actions has improved:

- assessment timeliness improving from 62.7% to 89.4% within 45 days and with increasing numbers being completed proportionately and earlier in the assessment period.
- improvement in timeliness of statutory visits, with CP visits improving from 90% to 95% and Children in Care from 81% to 83%.
- improvements on impacts with the number of “no further action” outcomes to assessments reducing from 58% to 49% and the number of re-referrals reducing from 23% to under 13%.

In addition to regular performance management, we have maintained the Weekly Referral Meeting (WRM), which analyses, through the lens of quality and impact, the decisions made at the front door and at the point of case allocation. This continues to provide a high level of oversight into practice, in real time, and helps us understand the impact of our decision making upon children and families. The Weekly Referral Meeting is multifaceted, it allows us to maintain robust oversight on the quality of referrals to Children’s Social Care; decision making at the Front Door; as well as considering the management direction afforded to social workers upon allocation; and ensuring our response has been both prompt and proportionate. This has been particularly valuable as we have seen “contact to referral” conversion reduce and the number of families stepping up from Early Help to Social Care has reduced from 16% to 12%. WRM provides clear oversight of decision making and gives assurance that decisions for more families to receive Early Help are justified, proportionate and in keeping with families’ needs.

We undertake regular Practice Review Audits in a collaborative approach to audit with the allocated social worker, to provide a space for understanding quality and impact and immediate learning. We have amended our processes and seek greater input and involvement from families in our audit process, alongside reflective discussion with the allocated social worker and their management.

Our Practice Review Audits have demonstrated an overall improvement in the quality of practice across 2024-2025. We rate audits Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate. Whilst we continued to find 79% of case files Good or Outstanding in 2025, the same as 2024, we found that of those 12% were Outstanding and 67% Good, compared with 6% Outstanding and 73% Good the previous year. We also found only 3% of case files being Inadequate, reduced from 7% the previous year. The greater proportion of audits finding practice to be Outstanding (12%) and the reduction in findings of Inadequate (3%) gives us evidence and assurance that incremental improvements in quality continue to be made.

A deep dive audit into the Quality of Management Oversight and Supervision was undertaken which identified that further support was needed to strengthen this area. This led to a focused practice session being arranged for Team Managers and Advanced Practitioners to improve consistency in supervision quality and frequency. In addition, a 'senior management' oversight case note was introduced to capture Service Manager and Head of Service management direction. The Weekly Review Meeting has seen improved management oversight at the point of assessment's being allocated which enables clearer direction to be provided to social workers. This impact of this work will remain under review during Practice Review and Quality Assurance activity.

We have also maintained our commitment to implementing Practice Weeks to support our understanding of the quality of practice in Darlington, this involves Senior Leaders spending the week close to practice, facilitating Practice Conversation with practitioners, undertaking Observations of Practice, and seeking feedback from children and young people, and their parents and carers. We recently held a Practice week with a focus on Domestic Abuse, which involved 52 Practice Conversations, 18 Observations of Practice, 54 Parents and Carers contacted for feedback and 30 Children and Young Peoples' surveys being returned.

The findings highlighted strong relational practice, with practitioners demonstrating empathy, effective communication, and a clear understanding of the impact of domestic abuse. Children and families reported feeling respected, supported, and empowered, with many praising the dedication and compassion of their social workers. Practice Conversations and Observations of Practice revealed strengths in direct work, planning, and multiagency collaboration, though areas for development were noted in consistency of recording, use of advocacy, and supervision quality. Feedback from the workforce reflected a positive culture of support and professional confidence. The overview report concluded with a commitment to continuous improvement through actionable recommendations which are reviewed and progressed through our Practice Development Group.

Our Practice Development Group meets regularly; its purpose is to identify actions, share best practice and to address any thematic issues within practice, emerging from our Quality Assurance and Performance activity; including Practice Review Audits, Weekly Review Meetings. The group also has strong links with the Assistant Director Practice Clinics so that we gain a real sense of crossover and cohesion between performance and quality. It is chaired by the Head of Practice and Quality (PSW) and includes Heads of Service, Service Managers, Quality Assurance Leads, the Relational and Restorative Practice Lead, colleagues from the Performance Team and Workforce Development. This membership ensures clear leadership to the ongoing development of our practice, and the culture that underpins Children's services. The leadership team is essential to the effectiveness of the group ensuring that it is moving forward and has a real impact, ensuring learning can be acted upon to drive continuing practice improvement.

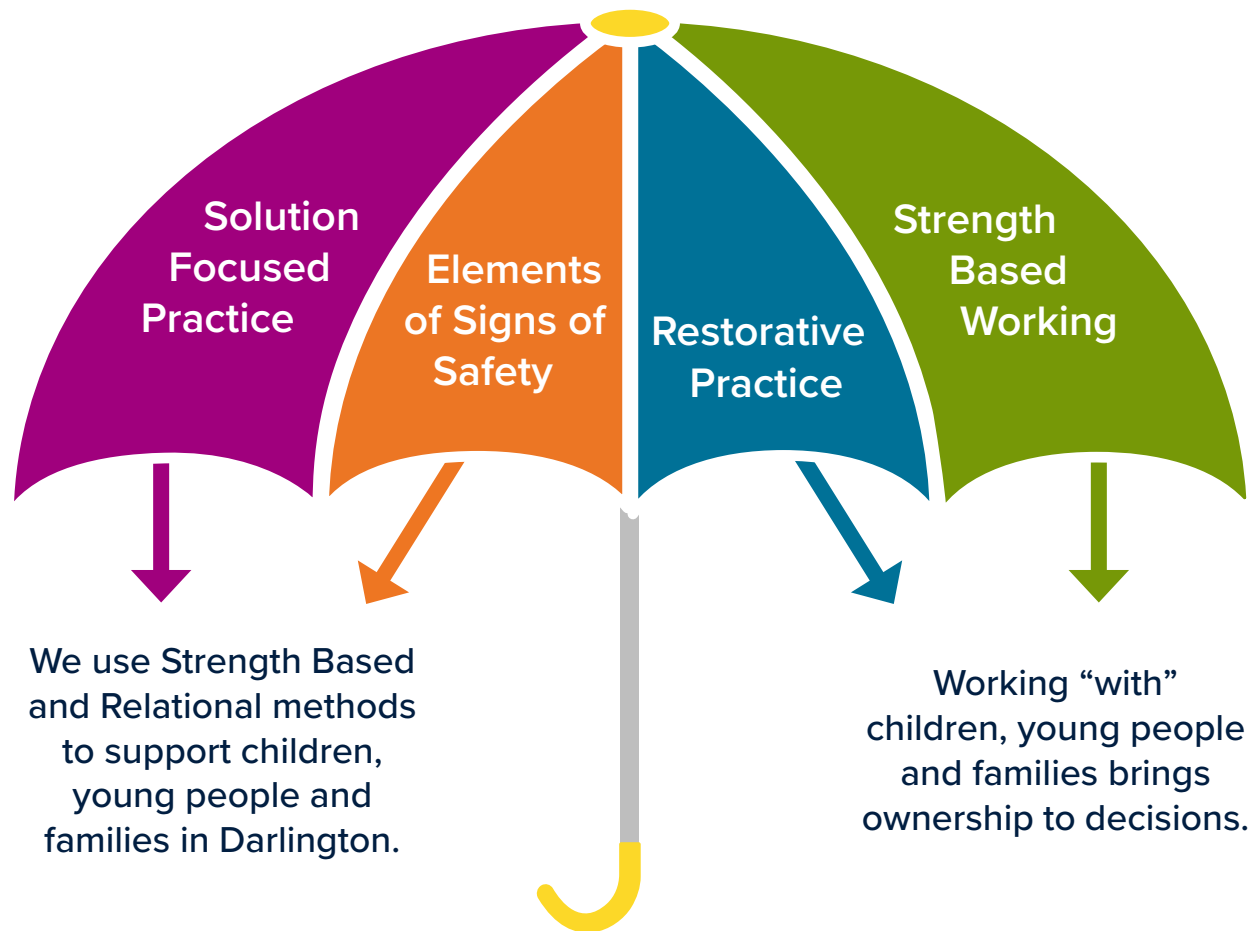
The group has so far identified themed audits around re-referrals, no further action assessments and further development and support around reflective management oversight to be key priorities.

The overall focus across our Quality Assurance activities is our Relational and Restorative Practice model. We assess not only the use of key elements within our Practice Umbrella, but also the impact of these interventions on children and families.

The use of Relational and Restorative Practice is evident in feedback from children, young people, parents, and carers; in case file reviews showing improved outcomes; and in reflections from our workforce.



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

Through our Practice Review Audits feedback is sought from families by auditors. This allows us to gain greater insights into the experience of those accessing our services. This allows us to address any immediate areas of learning with the allocated practitioner, and to draw out trends and themes over time. Family Feedback is also a core aspect of our annual Practice Weeks, utilizing staff from across the service to contact children and families to seek their views and feedback.

Parents and carers fed back that they had been treated with respect, dignity and felt that they had not been judged by their practitioner, particularly about their pasts. Many shared that

- they had been listened to
- they were also able to share their views and speak openly
- their wishes and feelings were supported
- their practitioner was there for them when they needed advice and guidance
- practitioners were kind, empathetic, and easy to talk to
- the practitioner had put the time and effort in to build trusting working relationships with them and their children.

"She's absolutely fantastic she's like my own family. She's there for us, she knows how to take me as I can be melodramatic and she knows how to bring me down. She has always made a difference, couldn't sing her praises enough. She's always been there. I've had some bad experiences over the years and XXX has always been there to save the day and she's the reason I haven't lost faith in the system"

"She helped me in so many ways it is unbelievable. We came here with nothing, and it was near to Christmas. I was stressing about it all. We had no curtains no bedding and so on. She organised everything, came in with some food and Christmas gifts which was beautiful. I also struggled with my confidence, and she made me stop, think, and clear my path of thoughts. She has done so much more than her job which she is clearly passionate about. She has been a rock. I don't know how Proof we would have survived without her."

'They helped me to move on and be safe. They were very good provided a lot of support and made a difference'

The social worker had a positive effect on my daughter's development; she helped her to be more"

'The social worker is great and easy to talk to. She is friendly, lovely and gives good advice'

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

Identifying and responding to children’s needs and appropriate thresholds

A continued rise in contacts 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 was predicted and the Front Door was designed to meet this demand, encouraging partners to contact CIAT with concerns for children, or for advice. Whilst these numbers are the highest regionally, we continue to believe this is central to effective and positive communication across the partnership. Nevertheless this places a great deal of pressure on the service and an ongoing understanding of what is driving the activity is essential; knowing ourselves and knowing our families had never been so important.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Safeguarding concern (contacts)	4,428	5,347	5,730	5,993	6,170
Non-Safeguarding concern (contacts)	868	1,386	2,003	1,693	1,291

We know that the ongoing increase in contacts has come about due to two significant factors.

One is that the model introduced in 2020 promotes conversation and stronger relationships with partners. Discussions held in relation to any concern for a child are not focused on meeting a defined threshold or viewing the service as a ‘gateway’ to statutory services but rather a conversation and working together to gain the right outcome. This approach promotes ‘contacts’ being made into the Front Door and sits well with the relational framework that Darlington has created; families and the workforce benefit from this.

The second is the increasing levels of need and complexity of need, some of which have been brought about by the Covid pandemic and the medium to long term impact on communities.

A significant focus at the Front Door over the past year has involved challenging ourselves, and challenging together as a partnership, to respond most effectively to the needs of children and families. Through the focused work we have seen increases to the number of families being supported via Early Help, both internally through our Building Stronger Families Team and through externally led Early Help Assessments via partners. This has led to reductions in numbers of social care referrals, and ultimately Children subject to Child Protection and Children in Care. The Weekly Referral meeting has provided management oversight and assurance that these decisions are safe and proportionate. The improved performance in relation to Step Ups from Early Help, Re-referrals and NFA assessments further supports the appropriateness of the decision making.

There continues to be challenges in terms of the high number of contacts received from Police colleagues, in the context of the low number that translate into referrals or the need to identify services. Joint working has been carried out to understand the drivers and challenges of this approach but this has not yet led to significant changes and the challenges remain. This is a continued area of strategic focus for the coming year.

The reductions in numbers of children being referred to statutory services and increases in numbers of children receiving Early Help support is in keeping with our ethos of ensuring that children and families receive the right support at the right time.

Analysis of the data confirms an ongoing consistency in terms of the primary drivers for the demand for services. The primary issues remain

- 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 partnership wide challenges with staff retention and recruitment, it is vital that partnership working is strong and effective. This has never been more the case than with pending service wide reforms on the horizon.

It is evident that the success of the Front Door has improved relationships with partners and that continued success is reliant on effective partnership working, with consistent partnership feedback via our formal surveys. Our partnership ethos of the “right service at the right time” extends to our approach to Early Help Assessments and a big focus has been on increasing the number of externally led Early Help Assessments for families. The table below shows a 16% increase in the number of externally led Early Help Assessments, which is very positive. This has contributed overall to increases in the number of children receiving Early Help support, preventing the need for statutory services.

	2023/24	2024/25
Children open to BSF	423	443
Children open to an External EH Lead	125	145

Data in relation to Building Stronger Families and our early help system is becoming more sophisticated and is helping us to understand what practice and outcomes look like from a quantitative perspective and through evaluation and feedback from families, the voice of the family is assisting with qualitative information being gained, understood and contributing to improvements and this developing service area.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
% EHA's completed within 30 days of referral	87.0	36.7	36.3	29.1

The timeliness of the completion of EHAs has been an area of focus over the past few years. Data tells us that assessments are not being completed swiftly; however, we regularly discuss how the timeline of families we work with in the non-statutory ‘early help’ space is often one that means more time is needed to build relationships during assessment, we recognise there is rarely one presenting issue, this brings with it further complexity. “Our families teach us a lot, and we listen.”

Our families have often told us that at the point of contact they aren’t always ready to voluntarily ‘open up’. So, we make contact with them quickly but then listen to how they would like their assessment to be carried out; maintaining a relationship with them throughout, encouraging commencement of meaningful assessment, all of which takes time. Alongside this we understand how in recent years we have seen the point at which families reach the service has changed, families often reach our service at a point of crisis, needing a different approach. Practitioners are entering their worlds with a high level of support approach; trying to problem solve, manage conflict, poor mental health and various other challenges our families face. Ensuring their wellbeing and building trust takes priority so immediate barriers to meaningful assessment are identified and tackled, then once there is a period of settlement the practitioner can commence the assessment in earnest. These important factors increase the time it takes to complete a meaningful assessment. During the assessment period help and support is continuously offered and all that takes place during this phase informs the overall assessment and plan from the outset.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Step Up to Statutory Services	20.3%	19.7%	16.1%	12.2%
All intervention completed and no further support	16.5%	22%	29.1%	31.2%

In 2024 we introduced a new EHA document, this utilised the 10 headlines that were set by the government's Supporting Families Outcome Framework. The assessment document is supported by a range of tools, including a Family Wheel, aimed to help identify which areas the families need support in; it utilises scaling to help measure progress. Staff are also actively encouraged to use a chronology and complete family's journeys within the assessment, bringing focus to root causes.

The family plan element of the assessment has also been updated, it continues with the headlines, ensuring all worries transfer into actions, there is a focus on understanding why support is needed, keeping the plan SMART, and reflecting on what the impact has been. The updated assessment and plan also bring focus to partners being included in EHA's and gathering information from them to inform the family plan. In the 24/25 year, we started to see work with families reaching point of closure in a timelier way, with exit plans for families and a good understanding of how progress will be sustained.



Making good decisions and providing effective help

Decision making flows from the front door through to the social work teams who provide help and support to children. Darlington has five Assessment & Safeguarding Teams and a dedicated Children with Disabilities Team who support children from the point of referral through to permanence. This is routed in relational practice and supports locality based social work practice. Each Assessment and Safeguarding Team is responsible for specific localities, enabling better relationships with partners within those localities.

All referrals are allocated by a social work manager or advanced practitioner with clear direction provided to the social worker, this is evidenced in all our Child & Family Assessments. Decision making and early response to referrals is monitored live via our Weekly Referral Meeting. This enables the Senior Leadership Team to have assurance that the right decisions have been made early into a child's journey and enables challenge to take place when necessary, and to provide effective challenge in "real time" when this has not been achieved.

A significant focus in 2024/25 has been upon the quality and timeliness of Child & Family Assessments and understanding the impact and outcomes on children and families better. This work has led to real improvements in the timeliness of assessments, with 89.4% of Child & Family Assessments completed within 45 working days, an improvement from 62% and 70% in the previous two years. Additional management check points have been put into place and the focus of the coming year will be to increase the number of assessments which can proportionately be completed at earlier checkpoints, as too many assessments are still only being completed at the 45-day point.

The analysis of impact has seen positive improvements this year with the number of "No Further Action" (NFA) assessments reducing to 49%, compared with 58% the previous year. The number of re-referrals has reduced to 12.9% from 23% the previous year. This gives assurance that assessments are meaningful, identify the key issues and most importantly ensure that robust and sustainable plans are put in place to effectively support families. When there are re-referrals, monthly deep dive activity has been carried out and is focused on each re-referral to establish the rationale and establish findings with an analytical and action-based approach taken. The deep dive activity is led by the relevant Service Manager but also includes other relevant members of Senior leadership Team (SLT) to ensure that findings are linked to learning in practice and focuses on decision making. The previous Child & Family Assessment 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 Assessment and Safeguarding. Allocation to the previous worker is attempted in every re-referral where appropriate as those established relationships already exist, and this prevents the family having to repeat their story and journey.

Assessment

925 children had a Child & Family Assessment completed in 2024/2025. This is a reduction when compared to 2023/24 (1,554) and 2022/2023 (1,461). Appropriateness of referrals for assessment is monitored via the Weekly Referral Meeting, including effective oversight of transfer from and to early help services.

Assessment timeliness is an area of improvement following significant focus and intervention. Assessment timeliness is now 89.4%, which is a significantly improved position when compared with 2023/2024 (62.7%) and 2022/23 (70%). Despite this a focus for the coming year will be to increase the proportion of assessments completed at earlier checkpoints, to ensure that families are receiving assessments which are timely and proportionate to their needs.

We have also seen improvements in terms of the impact of assessment over the past year with a reduction in both the number of assessments concluding with no further action (49% from 58%) and a reduction in the number of re-referrals (12.9% from 23.1%). Findings from Practice Review Audits tells us that overall, the quality of Child & Family Assessments has continued to improve across the year, demonstrating that children and families largely receive the right help at the right time, where Child & Family Assessments consider children's needs well, and lead to clear, good quality plans. Following feedback from partners in our Quality Assurance Partnership Meeting, we have introduced outcome meetings at the conclusion of Child & Family Assessments to enable full information regarding the outcome to be shared with partners involved with the child. This enables partners to understand next steps for the child and if there is no longer a role for social care, for partners to understand the rationale for this and any identified ongoing vulnerabilities. The impact of this should be that partners are well informed, children receive the right support and more children receive support as a 'step down' from social care.

Child in Need

256 children were an open Child in Need (CiN) at the end of March 2025. This is a decrease compared to the end of March 2024 (324) and consistent with lower numbers of referrals for social care during 2024/25, compared with previous years.

Our biggest referral factor is domestic abuse, and this continues to be a key reason for children to be active as children in need. Waiting lists to access domestic abuse services can be lengthy in Darlington. In response to this we have trained most of our social workers and family workers in 'Moving Forward' which is a programme that can be delivered directly with our families who have experienced domestic abuse. The aim is then to reduce the impact of domestic abuse on the children and prevent the reoccurrence of harm.

Another significant factor for children is parental mental health and an approach used in the Building Stronger Families team is one that is accessible to families who are also open to social care, this links in with one of the ten headlines from the Supporting Families Programme, this being "improved mental and physical health". Practitioners use a whole family approach from the outset of their work with families, they are trained in root causes so very skilled in considering what may be driving behaviours/struggles for adults, as well as children. Practitioners support adults to access local services, including Talking Therapies, Social Prescribing Team, Mind and We are With You (substance misuse and mental health very often present together). A Walk and Talk Group for parents is offered and this focuses on improving mental health, as well as physical health, with a mindful approach. Parenting programmes also help educate parents around ACES and mental health and the impact this has on themselves and therefore their children. As part of any pre-birth referral Building Stronger Families assessment consent is requested from the expectant mother for a referral to be made to perinatal mental health team if deemed appropriate, many are referred to this team during the assessment, those that step-up will already have consent gained as the perinatal team do not accept referrals until later in the pregnancy.

Children in need of protection

We held 346 strategy discussions in 2024/2025, which is a reduction of 34% when compared with the number of strategy discussion held in 2023/24 (527). This reduction level correlates closely to the reduced number of referrals for social care, which would indicate a consistent proportion of children receiving social care support are considered in need of protection. These led to 277 Section 47 investigations being initiated, which is a conversion of 78.9%, however of these Section 47's only 33.5% proceeded to an Initial Child Protection Conference. The conversion rate is low in comparison to comparators, however is consistent with our conversion numbers previously in 2023/24 (32%) and 2022/23 (26%). An independent review was commissioned through the Sector Led improvement process to consider practice and decision making regarding this part of the protection process and did not raise any key concerns or actions. This continues to be a focus of internal challenge and scrutiny of practice and decision making.

We have continued to embed relational practice throughout all our teams and remain committed to more family led solutions through use of Family Group Conferencing (FGC). 148 families had an FGC in 2024/2025 which is an increase of 26% when compared to figures for 2023/24 (117) and 2022/23 (115). This has led to some extremely positive outcomes for families and contributed to reductions in Children in Care and subject of Protection Plans.

Children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan

111 children were subject to a Child Protection (CP) Plan at the end of March 2025, this is a reduction on the previous year but in line with the reductions in referrals and numbers of Children in Need proportionately. When comparing this to our neighbouring authorities, our rate for CP remains below the regional rate.

One parent whose child has benefited from a Child Protection Plan told us

'The social worker has helped us get to a point I'm at now where I haven't taken drugs for over a year and half and I have my own place. The social worker has given me encouragement, they're been sorting things out with X (Mam). They have treated me with respect, everything has been spot on and nothing could have been done differently.'

The highest proportion of children, where the risk is either Neglect or Emotional Abuse, is similar to the national position. The rate for Physical Abuse is in line with the national position. For more than half of the year the rate for sexual abuse ranged from 0-2%, but the end of year figure was 0%. 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, or ceasing, to be subject to a Child Protection Plan.

Category of Abuse	National 2024	DBC 2025
Neglect	49%	59%
Emotional	40%	34%
Physical	6%	6%
Sexual	3%	0%
Multiple	2%	Not used

Children who become subject to a second or subsequent plan being agreed at any time after a previous plan is always carefully considered. It is sometimes the case that there are adverse and very different changes in a child's life and a second or subsequent plan is necessary, however exploring this is important so that the impact of the previous intervention is known and any learning from this acted on. Our rate for 2024-25 was 23.6%, an increase on previous years, despite improved re-referral rates. This remains slightly better than the National average of 24% and regional average 25% (most recent published data) but focused work is to be undertaken to understand the rises and address them.

Statutory visits for Children on a Child Protection Plan has been the result of focused work over the past year and this has led to improvements in performance with 94.5% of statutory visits being completed in timescales, compared with 90% in 2023/24 and 2022/23.

Timeliness of ICPC continues to be a significant challenge with only 76.9% of ICPCs being held in timescale, further deteriorating from 2023/24 (79.5%) and consistent with 2022/23 (76.4%). Focused work has been done to identify effective pathways and to promote effective communication but challenges still persist. A further focused piece of work is planned and regular reviews are taking place of those children where the ICPC is held out of timescales to understand the impact of the delay.

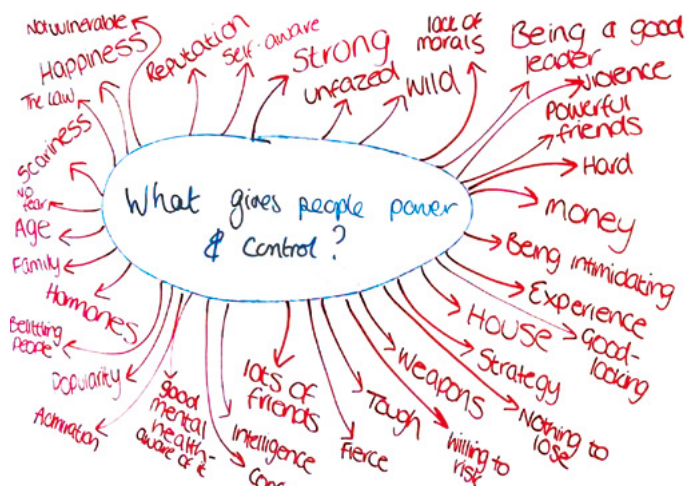
A formulation approach 're-think' is now taking place when children are approaching 2 years subject to a Child Protection Plan. This enables the social worker, team manager, IRO and partners to come together and consider ways to progress planning for children and avoid further delay. This is currently being embedded.

What does the quality of our CP work look like based on audits?

Findings from Practice Review Audits tell us that across the year, the quality of planning in reviewing for those children subject to a Child Protection Plan continues to improve, with evidence of plans that are measurable, outcome focussed and with trackable actions. Further, we have seen evidence of professional challenge, with a stronger focus on the prevention of drift and delay, with evidence that Family Group Conference is becoming increasingly considered at the earliest opportunity. Through Quality Assurance and monitoring we are aware of a small number of Children whose CP Plans have been in place for too long, with neither a de-escalation or escalation in their plans and the plan is to complete some focused deep dive review on these Children and families in the coming year.

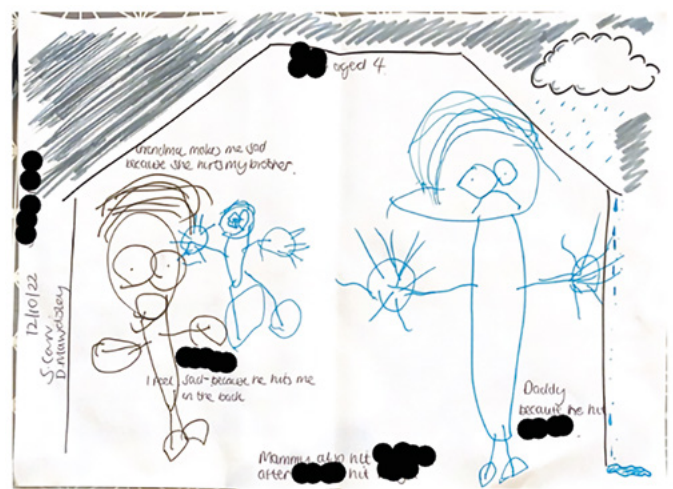
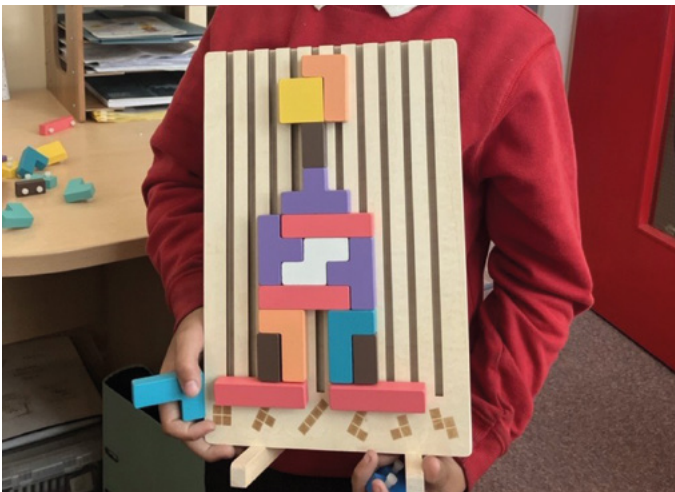
Participation and direct work with children and families

A variety of direct work tools are used to engage children and understand their lived experiences. An area of focus this year has been to develop the use of a narrative approach to case recording, writing directly to children in our records so when they read them, they can understand sensitively why we were involved. Some social workers have developed profiles about themselves to give to children and this is something we are encouraging the wider workforce to develop.

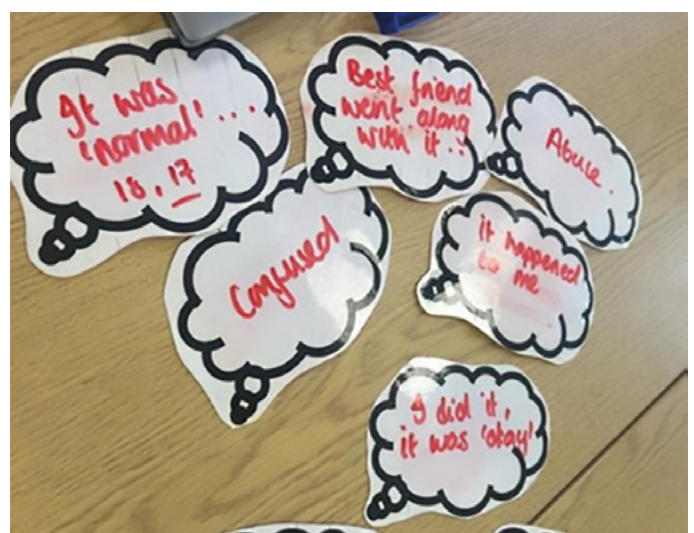


Direct work impacts directly on outcomes for children. The above direct work was used to understand two young children's experiences at home where concerns about domestic abuse and physical abuse were present. The direct work with the children coupled with multi-agency concerns enabled the social worker to make an application for the children to be placed outside of parental care and they were subsequently placed for adoption.

We have also very recently launched our Engagement Toolkit to further support and strengthen direct work, bringing together a wealth of tools mapped to children and young people's journeys to support practitioners with creative approaches.



Alongside this we have invested in Blue Cabin's Creative Life Story work programme. This has enabled us to have two experts in practice across the organisation to support our use of life story work. We have this year invested in a virtual memory box to further capture children's life story. We have a premise that all direct work is life story work and it is essential children understand why we are involved with their family.



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

A strategic priority has been our focus on those young people who are missing and/or exploited, recognising this as a key vulnerability area. These children are identified in the first instance via the Children's Front Door and this action is supported by a Daily Missing Meeting to ensure all missing episodes are considered and any risk associated with these episodes, for example, exploitation, is carefully analysed and appropriate responses agreed.

This work is complemented by forums such as an operational Missing and Exploited Group (MEG), the use of a Police led Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker (CEVT) and tools such as the Child Exploitation Matrix that can lead to a referral to MEG is proving effective. The Strategic Child Exploitation Group (CEG) is held quarterly and is a joint meeting with Durham County Council. The quarterly Regional Harm Away from Home meeting means that learning across the region is shared and joint approaches between authorities are strengthened.

A weekly Community Safety Check-in Meeting has also proved effective; internal and external partners are able to join this as a responsive meeting to immediate concerns and issues that arise linked to individuals, hotspots, vehicles and relevant incidents. This meeting aims to make spaces and places safer for young people, it assists further with the gathering of intelligence and to inform mapping.

A Child Exploitation Worker and a Missing from Home Worker are commissioned, via Barnardo's, as part of the Front Door Service. Performance in relation to the response to children who go missing has declined over the past year, with only 74.3% of Return to Home Interviews being offered within 72 hours, and only 51.4% being completed within 72 hours. This compares with offer rates of 87% (2023/24) and 84% (2022/23) with completion rates of 76.9% (2023/24) and 59.1% (2022/23). With the worsening performance an independent review of the response to those missing was commissioned. The findings of this review have led to changes in the delivery of this service; these are being embedded in the coming year.

The actual number of missing episodes has reduced over the past year with 272 incidents involving 81 children, compared with 423 incidents involving 122 children the previous year. The reduced missing episodes have been achieved following focused work, especially our own Children's Homes, to understand the risks and factors involved with children going missing and appropriate responses tailored to these.

Data is carefully analysed, month/quarter/annually, with the number of missing episodes and the number of individual children they relate to shown in an age range. A clear picture of who our children are that are missing is gained, as well as the response in terms of engagement in the Return Home Interview (RHI) and the timescale within which this is held. Importantly the quality of these RHIs is now audited with learning and outcomes shared with teams and the service.

Improvement is needed in relation to data gathered regarding children at risk of/being exploited, this is an issue both regionally and nationally. It has been highlighted that the data in this area of social care still requires development to create the picture of exploitation. Currently data does not consistently help to provide an understanding of what type of exploitation a child might be suffering and what the level of risk is. Gathering more sophisticated and accurate data is necessary to support the prevention of harm in relation to exploitation and assist with ensuring an appropriate response is provided.

Following a review undertaken by Barnardos the strategic and operational responsibility for children at risk of or experiencing exploitation was moved to the Care Planning part of the service. A review of the exploitation policy which will be presented at the strategic child exploitation group in September 2025 for implementation. A weekly thinking space for practitioners is to be introduced to support practice and a programme of additional training on exploitation including the use of a matrix to assess risk.

Management Oversight of Frontline Practice

Management oversight of front line practice has been a consistent area of focus. This has led to improved management oversight at the point of Child & Family Assessments being allocated, this offers clear direction to practitioners. This is complimented at our Weekly Referral Meeting where we look in live time at our response to referrals, including the management oversight, at various points from the point of contact through to allocation of the Child & Family Assessment.

We have rolled out a RAG rated supervision policy across the services whereby the Team Manager agrees the frequency needed for supervision based on the individual child's needs. Children who are subject to Child Protection Plans or in our care in short term placements are supervised monthly with children subject to Child in Need Plans or long-term matched children in our care having up to 12 weekly supervisions. Each child's circumstances are individually considered, and their status is only one factor that is considered, this means supervision of front-line practice is led by the child's needs.

Monthly Practice Review Audits are completed by members of the Senior Leadership Team collaboratively with practitioners and where possible, their team managers. This enables senior leaders to understand what practice for our children is like and by speaking to family members as part of the quality process, this enables a holistic view to be formed. These Practice Review Audits enable practitioners to have time to discuss the family they are working with and reflectively explore strengths and areas for development.

Learning from Practice Review Audits has also led to the completion of a themed audit of supervision and the development of an action plan to roll out a practice session to all managers to provide refresher learning and development on effective reflective supervision. We have also introduced a Senior Management Oversight case note function so that additional management oversight can be captured and understood.

Robust oversight of children subject to legal processes takes place through our legal planning procedure. This ensures decisions to issue care proceedings or for a child to become looked after is made by a Head of Service. All legal planning meetings are chaired by either a Head of Service or Service Manager to ensure oversight of planning for our children.

Our management structure lends itself to quality oversight of our teams with each Service Manager having clear roles and responsibilities. An example being one Service Manager is responsible for transition planning for children to adulthood and another is a lead for adoption. This enables consistent oversight from a member of the senior leadership team across key areas of focus.

Children with disabilities

We have a dedicated team who support children with disabilities. This team is responsible for assessing children's needs and eligibility and providing specific support linked to a child's disability needs. Whilst there is a clear criteria for children to be active to the children with disabilities team, an individualised approach is taken for children. This means that even if a child is not eligible but has overriding needs, they will be supported as a child in need, child in need of protection or as a child in our care. We have strengthened our offer for children undergoing a statutory assessment of special education needs by employing a dedicated social worker to complete social care advice where children do not have an allocated social worker. This was in response to our internal audits of social care advice as well as our SEND Inspection. During the SEND inspection we have ensured the CWD lozenge on LCS is used more widely to enable us to understand better our children's needs.

We have had one family subject to a Child Protection Plan active to the Children with Disabilities team, they have remained active to this team as whilst safeguarding concerns have become apparent, they were a family receiving a paid service due to the children's disabilities. If the child's primary need is safeguarding, rather than eligibility for paid services, children including those with a disability sit within our Assessment and Safeguarding Teams.

There are examples of children who are active to the Assessment and Safeguarding Service because their overriding need is one of safeguarding, receiving a co-worker from the Children with Disabilities team to assess the child's specific needs arising from their disability and eligibility for paid services to ensure children receive the right support at the right time. This ensures that children receive a priority response from both areas of the service seamlessly and was highlighted in a recent practice audit as an area of excellent practice.

We continue to focus on strengthening our transition to adulthood. We continue to have a transition to adulthood tracker and forum which is jointly held between children's and adult services to ensure children transition seamlessly. A preparing for adulthood procedure has been prepared and is being progressed and ensures that all children receive an appropriate transition but ensuring children whose needs aren't disability related is an area of ongoing focus.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children

We have continued to engage with the National Mandated Transfer Scheme to support unaccompanied children to be placed within the Darlington area. We have worked hard to develop support for our unaccompanied children which includes a bespoke Duke of Edinburgh award, regular drop in's and we have recruited a care experienced peer mentor who was an unaccompanied child to provide additional support.

At the 31st March 2025, we had 22 Unaccompanied young people in our care, this was an increase from 18 in our care as of 31st March 2024. Our UASC population accounts for 8.3% of our Children in Care population, compared to 6% in March 2024.

Children from Gypsy, Roma and travelling families

In Darlington, we have many families from the Gypsy, Roma and Travelling community. Social workers within Darlington have had specialist training to develop their understanding of traveler culture to aid their assessment of children and families. Specialist support is commissioned via Traveler Education and Attainment Service. They offer support to families with access to education and are a great source of knowledge and support for social care. Children who are home-educated are visited by an education safeguarding lead, who also specializes in supporting travelling families.

Young Carers

Our approach to assessment is to ensure that within the voice of the child we are considering their caring responsibility and subsequent needs at young carers. Where young carers have identified needs, we have a commissioned service via Family Action, and currently 53 referrals for children and young people have been made. We know that levels of vulnerability and complexity of need have increased, we have recognised that this means the extent to which children and young people may be taking on caring roles and responsibilities will also increase.

Children's Services, as part of a wider People Group Directorate, have the Commitment to Carers Strategy, which include a specific objective around Young Carers. There is a Carers Strategy Steering Group, which Children's Services are part of.

Private Fostering

In Darlington, during the 2024–2025 period, two children were identified as being in private fostering arrangements. These cases were managed in line with statutory requirements, ensuring that the children's welfare was prioritised and monitored effectively. Looking ahead, we are committed to undertaking focussed work to review and strengthen how we promote awareness of private fostering across our communities and among professionals. This will include evaluating current communication strategies and training offers to ensure that private fostering arrangements are recognised early, enabling timely intervention and safeguarding of children if required.

Areas of Strength and Areas for Development

Areas of Strength	Areas for Development
Our Weekly Referral Meeting – giving clear oversight, Strong Challenge and Strong Support	Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences
Quality and Impact of Assessments	Consistency of management oversight across Service
Relational Practice embedding across our whole service, with increased focus on children's records being written to them	Increase use of proportionate and time limited assessments
Robust oversight of legal and permanence tracking	The voice of Children and their families
Established, dynamic and responsive Edge of Care Support offer from Keeping Families Together service to support children to remain with their families	Review of longer-term Child Protection Plans
Revised pre-birth procedure to ensure that families who need a social work assessment are supported earlier in their pregnancy to ensure considered planning and provide support to prevent babies being born into care where possible	Ongoing partnership work (with police)

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 for 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.

Our approach to have two decision making panels and panels, a Practice Solutions Panel and a Complex Needs Panel focuses on high-cost support needs where funding is shared, for example with Health. Both panels are multi-disciplinary with attendees supporting practitioners to find the right solutions for children and families, and make sure we make the best use of available resources. This approach ensures a range of expertise and knowledge available to find the best solutions and follow through support.

Numbers of Children in Care has steadily decreased this year, with 265 Children in Care at the end of 2024/25, compared with 300 at the end of 2023/24 and 311 at the end of 2022/23. The use of these panels to consider creative and supportive solutions to families to prevent children coming into care has seen a significant reduction to children entering care, with only 62 entering care over the past year, compared with 121 in 2023/24 and 149 in 2022/23. Focused work to progress plans for children in care has seen 95 children safely leave our care over the past year. These reducing numbers of Children in Care allows increased focus on those children in most need in our Care.

Legal Gateway Meetings are held for all children where consideration is being given to commencing the 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."

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.

Following a review of the wording of our 'Letter before proceedings' being undertaken by the Senior Leadership Team with support from our legal colleagues, a revised letter is now more relational in language ensuring it is more accessible in terms of readability, thus improving understanding and engagement from parents. This new letter is embedded and informs the subsequent processes whereby children and their families are held at the centre of our planning for children. Exploration of family placement options via FGC and Viability Assessments is the first consideration for a child being removed from parental care. Our reductions in Children entering care correlates with significant increases in the number of Family Group Conference facilitated over the past year, with 148 completed, a 26% increase on the previous year. Our focus and support to kinship arrangements for children has ensured that our proportion of Children in Care placed with connected carers has increased to 20%, compared to 15.3% in 2023/24 and 15.8% in 2022/23.

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 plan for permanence 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 provide effective oversight of children's plans. Giving direction and guidance to managers and social workers in their work with children and families, this 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 takes place in a carefully planned and managed way. A reunification pathway has been produced for the Looked After Through Care Team (LATC) 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.

Participation and direct work with children in care and care leavers

We continue to build activities and groups for children and young people to get involved with, including Younger Children in Care, peer mentor youth sessions, Lego Club, a girls' group and our regular care leavers forum.

Young people are involved in the selection process for key roles in staff recruitment and input questions into our fostering selection process, which we are developing into a more active role in the panel.

We are planning to hold our first conference for children and young people where they will be able to share what matters to them and inform service development plans.

There is a care leaver representative on the Health of Children in Care and Care Leavers group which meets bi-monthly to deliver a strategic plan on health outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

Our Corporate Parenting Panel meets regularly, and is well attended internally, corporately and by care leavers. It is an active forum where good news stories are shared and celebrated, service plans and developments are tested (and in some cases grown), but above all there is a shared objective to do the right thing for children and young people. It is an environment where healthy challenge is welcome.

Our aspiration is to work with our Care Experienced Young People and our Participation team to review our Corporate Parenting arrangements over the coming year to ensure that the group continues to be child centred and focused on the issues that most matter to and impact upon Children in Our Care.

Helping and Protecting

Multi agency work involving our Front Door and our residential homes has continued to be effective in reducing missing episodes with 71 missing episodes reported this year, part of an ongoing reduction compared to 141 in 2023/24 and 271 in 2022/23. Our proactive approach and the impact of this work has been recognised by Durham and Darlington Police, their Missing from Home and Stronger Families Coordinator said,

'I have found that working in partnership with Darlington looked after children services has been imperative in making sure that we as partners are doing what we can to keep children safe. As part of our commitment to one another we have regular meetings so that any concerns/issues can be escalated and resolved in a timely manner. There has been a real collaborative and problem-solving working ethos between us which can be evidenced through the reduction of recorded missing children's episodes in Darlington.'

Our work with Blue Cabin and Creative Life Story continues and is proving effective in helping young people understand and make sense of their situation, now led by a therapeutic social worker, the model complements relational practice, and we are looking to continue funding this into the future.

We built on our partnership with Blue Cabin, introducing music-making activities for care-experienced young children to help with attachment and support relationship building. All our carers with a child under 4 now have music bags and this venture has developed into a positive support group for carers of babies and young children. The musical activities have also positively supported children moving on to a new home with adopters joining sessions with carers and taking the music bag with them to continue music making in the adoptive home.

Health

92.3% of required health assessment reviews due by 31 March 2025 were completed, with only 0.5% of young people refusing to attend. This maintains our performance consistently over 90% with ongoing engagement sought within Looked After Review and Corporate Parenting Panel to consider what barriers exist and how the performance can be further improved upon. We continue to progress timely assessments and emphasize the benefits of young people having regular check-ups.

Care leavers are supported to understand their health history and receive a health passport, completed by a looked after nurse, when they leave care.

We are passionate about promoting and supporting good mental health for our care leavers. Young people's mental health is prioritised and promoted through support and referrals from social workers, personal advisors, and Staying Close personal advisors. Our local offer includes access to independent emotional wellbeing support, counselling, and practical advice through commissioned services and partnerships. We ensure care leavers are supported to access mental health services, including NHS and voluntary sector provision, and we work closely with professionals to identify and respond to individual needs. We continue to explore innovative ways to enhance our mental health offer, ensuring it is accessible, trauma-informed, and responsive to the lived experiences of care-experienced young people.

A mental health nurse is based in the team one day a week who can provide therapeutic interventions for low mood, depression and anxiety without the need to join a waiting list. This has reduced the need for referral to Tier 4 mental health services for most young people.

We regularly host wellbeing activities and events such as walks, drop ins and chats to support care leavers and, aware of the difficulties Christmas can bring for people, we make sure every care leaver has a place to go on Christmas Day, including making referrals to The Big Christmas Dinner.

We believe in the strong link between physical and mental health, both for the positive impact exercise has on mood but also because it is an important way for young people to socialise, so all our care leavers have access to gym membership which also allows them to take a friend.

One of our Personal Advisor's is a trained mental health first aider, and our plan is to extend this training to all Personal Advisors over the next twelve months.

We have a Personal Advisor who is C-Card trained and able to dispense contraception and, following a review of our local offer, we plan to invest in developing our end-to-end sexual health support from consent through contraception, pregnancy, pre-birth and beyond.

Learning and Development

Attendance of Vulnerable Pupils

Suspensions for pupils in both primary and secondary phases continue to be above national and regional averages, with the exception of the secondary suspension rate where it is lower than the regional 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. All Darlington schools share live attendance data through the Liquid Logic EYES system. 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 below national average attendance for all pupils. When disadvantaged groups are compared Darlington is -0.2% better than national average. Similarly, Darlington is slightly above national average for Persistently absent disadvantaged pupils and below national average for 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. There has been a rise in the number of Electively Home Educated pupils since the pandemic. The authority has taken steps to mitigate this rise through the introduction of an Inclusion Charter which has been co-produced with school leaders and adopted by all schools in Darlington.

Stability and Permanence

We have maintained a clear focus on placement stability and permanence while understanding the dynamic between placement sufficiency and placement stability. We have continued to focus on the development and expansion of our Children's Homes and now have increased from 4 homes to 6 homes over a 3-year period. We have worked to embed relational practices across our homes and this has resulted in 5 of our 6 homes being graded as Good following OFSTED inspection.

CEDARS is our in-reach, outreach, and overnight service. It provides planned short breaks and has extended from a weekend service to operating 7 days a week. The service also offers a responsive and flexible approach to placements under pressure, when appropriate. Children were placed, with CEDARS, in emergency scenarios as an alternative to unregulated arrangements. This has resulted in some challenges, including the Inspection process. CEDARS is currently rated an Inadequate. However, a new Registered Manager was appointed and is recently in post. They are working proactively on an improvement plan for the home.

Overall, through more visible leadership, tailored relational practice development for staff and better communication, our homes are working well together, sharing practice and exploring ideas for the often-challenging situations they navigate with young people in their care. The positive impact of this approach is apparent in the home surroundings, observed by independent visitors in their monitoring and reflected in inspection findings generally. We want to keep building on this progress moving forward, using the wealth of information available about our homes more intelligently and developing shared learning opportunities, peer support and effective challenge.

The past year has also seen development progress with our fostering service. Following consultation and engagement with carers a new foster carer offer was launched in April 2024 and this has resulted in improved foster carer recruitment, with 11 new carers approved during 2024/25, compared to 5 in 2023/24 and 7 in 2022/23.



We have also focused on retention of carers and have continued to see a positive impact from implementing Mockingbird in Darlington and have recently introduced our second constellation, so more carers and children benefit from this support network. Our 2 constellations support 14 households of 20 carers and 23 children.

We are part of the Foster North East regional pathfinder and use the learning regional to keep ensuring that our fostering service continues to develop.

We have developed our therapeutic offer for children, increasing resources and restructuring the service to provide a structured programme of intervention and support so that there is a clear journey through therapeutic intervention. The team have commenced delivering PACE parenting training to in house carers and connected carers. This will be further supported by opportunities for carers to attend a “thinking space” to discuss therapeutic support and seek advice and guidance on implementing the training.

We successfully embedded Staying Close as part of our leaving care offer, stabilising transition to independence and helping young people achieve positive outcomes at this important stage in their lives, in addition to supporting placement sufficiency by moving young people on from residential care.

Despite this we continue to be challenged in relation to placement stability, and the impact of the work we have completed is yet to fully impact positively on this. We have continued to experience challenges and deterioration in placement stability; of children in care during 2024-25, 13.3% had three or more separate placements, above our local target of 10%. Of children under 16 who have been in care two and a half years or more, only 53.3% had been in their current placement for two years or more, again, below our local target of 68%. Placement stability meetings are held to prevent placement changes and breakdowns, and a strategic group is established to analyse learning and influence planning for children. This combined with the improvements to placement sufficiency will, it is hoped, positively influence placement stability in the coming year.

As of 31 March 2025, 20% of our children in care were placed within Kinship arrangements, an increase from 15% in 2024 and 2023. This is the result of the focused work we have carried out to support kinship carers and to identify them early in the planning process, through increased use of Family Group Conferencing.

‘Family First’ is one of our guiding principles and we are determined to do all we can to make sure children remain at home with their parents where they can, or within their wider family network when this is not possible.

Over the past year we’ve maintained improvements in support to kinship carers, including them in carer support groups and our second Mockingbird constellation. They now benefit from more financial support through the increase in our Age-Related Child Allowance introduced as part of the new fostering offer.

We have also embedded our peer mentoring scheme, adding invaluable offers of support available to looked after children and young people, and giving care experienced young people the opportunity to use their experiences positively and in paid work. The peer mentoring scheme has developed significantly and is providing a wide range of support to Young People. We have eleven care experienced mentors offering peer mentor support to one hundred children and young people aged five and over. We have recently appointed an additional 10 new mentors who are in the process of recruitment checks. We offer short and long-term peer mentor arrangements; our mentors are carefully matched to children who might want the support to help them through a particular situation they are experiencing or as someone they can trust if they have low support networks generally. Our peer mentors are enthusiastic and motivated to support young people they see experiencing situations and feelings they have previously. They have also engaged well in wider voice of young people work and activities.

Care leavers and transitions

As of 31st March 2025, we had 169 Care Leavers, of who 150 were relevant, former relevant or qualifying care leavers. We proactively keep in touch with our care leavers up to the age of 21 by visiting them once at least 8 weeks and whenever they move into new accommodation. As well as staying in touch between visits by other means. The level of keeping in touch is agreed between the young person and their PA, it is outlined in their Pathway Plan.

The majority of our 21–25-year-old care leavers choose to remain open having regular visits and at least 6 monthly Pathway Plan reviews. For those who decline the support we respect this decision and continue to make periodic attempts to remain in contact until they turn 25 and advise that PA support is available. We have an "always here" approach for any care leaver beyond the age of 25, whether that's for advice and guidance or just a chat.

We have seen some decreases in outcome for Care Leavers over the past year. Suitable accommodation has reduced to 96.7% for 19-21 years olds, and 95.7% for 22–25-year-olds, compared to 98.4% and 97.9% respectively the previous year. More significant reductions have been seen in relation to Education, Employment and Training with 41% of 19-21 NEET and 38.3% of 22.25 NEET, compared with 22.6% and 14.6% the previous year. The service has reflected on some of the changing needs of our Young People, with a number of young people who were in extremely challenging situations prior to leaving care and who have subsequently struggled to identify appropriate EET opportunities. There has also been some local challenges in relation to availability and accessibility of different EET options. The service are committed to improving outcomes and is undertaking deep dive audit work with the Quality Assurance team to understand the context of our offer and services and impact on Care Leavers in light of the changes in performance data.

Young people are encouraged to remain in care at least until their 18th birthday and to remain with their previous carers beyond this where it is appropriate and in their best interests. Currently, 9 care leavers are in Staying Put arrangements with their former foster carers highlighting the strong and stable relationships developed between foster carers and young people in their care. We encourage young people to maintain links with their Personal Advisor until they are 25 years old.

We have a strong local leaving care offer, led and developed by care leavers in conjunction with statutory, voluntary, and business partners. Our dedicated team of personal advisors build positive, trusting relationships with young people, offering an appropriate level of support and advice to young people during their transition to adulthood. The care leaver base is a hive of activity with cookery classes, mother and baby groups, budgeting workshops, drops ins, leaving care forums and access to the 'leaving care larder'; we also offer an Independence Programme in conjunction with Adult Learning and Skills. We provide a range of social and recreational opportunities for young people to feel part of the community and create and maintain positive relationships, including concerts, theatre trips, well-being walks and day trips further afield. We have a specific UASC offer and are currently developing a bespoke offer for care leavers who are parents and care leavers in custody. All care leavers have access to free Wi-Fi and calls with the National Databank SIM cards to help them remain connected with personal and professional relationships in their lives.

Children who are looked after and care leavers are helped to understand their rights, entitlements, and responsibilities in a variety of ways, including being provided with a QR code for the local offer to allow for quick easy access. In 2022, Darlington Borough Council made the commitment to sign the Care Leaver Covenant and we are now actively working with private businesses in the local area to proactively support positive outcomes for care leavers in Darlington. In July 2023, care experience was made a Protected Characteristic in Darlington Borough Council.

We highlighted implementation of 'Staying Close,' an enhanced support package for young people leaving care from residential homes as a key area for development in our last report, which has been delivered and is running successfully. We mobilised this at pace and with the relentless support of the Children's Strategic Commissioning Manager also gained internal and external support to make sure we have a variety of accommodation options available for young people taking part in the programme. We still have work to do, although we made some progress with longer term accommodation for young people to move on to, housing stock is limited, and demand is high, so this is an area we need to keep the focus on. A huge amount has been achieved in a relatively short period of time with this project, much of it down to the passion and commitment of practitioners involved, which has been recognised externally by them being awarded Frontline's 'Team of the Year' award 2024.

Staying Close continues to strengthen the support offered to young people preparing to leave care. The project has secured an additional year of funding from the Department for Education, recognising the vital role it plays in helping young people transition from care to independent living.

Currently, we are supporting 25 young people—a number that remains steady as individuals complete their support journey and achieve their personal goals. Since April 2023, the project has supported a total of 40 young people. Through close collaboration with the taper flat registered manager, semi-independent accommodation providers, and housing services, we have successfully transitioned 20 young people into more independent living arrangements.

Feedback from both young people and professionals continues to be overwhelmingly positive. One professional shared:

Support into adulthood is well supported and young people are referred to our Transition to Adult Services Panel at 16 and a transition assessment takes place depending on need well before adulthood.

"Her passion and drive for her role shines through! I've worked with many YPAs over the years, and she truly stands out—she's a credit to your team!"

We maintain strong and consistent relationships with our care leavers, ensuring they feel connected, supported, and valued. There are regular opportunities for young people to come together through social activities, peer support, and engagement events. Recent highlights include celebrating Refugee Week with a shared meal, participating in a national leaving care football tournament in Wolverhampton, and attending a cricket match.

We also facilitate meaningful dialogue between care leavers and decision-makers. A recent Q&A session with Darlington MP Loa McEvoy gave care leavers the opportunity to raise questions and share concerns directly. This has now become a regular six-monthly event, strengthening young people's voice and influence.

Our Staying Close Personal Advisors continue to champion practical support. One advisor successfully secured a 90% reduction in water rates, a breakthrough that, when fully rolled out, will benefit care leavers nationally. In addition, the Director of Resources Group has agreed a reciprocal arrangement across the 12 North East Local Authorities to fund council tax payments for care leavers. Free bus travel across the Tees Valley is also on track to be introduced in the autumn, further enhancing independence and access to opportunities.

Areas of Strength and Areas for Development

Areas of Strength	Areas for Development
Placement Stability in In-House Children's Homes	Embedding Psychological Support, develop an integrated model for residential and fostering teams.
Embedding Relational Practice	Increasing In-House Placement Options for Teenagers
Celebrating Young People's Achievements	Improving Educational Consistency for Looked After Children, we aim to reduce delays in completing Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and improve their overall quality.
Enhanced Support for Care Leavers	Expanding Placement Sufficiency, we will increase capacity and target recruitment and retention strategies.
Peer Mentor Programme	Implementing Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) Training for residential staff, fostering social workers, foster carers, and social workers for children looked after.

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

The service has continued to receive consistently strong support Corporately and Strategically over the past year, with financial and practical support available corporately to address the most significant challenges within the service, relating to placement sufficiency. The Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Children and Young People remain committed and fully engaged with the priorities of the Service and complement the support we have continued to receive from the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors. A new Chief Executive was appointed in recent months and has been very engaged with the service and our priorities.

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. The past year has seen a Local Area SEND Inspection and the CQC Inspection of Adults Services, both of which raised a number of areas of strength, both for the wider People group and for Children's Services. This builds upon and provides further assurance following on from the Children's Services ILACS in 2022 and the Focused Visit in 2023.

Despite the positive progress identified, we are not complacent and are hugely ambitious for our services. We have reflected on areas identified for development, particularly in relation to our response to children who are missing and in relation to outcomes for our Care Leavers. We have reviewed these services and commissioned some external input to better understand practice and impact and to improve outcomes.

We continue to utilise our Restorative Leadership work to support Team Managers to improve management oversight and the level of reflection within supervision. We have also refreshed our "Xtra Space" offer which is a dynamic approach to peer support, training and reflection to enhance the offer to front line workers.

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 a strategic plan for 2024-2027, which can be seen below:

Strengthening Families Plan 2024-2027

Our Priorities	Great social work practice	Family help & child protection	A better experience for children	Enabling great social work practice
Strategic Objectives	We have a shared, restorative working culture with a strong team ethos, clear roles and responsibilities and the accountability to meet them.	Families get the right help at the right time, and we are responsive to their needs.	We will embed and sustain Staying Close & Peer Mentoring support for children and young people	Where possible looked after children live in a Darlington placement whether this is in house fostering, residential or with connected carers.
	Children and young people are involved in shaping our services.	We prevent children coming into care with a Family First, multi-agency approach promoting children staying at home with parent(s).	Better placement stability for children in care.	Children in foster care live with one of our foster carers and our foster carers stay with us, encouraging others to foster for Darlington.
	We have more reflective discussions to help find solutions.	Where staying at home isn't possible, children are looked after by someone in their wider family or friends' network.	We understand and meet the needs of children and young people.	We create more time to spend with children and families.
	We have a well developed and co-ordinated approach to practice "experts" and good networks of support.	We will change our approach to 'intentionally homeless', introducing preventative multi-agency support and a 'Pathway Out of Homelessness'.		Our workforce is well equipped and effective.
	We have strong progression pathways, 'grow our own' talent and have an environment where workers want to work and stay in Darlington.			

We are working as a Leadership Team to understand how the Strengthening Families Plan aligns with the wider social care reforms and ensuring that our approach to reforms complements our ongoing improvement and planning via Strengthening Families.

Learning Culture

The ongoing development of a learning culture across the service continues to be a service priority. Over the past year we have continued with the Experts in Practice program, which supported a further 4 practitioners to develop their knowledge and skills in 3 key priority areas; Anti-racist practice, Autism and Preparation for Adulthood. This builds upon the areas of specialism from the previous year which was Harm Away from Home, Trauma Informed Practice and Creative Life Story Work. The aim of this is to allow individual workers to undertake learning and research 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.

The program has been extremely beneficial in terms of allowing practitioners to progress in an area of specialism that a traditional route to progression would not allow, while also allowing learning and development to be shared in the wider service. At our service wide Staff Conference this year, all of the workshops on the day were delivered by our own Experts in Practice. The scheme has also brought in external funding which has allowed for the commissioning of bespoke external training, for example funding the delivery of “Parent Assess” training over the past year.

We have also refreshed 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 uses our own internal staff in a Peer Support/Mentoring capacity, facilitating and delivering briefing and training sessions. It also offers a 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.

It helped to form links between Children’s 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. Our Staff Training and Development Plan continues to be shaped by robust training needs analysis, seeking collaborative feedback from our workforce as well as being shaped by local, regional and national guidance and practice trends. Our Practice Development Group also allows us to regularly bring together learning from quality assurance, compliments, complaints and other practice insights in a way that allows us to develop learning across the service to ensure we are closing the loop.

Workforce

We continue to have a stable and experienced Leadership Team, led by a Director of Children Services and Lead Member who are both invested in and understand the service aims and priorities. We have a stable and experienced Senior Leadership Team with the Assistant Director and Head of Service posts filled with permanent and suitably experienced leaders, with experience of and commitment to Darlington.



Following the implementation of strategies to increase our workforce retention and our recruitment we have experienced some positive workforce stability. Our vacancy rate (March 2025) remains low at 5%, which compares favorably to rates pre Covid. Whilst we have seen an increase in staff turnover (17.7% compared with 9.8% the previous year) this remains lower than in the previous years and the analysis tells us that very few of our turnover is workers leaving but is more a reflection of workers moving into more specialist or more senior roles. Our agency rates have also reduced during this time, they are currently 12%, compared to 15% in the previous 2 years. This remains a key focus for the coming year with the aim of further reductions in the use of agency workers.

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 Social Work workforce into employment in Darlington.

Our positive achievements in relation to the workforce combined with changes in demand for statutory services have created a stable year in relation to workloads. Caseloads for case holding social workers are considered weekly by Service Managers and monthly in Assistant Director performance clinics. The data shows that the average caseloads across all case holding social work teams has remained below 18 over the course of the year. Where there have been some exceptions to this, higher levels of monitoring and supervision have been in place, as well as specific action plans to mitigate any risk.

An enhanced recruitment and retention support package has remained in place for front line workers and Assistant Director 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 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 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. This equally invites the opportunity for front line workers to engage, contribute and shape the direction of the service. Workers continue to be positive and proud when discussing working for Darlington.

Having completed an agile (home/office) working pilot programme which led to a confirmed agile working offer for all staff, this way of working is now fully embedded. This offer seeks to empower and enable front line practitioners to fully embrace a hybrid approach to working. It 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.

Plans for Next 12 Months

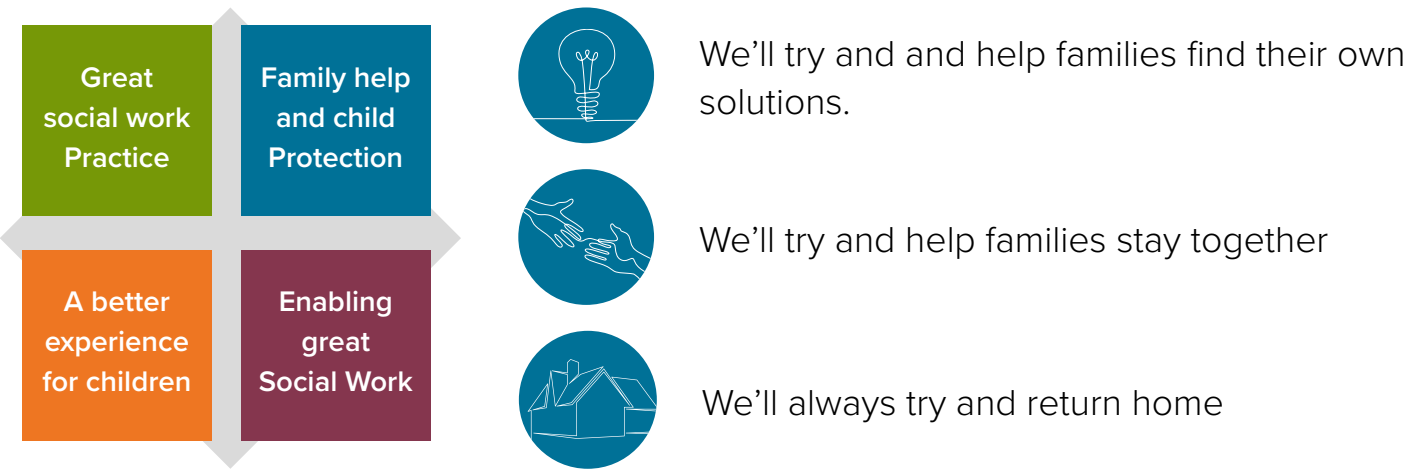
The past year has seen us consolidate our practice and performance in some areas, with some noted improvements and development and has also identified some areas of focus where we aim for further development. We remain committed to our Relational Practice approach, believing that this not only achieved the best outcomes for our workforce, but also for the impact and outcomes of the support and intervention carried out with children and families.

The plan for the coming year is very much one of scoping and shaping our readiness, both as a Children’s Service and as a partnership to embrace the changes required within the Families First Reforms. With this approach we will aim to prioritise building upon the existing elements of the service that are working well, but to develop and innovate to further improve the quality and impact of practice. Our approach will continue to be driven by our Strengthening Families and overriding relational and restorative ethos.

Specific service developments being embedded over the coming year including:

- Implementation of Partnership Board to realize the changes required as part of the social care reforms
- Development and re-design of our services for children who are missing and/or at risk of exploitation
- Increases to foster carer recruitment following the revision of foster carer offer
- Continued prioritization of Family Group Conferences and Peer Mentoring
- Care Leaver outcomes

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



Leadership and Management

We will also seek to drive and improve greater visibility of leadership across the service, building on the strong foundations already in place that ensure leaders are accessible, responsive, and connected to frontline practice. Creating further opportunities to strengthen this connection, through increased presence, engagement, and visibility, will reinforce a shared sense of purpose, support reflective practice, and maintain a clear line of sight to the experiences of our workforce in line with our relational practice model.

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	Whole workforce and partnership engagement to embrace and embed Families First reform changes.
Strong, stable and consistent Leadership Team	Placement Sufficiency Plans being developed to seek to expand and develop in house resources for Children in Care
Continued stability in Workforce	Retained focus on recruitment and retention of staff



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20th October 2025

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS QUARTER 1 2025-26

Purpose of the Report

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

Summary

2. This report provides performance information (April 2025- June 2025) 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. 0.3% of the 311 referrals were processed within three working days, exceeding our target of 5%.
6. In Q1 2025/26, 15.4% of children referred came from families with a previous referral within the past 12 months. This is a positive outcome, remaining below the target threshold of 18%.
7. At the end of Q1 2025/26, the Building Stronger Families team was supporting 233 families and 462 children. An additional 61 families, including 132 children, were receiving support from external agencies. During the quarter, 368 Early Help Assessments (EHAs) were initiated, with 13.3 % led by external agencies. This represents a 21.5% increase compared to the 303 EHAs started in Q1 2024/25, with a similar proportion of externally led assessments (13.5%).
8. In Q1 2025/26, there were 90 reported missing episodes involving 35 individual children and young people (CYP). This represents an increase from Q1 2024/25, which recorded 50 episodes involving 31 individuals, largely driven by a rise in reported incidents among children in care (CiC). Despite the quarterly increase, the current figure remains significantly lower than the 117 episodes recorded in Q1 2023/24.
9. All children and young people were offered Return Home Interviews (RHI) (excluding children from other authorities) following their missing episode in Q1 2025/26.
10. 85.7% of the young people reported missing had 3 or less episodes during Q1 2025/26 and 8.6% had between 4 and 9 episodes, with 5.7% having more than 10 episodes.
11. In Q1 2025/26, 295 children received a Children and Families (C&F) assessment—up from 259 in the same quarter last year, but down from 418 in Q1 2023/24.
12. 89.8% of C&F assessments were completed with the 45-day timescale. This represents a positive

trend compared to previous years, indicating improved timeliness and efficiency.

13. At the end of June 2025, 122 children had an open Child Protection (CP) plan — an increase from 115 in June 2024. In Q1 2025/26, 38 CP plans were initiated, compared to 30 in Q1 2024/25 and 27 plans were ceased, a decrease from 49 in Q1 2024/25.
14. Of the children whose CP plans ceased in Q1 2025/26: 51.9% transitioned to a Child in Need (CiN) plan following improvements and reduced risk. 29.6% entered care. 18.5% ceased for other reasons, including relocation to another local authority or ended social care involvement as significant improvements had been made and were either supported by the Building Stronger Families team or directed to universal services.
15. As of June 2025, 269 children were in care, of whom 9.3% were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).
16. In Q1 2025/26, 29 children from 19 families in Darlington entered care. This represents an increase from Q1 2024/25 (14 children), but a decrease compared to Q1 2023/24 (44 children). During Q1 2025/26, 6 young people entered care after being accepted by the Home Office as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
17. 30.6% (including UASC) of the children and young people (CYP) who came into care during Q1 2025/26, were placed with an internal foster carer.
18. 25 families ceased to be in care in Q1 2025/26. 43.3% of children returned home, 6.7% had an SGO/CAO granted, 6.7% were adopted, 30.0% turned 18yrs becoming care leavers (33.3% of which were UASC) and 13.3% due to other reasons.
19. In Q1 2025/26, there has been a reduction in the proportion of children in care placed with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers compared to Q1 2024/25. This has been accompanied by an increase in placements with in-house foster carers. Additionally, placements with parents have decreased, while placements with connected carers have risen.
20. 20.0% of children requiring a review health assessment or dental check-up by June 2025 have had one completed, meeting the current trajectory for this year.
21. At the end of June 2025, 98.7% of care leavers aged 19–21 and 96.6% of those aged 22–25 were living in suitable accommodation.

Where do we need to improve?

22. In Q1 2025/26, 88.7% of children's referrals were completed within 1 working day, just below our 90% target. This marks a notable improvement from Q1 2024/25, when only 81.0% were completed within the same timeframe, despite a 48.1% increase in the number of referrals assessed. Overall timeliness has improved compared to previous quarters. However, due to the relatively low volume of referrals we receive, even a small number of late completions can significantly affect our performance percentages, especially when compared to larger councils.
23. In Q1 2025/26, 59.7% of children (excluding those transferred in-conference) had their Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) held within the required timescale. This remains below the target of 95%, despite efforts throughout the year to improve performance. The main cause of delays continues to be late notification from Social Work Teams that an ICPC is

required. This notification must occur within 10 working days of the enquiry to allow partner agencies at least 5 working days to prepare reports and arrange attendance.

Work is ongoing to address this issue, with a focus on improving communication and timeliness of requests to ensure better compliance with statutory timescales.

24. Of the children who had an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC), 66.7% were made subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP). The remaining 33.3% were not placed on a CP plan; however, the conference concluded that these families could be safely supported under a Child in Need (CiN) plan. Notably, no ICPC resulted in a case being closed at that stage.
25. 1 family ceased their CP plan in June after being on it for over two years. This accounted for 7.4% of all cessations in the quarter. Due to the low number of total cessations, this caused the percentage of children ceasing CP after 2 years to exceed the 5% target.
26. In Q1 2025/26, 736 Child Protection statutory visits were scheduled. Of these, 70.4% were completed within 10 working days, and 92.4% were completed within 15 working days. The primary reasons for the delays were family availability and instances where the child was not at home during the scheduled visit time.
27. 66.7% of initial CiC reviews and 78.0% of subsequent reviews were completed within the required timescales. Although both figures fall below the target threshold, the small number of reviews conducted means that any delays have a disproportionately large impact on the overall percentages.
28. In Q1 2025/26, 81.6% of the 670 statutory visits for Children in Care (CiC) were completed within the required timescale. This represents a slight decline compared to Q1 2024/25, when 84.4% of visits were completed on time. While performance has improved compared to last quarter, it remains below the target of 90%.
29. As of June 2025, 16.0% of Children in Care (CiC) have experienced three or more placement changes within the previous 12 months. This exceeds the target of 10%, indicating a need for continued focus on placement stability. However, as the overall number of CiC decreases, even a single placement change can cause a noticeable percentage shift. This means that while the headline figure appears volatile, the underlying trend has remained relatively stable.
30. 51.1% 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 significantly below target (68%) and the national and regional average for 2023/24 (both 68%).
31. As of June 2025, 12.7% of Children in Care (not in an adoption or parent placement) have been placed 20 or more miles from home, exceeding the target of 10%. Although the number of children placed at a distance has only increased slightly over the past 12 months, the overall size of the cohort has decreased. As a result, even small changes in placement numbers can lead to proportionally larger percentage shifts.
32. Currently 8 young people are refusing to engage in medical checks. The children and young people are continually reminded of the benefits of having a check-up and encouraged to take part.
33. During Q1 2025/26, 59.3% of children who entered care for more than 20 days had their Initial Health Assessment (IHA) forms sent to Health within the required 5-day timescale. Of these, 46.2% were seen by a health professional within 20 days. The decline in timely assessments is primarily due to cancelled appointments and limited availability of medical professionals.

34. 31.1% of care leavers aged 19–21 and 34.5% of those aged 22–25 were classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). This is concerning, especially in light of the national trend, where the proportion of care leavers reported as NEET rose from 38% in 2022/23 to 46% in 2023/24.
35. In terms of positive engagement, 44.6% of care leavers aged 19–21 were in employment or training (32.4% full-time, 12.2% part-time), and 24.3% were in education. Among those aged 22–25, 55.2% were in employment or training (25.9% full-time, 29.3% part-time), and 10.3% were in education.

Recommendation

36. It is recommended that the 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

Background papers

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

Sharon Raine Head of Performance and Transformation: Extension 6091

Council Plan	This report contributes to the Council Plan by involving Members in the scrutiny of performance relating to the delivery of key outcomes with regards to Children's Social Care.
Addressing inequalities	This involves members in the scrutiny of the level to which Childrens Social Care contributes to ensuring that opportunities are accessible to everyone, with a focus on ensuring a good job, home and/or social connections for all.
Tackling Climate Change	This report does not identify any issued relating to climate change.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report allows for the scrutiny of performance which is integral to optimising outcomes and ensuring efficient use of resources.
Health and Wellbeing	This report supports performance improvement relating to improving the health and wellbeing of residents.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report supports the Councils Crime and Disorder responsibilities.
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.
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.

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DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Children's Social Care Performance Report

Page 93

June 2025 Q1 2025/26

Scrutiny

Scrutiny

Quarter 1 2025-26 Performance Summary

Referrals: In Q1 2025/26, 179 referrals were initiated, involving 311 children. This represents an increase from 123 referrals in Q1 2024/25, but a decrease compared to 226 referrals in Q1 2023/24. Of these, 82.3% progressed directly to a Child and Family (C&F) assessment, while 17.7% triggered a strategy discussion within 48 hours. Additionally, 56 separate referrals were received requesting single reports to support Special Educational Needs (SEN) assessments.

In Q1 2025/26, 88.7% of the 311 children had their referral completed within one working day, just below the target of 90%. This marks an improvement from Q1 2024/25, when 81.0% of referrals met the one-day timescale. Additionally, only 0.3% of referrals took more than three working days to complete, delivering performance notably better than our target of 5%.

Re-Referrals: In Q1 2025/26, 48 of the 311 (15.4%) children referred came from families with a previous referral within the past 12 months. This is a positive outcome, remaining below the target threshold of 18%.

Building Stronger Families: At the end of Q1 2025/26, the Building Stronger Families team was supporting 233 families, comprising 462 children. An additional 61 families, with 132 children, were receiving support from external agencies.

During this period, 368 Early Help Assessments (EHA) were initiated—an increase of 21.5% compared to the 303 initiated in Q1 2024/25. Of these, 13.3% were led by external agencies, a proportion that remains broadly consistent with the previous year (13.5%).

Missing: The total number of missing episodes in Q1 2025/26 was 90, involving 35 individual children and young people (CYP), an increase from Q1 2024/25, which saw 50 episodes involving 31 individuals. This rise is primarily attributed to an increase in reported missing episodes among children in care (CiC). Despite the quarterly increase, the current figure remains significantly lower than the 117 episodes recorded in Q1 2023/24.

In Q1 all Return Home Interviews (RHI) (excluding children from other authorities) were offered for each missing episode.

85.7% of the young people reported missing had 3 or less episodes during Q1 2025/26 and 8.6% had between 4 and 9 episodes, with 5.7% having more than 10 episodes.

Children & Families Assessments: 295 children had a C&F assessment completed in Q1 2025/26. This is an increase on the 259 assessments completed in Q1 2024/25, but a decrease on the 418 completed in Q1 2023/24.

89.8% of C&F assessments were completed with the 45-day timescale. This represents a positive trend compared to previous years, indicating improved timeliness and efficiency.

Section 47 Enquiries: 95 section 47 enquiries were started in Q1 2025/26, involving 183 individual children, 15 of which were already on an open Child Protection (CP) plan.

183 children had a section 47 started during Q1 2025/26 and 182 children their enquiry completed, with 35.3% progressing to an ICPC, 62.4% for the continuation of the C&F assessment and 2.4% saw legal discussions started.

Child Protection Conference timeliness: 66.7% of children who had an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) became subject to a Child Protection plan (CP). Although no ICPC led to a child's case closing, 33.3% did not have a CP plan outcome and the conference was satisfied that the family could be safely supported on a CiN plan.

In Q1 2025/26, 59.7% of children (excluding those transferred in-conference) had their Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) held within the required timescale. This remains below the target of 95%, despite efforts throughout the year to improve performance.

The main cause of delays continues to be late notification from Social Work Teams that a Child Protection Conference is required. This notification must occur within 10 working days of the enquiry to allow partner agencies at least 5 working days to prepare reports and arrange attendance. Work is ongoing to address this issue, with a focus on improving communication and timeliness of requests to ensure better compliance with statutory timescales.

Child Protection Plans: At the end of June 2025, 122 children had an open Child Protection (CP) plan — an increase from 115 in June 2024.

In Q1 2025/26, 38 CP plans were initiated, compared to 30 in Q1 2024/25 and 27 plans were ceased, a decrease from 49 in Q1 2024/25.

Of the children whose CP plans ceased in Q1 2025/26: 51.9% transitioned to a Child in Need (CiN) plan following improvements and reduced risk. 29.6% entered care. 18.5% ceased for other reasons, including relocation to another local authority or closure to our service.

1 family ceased their CP plan in June after being on it for over two years. This accounted for 7.4% of all cessations in the quarter. Due to the low number of total cessations, this caused the percentage of children ceasing CP after 2 years to exceed the 5% target.

Child Protection Statutory visits: In Q1 2025/26, 736 Child Protection statutory visits were scheduled. Of these, 70.4% were completed within 10 working days, and 92.4% were completed within 15 working days. The primary reasons provided for delays were, family availability and instances where the child was not at home during the scheduled visit time.

Children in Care: As of June 2025, 269 children were in care, of whom 9.3% were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

In Q1 2025/26, 29 children from 19 families in Darlington entered care. This represents an increase from Q1 2024/25 (14 children), but a decrease compared to Q1 2023/24 (44 children). During Q1 2025/26, 6 young people entered care after being accepted by the Home Office as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

30.6% (including UASC) of the children and young people (CYP) who came into care during Q1 2025/26, were placed with an internal foster carer.

25 families ceased to be in care in Q1 2025/26. 43.3% of children returned home, 6.7% had an SGO/CAO granted, 6.7% were adopted, 30.0% turned 18yrs becoming care leavers (33.3% of which were UASC) and 13.3% due to other reasons.

Children in Care Reviews: 66.7% of initial CiC reviews and 78.0% of subsequent reviews were completed within the required timescales. Although both figures fall below the target threshold, the small number of reviews conducted means that any delays have a disproportionately large impact on the overall percentages.

Children in Care Statutory visits: In Q1 2025/26, 81.6% of the 670 statutory visits for Children in Care (CiC) were completed within the required timescale. This represents a slight decline compared to Q1 2024/25, when 84.4% of visits were completed on time. While performance has improved compared to last quarter, it remains below the target of 90%.

Children in Care Placements: In Q1 2025/26, there has been a reduction in the proportion of children in care placed with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers compared to Q1 2024/25. This has been accompanied by an increase in placements with in-house foster carers. Additionally, placements with parents have decreased, while placements with connected carers have risen.

As of June 2025, 16.0% of Children in Care (CiC) have experienced three or more placement changes within the previous 12 months. This exceeds the target of 10%, indicating a need for continued focus on placement stability. However, as the overall number of CiC decreases, even a single placement change can cause a noticeable percentage shift. This means that while the headline figure appears volatile, the underlying trend has remained relatively stable.

51.1% 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 significantly below target (68%) and the national and regional average for 2023/24 (both 68%).

As of June 2025, 12.7% of Children in Care (not in an adoption or parent placement) have been placed 20 or more miles from home, exceeding the target of 10%. Although the number of children placed at a distance has only increased slightly over the past 12 months, the overall size of the cohort has decreased. As a result, even small changes in placement numbers can lead to proportionally larger percentage shifts.

Health and Dental Reviews: 20.0% of children requiring a review health assessment or dental check-up by June 2025 have had one completed, which are meeting the current trajectory for this year.

Currently 8 young people are refusing to engage in medical checks. The children and young people are continually reminded of the benefits of having a check-up and encouraged to take part.

Initial Health Assessments: During Q1 2025/26, 59.3% of children who entered care for more than 20 days had their Initial Health Assessment (IHA) forms sent to Health within the required 5-day timescale. Of these, 46.2% were seen by a health professional within 20 days. The decline in timely assessments is primarily due to cancelled appointments and limited availability of medical professionals.

Care Leavers: As of the end of June 2025, 98.7% of care leavers aged 19–21 and 96.6% of those aged 22–25 were living in suitable accommodation. However, 31.1% of care leavers aged 19–21 and 34.5% of those aged 22–25 were identified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). This is particularly concerning given the national trend, where the proportion of care leavers reported as NEET increased from 38% in 2022/23 to 46% in 2023/24. In terms of positive engagement:

Among care leavers aged 19–21, x% were in employment or training (32.4% full-time, 12.2% part-time), and 24.3% were in education.

For those aged 22–25, 55.2% were in employment or training (25.9% full-time, 29.3% part-time), and 10.3% were in education.

REFERRALS

DEFINITION

Monthly number of referrals to Children's Social Care and number of referrals started year to date. A contact will be progressed to a referral if it is considered that an assessment and/or service may be required. This does not include contacts referred for Special Education Needs (SEN) assessments or court report requests (S37/S7).

CSC 013

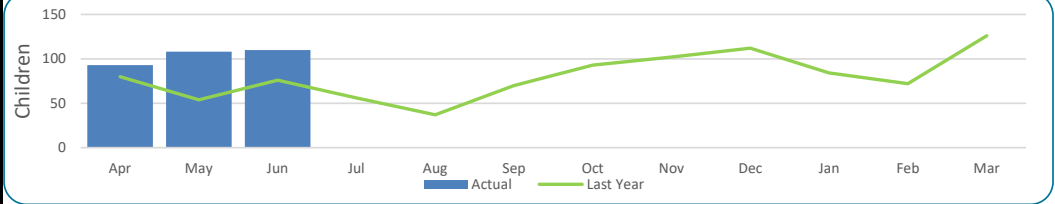
CSC 012

CSC 011

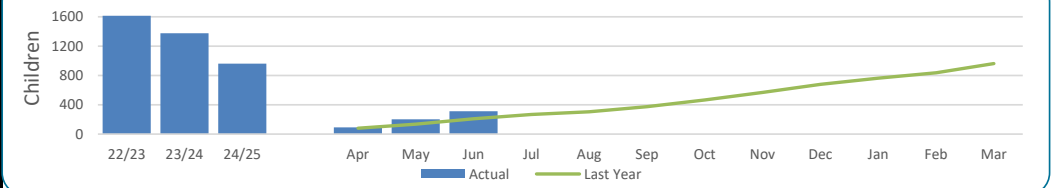
CSC 014

CSC 013: Children relating to the referrals started

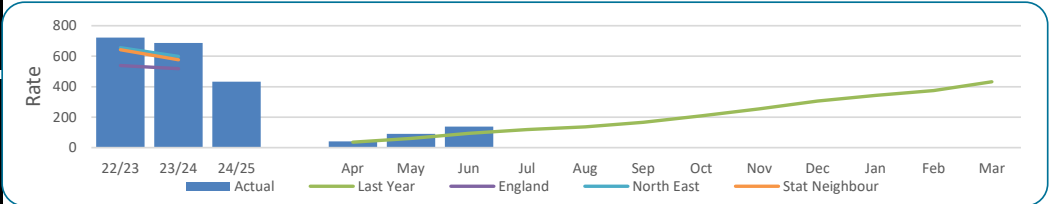
		Monthly number of grouped referrals started	Children relating to the referrals started	Number of children's referrals (year to date)	Contacts to referral conversation (year to date)	YTD Rate of referrals per 10,000 population.
In Month Performance					%	
	Apr-25	57	93	93	8.5	41.5
	May-25	61	108	201	9.0	89.7
	Jun-25	61	110	311	9.4	138.8
	Jul-25					
	Aug-25					
	Sep-25					
	Oct-25					
	Nov-25					
	Dec-25					
	Jan-26					
	Feb-26					
	Mar-26					
Annual Trend	2022/23	902	1,613	1,613	15	721.6
	2023/24	768	1,374	1,374	12.1	686.7
	2024/25	560	962	962	8.1	432.3
	2025/26	179	311	311	9.4	138.8



CSC 012: Number of children's referrals (year to date)



CSC 014: YTD Rate of referrals per 10,000 population.



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.

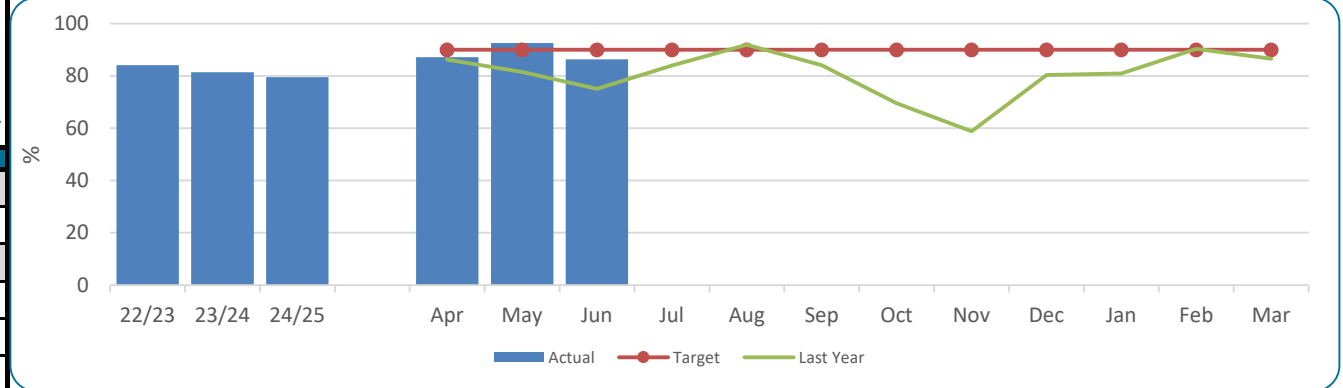
CSC 022

CSC 026

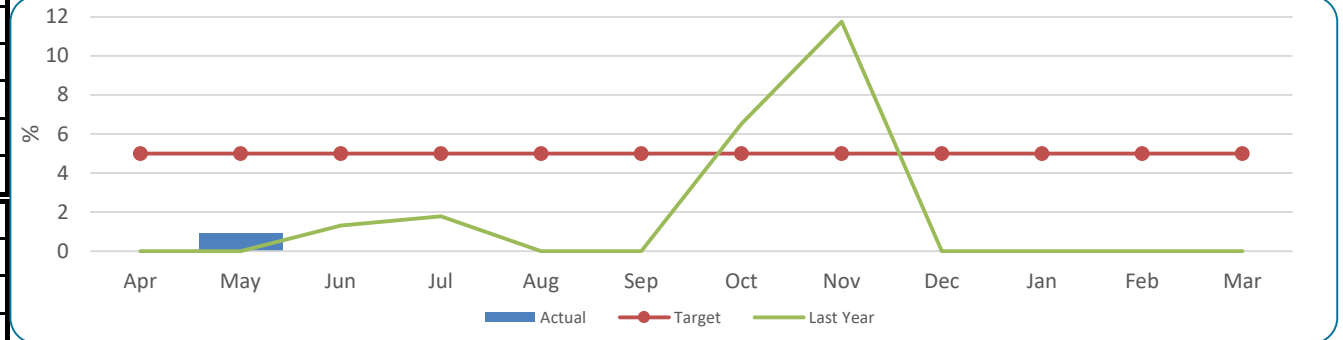
Monthly % of referrals completed within 1 working day.

Monthly % of referrals completed in over 3 working days.

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



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



In Month Performance	Target	90%	5%
	Apr-25	87.1	
	May-25	92.6	0.9
	Jun-25	86.4	
	Jul-25		
	Aug-25		
	Sep-25		
	Oct-25		
	Nov-25		
	Dec-25		
	Jan-26		
	Feb-26		
	Mar-26		
Annual Trend	2022/23	84.1	0.8
	2023/24	81.4	1.7
	2024/25	79.5	2.1
	2025/26	88.7	0.3

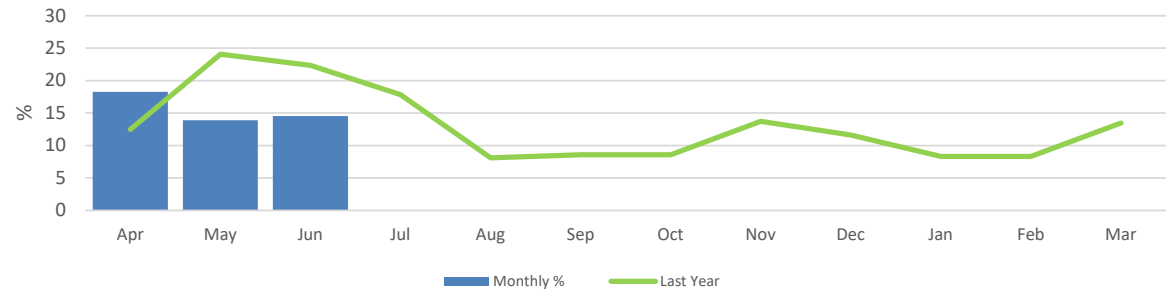
REFERRALS: RE-REFERRALS

DEFINITION

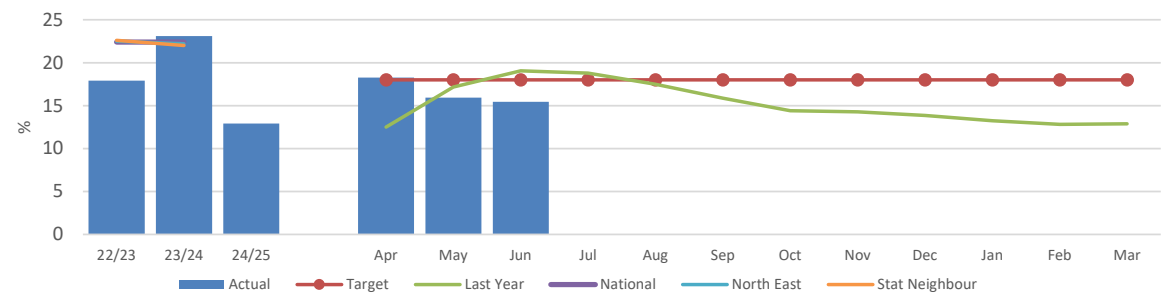
Percentage of re-referrals that are received within 12 months of a previous referral (based on referral start dates and in line with DfE definition).
A re-referral to Children's Social Care could be an indication that the previous referral was inappropriately closed down without addressing the initial concerns or issues.

		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)
In Month Performance	Target		18%	
	Apr-25	17	18.3	18.3
	May-25	15	15.9	13.9
	Jun-25	16	15.4	14.5
	Jul-25			
	Aug-25			
	Sep-25			
	Oct-25			
	Nov-25			
	Dec-25			
	Jan-26			
	Feb-26			
	Mar-26			
Annual Trend	2022/23	286	17.9	
	2023/24	333	23.1	
	2024/25	124	12.9	
	2025/26	48	15.4	

% of referrals that are re-referrals (monthly)



CSC 032: % re-referrals that are repeat within 12 months (cumulative)

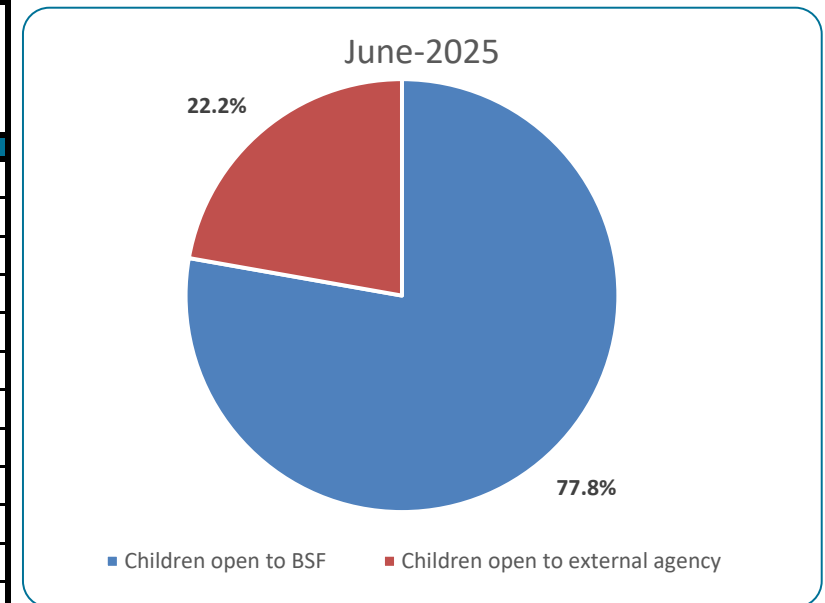


BUILDING STRONGER FAMILIES: OPEN EPISODES

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.

		Open to BSF at month end		Open to an external agency at month end		% of children open to BSF
		Children	Families	Children	Families	
In Month Performance	Apr-25	424	216	152	74	73.6%
	May-25	455	231	140	65	76.5%
	Jun-25	462	233	132	61	77.8%
	Jul-25					
	Aug-25					
	Sep-25					
	Oct-25					
	Nov-25					
	Dec-25					
	Jan-26					
	Feb-26					
	Mar-26					
Annual Trend	2022/23	490	218	125	68	79.7%
	2023/24	423	197	125	64	77.2%
	2024/25	443	219	145	70	75.3%
	2025/26	462	233	132	61	77.8%



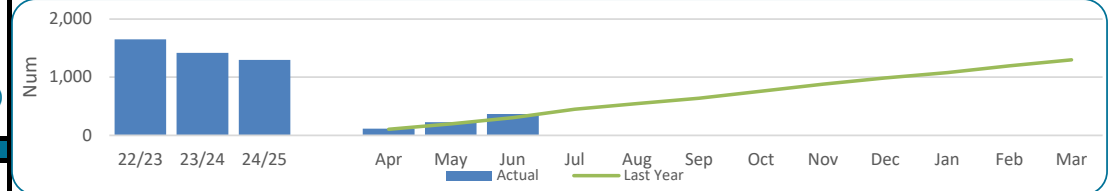
EARLY HELP ASSESSMENTS: STARTED

DEFINITION

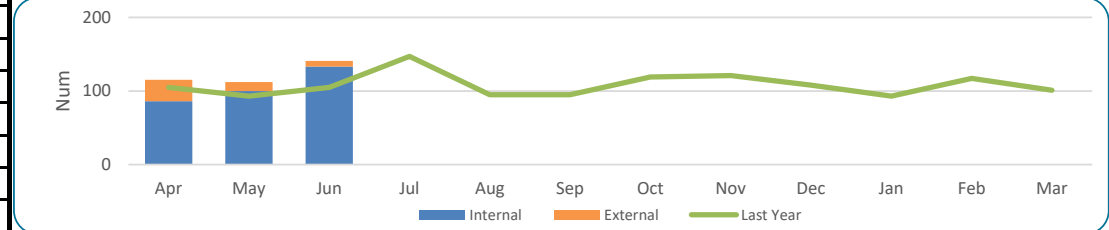
The number of individual Early Help Assessments (EHA) started in month and year to date, including those initiated by external agencies. The start date of the EHA is taken from the form created date in Liquid Logic and the start date of the external EHA is taken from the contact date when the agency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

		CSC 002		CSC 001	
		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)	
In Month Performance	Target			TBC	
	Apr-25	115	29	25.2%	115
	May-25	112	12	10.7%	227
	Jun-25	141	8	5.7%	368
	Jul-25				
	Aug-25				
	Sep-25				
	Oct-25				
	Nov-25				
	Dec-25				
	Jan-26				
	Feb-26				
	Mar-26				
Annual Trend	2022/23	1650	223	13.5%	1650
	2023/24	1,417	204	14.4%	1,417
	2024/25	1,299	188	14.5%	1,299
	2025/26	368	49	13.3%	368

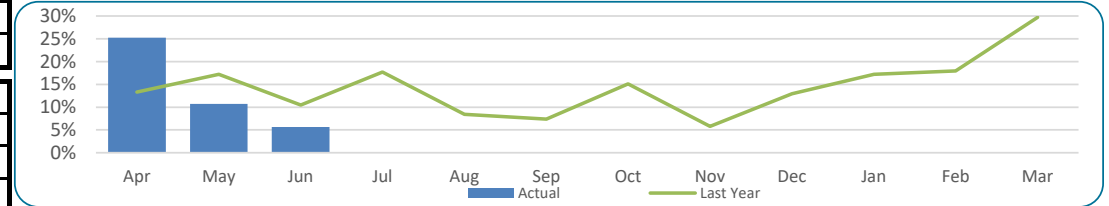
CSC 001: Number of individual EHA's started; year to date (inc. external)



CSC 002: Total number of individual EHA's started in month (inc. external)



% of the Early Help Assessments initiated by external agencies per month



MISSING: EPISODES

DEFINITION

The number of episodes of children going missing in Darlington, including Children in Care.

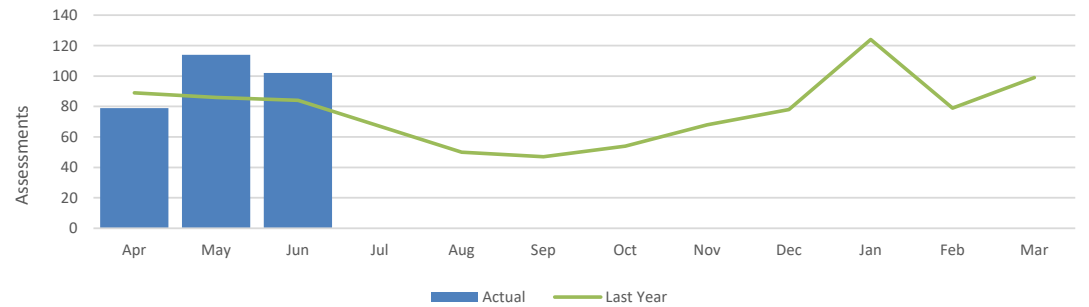
		CSC 215		CSC 246			
		Total number of missing episodes and children involved in month		Missing - Children in Care with DBC		Of which are in a placement more than 20 miles from home	
In Month Performance		Episode	Child	Episode	Child	Episode	Child
	Apr-25	31	17	16	10	5	4
	May-25	18	14	9	7	1	1
	Jun-25	41	16	17	7	8	4
	Jul-25						
	Aug-25						
	Sep-25						
	Oct-25						
	Nov-25						
	Dec-25						
	Jan-26						
	Feb-26						
	Mar-26						
Annual Trend	2022/23	691	162	383	31	2	2
	2023/24	423	122	152	27	13	6
	2024/25	272	81	154	24	25	11
	2025/26	90	35	42	15	14	7

ASSESSMENTS

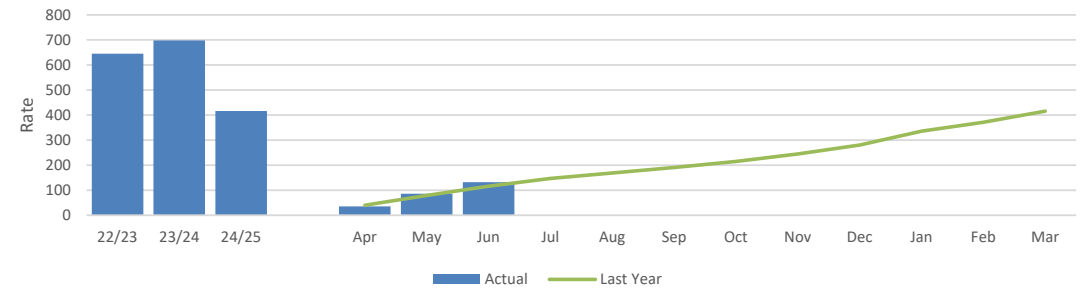
DEFINITION	Monthly and cumulative number of Children & Families (C&F) assessments completed for a child.
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		CSC 037	CSC 036	CSC 035
		Monthly number of C&F assessments completed	Number of C&F assessments completed year to date	Rate of C&F assessments completed per 10,000 of the 0-17 population.
In Month Performance	Apr-25	79	79	35.3
	May-25	114	193	86.1
	Jun-25	102	295	131.6
	Jul-25			
	Aug-25			
	Sep-25			
	Oct-25			
	Nov-25			
	Dec-25			
	Jan-26			
	Feb-26			
	Mar-26			
Annual Trend	2022/23	1,461	1,461	645.5
	2023/24	1,554	1,554	698.3
	2024/25	925	925	415.7
	2025/26	295	295	131.6

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

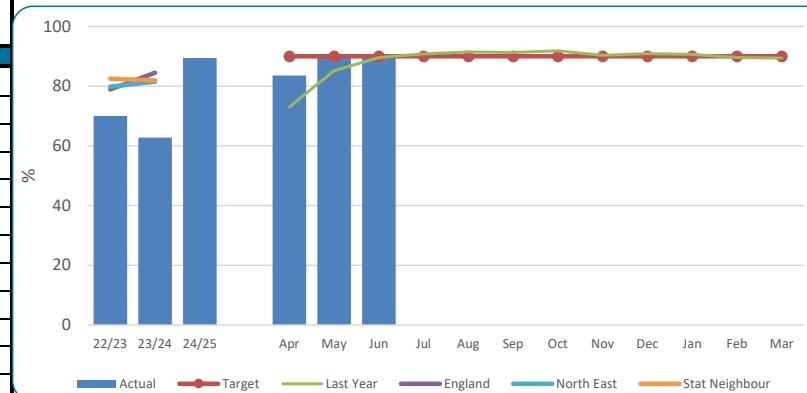
DEFINITION

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.

		CSC 038	CSC 040	CSC 060	CSC 080	CSC 100
		% C&F Assessments completed within 45 working days (year to date)	Monthly % completed within 45 working days	Monthly % completed within 25 working days	Monthly % completed within 15 working days	Monthly % completed within 10 working days
In Month Performance	Target	90%	90%			
	Apr-25	83.5	83.5	17.7	13.9	10.1
	May-25	90.2	94.7	14.0	9.7	5.3
	Jun-25	89.8	89.2	31.4	25.5	15.7
	Jul-25					
	Aug-25					
	Sep-25					
	Oct-25					
	Nov-25					
	Dec-25					
	Jan-26					
	Feb-26					
	Mar-26					
Annual Trend	2022/23	70.0		30.3	18.6	13.8
	2023/24	62.7		11.9	9.5	1.2
	2024/25	89.4		13.1	5.1	4.0
	2025/26	89.8	89.2	31.4	25.5	15.7

% C&F Assessments completed within 45 working days (year to date)



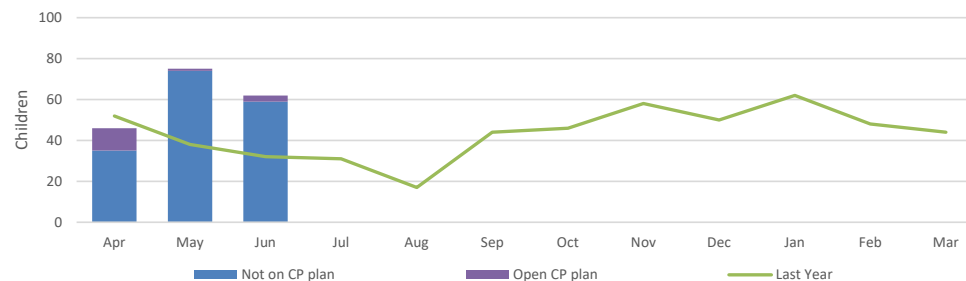
SECTION 47 ENQUIRES: STARTED

DEFINITION

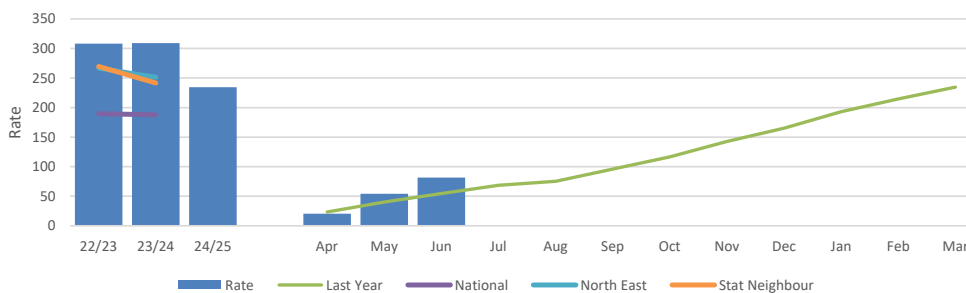
Number of children who have had a section 47 enquiries started monthly and year to date and the actual number of enquires started.

		CSC 166		CSC 164	
		Section 47 enquiries 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 enquiries started per 10,000 of the 0-17 population (Cumulative)
In Month Performance	Apr-25	23	46	11	20.5
	May-25	39	75	1	54.0
	Jun-25	33	62	3	81.7
	Jul-25				
	Aug-25				
	Sep-25				
	Oct-25				
	Nov-25				
	Dec-25				
	Jan-26				
	Feb-26				
	Mar-26				
Annual Trend	2022/23	351	681	30	308.3
	2023/24	372	693	22	308.8
	2024/25	277	522	33	234.6
	2025/26	95	183	15	81.7

Number of children; showing the total including and excluding those already on CPP



Rate of section 47 enquiries started per 10,000 of the 0-17 population (inc. children already on CPP)



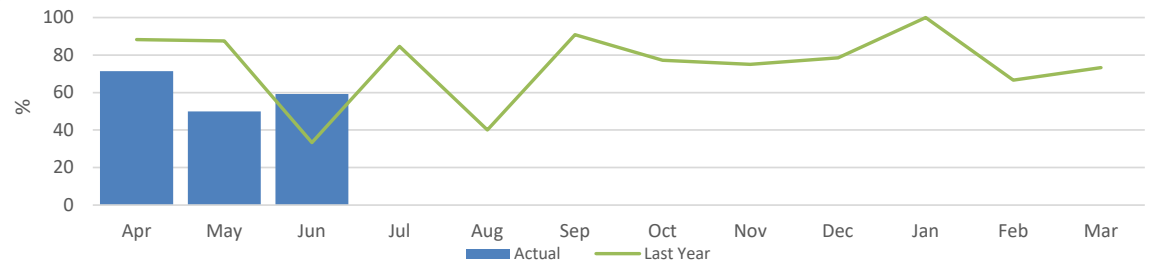
INITIAL CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES: TIMELINESS

DEFINITION

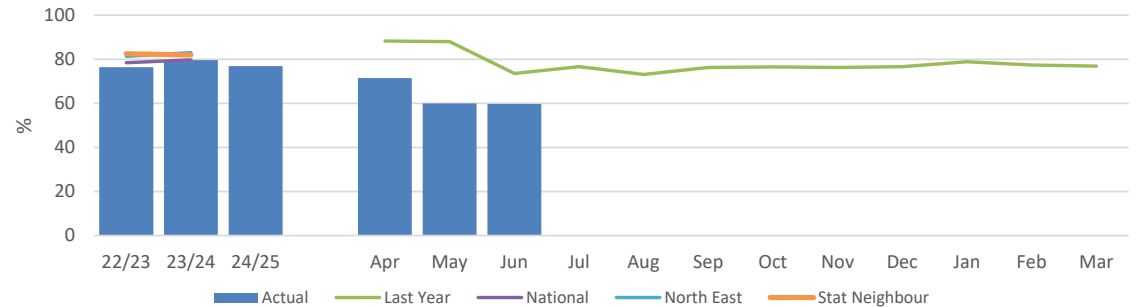
Of those Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) held within the period (excluding transfer ins), the percentage recorded in the Safeguarding Unit workbook where Child Protection strategy meeting / section 47 enquiry to ICPC are within 15 days (CPP). This provides an indication of how quickly the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

		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-25	10 / 14	71.4	10 / 14	71.4
	May-25	8 / 16	50.0	18 / 30	60.0
	Jun-25	16 / 27	59.3	34 / 57	59.7
	Jul-25				
	Aug-25				
	Sep-25				
	Oct-25				
	Nov-25				
	Dec-25				
	Jan-26				
	Feb-26				
	Mar-26				
Annual Trend	2022/23			119 / 156	76.4
	2023/24			171 / 215	79.5
	2024/25			120 / 156	76.9
	2025/26	34 / 57	59.7	34 / 57	59.7

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).



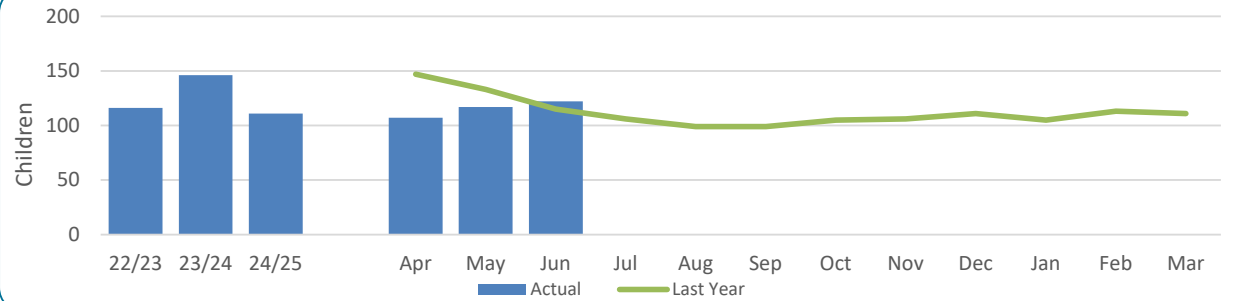
CHILD PROTECTION PLANS

DEFINITION

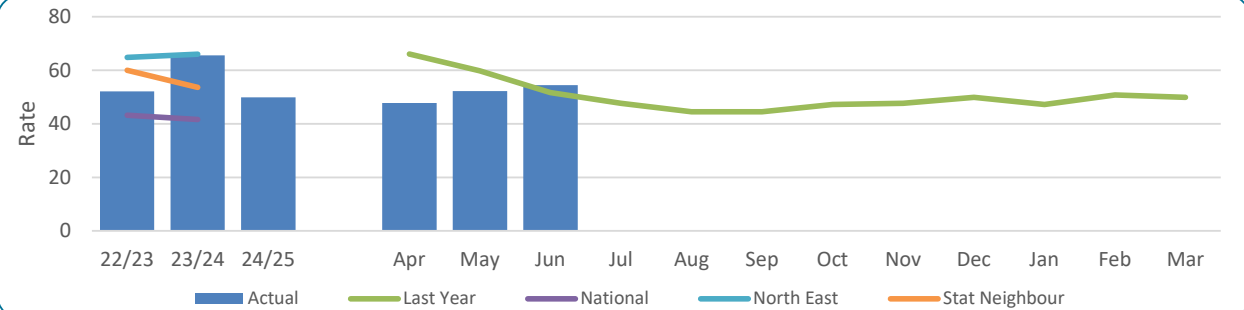
Number of children subject to a Child Protection plan at the end of the month.

		CSC 182	CSC 181
		Number of children subject to a CP plan	Rate of children subject to a CP Plan per 10,000 population
In Month Performance	Apr-25	107	47.7
	May-25	117	52.2
	Jun-25	122	54.4
	Jul-25		
	Aug-25		
	Sep-25		
	Oct-25		
	Nov-25		
	Dec-25		
	Jan-26		
	Feb-26		
	Mar-26		
Annual Trend	2022/23	116	52.1
	2023/24	146	65.6
	2024/25	111	49.9
	2025/26	122	54.4

CSC 182: Number of children subject to a CP plan



CSC 181: Rate of children subject to a CP Plan per 10,000 population



CHILD PROTECTION PLANS: REVIEWS

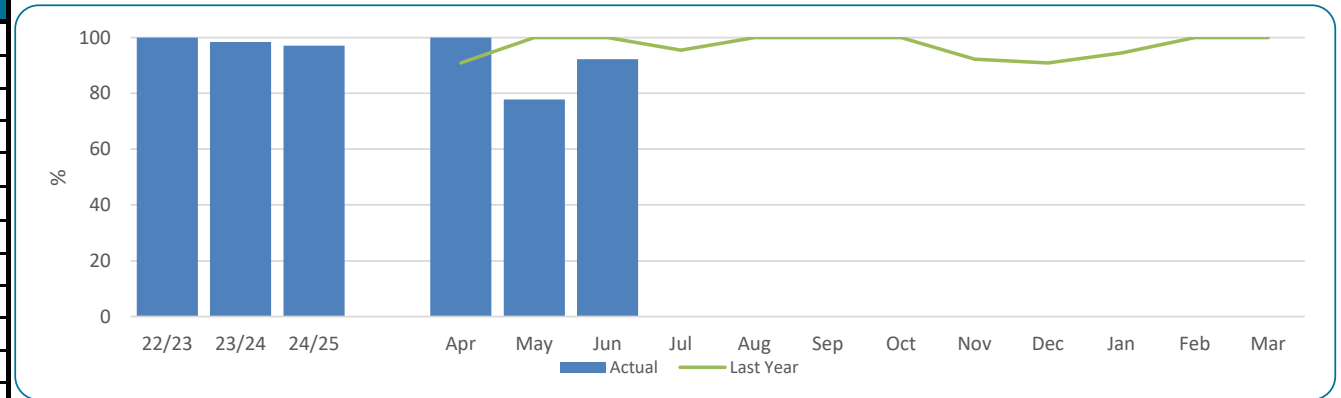
DEFINITION

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.

CSC 191a

In Month Performance	Target	CP plan review meetings held in timescale during the month	% of CP plans reviewed within the timescales.
	Apr-25	14 / 14	100.0
	May-25	7 / 9	77.8
	Jun-25	12 / 13	92.3
	Jul-25		
	Aug-25		
	Sep-25		
	Oct-25		
	Nov-25		
	Dec-25		
	Jan-26		
	Feb-26		
	Mar-26		
Annual Trend	2022/23	155 / 155	100.0
	2023/24	193 / 196	98.5
	2024/25	168 / 173	97.1
	2025/26	33 / 36	91.7

CSC 191a: % of CP plans reviewed within the timescales.



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.

CSC 186

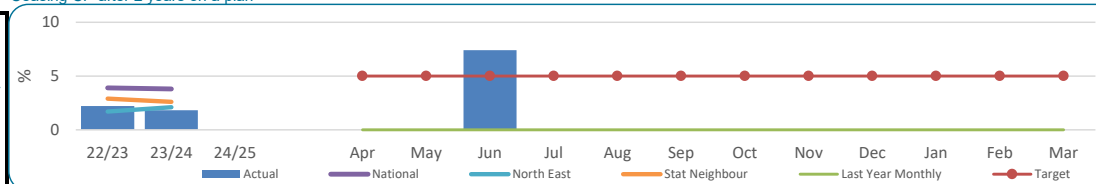
CSC 188

% children ceasing a CP plan who had been subject to CP for 2 or more years (Cumulative)

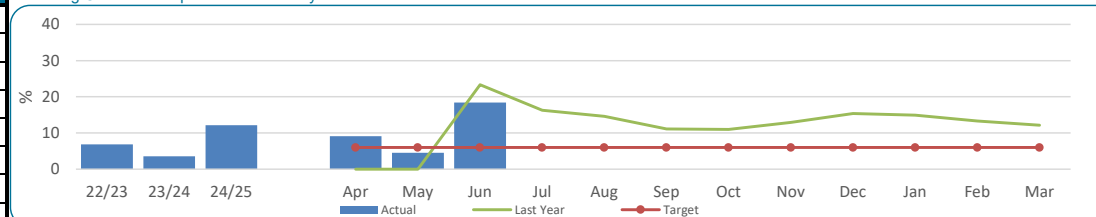
% of children becoming subject to a CP plan for a 2nd or subsequent time **within 2 years of a previous plan ending** (Cumulative)

% of children becoming subject to a CP plan for a 2nd or subsequent time **ever** (Cumulative)

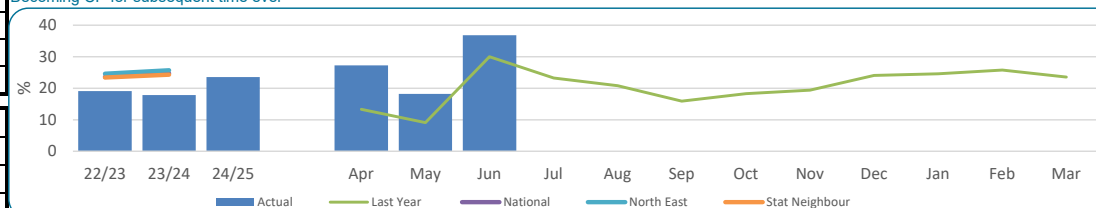
Ceasing CP after 2 years on a plan



Becoming CP for subsequent time within 2 years



Becoming CP for subsequent time ever



In Month Performance

Target

Apr-25

0 / 15

0.0

1 / 11

9.1

3 / 11

27.3

May-25

0 / 16

0.0

1 / 22

4.6

4 / 22

18.2

Jun-25

2 / 27

7.4

7 / 38

18.4

14 / 38

36.8

Jul-25

Aug-25

Sep-25

Oct-25

Nov-25

Dec-25

Jan-26

Feb-26

Mar-26

Annual Trend

2022/23

3 / 135

2.2

9 / 131

6.9

25 / 131

19.1

2023/24

3 / 166

1.8

7 / 196

3.6

35 / 196

17.9

2024/25

0 / 174

0.0

17 / 140

12.1

33 / 140

23.6

2025/26

2 / 27

7.4

7 / 38

18.4

14 / 38

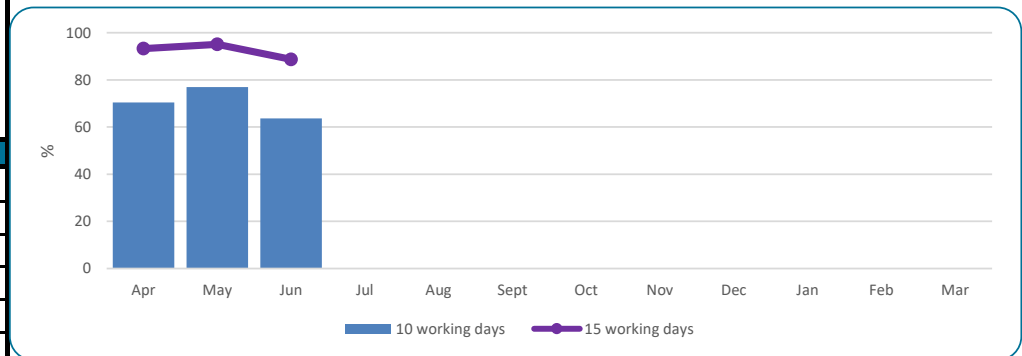
36.8

CHILD PROTECTION: STATUTORY VISITS

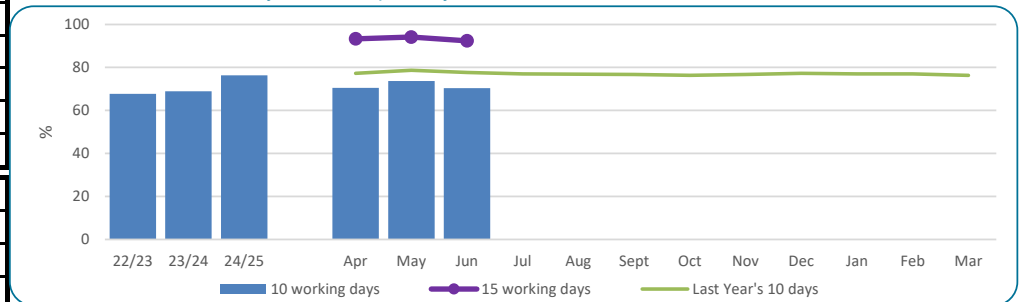
DEFINITION	Percentage of children subject to a Child Protection (CP) plan who had all statutory visits carried out within timescales and percentage of Child Protection statutory visits completed within timescale monthly and year to date.
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		CSC 252a	CSC 252b	CSC 252b	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)
In Month Performance	Target	90	90	90	90
	Apr-25	70.5	93.3	70.5	93.3
	May-25	77.0	95.1	73.6	94.2
	Jun-25	63.6	88.7	70.4	92.4
	Jul-25				
	Aug-25				
	Sep-25				
	Oct-25				
	Nov-25				
	Dec-25				
	Jan-26				
	Feb-26				
	Mar-26				
Annual Trend	2022/23			67.8	90.0
	2023/24			69.0	90.4
	2024/25			76.3	94.5
	2025/26	63.6	88.7	70.4	92.4

% Child Protection statutory visits completed within the month



% Child Protection statutory visits completed year to date



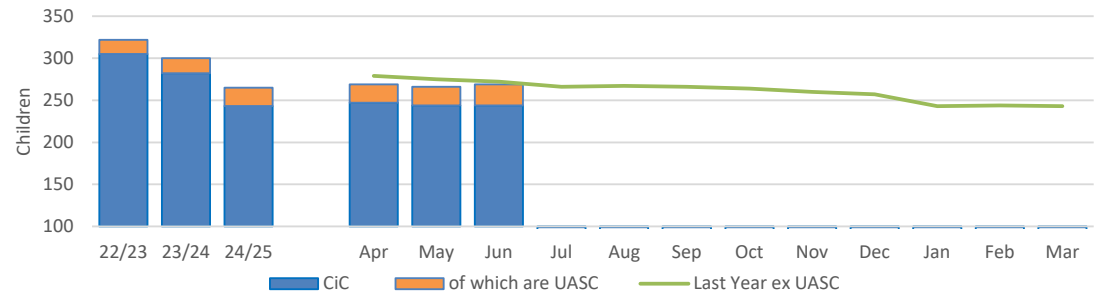
CHILDREN IN CARE

DEFINITION

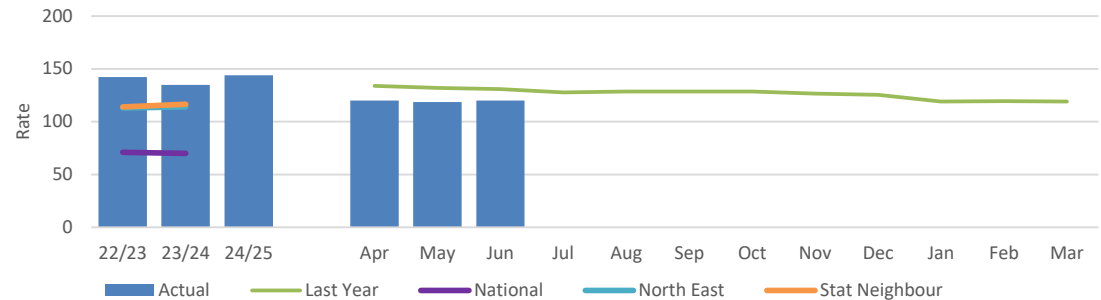
Number of Children in Care (CiC) at the end of each month and of which are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child (UASC).

		CSC 201	CSC 207	CSC 200
		Total number of Children in Care	Of which are identified as a UASC	Rate of CiC per 10,000 population
In Month Performance	Target			95
	Apr-25	269	22	120.0
	May-25	266	22	118.7
	Jun-25	269	25	120.0
	Jul-25			
	Aug-25			
	Sep-25			
	Oct-25			
	Nov-25			
	Dec-25			
	Jan-26			
	Feb-26			
	Mar-26			
Annual Trend	2022/23	322	17	142.3
	2023/24	300	18	134.8
	2024/25	265	22	119.1
	2025/26	269	25	120.0

CSC 201: Total number of Children in Care



CSC 200: Rate of CiC per 10,000 population



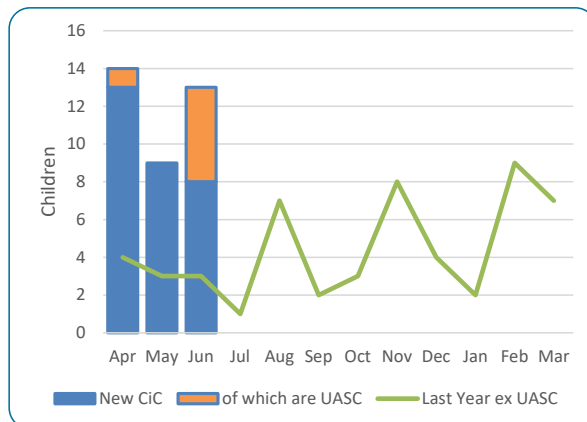
CHILDREN IN CARE: COMING INTO CARE

DEFINITION

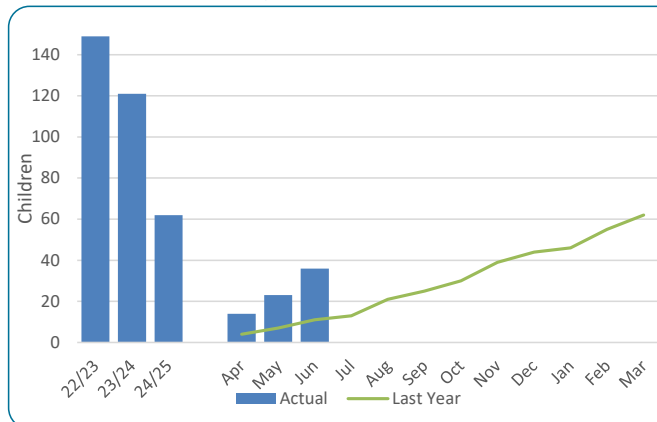
Number of children coming into the care of the local authority during the month and year to date and where they are an unaccompanied asylum seeking child (UASC). This is further broken down to show their first placement type.

		CSC 209	CSC 208b		First placement type in care									
		Monthly number of children coming into care	Cumulative number of children coming into care	of which are UASC	Placed with parent (P1)	Connected Carer (U1&U3)	Foster care (U5&U6) - Internal	Foster care (U5&U6) - External	NHS/ Medical trust (R2)	Family centre/ Mother & Baby unit (R3)	Homes and Hostels (K2)	Res accom. / Independent living (H5,P2, K3)	Other placement (Z1, Z12, Z14) inc unreg	Remand (R5, K1)
In Month Performance	Apr-25	14	14	1			10	1			1		1	1
	May-25	9	23			1		4	2					2
	Jun-25	13	36	5		3	1		2		1		6	
	Jul-25													
	Aug-25													
	Sep-25													
	Oct-25													
	Nov-25													
	Dec-25													
	Jan-26													
	Feb-26													
	Mar-26													
Annual Trend	2022/23	149	149	18	22	13	42	11	5	2	5	13	36	
	2023/24	121	121	11	14	9	34	2	7	1	2	8	44	
	2024/25	62	62	9	8	2	17	5	3	1	4	5	14	3
	2025/26	36	36	6	0	4	11	5	4	0	2	0	7	3

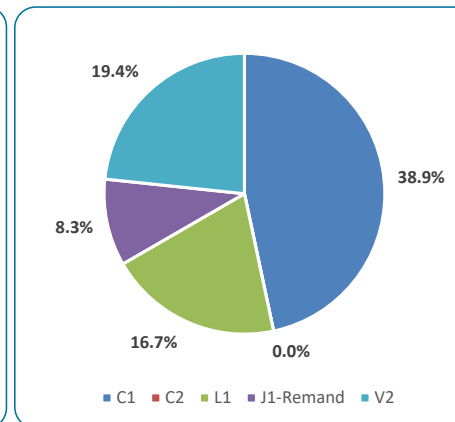
Monthly number of children coming into care



Total number of children coming into care within the year



Legal status coming into care-Exc UASC



CHILDREN IN CARE: CEASING CARE**DEFINITION**

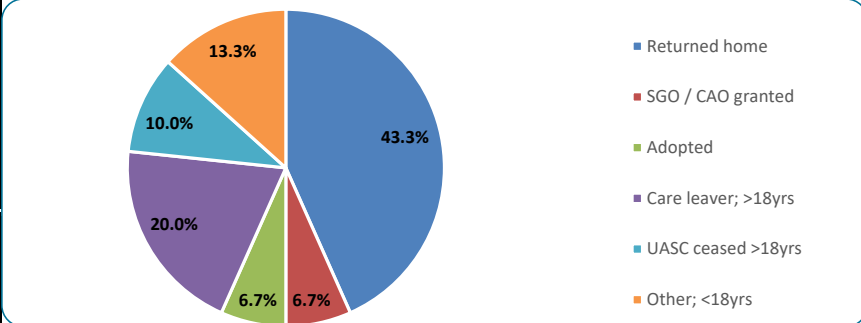
Number of children ceasing to be a Child in Care during each month and year to date and their destination when they ceased being in care. This could be due to returning home to parent or other person with no PR (planned and unplanned), having a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) / Child Arrangement Order (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.

		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
In Month Performance	Apr-25	10	10	7		1	1	1	
	May-25	11	21	6	1	1	1		2
	Jun-25	9	30		1		4	2	2
	Jul-25								
	Aug-25								
	Sep-25								
	Oct-25								
	Nov-25								
	Dec-25								
	Jan-26								
	Feb-26								
	Mar-26								
Annual Trend	2022/23	100	100	21	39	17	21		2
	2023/24	143	143	61	43	12	12	10	5
	2024/25	95	95	33	17	14	25	4	2
	2025/26	30	30	13	2	2	6	3	4

CSC 212: Monthly number of children ceasing care



Cumulative reason for children ceasing care



CHILDREN IN CARE: REVIEWS**DEFINITION**

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..Percentage of the current Children in Care (CiC) who have had their initial review, and all of their subsequent reviews completed within the required timescales.

CSC 219

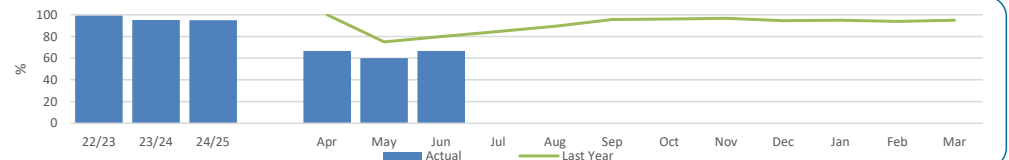
CSC 218

CSC 220

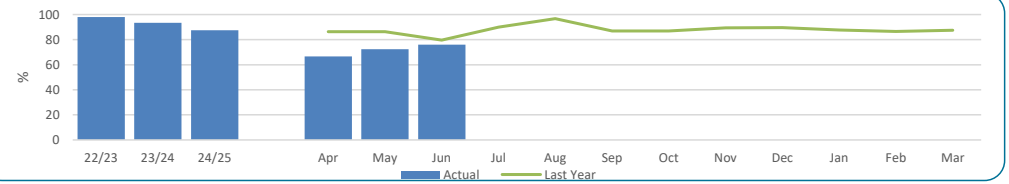
CSC 219: % CiC initial reviews completed within timescales (as at month end)

% CiC initial reviews completed within timescales (as at month end)	% CiC reviews had been completed within required timescales (as at month end)	% CiC subsequent reviews completed within timescales
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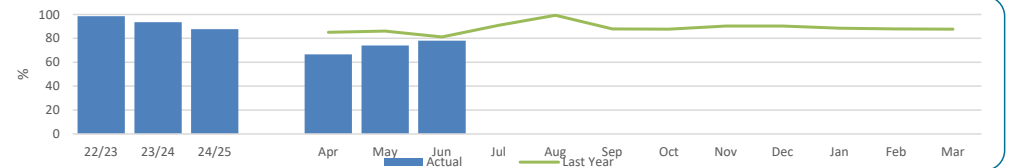
Apr-25	2 / 3	66.7	42 / 63	66.7	40 / 60	66.7
May-25	6 / 10	60.0	86 / 119	72.3	80 / 108	74.1
Jun-25	12 / 18	66.7	120 / 158	76.0	110 / 141	78.0
Jul-25						
Aug-25						
Sep-25						
Oct-25						
Nov-25						
Dec-25						
Jan-26						
Feb-26						
Mar-26						



CSC 218: % CiC reviews had been completed within required timescales (as at month end)



CSC 220: % CiC subsequent reviews completed within timescales



2022/23	104 / 105	99.1	297 / 303	98.0	278 / 282	98.6
2023/24	59 / 62	95.2	271 / 290	93.5	260 / 278	93.5
2024/25	38 / 40	95.0	224 / 256	87.5	214 / 244	87.7
2025/26	12 / 18	66.7	120 / 158	76.0	110 / 141	78.0

CHILDREN IN CARE: STATUTORY VISITS

DEFINITION

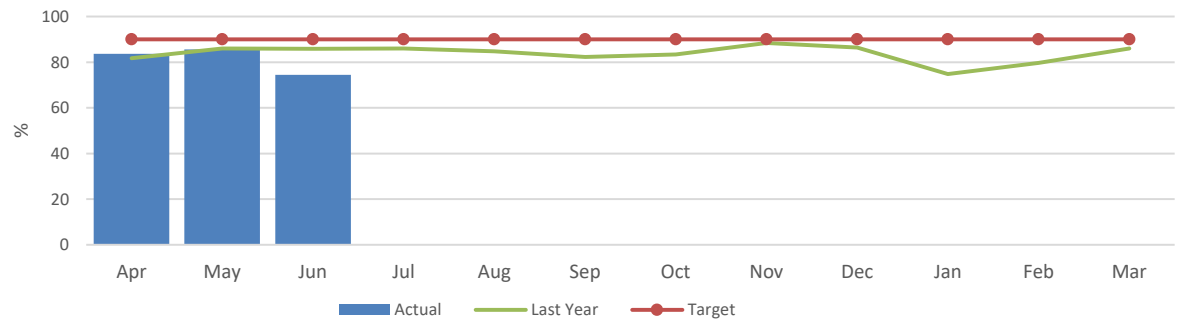
Percentage of Children in Care (CiC) who had all statutory visits completed within required timescales each month and year to date.

CSC 260a

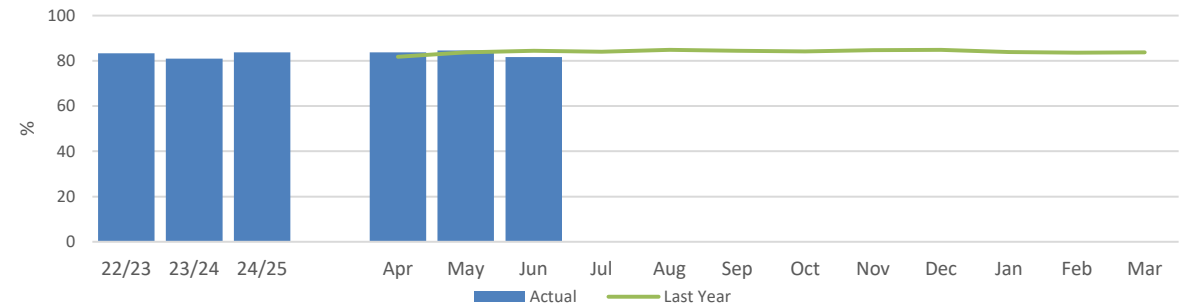
CSC 260b

In Month Performance	Target	% CiC visits completed in timescale within the month	% CiC visits completed in timescale year to date
	90	90	90
	Apr-25	83.7	83.7
	May-25	85.7	84.6
	Jun-25	74.5	81.6
	Jul-25		
	Aug-25		
	Sep-25		
	Oct-25		
	Nov-25		
	Dec-25		
	Jan-26		
	Feb-26		
	Mar-26		
Annual Trend	2022/23		83.4
	2023/24		81.0
	2024/25		83.7
	2025/26	74.5	81.6

CSC 260a: % CiC visits completed in timescale within the month



CSC 260b: % CiC visits completed in timescale year to date



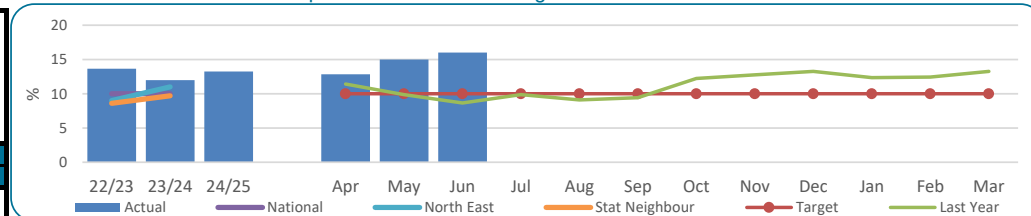
CHILDREN IN CARE: PLACEMENTS

DEFINITION

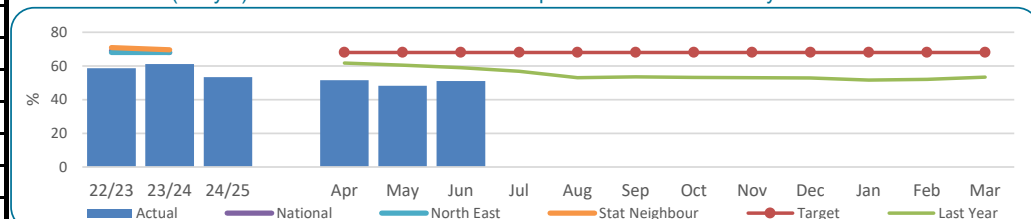
Of those Children in Care (CiC) at the point in time (excluding series of short-term placements), the percentage that had 3 or more separate placements in the previous 12 months; who (under the age of 16 years) had been in their current placement for 2 or more years. and who were placed more than 20 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.

		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	
In Month Performance	Target	10%		68%		10%	
		Children	%	Children	%	Children	%
	Apr-25	33	12.8	67	51.5	31	12.5
	May-25	39	15.0	65	48.2	29	11.8
	Jun-25	43	16.0	69	51.1	31	12.7
	Jul-25						
	Aug-25						
	Sep-25						
	Oct-25						
	Nov-25						
	Dec-25						
	Jan-26						
	Feb-26						
	Mar-26						
Annual Trend	2022/23	44	13.7	74	58.7	37	12.5
	2023/24	51	12.0	77	61.1	29	10.4
	2024/25	35	13.3	65	53.3	29	12.1
	2025/26	43	16.0	69	51.1	31	12.7

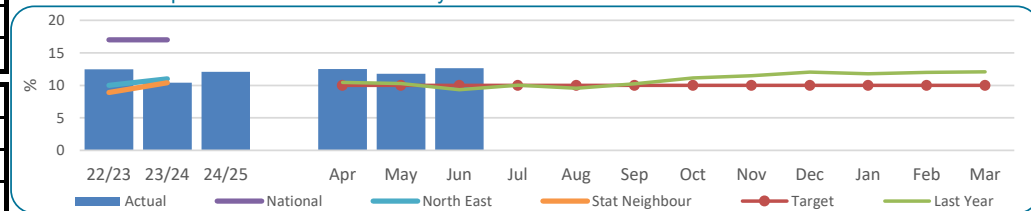
CSC 228: % CiC with 3 or more placements moves during last 12 months



CSC 229: % CiC (<16yrs) who have been in their current placement for 2 or more years



CSC 230: % CiC placed 20 miles or more away from home



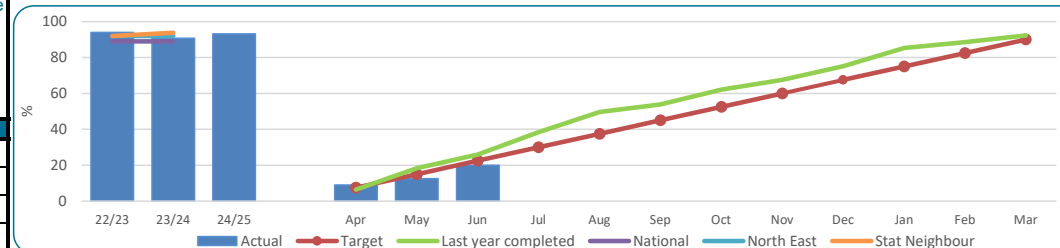
CHILDREN IN CARE: HEALTH ASSESSMENTS**DEFINITION**

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).

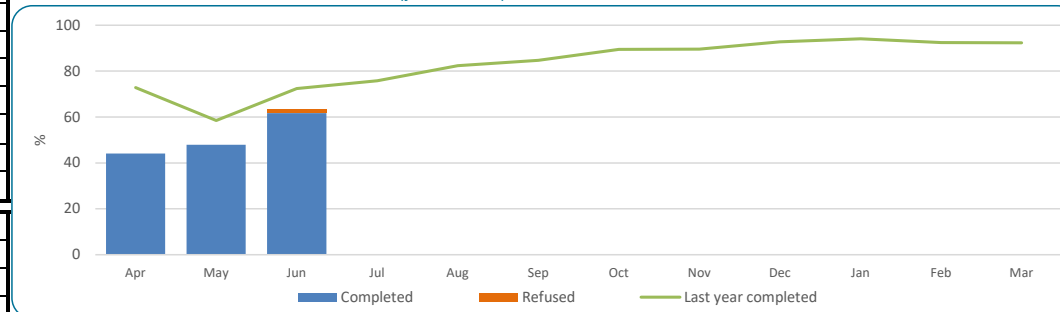
Children in Care share many of the same health risks and problems as their peers, but often to a greater degree. These indicators track the participation of our Children in Care's health as a proxy for monitoring the general health and wellbeing of the children, as well as providing a check on the effectiveness of joint working with Health to secure good health outcomes for Children in Care.

		CSC 250		CSC 250a	CSC 250b
		% of CiC who have an up to date health checks	% of CiC refusing engagement in their review health check (YTD)	% of CiC who had a review health check completed (Snapshot at month end)	% of CiC who are due and had a review health check completed (year to date)
In Month Performance	Target	90%			90%
	Apr-25	9.0		60.0	44.1
	May-25	12.5		43.8	47.9
	Jun-25	20.0	1.7	27.3	61.7
	Jul-25				
	Aug-25				
	Sep-25				
	Oct-25				
	Nov-25				
	Dec-25				
	Jan-26				
	Feb-26				
	Mar-26				
Annual Trend	2022/23	94.0	1.6		83.3
	2023/24	90.7	1.3		91.1
	2024/25	93.2	0.9		93.2
	2025/26	20.0	1.7	27.3	61.7

CSC 250: % of CiC who are up to date for a review health check



CSC 250b: % of CiC due a review health check (year to date) that have had one, and % that refused



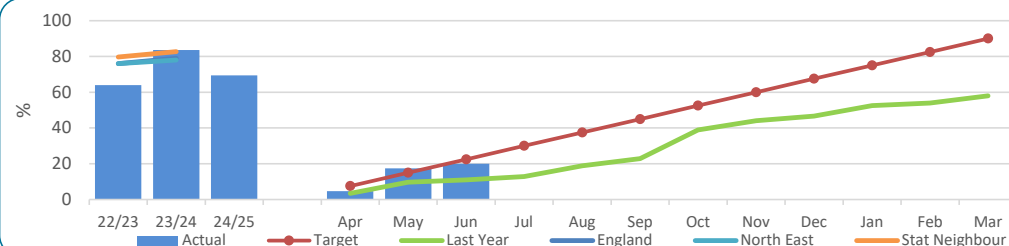
CHILDREN IN CARE: DENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

DEFINITION

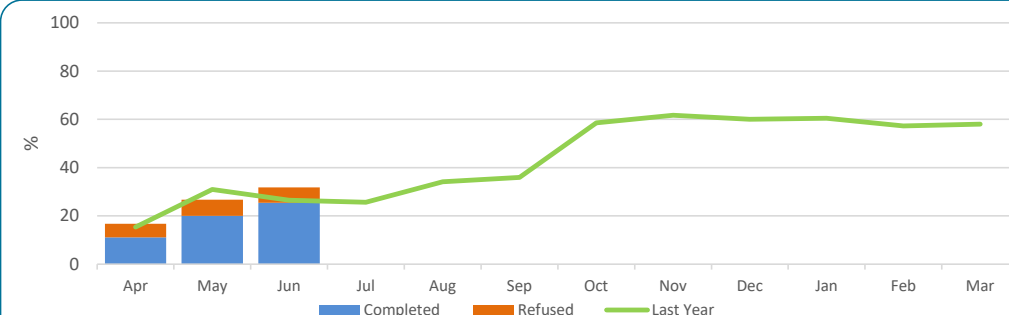
Of the Children in Care (CiC) at 31 March who had been in care continuously for at least 12 months, the percentage who had had their teeth checked by a dentist during the previous 12 months, and the percentage who had had an annual health check during the previous 12 months (excludes any who will turn 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.

		CSC 251		CSC 251c	CSC 251d
		% of CiC who have an up to date dental check	% of CiC refusing engagement in their dental check (YTD)	% of CiC who had a dental check completed (Snapshot at month end)	% of CiC who are due and had a dental check completed (year to date)
In Month Performance	Target	90%			90%
	Apr-25	4.7	5.6	40.0	11.1
	May-25	17.4	6.7	50.0	20.0
	Jun-25	20.0	6.4	38.5	25.5
	Jul-25				
	Aug-25				
	Sep-25				
	Oct-25				
	Nov-25				
	Dec-25				
	Jan-26				
	Feb-26				
	Mar-26				
Annual Trend	2022/23	64.0	1.4		47.7
	2023/24	83.5	3.0		83.1
	2024/25	69.4	3.7		69.4
	2025/26	20.0	6.4	38.5	25.5

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



CHILDREN IN CARE: INITIAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS

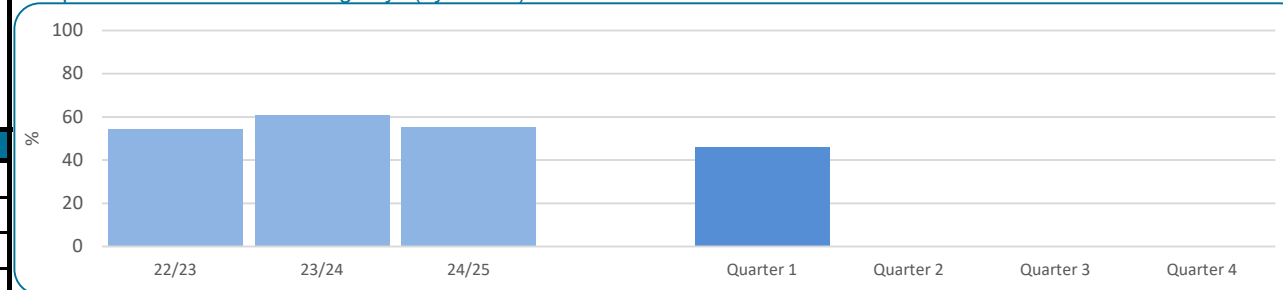
DEFINITION

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.

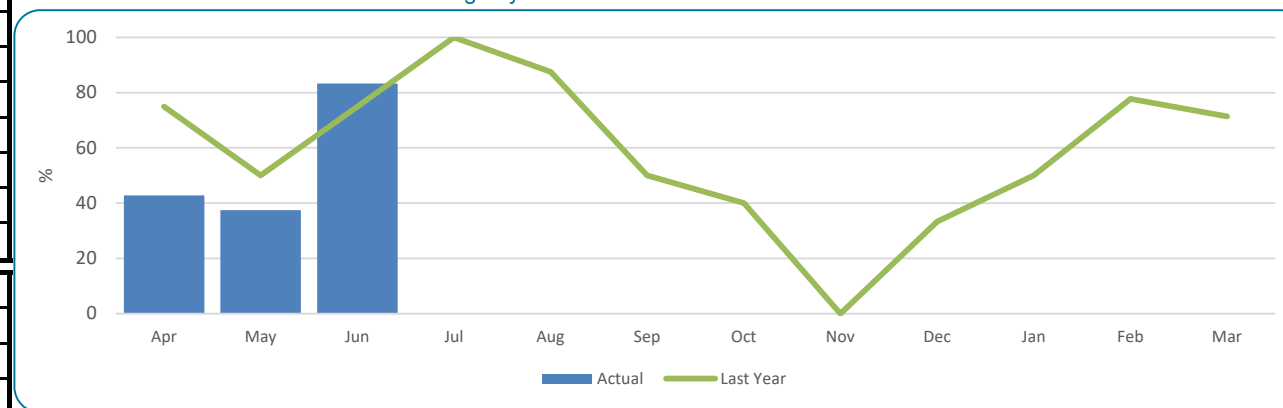
Page 120

In Month Performance	Target	Completed IHA within 20 working days (by Health)	IHA forms returned to Health within 5 working days
	95		
	Apr-25		3 / 7
	May-25		3 / 8
	Jun-25	12 / 26	10 / 12
	Jul-25		
	Aug-25		
	Sep-25		
	Oct-25		
	Nov-25		
	Dec-25		
	Jan-26		
	Feb-26		
	Mar-26		
Annual Trend	2022/23	54.5%	72.4%
	2023/24	60.7%	65.5%
	2024/25	55.2%	58.6%
	2025/26	46.2%	59.3%

Completed IHA within 20 working days (by Health)



IHA forms returned to Health within 5 working days



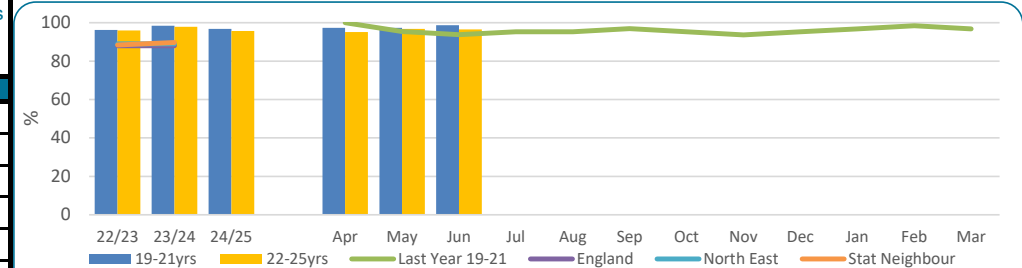
CARE LEAVERS

DEFINITION

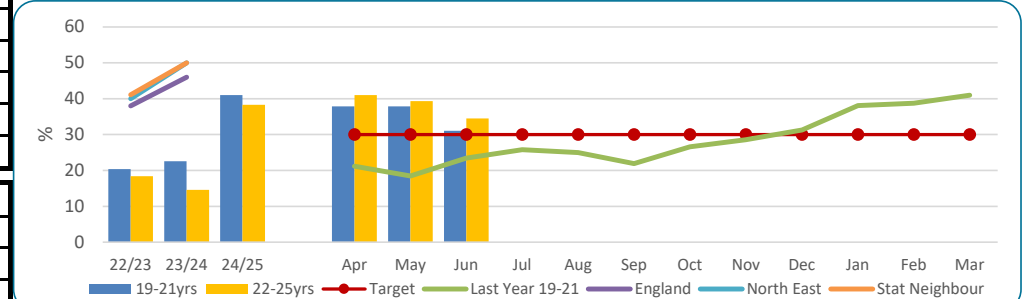
Former relevant care leavers split to show the young people who, at 31st March, will be aged 19-21 and those who will be aged 22-25. The percentage who were in suitable accommodation at their most recent contact, and the percentage who were not in employment, education or training at their most recent 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.

		CSC 286		CSC 294	
		19-21 year olds		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-25	97.3	37.8	95.1	41.0
	May-25	97.3	37.8	96.7	39.3
	Jun-25	98.7	31.1	96.6	34.5
	Jul-25				
	Aug-25				
	Sep-25				
	Oct-25				
	Nov-25				
	Dec-25				
	Jan-26				
	Feb-26				
	Mar-26				
Annual Trend	2022/23	96.3	20.4	95.9	18.4
	2023/24	98.4	22.6	97.9	14.6
	2024/25	96.7	41.0	95.7	38.3
	2025/26	98.7	31.1	96.6	34.5

CSC 286: % Care leavers in suitable accommodation



CSC 294: % Care leavers NEET



HR & RESOURCES**DEFINITION**

Corporate HR and Resource indicators - As at figures throughout the year.

		CSC 344	CSC 352	CSC 359	FHR 019d	FHR 001d	FHR 014d	FHR 002n	FHR 003n	FHR 025n
		% Social care worker turnover over past 12 months (FTE)	% of Children's social care workers (FTE) workforce that are agency workers	Vacancy % of Children's social care workers (FTE) workforce	% Staff Turnover voluntary leavers - Children's Services	Days Lost - Children's Services	% PDR's completed - Children's Services	Health & Safety near miss reports - Children's Services	Reportable Employee Accidents - Children's Services	Violent Incident Reports - Children's Services
In Month Performance	Apr-25	16.1	11.3	5.1						
	May-25	17.3	12.1	7.4						
	Jun-25	19.0	11.3	7.4				2		
	Jul-25									
	Aug-25									
	Sep-25									
	Oct-25									
	Nov-25									
	Dec-25									
	Jan-26									
	Feb-26									
	Mar-26									
Annual Trend	2022/23	21.3	15.1	7.4	14.4	11.2	25.9	1	2	99
	2023/24	9.8	15.7	2.2	6.7	10.0	79.9	4	1	54
	2024/25	17.7	12.1	5.1	11.1	12.7	65.9	12	0	63
	2025/26	19.0	11.3	7.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	2	0	0

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
20 OCTOBER 2025**

WORK PROGRAMME 2025-2026

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider the work programme items scheduled to be considered by this Scrutiny Committee during the 2025/26 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 next Municipal Year which has been prepared based on Officers recommendations and discussions held at the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Annual Briefing which took place on 28 May 2025.
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**).

Recommendation

4. Members are requested to consider and approve the attached draft work programme as the agreed work programme for the Municipal year 2025/26 and any other additional items which they might wish to include.

**Amy Wennington
Assistant Director Law and Governance**

Background Papers

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

Author: Mike Conway 6309

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. The Work Programme contains items which enable Members to scrutinise those areas that contribute the priority of 'Homes' - affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents and 'Living Well' – a healthier and better quality of life for longer, supporting those who need it most.
Addressing inequalities	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address.
Tackling Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address.
Efficient and effective use of resources	This report has no impact on the Council's Efficiency Programme.
Health and Wellbeing	This report has no direct implications to the Health and Well Being of residents of Darlington.
S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder.
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
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 was adopted on 18 July 2024, and outlines Darlington Borough Council's long-term ambitions for Darlington and priorities for action over the next three years. It gives strategic direction to the Council and Council services, defining priorities, identifying key actions, and shaping delivery.
7. The Council Plan identifies six priorities, including 'Children and Young People', which aims to support the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations. Eight key deliverables are identified as part of this priority.

Forward Plan and Additional Items

8. Once the Work Programme has been agreed by this Scrutiny Committee, any Member seeking to add a new item to the work programme will need to complete a quad of aims.
9. A copy of the Forward Plan has been attached at **Appendix 3** for information.

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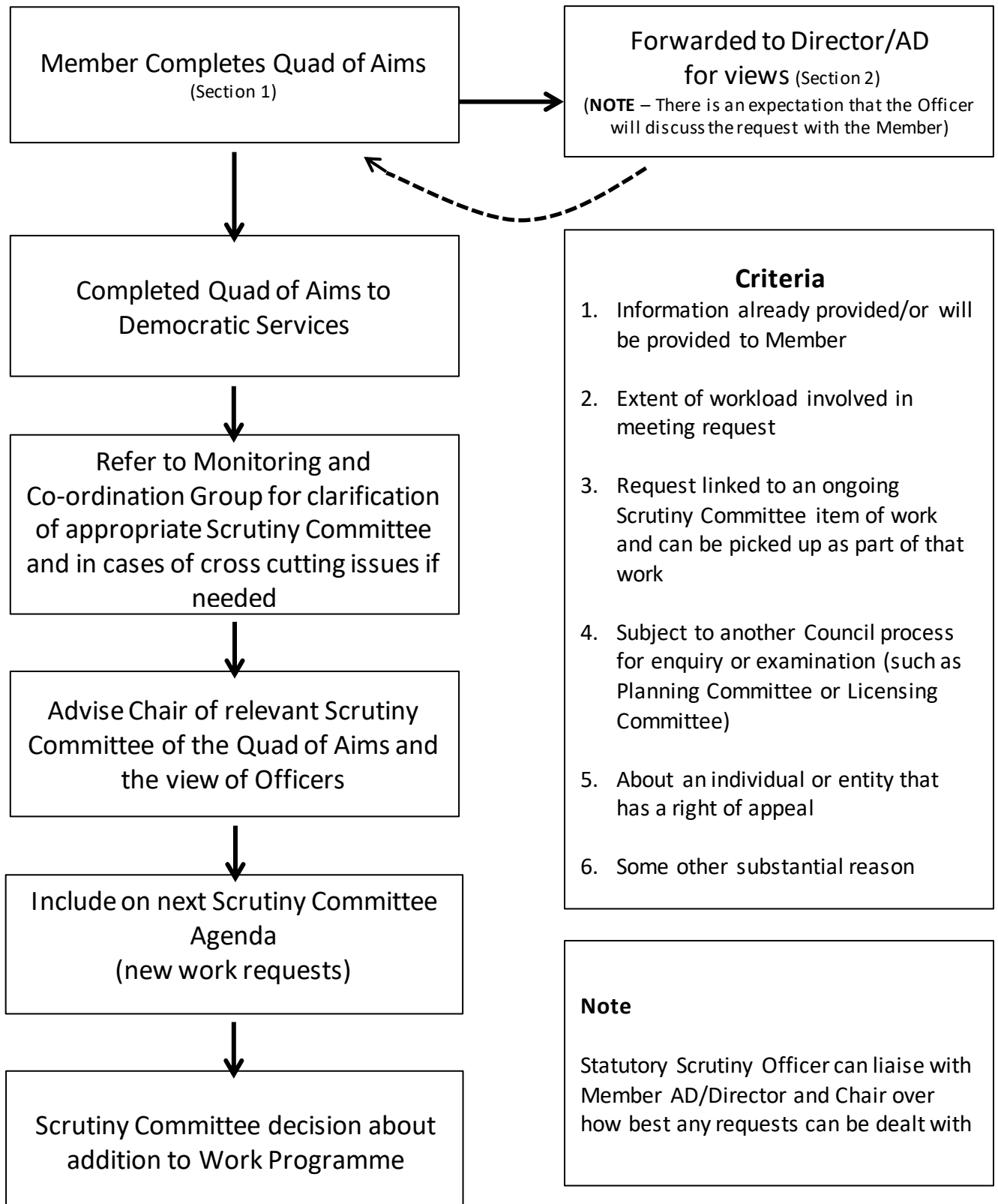
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26

Topic	Timescale	Lead Officer/ Organisation Involved	Link to PMF (metrics)	Scrutiny's Role / Notes
Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report	20/10/2025	Louise Addison, Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley		Annual Monitoring
Performance Monitoring Q1	20/10/2025	Chris Bell		To receive quarterly monitoring reports and undertake any further detailed work into particular outcomes if necessary
Children's Services Self-Assessment	20/10/2025	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
Learning and Skills Service Annual Report	20/10/2025	Paul Richardson		Annual Monitoring
Children and young Peoples Plan	05/01/2026	Christine Shields		To update Members on the refreshed Children and Young Peoples Plan
Local Designated Officer Annual Report (LADO)	05/01/2026	Martin Graham		To examine the Annual Report and assure Members that allegations made against staff who work with children are reported and how they are actioned
Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2024/25	05/01/2026	Martin Graham		To examine the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer produced by the Children's Safeguarding Unit.
Exclusion and Suspension Update	05/01/2026	Tony Murphy		
School Avoidance Update	05/01/2026	Tony Murphy		Long term school absence

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025/26

Topic	Timescale	Lead Officer/ Organisation Involved	Link to PMF (metrics)	Scrutiny's Role / Notes
Transitional Services	05/01/2026	Joss Harbron / Chris Bell		
Medium Term Financial Plan	05/01/2026	Brett Nielsen		
Transport Policy	02/03/2026	Tony Murphy		To update members on the Council's transport policy
Annual Fostering Report	02/03/2026			Annual Monitoring
Performance Monitoring Q2	02/03/2026	Chris Bell		To receive quarterly monitoring reports and undertake any further detailed work into particular outcomes if necessary
Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report	02/03/2026	TBD / Amanda Hugill		Annual Monitoring
Childcare Sufficiency Review	02/03/2026	Tony Murphy		Annual Monitoring
Update on Social Care Options for families affected by youth offending	02/03/2026	Chris Bell		Member request for an update on care available for families who are affected by youth offending (victims / perpetrators)
Children and Young People Public Health Overview	20/04/2026	Joanne Hennessey		Annual Monitoring
SEND Strategy Update	20/04/2026	Tony Murphy		To update members on the Council's SEND strategy
Performance Monitoring Q3	20/04/2026	Chris Bell		To receive quarterly monitoring reports and undertake any further detailed work into particular outcomes if necessary
Support for Darlington Youth Partnership	20/04/2026	Heather Insull (Youth Focus NE)		
Update on availability and condition of children's play areas in Darlington	TBD			Member request to provide the Committee with an update on the condition, locations and numbers of play areas in the town
Child Poverty	TBD	Lynne Davies		To update the committee on the results of the ongoing deep-dive on Child Poverty

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)

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		Criteria
1.	(a) Is the information available elsewhere? Yes No If yes, please indicate where the information can be found (attach if possible and return with this document to Democratic Services) (b) Have you already provided the information to the Member or will you shortly be doing so?	1. Information already provided/or will be provided to Member 2. Extent of workload involved in meeting request 3. Request linked to an ongoing Scrutiny Committee item of work and can be picked up as part of that work 4. Subject to another Council process for enquiry or examination (such as Planning Committee or Licensing Committee) 5. About an individual or entity that has a right of appeal 6. Some other substantial reason
2.	If the request is included in the Scrutiny Committee work programme what are the likely workload implications for you/your staff?	
3.	Can the request be included in an ongoing Scrutiny Committee item of work and picked up as part of that?	
4.	Is there another Council process for enquiry or examination about the matter currently underway?	
5.	Has the individual or entity some other right of appeal?	
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**



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

**FORWARD PLAN
FOR THE PERIOD: 1 OCTOBER 2025 – 28 FEBRUARY 2026**

Title	Decision Maker and Date
Procurement Plan Update	Cabinet 7 Oct 2025
Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility (TVERF) Update	Cabinet 7 Oct 2025
Council Tax Support Scheme 2026-27	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring - Quarter 2	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Schedule of Transactions	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Town Centre Regeneration	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Use of Land at Faverdale (Former St Modwen Land) for Biodiversity Net Gain and Nutrient Neutrality Credits	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Woodland Road Waiting Restrictions	Cabinet 4 Nov 2025
Housing Revenue Account MTFP	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025
Housing Services Tenancy Policy 2025-2030	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025
Land at Ingenium Parc and Morton Palms - Development Proposal	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025
Mid-Year Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management 2025/26	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025
MTFP for consultation	Cabinet 2 Dec 2025
Climate Change Progress	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Council Tax Calculation of Tax Base 2026/27	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Maintained Schools Capital Programme Summer 2025	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Council Plan Performance Report - Quarter 4	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Year End Performance Report - Quarter 4	Cabinet 6 Jan 2026
Calendar of Council and Committee Meetings	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Capital Strategy	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
MTFP 2025/26 - Final Version Post Consultation	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Project Position Statement and Capital Programme Monitoring - Quarter 3	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Revenue Budget Monitoring - Quarter 3	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026
Schools Admissions 2025/26	Cabinet 3 Feb 2026

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