

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
22 APRIL 2021**

**EFFECTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE
REVIEW GROUP**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To present the outcome and findings of the Review Group established by this Scrutiny Committee to examine the effects of the pandemic on children and young people and to make appropriate recommendations to Cabinet.

Summary

2. At a meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 4 January 2021 a draft Terms of Reference (**Appendix 1**) was approved by the Committee and it was agreed to establish a Review Group. All Members of the Scrutiny Committee were invited to participate in the Review and the Review was led by Councillor Cyndi Hughes, Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.
3. The Review Group held two fact finding 'virtual' events on 21 January and 25 March 2021.
4. Following the initial fact finding meeting Members met on 4 March 2021 to consider the evidence received from various organisations and discussed what the Members wanted to gain from the second fact finding event with the children and young people on 25 March 2021.
5. A further meeting of the Review Group was held on 30 March 2021 to enable Members of this Scrutiny Committee to consider all the information gathered and to identify its findings and make its recommendations.
6. A number of issues have been considered and discussed at the meetings and the notes of those meetings are attached (**Appendix 2**).
7. The aim of the review was to examine the current picture, identify good practice and if there are any gaps in service; and to make suggestions or recommendations to the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Darlington Cares Board and/or Cabinet.
8. The review highlighted many matters, related to Darlington children that expanded the brief of 'the effects of the pandemic', however, the Scrutiny Committee will use this information to inform future work programme items where appropriate.

Recommendation

9. (a) That the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee consider the following recommendations of the Review Group :-
- (i) To receive the final results of the 2020 Healthy Lifestyles Survey in order to continue to seek updates on progress made to encourage positive actions on the important issues raised by the 1,900 primary pupils and 1400 secondary pupils; and to consider also the issues mentioned within this review by the participating children and young people and experts ie. those who have been struggling to access IT, experiencing cyber bullying, consuming more fizzy drinks, chocolate and energy drinks and feeling stressed or anxious as well as sharing the good news gathered that many young people surveyed reported family relationships had improved and that they had used the lockdown to engage in creative, new activities.
 - (ii) Young people voiced concern at being unfairly blamed for breaking Covid rules and jeopardising the health of older people. Civic Enforcement performance indicators should be monitored to review incidents involving young people in order to address real concerns and highlight any misperceptions in representation in order to improve understanding and solidarity between the generations.
 - (iii) Children and Young People were unclear as to where they could find information about activities and events specifically designed for their age groups. To call for and promote a co-produced review/update with young people of the Living Well pages of the Council Website as well as an advertising/communications strategy with the aim of improving access to information by children, young people and families on activities, clubs, services and help available to them.
 - (iv) Children and Young People believed there were not enough positive activities universally available for them in their local communities or in the town centre. Call for and promote information on the availability of grants or other funding opportunities from the Council and other bodies that can help to resource more outdoor activities/inter-school activities year round.
 - (v) Councillors to promote activities for young people within their wards, to seek additional matched funding opportunities for such activities and to promote green spaces as play areas that could be utilised by children and young people near to their homes.
 - (vi) For co-opted partners and educators – who already provide excellent pastoral care, teacher engagement training, dedicated SEND officers, schools and pupil forums to help identify and deal with mental health and bullying, however young people feel more education and awareness is needed within schools covering a range of topics affecting mental health and wellbeing i.e. cyber-bullying, body image; to examine the things that have benefitted young people from the pandemic and to encourage these continue going forward; and additional pastoral contact from schools recognising the difficulties many young people have faced and continue to face and accurate, timely information about exams and transitions.

- (b) The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee consider the following recommendations of the Review Group for the Health and Well Being Board :
- (i) Due to the increase in the number of young people experiencing mental health difficulties from increases in eating disorders to anxiety, sleep issues and depression and the concomitant increased NHS investment as a result of higher demand, Members call on the Health and Well Being Board to monitor and broker engagement and liaison between mental health providers, charities, schools, colleges and commissioners, recognising that these difficulties have possibly been exacerbated by the pandemic.
 - (ii) Members call on the Darlington Children's Trust, which is the Health and Well Being Board to ambitiously drive forward the post-Covid children and young people's agenda to improve the health, wellbeing, equitable access to opportunities, engagement, experiences and life chances of all children and young people living in Darlington, recognising that these have possibly been exacerbated by the pandemic
- (c) The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee consider the following recommendation of the Review Group for the Darlington Cares Board: -
- (i) As the Partnership has previously identified poverty and inequality as the biggest obstacles to residents of all ages being able to share in the borough's success and to being happy, healthy, educated, employed and safe and secure, calls on all agencies, companies, organisations and individuals within the Partnership and throughout Darlington to recommit to the Charter for a Fairer, Richer Darlington, especially those elements relating to children and young people.
- (d) That, if agreed, the above recommendations be forwarded to Cabinet for information, and that Cabinet be requested to consider the following recommendations:
- (i) Mental Health – to examine upskilling and augmentation of our own staff and to promote better partnership working between providers and commissioners of mental health and wellbeing services in order to reduce waiting times to access services, to improve signposting and communications to young people, carers and families about opportunities to engage in activities that promote good mental health and positive wellbeing.
 - (ii) Call for and encourage take-up of additional career placement opportunities that do not rely on a family's own contacts from a younger age as well as more equitable access to employment/apprenticeship opportunities for young people.
 - (iii) Consult and engage more with children and young people as active citizens of Darlington. Organise opportunities to speak with children and young people about the issues making their way through Council in order to encourage a better understanding of the ways young residents can

engage with and exert influence upon those decisions that have an impact on their lives or future opportunities.

- (iv) Call for accessible, on-going advertising/ messaging for young people on the improved social offer in the town centre– i.e. Central Hub/Bowling Alleys, etc.
- (v) Commit to listening to and taking account of the voice of children and young people as part of the Council's strategic, Post-Covid approach across all departments.
- (vi) To promote a commitment to achieving better understanding and tolerance between all age groups within our Darlington communities

Councillor Cyndi Hughes
Chair of Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People Review Group

Allison Hill Ext 5997

Background Papers

Healthwatch Darlington Report – Children and Young Peoples Mental Health November 19 to August 2020

Professor Defeyter, Professor in Developmental Psychology, Northumbria University (two papers) 'Food and Coping Strategies during the Covid-19 Pandemic' and 'Covid-19 Back to School, Rebuilding a better future for all Children'

'Voices' (an Economic and Social Resource Council Project) led by Children North East and Newcastle University

Public Health Evidence Summary 'Impact of Covid 19 on Children and Young People in Darlington' 21 Jan 2021

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder
Health and Well Being	The initiative could have a positive impact on people's health and well-being.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	There are no issues which this report needs to address
Diversity	There are no issues relating to diversity which this report needs to address
Wards Affected	All wards
Groups Affected	All children and young people
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	Not a key decision
Urgent Decision	Not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	To enable people to be more healthy and independent, to enable children with the best start in life, to enable people to be more active and involved and to provide a safe and caring community
Efficiency	The outcome of this report does not impact on the Council efficiency agenda
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

10. Since March 2020, Committee met four times and received the following reports relevant to this review: Post-Covid-19 Public Health Priorities for children and young people, Safeguarding and Safeguarding Partnership Annual Reports, Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report, updates from the Darlington Parent Carer Forum, the Annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, a progress report on the Children and Young People's Plan 2017-2022, Youth Unemployment Scoping Paper, A Progress Update on Digital Inclusion, A presentation on the Darlington Mind Children in Need Self-Harm Project, an Update from the North East Regional Schools Commissioner on academies and academy trusts in Darlington and Quarterly Performance Indicators relating to Children on the Edge of Care, Children in Care and Care Leavers, with the purpose of ascertaining how children and young people in Darlington and the services that support them have been fairing through the pandemic.
11. Committee determined to undertake a review that would be wide-ranging in nature in order to understand better how services and partners were responding to the newly emerging needs of children and young people in Darlington since March 2020 and drew up its terms of reference accordingly.
12. The initial fact-finding, virtual meeting held on 21 January, 2021, to which mental health practitioners, council officers, academics, a myriad of organisations, charities and community and youth groups working with young people had been invited, was designed to provide evidence about the type of services and activities that have

been on offer; those services and activities that continue to be available and how these have been and are being offered to children and young people during the pandemic.

13. The aim of the Review was to gather evidence, examine areas of good practice and identify any gaps in service and to share their findings; and ultimately make recommendations to influence services and policies moving forward.
14. Members took into consideration Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that the opinions of children and young people should be considered when decisions are made about things that involve them.
15. At the meeting of the Review Group on 4 March 2021 Members examined the substantial evidence received to date from various organisations and gave consideration to the 'virtual event' with children and young people from primary and secondary schools.
16. Members also considered a mind map (prepared by Councillor Snedker) concretising committee's areas of discussion and investigation from the first review meeting: Learning, Mental Health, Socialisation, Physical Health and Employment. **(Appendix 3)**
17. The purpose of the second fact finding meeting on 25 March 2021 was to meet with children and young people from primary and secondary level to speak about their life during Covid experiences and those of their peers over the past months, with Members particularly interested in hearing directly from young people themselves in order to better understand whether services were known about, being accessed equally across the borough and covering the full spectrum of need of all children and young people in the borough.
18. Members posed some simple open-ended questions to the young people asking about the best things and the worst things they felt came out of last year; what they believed could have been done to make last year better for them; and what advice they would give to other young people also having been through the past year.
19. Healthwatch report published December 2020 'Children and Young People's Mental Health Report 2020 (including Covid-19 experiences) contained information and findings following consultation with 478 children, young people, parents and carers about what young people, carers and their families were experiencing when using local services in normal times; what everyday life events were affecting young people locally which helped to indicate areas of intervention and what young people and families wanted to see when it came to information sharing in the town. The report also offered an insight into the complexities of how the pandemic had affected young people and their families across Darlington.
20. At the review group meeting held on 25 January 2021 Members received an up-to-date, contextual presentation on child poverty, youth related crime, domestic abuse, digital exclusion, youth unemployment, education gaps, health behaviour and mental health indicators for Darlington along with testimony from various organisations confirming the statistical evidence and the findings of the Healthwatch report.

Acknowledgements

21. The Review Group acknowledges the support and assistance provided in the course of their investigations and would like to place on record its thanks to the following :-

- (a) Jane Kochanowski, Assistant Director, Children and Young Murray Rose, Director of People
- (b) Seth Pearson, Chief Executive, Darlington Partnership
- (c) Mary Hall, Public Health Lead
- (d) Catherine Shaw, Relationships, Education and Sexual Health Co-ordinator
- (e) Natasha Telfer, Strategy and Performance Manager
- (f) Stephen Wiper, Creative Manager, Creative Darlington
- (g) Allison Hill, Democratic Support
- (h) Gill Etherington, Virtual School
- (i) James Graham, Mental Health Commissioning Manager
- (j) Gillian Leckenby, Locality Manager, CAMHS
- (k) Andrew Poinen, Kooth
- (l) Martin Stand, Darlington Area Churches Youth Ministry
- (m) Jemma Austin, Jessica Mather, Jade Kirk and Amy Adams, Healthwatch
- (n) Professor Greta Defeyter, Professor of Developmental Psychology and Director of the Healthy Living Lab at Northumbria University
- (o) Stephen Morgan, Director, NQA Foodbank
- (p) Peter King, Head Teacher, Mowden Federation
- (q) Jenny Young, Blue Cabin
- (r) Nicole Garstin
- (s) Freya Svendsen, YMCA
- (t) Carla Scaith, Parent Carer Forum
- (u) Carole Ridley, Darlington Foster Carer Association
- (v) Cheryl Hunter, Humankind
- (w) Hollie Richardson and Donna Wright
- (x) All the children and young people and staff members from the primary and secondary schools who participated in the event on 25 March 2021.

22. The review group acknowledged the fantastic commitment of all schools during the pandemic and the herculean efforts that were made by all to bring online teaching on board in a short period of time, to open for face-to-face teaching for the children of key workers and the most vulnerable, to provide food, supplies and administer vouchers to children and young people on Free School Meals (FSM), to provide pastoral care, to shoulder safeguarding responsibilities normally led by other professionals and to step-up their community leadership roles.

23. The Review Group were struck by the general resilience, commitment and optimism of the children engaged on the virtual fact gathering meetings and that they were constructive and had innovative ideas about the future.

24. The review group appreciated that the Council, the wider community and in particular Childrens' Services had come together to respond creatively to issues surrounding emergency food insecurity, school uniform provision and Personal Protective Equipment.

Conclusions

25. It was evident that communication between all agencies was good and that most of our children and young people were resilient and able to deal with the change in circumstances well; however, we acknowledged that there were some groups like those with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) that were unable to attend an education setting or access much needed, timely support or services, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, however it was also noted that all Darlington schools remained open to pupils with EHCP's throughout the pandemic and regional data would indicate that attendance at Darlington special schools and for pupils with ECHPs was amongst the highest in the region; that the experience and outcomes of the pandemic amongst children and young people living in relative poverty has been generally worse than that of their more affluent peers and that there admittedly, were a number of groups with which we were unable to engage fully i.e. College and University students; Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS); Children and Young People with a Special Educational Need and/or Disability (SEND); Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) pupils; Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people and Looked after Children. However, it was noted that issues affecting many of these groups, and others, had been reported to full Committee and that the effect of the pandemic was also being monitored by Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
26. Positive feedback from the children and young people echoed what we had also learnt from speaking with other organisations and practitioners; although Members were concerned about the negative attitudes and intolerance often shown toward young people and that these community barriers need to be broken down. Activities and programmes that are able to create and support positive relationships between citizens of different generations would help break down barriers, avoid misunderstanding and increase tolerance.
27. All organisations have learnt much from the experiences of the pandemic and Members encourage everyone to use these experiences as an opportunity going forward to improve outcomes for all.
28. Speaking with the children and young people informed us that going forward as we come out of lockdown restrictions that they would like better access to outdoor spaces, especially in their local areas and that they feel safe in these open areas and on the street; and to be able to access activities; and in particular to be able to access more Arts projects which were referred to specifically by the young people as being insufficient in availability to demand.
29. Members agreed that following the success of the fact-gathering event with the children and young people the authority continue to include the 'voice of the child' in future decisions as engagement with our young people was important.
30. During this Review Members have identified a lot of good practice and there has been a lot of learning throughout this time both good and bad and that there were some areas where more work needs to be done, such as with those with EHCPs, children and young people living in relative poverty, better sign-posting and communications about services and activities available.

31. Members would like to promote a 'child and young person friendly Darlington' and intend exploring further the steps required for the UNICEF model accreditation that would enable Darlington to become a children friendly town.
32. Members agreed that mental health issues were a major concern among our children and young people and highlighted this as a priority and highlighted that on line services had been made available in Darlington and also acknowledged that this was a national issue which needs to be addressed.
33. Members identified areas to continue to monitor that will have been affected by the pandemic including the effect on our SEND young people and also the increase in Home Education.
34. Members heard evidence from multiple stakeholders and providers that the collective effects of the pandemic were to widen and deepen the inequalities experienced by children and young people. It is felt that the ambitions and priorities of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) holds the key to tackling the causes of inequality. Achieving the priorities of the CYPP would not only reduce inequality for all in Darlington but also increase our citizens resilience and preparedness for any future pandemic or national emergency.

REVIEW GROUP TO EXAMINE THE EFFECT OF THE PANDEMIC ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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?)
<p>To examine how children and young people are coping with the current situation arising from the Covid 19 Pandemic and how this is affecting them.</p> <p>The multi-agency review to include the themes of food poverty, mental health and education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic Officer. • Relevant representatives of children and young people. • Charities, inc. Firststop, FoodBank, King’s Church, Darlington MIND • Families from the Parent Carers Group • Young Carers • Children in Care and Care Leavers • Foster Carers • Businesses/Partnership Board • Schools (Primary and Secondary) • Social Workers
PROCESS (HOW CAN SCRUTINY ACHIEVE THE ANTICIPATED OUTCOME?)	HOW WILL THE OUTCOME MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To arrange a hearing with various organisations, children and young people and their families learn what impact the pandemic is having on them. • To focus on areas of food poverty, mental health, education, jobs and training and digital inclusion. • To gather evidence from the various local groups, organisations and schools involved with children and young people. (This can be both in person and written evidence) • To identify gaps in services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To gain a better understanding of how the pandemic is affecting our children and young people and to gather evidence to share with other authorities and organisations on what has worked well and is making a difference and what more needs to be done. • To share information and highlight good practice and to celebrate achievements. • Make recommendations to Cabinet to influence services and policies moving forward.

Signed CouncillorCyndi Hughes.....

DateNovember 2020.....

SECTION 2 TO BE COMPLETED BY DIRECTORS/ASSISTANT DIRECTORS

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

	Criteria
<p>1. (a) Is the information available elsewhere? If yes, please indicate where the information can be found (attach if possible and return with this document to Democratic Services)</p> <p>We don't have any specific information relating to Darlington, but there are national reports on how children have responded to and coped with the pandemic</p> <p>b) Have you already provided the information to the Member or will you shortly be doing so? The national reports can be forwarded if required</p> <p>2. If the request is included in the Scrutiny Committee work programme what are the likely workload implications for you/your staff? Staff will be requested to provide information/data to members and therefore the workload implications will be minor on staff time</p> <p>3. Can the request be included in an ongoing Scrutiny Committee item of work and picked up as part of that? This piece of work would be a new request</p> <p>4. Is there another Council process for enquiry or examination about the matter currently underway? Not at this time</p> <p>5. Has the individual or entity some other right of appeal? N/A</p> <p>6. Is there any substantial reason (other than the above) why you feel it should not be included on the work programme? No</p>	<p>1. Information already provided/or will be provided to Member</p> <p>2. Extent of workload involved in meeting request</p> <p>3. Request linked to an ongoing Scrutiny Committee item of work and can be picked up as part of that work</p> <p>4. Subject to another Council process for enquiry or examination (such as Planning Committee or Licensing Committee)</p> <p>5. About an individual or entity that has a right of appeal</p> <p>6. Some other substantial reason</p>

Signed : Jane Kochanowski

Position: Assistant Director

Date: 30 November 2020

Children and Young People Scrutiny Review Group

Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People

21 January 2021

Present: Councillors Ali, Bell, Crudass, Mrs. Culley, C Hughes (Chair), Lister, Renton and Snedker.

Co-opted Members: John Armitage, Nick Lindsay and Carly Spence.

Officers: Jane Kochanowski, Seth Pearson, Mary Hall, Catherine Shaw, Natasha Telfer, Stephen Wiper, Gill Etherington and Allison Hill.

Participants: James Graham, Gillian Leckenby, Andrew Poinen, Martin Stand, Jemma Austin, Jessica Mather, Jade Kirk Amy Adams, Professor Greta Defeyter, Stephen Morgan, Peter King, Phillip Roberts, Jenny Young, Nicole Garstin, Freya Svendsen, Carla Scaith, Carole Ridley, Cheryl Hunter, Hollie Richardson and Donna Wright.

Purpose of the meeting:

A fact gathering event with various organisations, charities and community groups working with young people to gather evidence on what has been done, and continues to be done during the pandemic. The Chair advised all that the aim of the Review was to gather evidence, examine areas of good practice and identify any gaps in service and to share the findings and ultimately make recommendations to influence services and policies moving forward.

Natasha Telfer, Strategy and Performance Manager gave a presentation to set the scene regarding the impact of Covid 19 on children and young people in Darlington with some contextual Darlington data under the various topics of Education and Childhood (which included child learning, digital exclusion, early years, apprenticeships); Youth Unemployment; Safety (which included crime and safeguarding); Child Poverty; Health (which included general and health behaviours); Mental Health (detailing the Co-SPACE research March to October); Equality (which included SEND, Care Leavers, Young Carers, Low Income and BAME).

Health and Mental Health – Happiness, resilience and well-being:

Mary Hall, Public Health Lead, Adults and Partnerships advised the Group that the impact on young people was huge especially with the lost support within schools by way of nutrition, physical activity and mental health as schools and teachers provided a trusted source of support and help.

Nick Lindsay, emphasised the fact that Darlington has moved ahead on Multi Agency working offering a vast array of services to support young people.

Catherine Shaw, Relationships, Education and Sexual Health Co-ordinator reported on the Healthy Lifestyle Survey and the logistical difficulties with delivery during the pandemic. The Primary Survey had been completed by 20 primary schools (1,900 pupils) and gave some of the main headlines: _

- 14 per cent had struggled to access IT
- 16 per cent were worried about Covid and contracting it
- 71 per cent enjoyed being at home and the added family time
- 22 per cent were undertaking less exercise
- 35 per cent doing more at home regarding exercise
- 33 per cent stated that family relationships had improved
- 14 per cent stated that family relationships were worse
- There had been an increase in screen time – gaming, Youtube
- 6 per cent do not play games
- There had been an increase in the number of those creating Youtube channels
- Some of the reasons for stress given included siblings, health issues and concerns, news, body image
- The majority were excited to return to school
- Dental – 68 per cent actively clean their teeth (concern that most not seeing a dentist)
- No increase in bullying overall however there has been an increase in cyber bullying
- Consumption of Fizzy drinks, chocolate and energy drinks

Secondary – 1400 responses reflecting a similar story. 73 per cent had enjoyed the increased family time; increase in screen time; overall a quarter were feeling anxious; and eating habits similar picture to primary.

James Graham, Mental Health Commissioning Manager advised Members that indicators showed that there was an increase in the number of young people experiencing difficulties; referral demand had reduced since the first lockdown but contacts had gone up; after Summer referrals had increased in excess of pre pandemic and there were a lot of drivers influencing this including isolation, bereavement, vulnerable situations at home; and mental health issues were particularly high in the 12-24 year old age range. He also confirmed that the NHS had a longterm plan on children and young people mental health issues and there was an increased investment because of this significant demand and this will be in liaison with colleagues in Darlington with a whole system approach.

Questions – Secure Units and inpatient facilities – plans to open some beds being progressed.

Gillian Leckenby, Locality Manager, CAMHS advised Members that there had been a significant increase in young people with eating disorders and this was a national issue. By not having the young people in school there was a loss of other agencies seeing these young people. There had also been an increase in neuro development referrals – up from 40 a month to currently 70 a month. Young people were still being seen within 6 weeks.

Andrew Poinen, Kooth advised Members no specific issues in relation to Darlington, North East as a whole has the highest rate of sleep issues and sadness rate was high.

Questions – What is being done to help? A – monitoring reports. Q – How is this fed back? (further information required on this). Gillian Leckenby confirmed that they were aware of the sleep issues fed to them by Kooth.

Martin Stand, DACYM advised Members of the work of the Listening Post – mentoring needs provision for young people and offering low level support. Since September they had helped over 80 students, 320 sessions carried out in 10 locations (mainly educational settings). He stressed that the Listening Post was not a counselling service just offering low level support. Anxieties reported included missing out on key milestone 'existing not living'; university anxiety; exam anxiety; symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Jemma Austin, Healthwatch advised Members of the Children and Young People's Mental Health (including experiences during the Covid-19 Pandemic) November 19 to August 2020 report of Healthwatch Darlington's survey. Confirmed the anxieties of young people in relation to education; going back to school; information being supplied to them and would have preferred to hear more positives rather than negatives; feelings of isolation and loneliness; no face to face contact; digital exclusion barriers.

Jessica Mather, Healthwatch Youth Volunteer advised Members of her work in helping young people and which has included; a project to redesign the waiting area at the Mulberry Centre; creating posters; podcasts and blogs; facebook Live and the 'worried about the future' campaign. The podcasts are Jessica, Jade and Amy (also Youth Volunteers) sharing their own personal experiences.

Food, Learning and Fun:

Professor Greta Defeyter, Professor of Developmental Psychology and Director of the Healthy Living Lab at Northumbria University outlined of her research and report looking at the effects of the pandemic and advised Members that the 2 main groups being the more advantaged and the less advantaged in relation to Food Poverty. Between March and August 2020 2.3 million children (FSM) forced in to food poverty. National data showed many attempts to delivery FSM parcels/Voucher schemes/Winter relief schemes still hadn't addressed the problem. She reported that there had also been an increase in the intake of sugar beverages, snacks and a decrease in the intake of fruit and veg. An increase in obesity and malnutrition and a widening educational gap.

Looking at how we move forward and suggested a coherent strategic approach across all departments with the voice of children and young people to shape locally and advocate for change at a national level.

Stephen Morgan, Director, NQA Foodbank provided Members with information relating to the NQA foodbank. Since December 448 food parcels delivered; an increase in the number of referrals from working families how have recently lost their jobs; on-site training delivered to all volunteers; now supplying nappies and baby food; also cater for food allergies. No questions asked (hence the name), volunteers work weekends and evenings and some out of hours providing services where others can't. Received a lot of support from other business/organisations including Bikestop Darlington and Mango Bean and the Scouts.

Questions – Is there a strategic audit making the connections.

Seth Pearson advised Members about the Bread and Butter Thing , a Charity which operates in Manchester. Predominately different from the NQA foodbank as recipients pay for the food (ie £7 for £35 worth of food) – food which otherwise would have gone to waste.

Hubs located at Harrowgate Hill, Windsor Court, Corporation Road, Red Hall, Firthmoor (100 families in week – working at capacity); and Skerne Park Hub due to open soon.

Recent grant to purchase a second van to double the amount of food available. During March to November 2020 6,236 deliveries to families; 260 families receive regular supplies; and 75 tonnes of food has been delivered to support families.

Question – can Members have some analysis data of this service.

Peter King, Headteacher Mowden Federation advised Members that the pandemic hadn't been all bad for our children although accepted that his school did not have the most disadvantaged students.

He advised that when students returned to school in Autumn there was evidence of significant gaps in knowledge and students weren't as disciplined in schooling; there had been good attendance during the Autumn Term. He advised Members of his involvement with a research project with Children North East Charity – a Poverty Proofing Audit (undertaken recently); family life and contribution of parents had been excellent and the school had been very transparent with the children and offered extra help around well being; a school meal service had been provided throughout. The barriers that he had encountered including balancing the views of all, remote learning; pressures of those in school and the lower ability students not being able to do so well with remote/live learning.

John Armitage, Headteacher Rydal Academy (and Co-opted Member) outlined the key messages from his school. The difficulty with engagement with some groups ie Gypsy, Roma and Travellers where there was a low level of engagement on remote education packages however the Traveller Support Service were looking to address this and offer support.

Questions – Is the Home Schooling Service also being included? A – Yes the Authority work closely with Elective Home Schooling and this has continued throughout the pandemic.

Gill Etherington, Virtual School advised the Members of her involvement with the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for the authorities children in care and that there had been positive contact; and outlined other activities to encourage and keep in contact with the young people in care. Some of the young people were doing well on line and others were accessing schools.

- 38 children in Year 1 and Year 7 received a monthly book supply from Books Trust
- Between Mar and October 2020 Letterbox parcels to all young people
- Supporting the Laptop scheme to ensure all LAC have access to laptops
- Working with BlueCabin — 111 primary school children received Arts packs over the Summer with positive feedback
- 55 activity packs delivered in December to KS3 pupils

Questions – The Chair requested evaluation and impact feedback to be supplied to the Group.

Jenny Young, Blue Cabin outlined the work of the Community Interest Group over the past 18 months alongside the authority; thinking of new creative activities planned in conjunction with the Virtual School; £55K funding available for digital resources and also a further years funding with the virtual school; referred to the Dream Catcher, Theatre, Doodle Jam, Puppet Theatre packs that had been created and delivered to the young people; the bespoke work in relation to the ‘merry maker’ that had been gifted to 10 children in need.

Stephen Wiper, Creative Manager outlined the work of Creative Darlington :

- **Darlington Hippodrome**, have led the **In2 programme**. The programme is backed by Darlington Borough Council and addresses particular recommendations by the Durham Commission report, commissioned by Arts Council England, In2 has offered access to culture and leisure activity and worked with schools including Corporation Road Primary and Longfield Academy. In2 intend to work post Easter 2021 with a cohort of c 100 children from years 6 and 7.
- Creative Darlington, Darlington Hippodrome and Durham Music Service and Brightwater are supporting the **Skerne project**, ongoing work in schools including Haughton Academy, involving Opera North and co-ordinated by Orchestras Live, to create a new film and original music celebrating the river.
- **Head of Steam** railway museum have developed digital engagement, recognized in its scope by Tees Valley Museums.
- The Virtual School and Creative Darlington have supported various programmes of work, co-ordinated by **Blue Cabin**, including a creative mentoring programme and the distribution of creative packs.
- Creative Darlington has supported Theatre Hullabaloo who have also been supported by the Health Visitor Network, in distributing over **500 baby play packs** (a package including creative materials, a puppet, video packages available by phone) encouraging creative play. This programme has reached families with young children at a time when The Hullabaloo has not been open.
- Creative Darlington has offered support to Theatre Hullabaloo to develop a **Thriving Communities** proposal, decision expected 8 March 2021. If funding secured Theatre Hullabaloo will work with core partners, Foundation UK and Groundwork NE & Cumbria, to offer a variety of social prescribing options to address an increase in postnatal depression since March 2020. Other providers will include Darlington Library Service (outreach pop up library offer) and the Dolphin Centre (creche, baby play and swim offer) and we will work with Healthwatch Darlington to respond to the service user voice.
- **Tracks** are currently promoting a Back on Track programme in Spring 2021 supported by Creative Darlington and Arts Council England, which includes a digital programme of **Big Little Gigs** (live performances promoted to families with young children and babies) and **Noisy Daughters** online workshops. They’ve also led Hark! The Sound of Christmas events and other online programmes, including Darlo@Home, with support from Darlington Borough Council’s events service and Creative Darlington.
- Creative Darlington has also either offered or allocated support to particular organisations and enterprises, including **The Forum Music Centre**, and **The**

Bridge Centre for Visual Arts, to help them prepare for and respond to challenges to sustained operation, arising from the pandemic.

- Creative Darlington has commissioned **Helix Arts** to provide training and support to nine artists and producers to devise and submit funding proposals to support community based projects in Darlington in Darlington in 2021/22. Creative Darlington will offer support to these proposals subject to their success in securing additional funding from other sources, e.g. Arts Council England. Some of the artists and producers intend to engage with young people at risk of homelessness, to address mental well-being.

Freya Svendsen, Tees Valley YMCA advised Members of the work of the YMCA particularly in relation to throughout the pandemic (mainly via Zoom) which included targeted group sessions; a healthy living programme with a personal trainer; Since April 330 attendees and continued promotion of the sessions available; distribution of tables and some dongles; creative sessions with the IN2 project; working with two groups 10-13 year olds (jnr) and 14-19 year olds (snr) and over 25 SEN.

Carole Ridley, Darlington Foster Carer Association advised Members how the Association were still offering a service through virtual methods i.e Zoom, and on line via Facebook

Carla Scaith, Parent Carer Forum advised Members what services the Parent Carer Forum were continuing to offer families and young people including weekly SEND sessions; virtual exercise sessions; and advised that feedback from families as that it is difficult for SEND children to access on line learning so the Forum are working with local businesses to create some on line sessions.

Cheryl Hunter, Humankind advised Members how she was trying to replicate the services offered to young people remotely and looking at the increased support required for those young carers who were new to the service and the vulnerability of young carers at this time. She acknowledged the good partnership working with colleagues in Healthwatch, Kooth, MIND and CAMHS; and also with schools.

Role of the Strategic Partnership :

Due to time restraints it was agreed to discuss the role of the Strategic Partnerships at a separate meeting to be arranged.

Next Meeting: – Meeting on 4 March 2020 to hear the 'Voice of the Young Person'.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Review Group

Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People

4 March 2021

Present: Councillors Ali, Crudass, Mrs. Culley, C Hughes (Chair), Lister and Lucas.

Co-opted Members: John Armitage.

Officers: Jane Kochanowski, Allison Hill.

Apologies: Councillors Renton and Snedker; Carly Spence and Nick Lindsay.

Purpose of the meeting:

To examine the evidence received to date from various organisations and to consider the next steps (list of evidence received below).

Aim of the review to examine the current picture, identify good practice and if there are any gaps in service; and to make suggestions or recommendations to the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Darlington Partnership and/or Cabinet.

Members considered a mind map (supplied by Councillor Snedker) outlining the various areas of investigation: Learning, Mental Health, Socialisation, Physical Health and Employment.

Members discussed young persons mental health issues as a major concern and highlighted it as a priority. Members also discussed Kooth, the on line service offered to young people aged between 11-18 across Darlington and accessible from any internet device and some of the responses they had received regarding the service. Once registered the young person can access support and advice on their emotional wellbeing and mental health, however this is a digital platform and Members acknowledged that a face-to-face element was missing.

The next meeting of the Review Group is the Virtual event to hear the views of young people and Members discussed the questions to ask the young people i.e. What are the good things about the current situation? What are the negative aspects because of Covid? How has your home situation changed? Food provision?

Next Meeting – ‘Voice of the Young Person’ Event to be held virtually on 25 March 2021 with primary and secondary students.

Evidence received from:

4Motion Darlington

Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team

Healthwatch Mental Health 2020 Report

Humankind, Darlington Young Carers Service

Public Health, Impact of Covid 19

Professor Defeyter, Professor in Developmental Psychology, Northumbria University (two papers)

Voices Project led by Children North East and Newcastle University

Children and Young People Scrutiny Review Group
Effects of the Pandemic on Children and Young People
25 March 2021

Present: Councillors Ali, Bartch, Crudass, Mrs Culley, C Hughes, Lucas, Renton and Snedker.

Also: Councillor Clarke

Co-opted Members: John Armitage and Nick Lindsay

Officers: Joanne Shutt, Allison Hill.

Apologies: Councillors Bell and Lister.

Purpose of the meeting:

This is the second fact gathering 'virtual event' with children from secondary and primary level to ask them about their 'Life during Covid' experiences and those of their peers over the past months.

Members were interested in hearing directly from young people themselves in order to understand whether services are known about, being accessed equally across the borough and cover the full spectrum of need of all children and young people in the borough.

The students were asked 3 simple questions as follows:

- what are the three best things to come out of the last year for young people like you? The three worst?
- what could have made the last year better for you (or young people you know)?
- what advice would you give to young people your age, having been through the past year?

These questions were specifically designed to be open ended to allow the children and young people to share their experiences and thoughts more comfortably. A Youtube video by the Chair as an introduction was circulated to all schools, along with the questions prior to the meeting.

List of the schools which participated in the event:

Primary

- West Park Academy
- St Teresas RC
- Mowden
- Education Village (Beaumont Hill)
- Northwood
- Reid Street

- St Augustines RC
- Bishopton Redmarshall
- Redhall
- St Bedes RC
- Holy Family RC
- Whinfield
- Firthmoor
- Harrowgate Hill
- St Georges

Secondary

- Longfield Academy
- Haughton Academy
- Education Village (Beaumont Hill)
- Wyvern Academy
- Carmel College
- Polam Hall
- Hummersknott Academy

Responses to the questions from Primary students:

What was good?

- *More time with my family*
- *Able to go outside more*
- *Learnt new skills ie. cooking*
- *Visiting friends house*
- *Walks with my Dad*
- *Could spend more time with my family and pets*
- *At home more*
- *Not having to do school work during the first lockdown*
- *Learning to see people in a different way*

What was bad?

- *Not knowing what was going on during lockdown*
- *Not seeing friends from school*
- *Couldn't go to the shops*
- *Lack of freedom*
- *Not being able to practice conversation*
- *Not being able to see distant family*
- *Not being able to see friends*
- *Going into school when others didn't*
- *Having to wear masks and social distance*
- *Being bored*

What advice would you give to other young people as we go forward?

- *Not to take anything for granted*
- *Not to take it too seriously*
- *Follow the rules and it will be better for the future and we will get out of this sooner*
- *Keep exercising because it is good for you*
- *Keep a positive mindset*
- *Be patient as there is light at the end of the tunnel*
- *Don't worry – stress can hurt your mental health*
- *Don't give up and stay positive*
- *Even though it is going to be hard and some will get hurt, it will get better*
- *Keep spirits high and share feelings, keep strong and prepare to expect the unexpected*
- *Stay connected*
- *Stay safe*
- *Follow school advice and listen to the teachers*
- *Don't stop believing*
- *Cherish the moments in primary school*
- *Keep head up high and keep positive inner strength*
- *Make it safer for us to ride our bikes near our home*
- *More activities in the park*

What ideas would you give to us to make things better/services we could provide?

- *A list of activities to show where we can go*
- *Exercise and Arts Groups*
- *Planned activities that can be done safely*
- *Activities outside in woods and in nature*
- *We are sick of sitting at computer screens and want to be able to go out to Arts Clubs, Museums and activity clubs*
- *Reopen clubs*
- *Keep exercising, keep safe and stay in the uk*
- *More school based holiday activities – football etc. less IT activities*
- *Shops opening sooner*
- *More activities around transition – face to face rather than virtual. Lost time and opportunities during lockdown*
- *Being back to normal and back to school*
- *Preparing to be out of lockdown*
- *Activities outdoors to promote self esteem and good mental wellbeing*
- *Access to support at school*
- *Access to outdoor space, more football pitches, arts and crafts and music opportunities closer to schools*
- *Help to get back to normal (stats etc)*

- *Access to more gloves and masks for all to be able to use if needed*
- *Adults need to follow the rules*
- *Having a virtual end of school year and beginning of new school year*

Responses to questions from Secondary students:

What was good?

- *On line learning (also helped to stay connected with friends)*
- *Appreciation of school*
- *Having more free time*

What was bad?

- *Lack of motivation*
- *It was a struggle for everyone*
- *Feedback from teachers was generally good but in some cases it wasn't*
- *Unprecedented times*
- *Difficult to socialise without leaving the house*
- *Not being able to see friends face to face*
- *Hard to remember your programme for on line learning, it was better in school*
- *Not being able to see family, particularly for the younger students*
- *Negative picture painted by the government was not helpful*

What advice would you give to other young people as we go forward?

- *Always wear masks*
- *Keep connected with friends*
- *Make sure you manage your workloads/good time management*
- *Positive mental health and attitude*
- *Stay calm and don't get stressed as it can get out of hand*
- *Organisation is important*
- *Important to set timetable as you would in school and not go over your hours*
- *Don't put pressure on yourself, take a break and support will be there if you need it*
- *Mix it up, down time also*
- *Listen to music to calm you down after a long day or exercise on a morning to motivate you for the day*
- *Set an alarm every hour so you don't go over your lesson time*

What ideas would you give to us to make things better/services we could provide?

- *Stress relief classes*
- *Support each other*
- *Not to be scared, be brave and do challenging things*
- *Ask students about some of the decisions being made 'pupil voice' in how things are going to be organised going forward*
- *More outside activities not just school work (also pastoral care)*

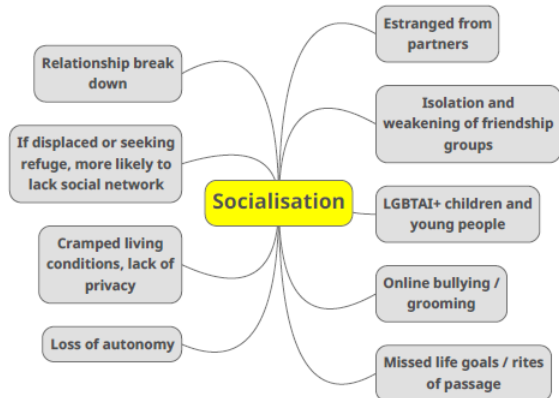
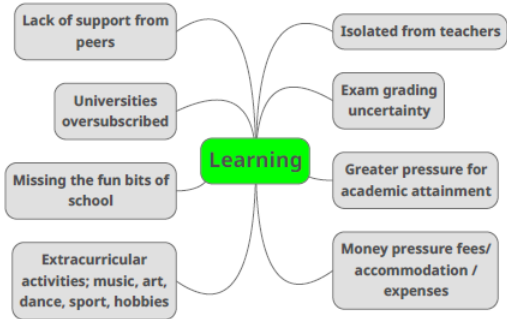
- *Keep in contact with friends*
- *More clubs and activities to take place as a lot of social skills have been lost during lockdown*
- *Meet other people to get back to normal and meet new friends*
- *Team building skills*
- *Home learning – organised chats with pupils only*
- *Website so that students can contact and talk to Councillors more easily – advertise who the councillors are and how young people could contact them - councillors could maybe introduce themselves and their responsibility area to pupils in assemblies etc*

What support do you have in school?

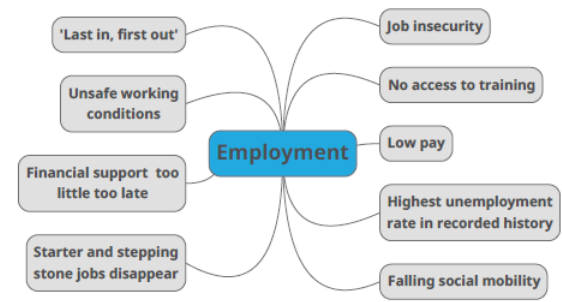
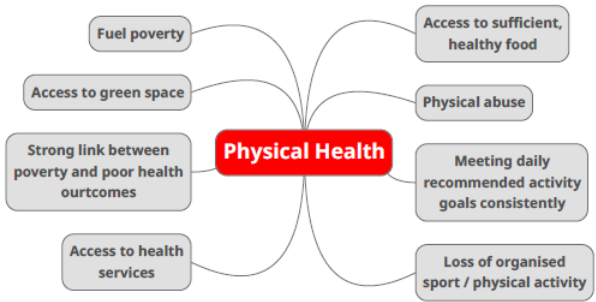
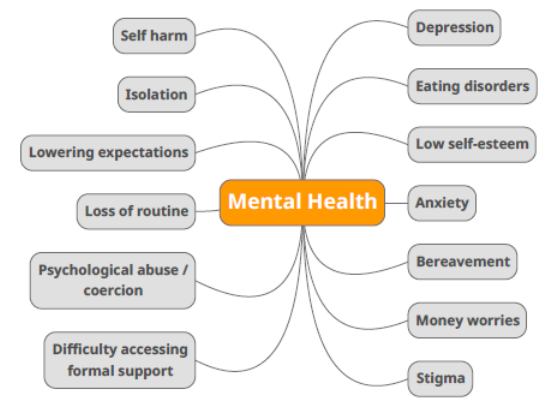
- *Instagram welfare page*
- *School council*
- *Student ambassadors*
- *Kooth*

Suggestions for what to do?

- *Badminton and Tennis Clubs*
- *Sports Day/Town fairs (outside events)*
- *Inter schools competitions to get back some community spirit*
- *Activities during school holidays*
- *Arts – fun for everyone*
- *Provide a mixture of activities for everyone including Sports/Arts/Science/Maths*
- *Outdoor music events/movie nights outdoors*
- *Career advise/activities – work placements*
- *Youth Clubs*
- *Negative media portrayal of young being to blame for the spread of Covid – annoying – not fair to blame one generation*
- *There has been a huge amount of pressure on young people – stress issues of not being able to see friends and it can be intimidating if you go out to see your friends as the police tell you to social distance*
- *When we go out we see others not adhering to the rules and this is unfair and you feel disappointed*



AREAS FOR INVESTIGATION



Reading list:
 > youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports/coronavirus-impact-on-young-people-with-mental-health-needs/
 > onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1475-5890.12230
 > childrenssociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/impact-of-covid-19-on-young-people