

**COUNCIL**  
**1 FEBRUARY 2022**

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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 under the Children and Young People Portfolio.

**Care Leaver Covenant**

2. Cabinet gave its approval for Darlington Borough Council to sign The Care Leaver Covenant for the benefit of care leavers in Darlington.
3. The Care Leaver Covenant works with organisations across England in all different sectors to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently. The Covenant is funded by the Department for Education and delivered by Spectra.
4. By signing the Covenant, this will ensure that care leavers in Darlington are given the best opportunities to support them into independence and to achieve their potential and ensure that as Corporate Parents, we continue to be ambitious for our children and young people and offer the highest quality of service, in line with our Care Leavers Local Offer. <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/education-and-learning/childrens-social-care/leaving-care-and-the-local-offer/our-local-offer-to-care-leavers/>

**Health and Wellbeing Board**

5. The Board scheduled for 16 December 2021 was postponed to free up time for health colleagues to concentrate on pressing pandemic issues.

**Early Intervention and Front Door**

6. The Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) have now been working within the Professor David Thorpe Model for 20 months with the performance and statistics evidencing the success of the model to date. The Weekly Review Meeting continues to work well and allows for senior leaders to oversee all contacts and referrals, this meeting has progressed well, it is highly effective and from January 2022 our external safeguarding partners will be invited to attend and participate at regular intervals.
7. Bespoke training has been devised to roll out training in relation to the Prof Thorpe model, this has been delivered to members of the Weekly Review Meeting, social care teams, new CIAT staff and is to be delivered to multi-agency professionals on 19 January 2022.
8. CIAT are now a fully staffed DBC team therefore the stability and consistency of the team enhances the ability to provide an effective, quality and timely response to our children and families within Darlington.

9. So far in Quarter 3 CIAT has remained busy. There has been a continued high number of contacts where domestic abuse/violence are the abuse category, there has been an increase in physical abuse and adult mental health contacts. There has been an increase in referrals to Building Stronger Families for early intervention and prevention work, there has been a reduction in referrals to social care however this is now increasing as we move into Quarter 4. The number of contacts that have an outcome of advice and guidance/signposting remains relatively high; however, through oversight and exploration in the Weekly Review Meeting it is evident enquiries are effective and the right service has been identified for the family and child/young person at the right time, this being at the centre of decision making and ethos.
10. CIAT have received positive feedback during October from CAFCASS and multi-agency professionals, professionals were particularly impressed that they are able to phone Darlington's Front Door using a designated telephone number and speak directly with a qualified Social Worker rather than complete written referrals. They have complimented the use of the model, prompt response and detailed feedback being received when they have made contact with the service.

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

11. Planning for Reparation and Activity sessions has begun, some changes were required however this has been a positive experience for young people and their parents/carers. Community Resolution work is also set to commence once initial planning and identification of the cohort of young people who will be involved in this is finalised. There has been a lot of work carried out with multi-agency partners in relation to the understanding, identifying and responding to Harmful Sexual Behaviour and YPE and JS will inform and help facilitate training sessions for school, as well as contribute to the refreshing of multi-agency protocol around this issue.
12. Darlington's Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) bid has been submitted, the bid is around a 'Supportive Home Theme'.

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

#### **Corporate Parenting Panel**

13. The Panel met on 14 December 2021, with young people involved, alongside Members and Officers. The Panel discussed:
  - (a) The health response to the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to children in care.
  - (b) The Ofsted-focused visit to consider Darlington's arrangements for care leavers.
  - (c) The care leaver activities that have taken place during the Festive period which include:
    - (i) A social media campaign for donations of selection boxes, toiletries and token gifts for care leavers.

- (ii) "Santa at the station" – an event for care leavers and their children to visit Santa at the Head of Steam railway museum and refreshments.
- (iii) Christmas Market at Raby Castle – a group of care leavers were supported to visit the festive event at Raby Castle with their Personal Advisors.
- (iv) Deliveries of Salvation Army hampers to all care leavers by their Personal Advisor.
- (v) A trip to the Hippodrome pantomime.
- (vi) A care leavers' Christmas party at the Pennyweight.
- (vii) A small number of care leavers who may have been alone at Christmas have been linked with a project that will be hosting a Christmas dinner on Christmas day for care leavers across Teesside.

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

14. At the end of November 2021 there were:

- (a) 284 children being supported through a child in need plan, which is a reduction from 331 at year end 2020/21.
- (b) 90 children subject to child protection plans, a reduction from 87 at year end 2020/21.
- (c) 261 children in care which is a reduction from 272 at year end 2020/21.
- (d) All 148 care leavers between 16 – 25 years have access to a personal advisor for support, advice and guidance.

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

15. At the end of October 2021 there were 55 mainstream foster carers and 22 fully approved connected foster carers. There were also 8 temporary approved connected foster carers and a further 6 carers where children were not in placement. A total of 14 connected foster carer assessment were ongoing. On 10 December 2021, 61 children and young people were placed with mainstream foster carers and 39 children and young people were placed with connected carers (this includes fully approved and temporary approved connected foster carers). At the end of October, there was a total of 4 fostering applications in Stage 1 and 5 applications in Stage 2 of the assessment process.
16. Young people are supported to consider "Staying Put" with their previous foster carers when they reach adulthood, and at the end of October, there were 7 young people with their previous foster carer in a "Staying Put" arrangement. A further 2 young people were with their previous Independent Fostering Agency carers.
17. 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 had a focus on the contribution that foster carers own “Sons and Daughters” make, and this is an important event in the fostering annual calendar. We utilised social media to reinforce the benefits of becoming a foster carer with Darlington Borough Council. The Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team supported 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.

18. At the end of October 2021, 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. Bed occupancy is at 82 per cent, which has been the case since August.
19. At the end of November 2021, the Disabled Children’s Team were supporting 116 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. Given concern about an increase in the rates of Covid, the team will make “virtual” or “doorstep” visits if families are isolating.

### **Education**

20. Hummersknott Academy has recently been inspected by Ofsted and graded as a “Good” school. Inspectors recognised the high-quality pastoral care, wealth of personal development opportunities and ambitious curriculum. Polam Hall Academy has also been judged as “Good” in their recent inspection. Inspectors noted the strong sense of community and personal development offered at Polam Hall and high expectations for every child. Gurney Pease Academy was also judged as “Good” in their recent Ofsted inspection. Inspectors highlighted the school’s inclusive and welcoming approach, the high ambition for all pupils and the strength of support for reading.

### **Youth Unemployment**

21. The 18–24-year-old claimant count for November 2021 stands at 8.7 per cent (635 young people), this is down from a peak of 13.8 per cent (1,005 young people) in March 2021 and lower than it was before the start of the pandemic (January 2020 - 8.9 per cent or 650 young people).
22. The Darlington figure of 8.7 per cent remains above the North East average of 6.7 per cent and the Great Britain average of 5.7 per cent, both of which have also seen improvements since March 2021. Darlington has the third highest youth claimant rate in the Tees Valley, after Hartlepool and Stockton, where claimant counts range from 7.5 per cent to 10.5 per cent.
23. The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) has now been extended until 31 July 2023 and in Darlington the main providers will continue to be DBC, CAB and Morrison Trust.
24. Youth unemployment has been a persistent problem in Darlington for many years and a multi-agency group was established and chaired by the Chief Executive and has been considering appropriate interventions over the summer of 2021 and Cabinet have now approved up to £70,000 of Contain Outbreak Management Funds/Covid Reserve to fund a

range of interventions to support local young people giving them greater prospects of securing work.

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

25. The neurodevelopmental pathway is an improved and sustainable provision which will meet current and emerging needs of children and young people in Darlington who display traits associated with neurodevelopmental conditions. It will be a whole system approach which will be more cost effective and a better use of current resources and has been jointly commissioned by the Tees Valley CCG and Darlington Borough Council.
26. The introduction of the Neurodevelopmental Pathway is a move away from the former diagnosis model to a needs-led model for children and young people with a range of neurodevelopmental issues.
27. The Family Support Hub is delivered from the Hippodrome in Darlington and provides a drop-in facility for parents and carers to meet with professionals and receive advice and support. Darlington Council along with Tees Valley local authorities and Tees Valley CCG have commissioned Daisy Chain to provide the Family Support Model.
28. The contract has been in place from 1 December 2021.

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

29. Statutory Safeguarding Partners continue to meet monthly and are updated on the work of the sub-groups which continue to meet virtually and drive forward the work of the partnership.
30. In November, the final governance proposals for the partnership were presented to partners which set out the terms of reference and lines of accountability of each of the sub-groups. There will be two strategic groups, the Learning and Development and Quality Assurance and Performance Management Groups with two Operational Groups sitting underneath, one focussing on children and one on adults. The Statutory Partners were happy to accept the proposals and for the sub-group chairs to make arrangements to move forward. It was acknowledged membership will need to be reviewed to ensure the right people are represented from all partner agencies on each of the groups.
31. The Council's website also provides information on the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership working with private, voluntary and public sector and community groups to agree the major issues and opportunities for Darlington and to ensure action is taken.  
[www.darlington.gov.uk/your-council/communities/darlington-partnership/](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/your-council/communities/darlington-partnership/)

### **Climate Change**

32. The blended approach is a much more modern and flexible way of working and will build on the success and popularity of home working during the pandemic. The reduction in the need for office space across the town could also lead to some financial benefits and will help us with our climate change commitment as there will be less travel and recycling of equipment which is no longer needed.

33. Childrens' services have continued to reduce their use of paper, through managing increasing numbers of documents and forms in electronic formats and will continue to build on this progress, only using paper where absolutely necessary. The service is also promoting and supporting staff to engage with the Climate change Academy 10 training module, to ensure that all staff have the opportunity to raise their own awareness about the personal impact they can make to climate change. In addition, staff have been made aware and encouraged to access the electric vehicle salary sacrifice scheme to contribute to reducing their emissions when completing Council business.

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