

**COUNCIL**  
**14 JULY 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.

**Early Intervention and Front Door**

2. The Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) remains stable and settled and all members of the team are employed by DBC. Work has been ongoing as a new Domestic Abuse Worker will be joining the Front Door Service and will work alongside CIAT. Interviews are due to be held in June 2022 and it is hoped there will be a successful appointment to this vital role that will help in our response to children and families who experience domestic abuse. The successful candidate will assist with triage, information sharing and decision making and the successful person will also work across other children's teams and attend strategy meetings. Another post is being created to work across CIAT and Building Stronger Families, this will assist with contact enquiries where early help may benefit the family and will greatly assist with a preventative approach that is so beneficial to families. Interviews have also been held for a safeguarding health representative who will form part of the Front Door Service, it is hoped the successful candidate will join the Front Door towards the end of June/early July 2022.
3. Training in relation to the approach and work carried out at the Front Door has been arranged for Building Stronger Families staff. This training will provide Building Stronger Families staff with an overview of the model used in CIAT when gathering information, this helps ensure the right decisions are made for children and families. This training will be particularly beneficial for staff from Building Stronger Families when they are considering whether the children need to be transferred to social care and a social worker appointed.
4. A survey monkey began in April 2022 whereby all callers to the Front Door Service receive a short survey for completion. The results for April were excellent with 100% of callers feeling listened to within the call and the calls being deemed as respectful and polite. Positively a number of Social Workers were mentioned by name within the survey and this has been fed back and has increased morale and confidence.
5. In May 2022 the MAMM (Multi-agency Missing Meeting) and CEG (Child Exploitation Group) merged to become MEG (Missing and Exploited Group). This was following observations of both meetings taking place and a review of how best to respond to children who go missing and who are likely to be at a greater risk of exploitation was carried out. Also, following a learning review in relation to exploitation a twice weekly meeting known as CSCI (Community Safety Check In) is now held at the Front Door. During this meeting agencies can join remotely and 'check in' and share intelligence and information in relation to young people, risky 'places and spaces' and other matters where there are concerns around exploitation. From this 'mapping' of these children, potential

gangs and risky 'places and spaces' will assist with responding to such matter through disruption activities and education.

### **Building Stronger Families Service**

6. The service remains busy with a high number of early help assessments being completed. Staff continue to work from home as part of the agile working pilot scheme, however they are delivering direct work within the centre at McNay Street and across the town, as well as completing home visits as needed.
7. Targeted and universal groups are building back up, with the majority now operating across the town, including Inspire to support victims of domestic abuse, and parenting workshops across a range of ages. There are also groups running from Skerne Park at the Coleridge Centre for early years children with additional and sensory needs, as well as McNay Street for children with a speech and language delay noted in the 2-year, 2 months developmental check by health visitors, who refer families onto the group for extra support.
8. Building Stronger Families managers sit on the Neurodevelopmental Pathway Panel, and those children who don't meet the criteria for the pathway are signposted to other services, including having an early help assessment and support with parenting and behaviour management. Staff have completed training with Daisy Chain to ensure that they have skills relating to working with families with Neurodevelopmental difficulties, delivering different strategies and resources to parents and carers.
9. Older children and teenagers are coming into the centre to take part in Being Me and I am Me, which are programs designed to promote identity, safety, confidence, and self-esteem. The majority of children attending these groups are girls and following on from a number of referrals into the service for younger teenage boys with similar issues, a new group has been devised to support a group of boys called Being Me for Boys, and this is due to start, involving a lot of online safety as well as personal hygiene and self-esteem. This will be evaluated later in the year.

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

10. Victim Support Pathway – victim group are currently working through their Duke of Edinburgh award at a horse academy. This is working very well and the young people are learning new skills while developing in confidence and growing as a team. To date the group have learned how to rug and de-rug, tack and un-track, learnt about different brushes within a grooming kit and what each piece is used for as well as learning how to groom. They have also learnt how to lead and turn a pony without a rider and had a lesson on how to walk, turn, sit, trot and halt their ponies.
11. Since sharing our school intervention menu at Vulnerable Pupil Panel at the beginning of March we have had 7 schools approach us for input with 5 schools confirming intervention sessions over the next few months with particular focus on emotional management, exploitation and ASB.

## **Looked After and Care Leaver statistics**

12. At the end of May 2022 there were:

- (a) 291 children being supported through a child in need plan, which is a decrease from 331 at year end 2020/21.
- (b) 113 children subject to child protection plans, which is an increase from 87 at year end 2020/21.
- (c) 275 children in care, 6 of whom are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; this is a very slight decrease from 272 at year end 2020/21.
- (d) All 157 care leavers between 16 – 25 years have access to a personal advisor for support, advice, and guidance. The Looked After Through Care Service is in touch with all care leavers

## **Looked After Resources including Fostering, Residential, Keeping Families Together and Family Group Conference**

### **Fostering and Supported Lodgings**

- 13. Work has been ongoing to prepare for the launch of a Mockingbird constellation of foster carers, which aims at developing strong support networks for a group of foster carers, which in turn helps to maintain placement stability for children and young people. We have identified a social worker to undertake the liaison worker role, and a foster carer to undertake the hub home carer role, and we will be working to identify the satellite foster carers. The Mockingbird implementation group are meeting on a regular basis to monitor progress.
- 14. We have been developing a series of self-service reports regarding the fostering recruitment process, and we are now able to “run” reports which will provide management information to support a focus on improved practice. The Fostering and Supported Lodgings team members have received some training to support with this.
- 15. To support The Fostering Networks Foster Care Fortnight (9-22 May) our marketing activity our marketing team have put together an extensive campaign, including for the first time a TV advert that will not only support Foster Care Fortnight but will keep this important message alive throughout the year.

### **Residential Services**

- 16. We received the keys for Lancaster Close, our newly built Children’s Home on 19<sup>th</sup> May and work has been ongoing to prepare for Eldon Street to relocate to Lancaster. This includes an application to Ofsted for registration, an update of procedures to reflect the new premises, preparation of the staff team and young people, and preparation and furnishing of the premises.

17. When Eldon Children's home re-locates, work will progress further to re-purpose the Eldon Street building into "Cedars" our respite and emergency care unit which will be funded for 2 years. One of the exiting residential managers has been recruited to the post of Registered Manager for Cedars, and we are in the process of recruiting a Registered Manager for Lancaster Close.
18. At the end of April, Gilling, Dunrobin and Eldon Street Children's homes all had three young people in placement, so were at capacity. This represents the highest level of occupancy for over 5 years. Harewood Hill Lodge, Short Breaks Unit provided care to 24 children in both April and May, which represents 86% capacity, leaving scope for emergency situations should a child require additional support.

### **Keeping Families Together (KFT)**

19. In April the Team made 32 visits and in May they made 13 visits. Direct work was completed with children and with their parents/carers. There are currently no families awaiting support from Keeping Families together

### **Corporate Parenting Panel**

20. The Panel met on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2022. This was a face-to-face meeting. The Panel discussed the following agenda items:
  1. Promises Tree General update
  2. Care Leavers activities since the last meeting in May – June 2022
  3. Achievements of our cared for children and young people
  4. The Care Leavers Covenant update
  5. Fostering and Supported Lodgings marketing activity to support carer recruitment 26<sup>th</sup> April – 27<sup>th</sup> June 2022
  6. Update on the Mockingbird Fostering project
  7. Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking Children (UASC)

As it was an informal meeting, the Performance for Looked After Children and Care Leavers for Quarters 3 and 4 2021-22 will be discussed at the next formal meeting

### **Education**

8. The joint Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection was carried out over five days in January. It looked at how providers across Darlington – including council, NHS and schools – have implemented SEND reforms since 2014 to the present day. Inspectors spoke to children and young people with SEND as well as their parents and carers, visiting a range of settings. Inspectors have published a report on the services provided to children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) in Darlington – highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

9. Reid Street Primary school was recently inspected by Ofsted and maintained its “Good” grading. Inspectors recognised the high ambitions for all at Reid Street and that the school is a happy and safe place where pupils develop independence. Whinfield Primary school has also maintained its “Good” rating. Inspectors recognised leaders are ambitious for all pupils, that children feel valued and well cared for, parents appreciate the warm welcome you give them and pupils with SEND achieve well. Mowden Junior School has also recently maintained its “Good” rating. Inspectors recognised leaders put pupils at the heart of decision making, that Mowden Junior School is a friendly and caring school where pupils get lots of opportunities to develop as individuals and pupils with SEND make strong progress.

### **Youth Unemployment**

10. The 18-24 year old claimant count in Darlington continues to fall and in April 2022 stood at 6.0% (435 young people), this is down from a peak of 13.8% (1,005 young people) in March 2021 and the lowest it has been since mid-2016.
11. The Darlington claimant count figure is only 0.6% above the North-East average of 5.4% and just 1.4% above the Great Britain average of 4.6%. This is the closest the figures have been to the national average since comparable records began in January 2013. Darlington has the lowest youth claimant rate in the Tees Valley, where claimant counts range from 6.0% to 8.0%.
12. Young people continue to be supported through a range of local and national employability programmes, including DBC’s Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) which runs until 31 July 2023. The DBC YEI Team are the best performing in the whole of the Tees Valley YEI Partnership.
13. DWP has a dedicated Job Centre Youth Adviser who is co-located with the YEI team and is looking to co-locate another adviser shortly. The team are now based in 193 Northgate.

### **Children’s Commissioning and Contracts**

14. The new regional Framework contract for the provision of Independent Foster Agency placements went live on 1 July 2022. All 12 Councils within the North East are parties to this contract agreement. The contract remains open at all times for additional providers to join following a satisfactory suitability assessment. The placement of children within the DBC in house foster service will continue to remain the first priority option to be exhausted before considering external providers. In circumstances where it is not possible to place with internal foster carers, the regional Framework contract will be the primary route for securing externally provided foster care. Contract expenditure is only made at the point of a placement being made.

## **Climate Change**

15. We continue to promote climate change and environmental awareness with all teams. The theme for the summer is recycle, reuse, and recover e.g., garden and household wate – use for projects, compost etc.

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