

COUNCIL
24 NOVEMBER 2022

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.

Early Intervention and Front Door

2. The Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) has moved from the Police Station to the Town Hall. This move is to accommodate and facilitate the vision and growth of the Children's Front Door. Multi-agency representation is strengthening, and this is forming an even stronger response and approach to concerns for children in Darlington.
3. The survey monkey has been ongoing for 6 months and continues to provide excellent feedback. Results from April to September highlight 100 per cent of wishes and views being listened to during calls, 100 per cent of calls meeting expectations of politeness and respect and 94 per cent of calls where the referrer feels contact with CIAT will have a positive impact on the child/young person.
4. The Missing and Exploited Team that form part of the Front Door continues to develop and over the past 6 months early intervention has been a focus. Early intervention is now shaped and supported by way of twice weekly multi-agency Community Safety Check In (CSCI) Meetings. This is an arena where partners can share vital intelligence/information to assist with disrupting any form of exploitation. The Early Intervention Exploitation Panel sits monthly and this forum analyses information gained through the CSCI, helping partners work together to improve the safety of 'places and spaces' deemed to be unsafe for children vulnerable to exploitation, as well as to identify any forming of gangs. The MEG (Missing and Exploited Group) focusses on those children who go missing regularly, and children who are deemed to be at higher risk of exploitation, action based plans are developed across agencies to reduce missing episodes and reduce the level of risk of exploitation.

Building Stronger Families Service

5. There is now an offer of both universal and targeted programmes and will further expand our town wide delivery, utilising community centres and schools. Reducing Parental Conflict and CAPVA, as well as a range of targeted work for older children and drop in sessions for advice are now part of the offer, alongside Early Years groups with a focus on speech and language development and socialisation for children and parents to help with Covid recovery.

Young People's Engagement and Justice Service

6. Darlington were successful in the Safer Streets 4 bid and recruitment of an Intervention Worker has taken place. This role will allow for a focus on increasing capacity in the ASB Pathway and will increase school input.

Safeguarding Assessment and Care Planning including Children with Disabilities

Looked After and Care Leaver statistics

7. 289 children were in care on 30 September 2022, 12 of which are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). This is an increase from the position at the end of June when there were 280 children in care, 7 of whom were unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children, and an increase in the position at year end March 2022 when 273 children were in care, 3 of whom were UASC. At the end of September, we were at Cycle 17 of the mandated National Transfer Scheme, and we know that Darlington will receive referrals in cycles 17, 18 and 20. The duration between completed cycles is dependent upon the number of UASC reaching the UK.
8. All 168 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. 98 per cent of our care leavers aged 19- 21 were in suitable accommodation at the end of September 2022. This was due to 1 young person being in custody

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

Fostering and Supported Lodgings

9. We are working on a project called "This is the Place" with Blue Cabin (who we work with on the Creative Life story project). The project will begin on 11 January 2023 and is for foster carers and pre-school children to engage in making music together to help develop skills and relationships.
10. We have continued to work on developing our Fostering "Mockingbird" constellation. There is a launch event planned for 28 October, and we will be "going live" from 31 October 2022. We are working with the Marketing Team to ensure wide publicity for this new development which we hope will support foster carer retention, and recruitment.

Residential Services

11. A Registered Manager for Lancaster Close has been recruited and commenced on 26 September. We are waiting for Lancaster Children's home to be registered with Ofsted so the children living in Eldon Children's home can move into their new home.
12. Dunrobin Children's Home continues to have three young people in placement, so is at capacity. Eldon Children's Home has three young people in placement; however, one young person is currently in a secure welfare placement. Gilling Children's home has two young people in placement one has successfully been reunified with his father, and another young person is also working towards being reunified home with his father.

Harewood Hill Lodge, Short Breaks Unit provided care to 24 children in September, which represents 82 per cent capacity, leaving scope for emergency situations should a child and their family require additional support. Harewood Hill Lodge is currently providing 7 beds a month to other local authorities, which generates income.

13. Findings from recent OFSTED inspections of our Children's Homes have demonstrated that we are not consistently providing care to the high standards we aspire for, and young people are not consistently achieving the outcomes we aspire for them. We have worked with OFSTED to put immediate actions in place where this has been needed and have developed a more detailed service improvement plan which recognises some of the wider issues and challenges and actions as to how to address these and improve. A follow up Inspection visit was completed to the Children's Home that was rated inadequate on 11 October 2022, which noted improvements and a number of areas having been addressed.
14. A task and finish group has been diarised to support the improvement plan and ensure developments are consistent across all four children's homes. Key members of the task and finish group have been identified and a provisional plan created.

Family Group Conference (FGC)

15. There has been a continued welcomed increase in the number of FGC requests. In the month of September, there were 30 requests for FGC support. 7 FGC's, 2 FGC reviews and 1 Emergency Family Network Meeting was held in September.

Keeping Families Together (KFT)

16. KFT Social Workers remained in Assessment and Safeguarding so KFT support has continued to be provided by the 3 Family Workers with support from the Team Manager and KFT Advanced Partitioner who commenced post 1 September 2022. In the month of September, there were 6 requests for KFT support, all of which were progressed. KFT were supporting 9 families as of the end of September.

Education

17. The School Uniform Exchange scheme continues to support families this academic year. The scheme has been running for 18 months and operates in Queen Street Shopping Centre. There is a strong demand for the service, having been used by 2,500 families from all schools across Darlington. Second-hand uniform items are sifted for quality, laundered, and bagged before being distributed to families.
18. The Council will be using the Household Support Grant to provide supermarket vouchers to families in receipt of free school meals during the October, February, and Easter school holidays. Families will receive a voucher of £20 per week in the holidays for each child in receipt of free school meals which can be used at a range of supermarkets.

Youth Unemployment

19. The 18-24 year old claimant count dropped to a six year low of 6.0 per cent (435 young people) in May 2022, however since then it has slowly crept back up to 6.9 per cent (500 young people) in August 2022 due to the economic slowdown. Both the North-East and

National averages have also risen but at a slightly slower rate and now stand at 5.4 per cent and 4.6 per cent respectively.

20. Darlington and Middlesbrough have the second lowest youth claimant rates in the Tees Valley, where claimant counts range from 6.6 per cent in Redcar and Cleveland to 9.0 per cent in Hartlepool.
21. 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 31st July 2023. The DBC YEI remain the best performing team in the whole of the Tees Valley YEI Partnership. DWP has a dedicated Job Centre Youth Adviser co-located with the YEI team as well as a second member of Jobcentre Plus staff. The team are based in 193 Northgate.
22. The Youth Friendly Darlington Initiative was formally launched with a business breakfast at Darlington College on 11 October 2022. The Council and partner organisations have been working with Youth Employment UK, the pre-eminent national charity in this field since April. As experts on youth employment and unemployment, they are ideally placed to understand the complex landscape facing young people, educators, employers and policy makers. There are two key elements to the initiative:
 - (a) an on line 'hub' where young people can access employment support and where businesses can promote the opportunities they have available and;
 - (b) A Good Youth Employment Charter, where employers agree to work towards a set of principles and to being recognised as a Youth Friendly Employer
23. Both elements are now live and being developed and promoted.

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

24. Joint work has been taking place in respect of the Foundations Families Accommodation and Outreach commissioned service between Children's Commissioning, Private Sector Housing and Foundations (the provider) to maximise the number of properties available for Darlington families receiving support through this contract. This joint venture has focused on the potential for empty homes to be brought back into use for local families. Initial exploratory discussions however, have already identified two potential empty properties with owners in support of their properties being used by Foundations to deliver this service.
25. Work will begin in November between local authority SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Commissioning, Health and Parents Carer Forum colleagues in terms of identifying and mapping out need in respect of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing offer across Darlington. At the heart of this initiative will be co-production with families and children involved in the SEND agenda who have directly experienced these services as well as key stakeholders. Darlington, along with neighbouring Tees authorities and NECS (North of England Commissioning Support Unit) have been successful in securing funding in terms of developing the 'child's voice' to help progress this offer.

Climate Change

26. We continue to encourage teams to develop themes and ideas to support climate change. The current theme is energy efficiency within the home.

Councillor Jon Clarke
Children and Young People Portfolio