

COUNCIL
13 MAY 2021

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.

Health and Wellbeing Board

2. The Board has not convened since the last meeting. The next Health and Wellbeing Board will take place in June 2021.

Early Intervention and Front Door

3. Children's Information and Advice Team received 426 contacts in January and 479 contacts in February. The numbers are broadly consistent with those seen in previous months and appears more stable than during earlier periods in the pandemic when numbers of contacts were less consistent. There were 32 referrals to social care in January and 40 in February, which is a reduction on the previous year and consistent with the new front door methodology of increasing contacts but reducing referrals through a conversational style of practice. Trends at the front door show a slight decrease in contacts relating to adult mental health but an increase in contacts relating to family dysfunction and domestic abuse.
4. Early Help Services have continued to offer a dynamic response within the pandemic, with a combination of face to face and virtual visits and interventions. There were 55 Early Help Episodes commenced in January and 32 in February. Success and satisfaction rates continue to be positive with 74 per cent of families in January and February reporting positive changes because of Early Help support. All families in February engaged with the Early help offer which is very positive.
5. The Troubled Families Programme has been renamed to the **Supporting Families Programme** to better reflect service delivery. For 2020/21 Darlington achieved 100 per cent payment by results with 156 families able to demonstrate significant and sustained progress.

Safeguarding Assessment and Looked After Through Care:

Corporate Parenting Panel

6. The Panel has not met since the 16 February 2021. The Panel held on this date was reported in the previous portfolio report. The next scheduled Panel is 20 April 2021.

Child Protection, Looked After and Care Leaver statistics.

7. At the end of February 2021 there were:

- (a) 348 children being supported through a child in need plan
- (b) 84 children, subject to child protection plans
- (c) 279 children in care. There continues to be significant drive to progress children's permanence plans enabling them to safely leave the care of the local authority.
- (d) 106 relevant, former relevant and qualifying Carer Leavers and 40 eligible Care Leavers aged 16 and 17 years all have access to a Personal Advisor for support, advice and guidance.

Fostering Residential and Lifestages

- 8. 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 continue to receive support from the Marketing and Communications Team to ensure interesting articles and messages are regularly added to social media. Work is ongoing with robust recruitment campaigns for "Foster Carer Fortnight" this month.
- 9. Placement stability for children remains high due to the continued dedication from both mainstream foster carers and connected kinship carers. Contact for children with their families, has been promoted by carers, which has included face to face contact as well as virtual contact via facetime, telephone etc.
- 10. 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, work has been ongoing to try and secure a vaccine at the earliest opportunity. Foster carers who work for independent agencies and who live in the Darlington area have been offered vaccinations too.
- 11. The three mainstream residential homes are providing placements to five young people who have largely adhered to covid regulations, with very few missing from placement episodes. Staff work closely with education providers to engage young people with attendance and learning. Regulation 44 monitoring visits have been conducted virtually, but from May 2021, visits will take place face to face, subject to social distancing and other appropriate measures.
- 12. Harewood Hill Lodge has been providing respite to approximately 25 children, 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. We propose to return to the pre-pandemic mode of service delivery from May 2021, subject to national guidance.
- 13. Children with a disability continue to be supported through the Disabled Children's Team (Lifestages 0-25 team). Direct home visits are made where possible, but where children or family members have medical vulnerabilities, doorstep or virtual visits are arranged.

Education

14. The full reopening of schools commenced on 8 March 2021. Up to 21 March 2021 local schools undertook over 39,430 lateral flow tests with 71 positive results in staff and pupils. This represents a positivity rate of 0.18 per cent. Secondary school pupils are now expected to be twice weekly at home and report results to schools to record.
15. Face coverings for pupils and staff are now in use in all indoor settings. The government has confirmed that this expectation will be in place until at least 17 March.
16. Attendance at Darlington schools week commencing 25 March was at 89.4 per cent higher than the North East average of 88.5 per cent. Attendance of vulnerable pupils continues to be strong with 81.88 per cent of pupils with a social worker attending week commencing 25 March higher than North East average of 81.4 per cent. 85.2 per cent of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan attended in Darlington week commencing 25 March compared with a North East average of 82.2 per cent.

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

17. The Community Short Breaks Framework for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has been reopened via the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO) portal enabling new providers to join. An additional provider has been appointed to deliver individualised support to access existing community activities.
18. Officers are meeting with regional colleagues to assess the feasibility and viability of new regional contracts for independent fostering agencies (IFA), independent advocacy for children and young people, independent investigating officers, independent persons, and independent visitors. Updates will be provided as this work progresses.
19. Work has been undertaken in conjunction with Working Age Adults commissioners to review the existing Housing Related Support contracts in preparation for new contracts commencing 1 April 2022. The service reviews have included joint work with operational colleagues to ensure that services are aligned to better meet the needs of children, young people, and families in Darlington.
20. Successful contract negotiations have been undertaken with the provider to extend the Darlington Young Carers contract by an additional two years to ensure that support is available to young carers and young adult carers within Darlington.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

21. In February, the Statutory Safeguarding Partners invited the Chairs of the subgroups to provide an overview of how the groups are working. The chairs highlighted the effectiveness of the critical operational meetings commenced in response to COVID and are proposing an operational group continues to meet moving forward. A proposal of roles of groups and governance framework is to be drawn up for presentation at a future meeting.

22. Ryan Haig, Senior Safeguarding Leader for Department for Work and Pensions for Durham, Darlington and Tees Valley joined the Learning and Development subgroup to introduce himself and the role he undertakes for DWP. The DWP has recently created a central team to focus on strategically supporting their most vulnerable customers. Partners around the table recognised the value in linking in with Ryan for information to inform Safeguarding Adult Reviews and Adult Strategy Meetings. Ryan will be meeting the Statutory Safeguarding Partners in due course.
23. In March, the Statutory Safeguarding Partners were provided with an overview of the evaluation of the thirty-nine-week review of the children's front door. The data shows that there has been a 23 per cent decrease in email contacts which demonstrates partners commitment in embracing the new model and moving towards a more conversational based relational practice. There has been an expected reduction in referrals to children's social care compared to same period 39 weeks before implementation, ensuring the work centres around the need to keep the most vulnerable children safe. The findings of the full year evaluation will be a milestone and will be presented to partners at a future meeting.

Climate Change

24. At the present time Children's Services staff continue to work from home enabling a continued effort to reduce our impact by working to paperless processes, reduced printing, and keeping travel to a minimum.

Councillor Jon Clarke
Children and Young People Portfolio