

**COUNCIL**  
**25 MARCH 2021**

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**OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO**

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

**School Admissions 2022/23**

2. In line with the School Admissions Code, Members considered and approved the Local Authority's admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools for which Darlington Local Authority is the admission authority for the 2022/23 academic year.

**Health and Wellbeing Board**

3. The Health and Wellbeing Board met on the 18 March 2021. The main discussion item was an update on the COVID-19 local outbreak. This discussion was informed by a presentation by the Director of Public Health which outlined some key data describing the impact of the pandemic on local communities in Darlington.
4. Other issues considered at the meeting included an update on the Darlington Carer's Action Plan 2020-22. Members of the Board have endorsed the Action Plan and will act as champions for carers in Darlington.

**Early Intervention and Front Door**

5. Children's Information and Access Team received 551 contacts in November and 515 contacts in December. The numbers are broadly consistent with those seen in September and October and relate to increased activity as a result of schools reopening, and other services increasingly working with children and the increased contact with children relating to concerns for children being more frequently seen.
6. Early Help Services have continued to offer a rapid response service to families who need help and support. When a family are identified at the Front Door as requiring early help and support, a member of the Early Help team has continued to offer a same day visit, to consider their support needs and explain in person the services that Early Help can provide. This has led to a continued 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. Despite being voluntary there has been a strong take up from families with the service, with 112 Early Help assessments started in November and December 2020. Of the Early Help assessments completed, 72.6 per cent of families report positive changes as a result of Early Help support.
7. Service delivery has continued to involve a combination of services delivered face to face where necessary, but with a continued reliance on delivering services online, with advice about children's development, school readiness and regular video sessions around play and positive interaction, proving very popular with

families. For the families who need more than virtual contact, home visits to families have continued to be undertaken.

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

### **Corporate Parenting Panel**

8. The Panel met on 16 February 2021, with young people involved, alongside Members and Officers. The Panel received and discussed:
  - (a) A report on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic of the education of Children in Care;
  - (b) An updated report on the support provided for Care Leavers during Christmas and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic;
  - (c) An update report on the “lockdown diary;”
  - (d) A verbal update regarding how Darlington Borough Council’s foster-carers and residential staff have been managing during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic;
  - (e) A formal review of the Promises Tree.

### **Child Protection, Looked After and Care Leaver statistics.**

9. At the end of January 2021 there were:
  - (a) 352 children being supported through a child in need plan
  - (b) 82 children, subject to child protection plans
  - (c) 284 children in care – this number is comparable with the end of January 2020. There continues to be significant drive to progress children’s permanence plans enabling them to safely leave the care of the local authority
  - (d) All 146 Care Leavers between 18-25 years have access to a personal advisor for support, advice and guidance

### **Fostering, Residential and Lifestages Disabled Children’s Team**

10. There is a continued focus on the recruitment of mainstream foster carers to help meet the needs of looked after children. We have seen an increase in enquiries about mainstream fostering, and we are receiving support from the Marketing and Communications Team to ensure interesting articles and messages are regularly added to social media. There is a Strengthening Families workstream focussing on increasing the number of in-house mainstream foster carers to provide high quality placements for our looked after children.
11. Foster carers have consistently cared for children, with support from their supervising social workers and placement stability with both mainstream foster carers and connected kinship carers has been very good during the Covid-19 pandemic. Foster carers with capacity have, where possible, provided placements to enable sibling groups to remain together. We have had foster carers who have

been unwell with covid, and in the majority of cases placement stability has been maintained.

12. Foster carers have been offered a covid vaccination, and there has been a high take up rate. For those foster carers who live out of area, we are liaising with the relevant Local Authority to arrange a vaccination where possible.
13. The three mainstream residential homes are providing placements to 5 young people who have largely adhered to covid regulations, with very few missing from placement episodes. Staff encourage young people to engage with their education provision to help provide structure and focus as well as learning opportunities.
14. Harewood Hill Lodge has been providing respite to approximately 25 children since summer 2020, with staff groups and children working in “bubbles” as far as possible to minimise the potential for the spread of infection. Parents have provided positive feedback in relation to the service.
15. The Disabled Children’s Team (Lifestages 0-25 team) continue to support disabled children and their families. Direct home visits are made where possible, but where children or family members have medical vulnerabilities, doorstep or virtual visits are arranged.

## **Education**

16. Officers continue to work with the Education Strategy Group to support schools to reopen from 8 March. Pupils returning to secondary schools will be tested three times on site and then once at home in the first two weeks back. After that, they will be expected to be tested twice weekly at home and report results to schools to record. Secondary staff will also get twice weekly home tests. There will be no tests for primary school pupils, though staff will continue to have to test themselves at home twice a week
17. Secondary schools will also be expected to retain a small testing site for those unable to test at home. Pupils will be allowed to attend lessons as normal after their first negative result. Secondary staff will also get twice weekly home tests. Officers continue to offer support and advice on testing to schools and weekly Public Health Clinics for school leaders continue to be held.
18. Darlington School Forum meet on 9 March. The Forum was given an update on the current year budget. The Forum also noted the high needs budget and the early years hourly rates for 2021/22.

## **Children’s Commissioning and Contracts**

19. The Community Short Breaks Framework for Children and Young People with SEND has been reopened via the NEPO portal enabling new providers to join the contract. An additional provider has been appointed to deliver Sport, Art/Craft, Drama, Recreational and Personal Development Activities, Holiday Club and After School Club provision. The Tees Valley Residential Homes Framework has also been reopened with two new providers appointed to operate from January 2021.
20. Regional provider risk management approaches have remained in place throughout the second wave of the pandemic. All providers commissioned by Darlington

Borough Council for care, support and accommodation of Darlington Children and Young People have remained operational.

21. The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination to external and internal providers of front line children's social care services in Darlington has been very successful with an exceptionally high take up of vaccinations. All vaccinations appointments were offered within required timeframe of the 15 February 2021.

### **Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP)**

22. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners (SSP) continue to meet monthly. In December, partners were provided with an overview of current safeguarding arrangements within the County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service. Robin Turnbull, Group Manager, assured partners of the fire service's commitment to continually raise awareness of safeguarding across its workforce including the delivery of mandatory training packages to provide all staff with the skills to identify safeguarding concerns.
23. Elective Home Education (EHE) was an area Partners were keen to seek assurance as there has been an increase in parents electing for home education since the start of the Pandemic, a picture being seen nationally. Partners were assured of ongoing work by the EHE Advisor, Education Safeguarding Officer, Vulnerable Pupil Panel and Monitoring Panel who continue to make every effort to ensure all children are seen.
24. In January, partners were provided an overview of current safeguarding arrangements within the National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC). At the start of the Pandemic, only the very high-risk service users were being seen. Both services have reported, as offices begin to open they are now able to see more service users. NPS continued to undertake interventions and accredited programmes and the courts continue to hear priority cases, with no outstanding backlogs as was seen in the first lockdown. CRC is running unpaid work and accredited schemes and are now providing more face to face engagement for critical cases including MAPPA and safeguarding. It was highlighted that CRC will become the responsibility of NPS from June 2021 and both organisations working through how they will operate in readiness for this.
25. Partners continue to receive an overview of child and adult multi-agency performance data on a quarterly basis. Partners were assured measures are in place to address themes or trends highlighted to further understand the changing landscape which will shape what needs to be taken forward.

### **Climate Change**

26. Children's Services continue to reduce the carbon footprint by moving to paperless practice, reducing printing and post is also impacting positively on the budget. Agile and home working has reduced the need to occupy large office buildings and the declining use of personal vehicles, ensures emissions are reduced. Staff are encouraged to complete training on climate change on Academy 10.

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