

**COUNCIL**  
**31 MARCH 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 undertaken under the Children and Young People Portfolio.

**School Admission Arrangements**

2. Cabinet have approved the Local Authority's admission arrangements for the three maintained primary schools in Darlington for 4 for the 2023/24 academic year: and the administration of in-year applications thereafter.

**Early Intervention and Front Door**

3. There has been an increase in referrals to social care and domestic violence and family dysfunction are identified as particular areas of concern in the majority of the concerns for children. The issues that families are facing are often complex and a RAG rating system has been implemented; this helps identify the level of risk and the urgency of response required. This system allows for a rationale as to why a concern requires the time response that it has been allocated and allows the team to prioritise referrals to social care swiftly and without delay.
4. The Weekly Referral Meeting attended by senior leaders continues to provide oversight of referrals and in light of the increase it is important to understand the appropriateness of decision making. At present senior leaders are satisfied that the right service is being provided to children and their families. The Weekly Referral Meeting has seen the first of our external partners join us in February, this has proven to be successful with all feeling there is lots to learn from one another and the opportunity strengthens relationships.
5. The Children's Initial Advice Team is now fully staffed with permanent employees, the team is stable and settled.

**Building Stronger Families Service**

6. The team are leading on early help assessments, and supporting those led by external partners through health and education, with relational practice being at the core of the support offer. A high number of family network meetings are being facilitated within family homes and the children's centres, enabling families to draw on and build on existing strengths to devise their own restorative family plans. The service is opening up with more targeted groups following the pandemic, and these include the Inspire Program to support those who have experienced domestic abuse, with a waiting list for this popular rolling program. There is also a constant demand for the Reducing Parental Conflict Program, for those parents who are experiencing conflict without domestic abuse, and this is a factor in a high number of early help assessments being delivered. Young people are attending weekly for self-esteem and confidence work through the Being Me and I am Me

group, and this is successful in helping them make better life choices and decisions, and Theraplay has now started again, which is for all children and parent's with attachment difficulties, but especially well suited to children with Autism and ADHD, where attachment related interaction is difficult.

7. McNay Street are working closely with Corporation Road School to support the start of a community hub for the Northgate area, with the aim of supporting those hard to reach families in the area, promoting service and resource awareness, and ensuring accessibility for all.

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

8. The service continues to be very busy with various groups and activities. The Victim Support Group consists of 4 vulnerable young people between the ages of 9 and 15; in the main they are being supported following harm by way of sexual abuse. The group are about to commence the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme. Other activities have included a session at the climbing wall, a hike, geo-caching, an educational visit to Beamish, Christmas card making and outdoor cooking using the burners. These activities have helped create a strong bond within the group which in turn will prepare them for the teamwork required for the Award going forward. The aim of establishing the group is to enable the young people to support each other on their journey of recovery.
9. Work is underway on the development of the Community Resolution offer and a pilot will commence in early March, data will be received from the Police on a monthly basis detailing those young people who have been issued with a community resolution in that period. The service will make contact with these young people to offer support, for those young people who are already open to services, contact will be made with the lead professional to offer advice/guidance and consultation on potential intervention that the service themselves may wish to consider to address the behaviour.
10. Once again used bicycles donated to the service by Durham Constabulary, DBC staff and members of the public have been delivered to families across the borough. These bikes have been worked on by young people involved with the service resulting in bicycles being brought back to an as-new standard. A total of 11 bicycles were delivered to 8 families; any surplus bicycles will be offered to local primary schools.
11. The Anti-Social Behaviour pathway has received 8 referrals from the Civic Enforcement Team and as a result of this a 7 week programme has been devised.

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

#### **Corporate Parenting Panel**

12. The Panel met for a formal meeting on 15 February 2022. There were discussions about:
  - (a) Performance data for Looked After children and Care Leavers
  - (b) Update on the care Leavers Covenant
  - (c) Update on activities care leavers have been involved with since Christmas

- (d) The Mockingbird Project – a new fostering initiative for Darlington
- (e) Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People and the establishment of a steering group to drive good practice

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

13. At the end of January 2022 there were:

- (a) 281 children being supported through a child in need plan, which is a reduction from 331 at year end 2020/21.
- (b) 89 children were subject to child protection plans, which is a slight increase from 87 at year end 2020/21.
- (c) 268 children in care, 3 of whom are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; this 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 Service and Lifestages Disabled Children's Team**

- 14. At the end of January 2022 there were 53 mainstream foster carers and 21 fully approved connected foster carers. There were also 7 temporary approved connected foster carers and a further 3 carers where children were not in placement. A total of 10 connected foster carer assessment were ongoing. There were 2 prospective mainstream foster carers in Stage 1 of the assessment process, and 6 in Stage 2. On 11 January 2022, 64 children and young people were placed with mainstream foster carers and 41 children and young people were placed with connected carers (this includes fully approved and temporary approved connected foster carers).
- 15. Young people are supported to consider "Staying Put" with their previous foster carers when they reach adulthood, and at the end of January 2022, 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.
- 16. 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. A digital marketing officer has recently been appointed and will be supporting Fostering and Supported Lodgings with their marketing work. There are plans to commission some photographs and videos to promote the service, and work is ongoing to have a advertising campaign in April on local buses and at bus stops. Other advertising screens in the town are also being considered.
- 17. On 11 February 2022, there were 7 young people cared for across the three residential children's homes, which is an increase. 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 84 per cent.

18. At the end of January 2022, 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**

19. Firthmoor Primary School was inspected by Ofsted on 8 and 9 December 2021 and continues to be judged a "Good" school. Inspectors recognised the strong sense of community at Firthmoor Primary. Pupils love the school and feel proud to be part of it and staff are ambitious for all pupils and pupils achieve well as a result.
20. The Schools Forum met on 8 March. The Forum was given an update on the current year budget. The Forum also noted the high needs budget and the early years hourly rates for 2022/23.

### **Youth Unemployment**

21. The 18–24-year-old claimant count continues to fall and in January 2022 stood at 8.0 per cent (580 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 8.0 per cent remains above the North-East average of 6.2 per cent and the Great Britain average of 5.1 per cent, both of which have also seen improvements since March 2021. Darlington has the second lowest youth claimant rate in the Tees Valley, where claimant counts range from 7.2 per cent (Redcar and Cleveland) to 9.6 per cent (Hartlepool).
23. Darlington Borough Council YEI is the most successful of all the consortium of Tees Valley providers, and had achieved:
  - 960 – Total number of starts onto programme
  - 884 – Positive Outcomes (education or job, 74 per cent into job)
24. In Q4 2021, the number of positive outcomes was 87, and in the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 months of Q1 2022 it is 100, 97 per cent are into jobs. This has been possible by engaging with employers to deliver bespoke pre-employment training and guaranteeing interviews for participants; a lot have been for Kickstart opportunities. One employer YEI exclusively worked with, Click Digital Solutions, have employed 70 young people from Darlington in the last 6 months. Other employers YEI are working with include EE and Jacobs on long term recruitment programmes.

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

25. Darlington have been proactively involved in a number of regional commissioning and procurement exercises, including the provision of children's advocacy services effective

from 1 April 2022 and the provision of Independent Foster Agency care which is due to go out to procurement imminently with a new contract commencing 1 July 2022.

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

26. Statutory Safeguarding Partners met in January and were updated on the work of the sub-groups which continue to meet virtually and drive forward the work of the partnership. Child safeguarding data for the 2nd quarter period of 2021/22 provided partners with assurance that there were no real exceptions or problems being highlighted and discussed the benefit of having trend data over several years to help understand where there are any continuing or emerging trends. Partners agreed, whilst the data provided a snapshot of that particular quarter period, it did not provide an overview of the whole system and have requested the Quality Assurance and Performance Group ensure all future reporting provides trend data and assurance that safeguarding systems and processes are working.

### **Climate Change**

27. We continue to promote awareness of climate change within the teams. The theme of the month is to recycle household waste.

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