

COUNCIL
15 JULY 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.

Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting

2. Ofsted met with the Director of People, Assistant Directors for Children and Education Services and the Head of Performance on the 3 June 2021 for an annual discussion relating to the Children's Self-Assessment (SEF). It was a positive meeting with Inspectors reassured of our continuing journey of improvement in both practice and quality of services. The transition of our self-assessment from one of compliance to highlight quality of practice and the impact that our services have on children and families was noted. A suggestion for increased performance data to be included throughout the SEF, enabling challenge and scrutiny was made.
3. We continue to anticipate a SEND Inspection and a Focus Visit/Inspection, under the ILACS framework. No indication was given at the meeting as to when these visits would take place.

Early Intervention and Front Door

4. Both the Youth Offending Service and the Early Help Service have undergone a rebranding. Following engagement with key stakeholders including service users and partner agencies, the Youth Offending Service will now be known as the Young People's Engagement and Justice Service and the Early Help Service will now be known as the Building Stronger Families Service. The name changes recognises the up to date focus and remit of the respective services.

Safeguarding Assessment and Looked After Through Care:

Corporate Parenting Panel

5. The Panel met on 20 April 2021, with young people involved, alongside Members and Officers. The Panel received and discussed:
 - (a) A positive report on Care Leavers who are in Employment, Education or Employment and those who are not.
 - (b) A report on how Care Leavers are being supported in respect of their cultural diversity.
 - (c) Photographs of Easter Eggs that had been donated for Care Leavers were circulated.
 - (d) Performance data for young people in Care and Care Leavers for Quarter 3 2020/21.

- (e) A presentation in respect of the impact that the pandemic has had on the mental health of young people in care and Care Leavers.
- (f) A verbal discussion regarding the impact of reintroducing face to face contact/family time for young people in Care and Care Leavers.

Child Protection, Looked After and Care Leaver statistics.

- 6. At the end of April 2021 there were:
 - (a) 304 children being supported through a child in need plan, which is a reduction from the 331 at year end 2020/21.
 - (b) 81 children subject to child protection plans, a reduction from 87 at year end 2020/21.
 - (c) As at 28 May 2021 there were 269 children in care. We continue to reduce the need for children to become looked after and safely return children home with the use of relational practices and safety planning, where appropriate.
 - (d) All 148 Care Leavers between 16 – 25 years have access to a personal advisor for support, advice and guidance.

Fostering Residential and Lifestages

- 7. There is a continued focus on the recruitment of mainstream foster carers to help meet the needs of children in care. There has been an increase in enquiries about mainstream fostering, with the service being supported by the Marketing and Communications Team to ensure interesting articles and messages are regularly added to social media. In May, we had a specific campaign during Foster Care Fortnight, where we attracted 36 initial enquiries during the month, which is the best response we have had for several years.
- 8. There is a Strengthening Families workstream focussing on improving efficiency and service delivery in the Fostering Team, with the aim of increasing and retaining the number of in-house mainstream foster carers to provide high quality placements for our children in care.
- 9. 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. From 1 June 2021 we have reverted to the “pre-COVID” delivery model with appropriate measures in place to ensure the safety of children and the staff team.
- 10. The Disabled Children’s Team (Lifestages 0-25 team) continue to support disabled children and their families. The team work closely with colleagues in health and education and with specialist service to ensure co-ordinated service delivery. An increased number of home visits are now taking place in accordance with the team’s “COVID recovery” plan.

Education

11. The newly commissioned SEND units at Red Hall primary school and Rise Carr College are progressing well and are scheduled to open to pupils in Autumn 2021.

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

12. Following the appointment of an additional provider to the Community Short Breaks Framework Contract. Officers have been working alongside contracted providers and the parent carer forum to co-ordinate a forthcoming virtual engagement event to raise awareness of the current community short breaks services available in Darlington both through the contract and providers own broader community initiatives.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

13. Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust provided an overview of current issues affecting service areas/safeguarding arrangements within CAMHS. An online virtual support pathway called CONTACT is currently being produced in conjunction with; parents and carers forum, the local authority and education colleagues to further support meeting the needs of children with neurological needs. Partners agreed to keep this issue on their radar and requested appropriate performance data is fed into the partnership.

Climate Change

14. 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