

COUNCIL
30 SEPTEMBER 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 Health and Wellbeing Board met on 16 September 2021. The main discussion item included an update from the Tees Valley NHS Clinical Commissioning Group on the Darlington vaccination programme.
3. Members also received a presentation on the Needs Led Neurodevelopmental Pathway from the CCG's Head of Commissioning and Strategy for Children, Young People and Maternity, NHS Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group. A specific area of need was highlighted in autism for children and young people and the opportunity to integrate this work with the work the council is undertaking to improve outcomes for children and young people with autism.
4. Following the recommendation from Cabinet in March for the Health and Wellbeing Board to investigate the impact of hot food takeaways on the health of residents, and, in particular, on childhood obesity in Darlington, Members welcomed a presentation detailing the planning options in relation to hot food takeaways.

Early Intervention & Young People's Engagement and Justice

5. The Building Stronger Families Service (formally known as Early Help) are resuming all groups from September, both universal and targeted and to increase awareness there have been a series of activities over the summer holidays using the Head of Steam's field. The groups from September will include the Inspire to Change Programme, for men and women who have been abusive, controlling or violent towards their partner, which staff have been trained to deliver over the summer, we are also focussing on babies born during lockdown to help address any delayed development, particularly speech and language.
6. From 1 August, a new assessment pathway was introduced, which means that more direct work takes place before the Early Help assessment is completed, inclusive of family network meetings, where families devise their own plan, outlining who will support them in effecting change.
7. The draft Youth Justice Plan has been submitted by the Young People's Engagement and Justice Service to the Youth Justice Board and the service is awaiting comments from the National Board. Ordinarily the plan requires approval from the Board before any official allowance is released to the authority however, the service recently received the official allowance figure earlier than usual, showing an 8 per cent uplift on last year.

8. Anti-social behaviour (ASB) group sessions are now complete with a reported reduction in crime and ASB in the town centre (reports from July). Following on from successful sessions with Fire and Rescue the service are now working to develop a rolling programme for young people. The programme will be accessible to all young people, whatever the pathway/offence, in particular, to those out of education, who perhaps would not get the generic safety messages at school.
9. Summer activities come to an end this week. The activities have been very successful in terms of attendance and behaviour of young people and a review meeting in terms of reflection/learning is planned for September when staff are back from annual leave to plan for future events.
10. Prevention and Diversion Programmes delivered by the service have been recognised by the Youth Justice Board, following a presentation at a regional Youth Justice Meeting and this presentation, along with details of our provision (Duke of Edinburgh, Bike Project, School Work) will be uploaded to the Youth Justice Resource Hub.

Safeguarding Assessment and Looked After Through Care

Corporate Parenting Panel

11. The Panel met on 15 June and 14 September 2021, with young people involved, alongside Members and Officers. The Panel received and discussed:
 - (a) Performance data for young people in care and Care Leavers for both Quarter 4 2020/21 with an overview of the year end, and Quarter 1 2021/22 performance data.
 - (b) A briefing report regarding dentistry during the pandemic.
 - (c) The revised Health Passport for care experienced young people.
 - (d) The new initiative to launch an Education Passport for care experienced young people.
 - (e) The Care Leaver Covenant. The Care Leaver Covenant was launched in Care Leavers Week 2018 and is part of the Government's Keep On Caring strategy to support people leaving care to become independent. It allows public, private and voluntary sector organisations to pledge support, including: apprenticeships, work experience and free or discounted goods and services. All support given through the Care Leaver Covenant will help Care Leavers to make a transition to independence. There is no cost attached to signing up to the Care Leaver Covenant. The Panel provided their support to the Care Leavers Covenant. Further discussions are underway regarding next steps.

Child Protection, Looked After and Care Leaver statistics

12. At the end of July 2021 there were:

- (a) 289 children being supported through a child in need plan, which is a reduction from 331 at year end 2020/21.
- (b) 77 children subject to child protection plans, a reduction from 87 at year end 2020/21.
- (c) 260 children in care.
- (d) All 148 Care Leavers between 16 – 25 years have access to a personal advisor for support, advice and guidance.

Care Experienced/Care leavers summer events

13. The looked after through care team have always ensured that Care Experienced/Care leavers have every opportunity to participate in organised activities provided from the team. These organised events that Care Experienced young people have participated with over the summer 2021 have been fully funded and organised by the Looked After Through Care Team and are listed below:

- 16 June – 1st Care Experienced/Care Leavers Picnic in the Park
- 6 July – Care Experienced Forum
- 14 July – 2nd Care Leavers Picnic in the Park
- 22 July – Care Experienced Virtual Quiz
- 12 August – Face to Face Care Experienced Forum and Pizza at Pease House
- 13 August – Mother and baby day trip to Redcare
- 16 August – Care Experienced Football Match - Staff v Young People
- 20 August – Care Leavers walk/Roseberry Topping day trip
- Couch to 5K – Each Thursday lunchtime
- 26 August – Care Leavers Virtual Quiz
- 28 August – Olly Murs concert at Mowden Darlington Arena
- 2 September – Hamsterley Forest Biking Day Trip
- Pscho Education Group – commenced 1 July 2021

Fostering, Residential and Lifestages

14. At the end of July there were 54 mainstream foster carers and 23 fully approved connected foster carers. There was a total of 7 fostering applications in Stage 1 and 5 applications in Stage 2 of the assessment process.

15. The number of initial enquiries in May was the highest recorded at 36, following a positive “Fostering Fortnight” foster carer recruitment campaign. There were 9 initial enquiries in June and 6 in July. Work is ongoing to promote the benefits of becoming a foster carer with Darlington Borough Council and there is a Marketing and Recruitment Plan in place to ensure a sustained focus on this key area.

16. At the end of July there were 5 young people cared for across the three residential children's homes. Harewood Hill Lodge returned to the pre-Covid delivery model, and short breaks are being provided to 27 children and young people.
17. At the end of July 2021, the Disabled Children's Team were supporting 113 children and young people. Social workers liaise closely with Health and Education colleagues and promote a restorative approach to working with children and their families.

Education

18. With the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, in line with Step 4 of the Roadmap, children and young people are now able to enjoy more freedom and socialisation in their education. Schools and colleges have a range of measures in place to manage COVID-19. For example: testing, ventilation and hygiene. All schools and colleges are advised to continue with regular handwashing, cleaning regimes, and to keep spaces well ventilated. These measures will be supported by the Education Service and Public Health team to respond to any spikes in infection in education settings. If a child or young person has been identified as a close contact, they will be advised to take a PCR test. They will not have to self-isolate, unless they have a positive PCR test result.
19. When they returned at the start of the autumn term, secondary school and college students were advised to take two on-site rapid COVID-19 tests (3-5 days apart), followed by twice weekly testing at home. If the test was positive, then the pupil will be expected to take a confirmatory PCR test.

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

20. Significant renovations have been undertaken in the self-contained accommodation available through the commissioned young person's Positive Support Pathway. The renovations have included a full refurbishment and modernisation of all 25 flats at the YMCA foyer. Work has also been undertaken to enhance the exterior of the foyer through a very positive garden renovation project with the Prince's Trust involving residents at the foyer. The garden renovation project has created a refreshed and attractive outdoor space for the young people to undertake group activities.
21. Opportunities to strengthen the Voice of the child/young person in commissioned services have commenced within the young carers support service. The young carers have scheduled a "meet the commissioner" engagement event and it is the intention that a series of further meetings will be held to reflect upon what works well in the service and where there are opportunities for further improvement.
22. A procurement exercise has commenced for the provision of accommodation and outreach support for families in Darlington. The existing contract is in place until 31 March 2022, and the new procurement will establish the service continuity arrangements effective from 1 April 2022. The procurement closes for evaluation on 17 September 2021.

Climate Change

23. Children's Services continually are looking at ways to reduce paper usage and with the implementation of the Liquid Logic case management system have been able to drastically reduce our paper usage and are not routinely keeping paper files across Children's Services; and are looking at national best practice in terms of how best to deliver relational approaches to families without an over reliance on papers and paper files to go .

Councillor Jon Clarke
Children and Young People Portfolio