

**COUNCIL  
26 NOVEMBER 2020**

---

**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO**

---

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Children and Young People Portfolio.

**Early Intervention and Front Door**

**Front Door**

2. The Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) has continued to encourage telephone contacts from partner agencies to ensure relationship-based approaches to dealing with concerns about children.
3. A 26-week evaluation of the progress of the CIAT was completed in September, following the new service going live in March 2020. The evaluation found that the team are developing in key areas and performance recognises this. The team are increasing the number of contacts which are received by the telephone as opposed to email, and there has been a reduction in the number of referrals to children's Social Care and increases in the number of families receiving Early Help.

**Early Help**

4. Early Help Services increased their offer during August 2020, and this included a rapid same *day*, response service to families requiring help and support being introduced. This has led to an increase in families accessing the service and improved performance in terms of how quickly Early Help are engaging with families and the timeliness of assessments.
5. Services delivered through McNay Children's Centre are continuing to be done so, online, with advice about children's development, school readiness and regular video sessions around play and positive interaction. For families who need more than virtual contact, face to face home visits have continued to be undertaken.
6. Where communication with some children has proved challenging, continued use of the Mind of My Own (MOMO) app is in place to better support this. The service continues to explore the uses of different technologies and innovative approaches to engage with families.
7. The Early Help Service has continued to develop integrated services and approaches to reduce parental conflict, into local services for families under the programme, 'Reducing Parental Conflict', with funding allocated from the Dept of Work and Pensions (DWP). Practitioners have received awareness training on how to support families and identify need. A working group are developing digital resources, toolbox for families, and promotional websites to support children's emotional well-being.

## **Safeguarding Assessment and Looked After Through Care:**

### **Corporate Parenting Panel**

8. The Panel met on 8 September 2020, with young people involved, alongside Members and Officers. The Panel received and discussed:
  - a) The Annual report of the Independent Reviewing Officers;
  - b) Performance data for Children in Care and Care Leavers for the fourth quarter in 2019/20;
  - c) School attendance of Children in Care during the Covid-19 partial school closure period;
  - d) The additional support that had been offered to Care Leavers during the lockdown period;
  - e) The additional support offered to all Children in Care and Care Leavers to promote positive mental health; and
  - f) An update on the development of lockdown diary for Children in Care and Care Leavers.

### **Child in Need (CiN) Child Protection, Children in Care and Care Leaver statistics**

9. At the end of September 2020 there were:
  - a) 314 children in need (CiN) – the number of children being supported with a CiN plan has reduced from 334 at the end of quarter 1 for 2020/21;
  - b) 103 children subject to child protection plans – this is a slight increase when compared with 95 at the end of quarter 1 for 2020/21;
  - c) 302 children in care – this number has increased since the end of quarter 1 for 2020/21 (291). During quarter 2 a small number of children and young people left care, but this figure was not sufficient to see a reduction in the overall number of children. There continues to be significant drive to progress children's permanence plans to enable them to safely leave the care of the local authority;
  - d) 146 Care Leavers between 18-25 years, all of whom have access to a personal advisor for support, advice and guidance.

### **Fostering Residential and Lifestages**

#### **Children with Disabilities**

10. In the early stages of Covid, to reduce the risk of infection, interim changes were made to the number of children accessing Harewood Hill Lodge Short Break Centre. Risk assessments identified the most vulnerable children and they have been provided with a service that was/is targeted for a group of vulnerable children/young people with a disability. From 27 July, Harewood Hill Lodge has provided an

extended service to the full-service user group. Children and staff have been “grouped” as far as possible to minimise the risk of cross-infection.

11. As a result of the medical vulnerabilities of some of the children, parents and carers have been “shielding” so have accepted virtual visits as being beneficial by keeping everyone safe, whilst providing a good level of support. Since August, an increased number of doorstep and face to face visits have taken place, although virtual visits have continued in some cases, and have worked very well for many children and families.

## **Fostering**

12. Our foster carers have continued to be flexible to help provide extra placements to meet the needs of children since the onset of Covid. Most children have remained in placement with only a small number of moves taking place, in accordance with care planning requirements.
13. Where foster carers have had capacity, we have agreed a small number of exemptions to the fostering limit, or variations to the foster carer’s terms of approval, to enable them to care for siblings or to provide emergency placements.
14. Since July, face to face visits have taken place between professionals and foster carers, subject to the individual circumstances of the fostering household.
15. Supervising social workers have continued to progress prospective foster carer assessments and the ‘Skills to Foster’ training programme has been delivered virtually.

## **Children’s Residential Services**

16. Since March, our three mainstream residential homes have functioned without interruption. Clear risk assessments and safe systems of work have supported the staff to remain well and continue to deliver a service. Young people have remained well and have had support to understand and accept the requirements of social distancing, hand washing and good hygiene.

## **Education**

17. Education services continue to work closely with the LA’s Public Health team to provide schools with advice and support. The Public Health Principal and Head of Education and Inclusion have operated a joint weekly drop- in clinic for schools and colleges this half term and offer early morning availability from 8AM to speak to any head teacher/principal to offer advice on any specific Covid-19 issues relating to their setting. There has been positive feedback from these sessions which are continuing for the November to December half term.
18. Department for Education data shows Darlington ahead of national average on overall attendance. Attendance has been particularly positive for those pupils with SEND needs and an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Attendance for these learners has been consistently significantly above national average. On 14<sup>th</sup> October Darlington’s attendance rate for pupils in special schools was 91 per cent, over 10 per cent above national average.

19. The Schools Forum met on 13<sup>th</sup> October. Forum were presented with papers which updated the current year's budget position and provided details regarding the formula for school budgets in 2021/22. Forum were also given an update regarding progress against the high needs (SEND) strategy and the provision of high needs outreach.

### **Children's Commissioning and Contracts**

20. Officers have continued to work alongside regional colleagues to ensure RAG rated COVID-19 monitoring is undertaken with all service providers providing residential care and independent foster agency placements to local children. Providers and Officers have worked together to enable services to remain operational throughout this period. As we head into Autumn, the positive work undertaken in relation to COVID-19 impact monitoring will be broadened to include all aspects of quality assurance and contract monitoring, with Officers taking the lead for providers operating within their locality.

### **Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)**

21. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners (SSP) meet every three weeks and continue to engage with wider partners to obtain an understanding of current issues about safeguarding and challenges they may be facing. Partners were provided with an assurance report on Elective Home Education following previous discussions on safeguarding concerns for Gypsy, Roma and Travelling community. It was recognised there is a consistent and persistent approach to elective home education and evidence of good partnership working, to ensure all are safeguarded.
22. County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust provided an overview of measures currently in place to protect the vulnerable as well as details of recovery/restoration of services. Partners were informed on the role the Clinical Commissioning Group has played in supporting organisations with PPE and infection prevention and control guidance. It was positive to see multi-agency arrangements continue to be maintained and agencies embracing the use of online platforms such as Microsoft Teams to engage with families and each other.
23. Partners were provided with an overview of the findings of a thirteen-week review of the children's front door arrangements. Key highlights included a ten-fold increase in the number of telephone contacts which was very positive with partners embracing the new processes and welcoming the opportunity for telephone conversations about their concerns to enable support to be provided by services who are best placed to provide this. It was recognised that this is a big shift in processes and may take some organisations more time to embed.
24. The Quality Assurance and Performance Management and Learning and Development Sub-groups continue to meet via Teams and partners were assured by Chairs of the groups that multi-agency representation and attendance is good and feedback from partners is positive. Work continues to ensure policy, procedure and guidance and safeguarding training is made available to support those working on the front line. The Chairs are looking at how they can align the respective sub-

group meetings more closely to ensure that learning has been embedded in practice. Partners recognised there is assurance in the multi-agency Performance data and agreed reporting has come a long way, putting the partnership in a better position to make the right decisions.

**Councillor Jon Clarke**  
**Children and Young People Portfolio**