

**COUNCIL**  
**25 NOVEMBER 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.

**Early Intervention and Front Door**

2. The Front Door remains busy with an increase in contacts and referrals when compared to previous months. This is a trend which is being reported regionally and nationally. In terms of the issues presenting at the Front Door, there has been a fall in contacts concerned with adult conflict, however there was a rise in contacts related to adult mental health. Adult mental health is currently the second highest presenting issue with domestic violence remaining the highest. Re-referrals remain below target which is positive.
3. A partnership is being built with the Head of Steam Museum, with one of the groups being led from this site once per month. Partnership with Health remains strong and our Health partners are offering a targeted baby health clinic from McNay Street, this is well attended. Other groups on offer are the Inspire programme for victims of domestic abuse, and although in its first run, this has been very popular with places now fully booked and a waiting list in place. There is also a new pre and post birth group called Bump, baby and beyond, which has been developed to promote parents learning about the care of babies, as well as offering a social hub to meet with other new parents and make friends.
4. Skerne Park Community Partnership are leading on a stay and play group from the Coleridge Centre, and this will be led by parent volunteers, and support with advice and guidance by Building Stronger Families staff, for example, the teams DWP secondee will attend to advise on jobs and training opportunities, and the Foundation Secondee will be able to offer advice around housing issues. The plan is to develop a parent led 'Dad's Group', this is something families have identified as beneficial.
5. The service has been very busy with a high number of early help assessments being led by the team, especially between July and September. The new assessment pathway introduced over the summer months promotes a relational way of working with families and empowers them to develop their own smart plan which includes a network of support from family, friends, and community resources. The aim of the plan is to support families to make positive changes that are sustainable long term.

**Young People's Engagement and Justice Service**

6. Following summer activities a review was carried out and from this there is a new referral process for the Activity and Reparation Team. Young people and their parents/carers will be invited to a drop in session at our workshop and this will take the form of a welcome/introduction to the service, to our reparation projects and will also mean families can meet the team. The session will also be focused on understanding the young

person's strengths and interests with a view to helping plan for reparation focussing on aims with planned activities included.

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

#### **Corporate Parenting Panel**

7. The Panel met on 26 October 2021, with young people involved, alongside Members and Officers. The Panel received and discussed:
  - (a) The Annual Fostering report.
  - (b) The Annual Virtual School report.
  - (c) The Annual Independent Reviewing Officers' report.
  - (d) Information in relation to a Care Leavers' event regarding clothes donations.

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

8. At the end of September 2021 there were:
  - (a) 275 children being supported through a child in need plan, which is a reduction from 331 at year end 2020/21.
  - (b) 79 children subject to child protection plans, a reduction from 87 at year end 2020/21.
  - (c) As at 14 October 2021 there were 261 children in care.
  - (d) As at 14 October 2021 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**

9. 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 through September and October 2021 have been fully funded and organised by the Looked After Through Care Team.
10. Care Leavers week for 2021 started the week commencing 25 October, and activities for this week involved:
  - (a) On 26 October a clothes swop shop was held.
  - (b) On 28 October two care leavers were taken to the NLCBF celebration event in Leeds.

- (c) On 29 October a celebratory meal for Care Leavers was held at Uno Momento in Darlington.
- (d) All Care leavers who live out of area were sent a celebration card, poem and cake to mark Care Leavers week.

### **Fostering, Residential and Lifestages**

- 11. At the end of August 2021 there were 55 mainstream foster carers and 22 fully approved connected foster carers. 58 children and young people were placed with mainstream foster carers and 45 children and young people were placed with connected carers (this includes fully approved and temporary approved connected foster carers). At the end of August, there was a total of 7 fostering applications in Stage 1 and 6 applications in Stage 2 of the assessment process.
- 12. 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, 6 in July and 9 in August. 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. Throughout October, The Fostering Network have a focus on the contribution that foster carers own “Sons and Daughters” make, and this is an important event in the fostering annual calendar. The Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team is supporting this national campaign by recognising and thanking all the sons and daughters of our mainstream and fully approved connected foster carers with a gift voucher and thank you card.
- 13. At the end of August 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 26 children and young people.
- 14. At the end of August 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 strength based, restorative approach to working with children and their families.

### **Education**

- 15. The two newly commissioned resource units for pupils with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) opened for pupils in September 2021 and have each welcomed their first cohorts of pupils.
- 16. Officers continue to work closely with school leaders to ensure support and guidance is available on Covid 19. Weekly all head teachers briefing meetings relating to Covid issues are continuing and schools can join a daily online meeting with Education and Public Health officers to discuss issues of concern.
- 17. The school-based vaccination program for 12–15-year-olds is being rolled out nationally and the first Darlington schools have taken part. The program is being operated by Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust.

## **Youth Unemployment**

18. The 18-24 year old claimant count for August 2021 stood at 10.9% (795 young people), this is down from a peak of 13.8% (1,005 young people) in March 2021. The Darlington figure is still above the North East average of 7.9% and the Great Britain average of 6.9%, both of which have also seen improvements since March. Darlington has the second highest youth claimant rate in the Tees Valley, where claimant counts range from 9.2% to 11.8%.
19. The economy is picking up and there has been an increase in vacancies in some of the more traditional sectors where young people seek employment (hospitality and catering and retail). However, we are also hearing that employers are having trouble filling vacancies.

## **Children's Commissioning and Contracts**

20. The procurement exercise for the provision of accommodation and outreach support for families in Darlington has concluded with Foundations appointed as the successful contractor. The new service arrangements will take effect from 1 April 2022 and will incorporate: integrated working with the Councils Building Stronger families service; specific opportunities for Kinship Carers to receive instant access information and support, and an increase in the number of units of accommodation in Darlington from 6 to 12 for families at risk of homelessness within the first year of operation.
21. Following an allocation from the Regional Recovery Funding, a new regional commissioning hub will be developed effective from 1 April 2022 for an initial period of 12 months. The hub will be hosted by Stockton Borough Council (working on behalf of all 12 Councils in the North East) and will complement the place-based priorities of children's commissioning in Darlington across both the social care and SEND agenda. The remit of the regional commissioning hub will include:
  - (a) The ability to use market weight as a key purchaser of social care, education, health and specialist services.
  - (b) Support to Councils in accessing market capacity when and where needed and influence the overall quality and cost of services.
  - (c) Providing additional capacity to Councils in the region to support innovation.

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

22. Statutory Safeguarding Partners continue to meet monthly and continue to have oversight on safeguarding issues. Child safeguarding data for the 4th quarter period 2020/21 provided partners with assurance that there were no real exceptions or problems being highlighted with trends and patterns being monitored.

## **Climate Change**

23. Hummersknott Academy has been awarded beacon status by The Tree Council after taking part in a project aimed at raising awareness of caring for the environment.

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