

COUNCIL
26 JANUARY 2023

OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

1. Since the last meeting of Council, the report following the OFSTED ILACS Inspection has been published. The Inspection took place between the 10 and the 21 October 2022 and was the first full inspection of Children's Services since 2018, at which time the service was judged as "Requires Improvement". The outcome of the most recent inspection found that Children's Services are "Good" overall and judged to be "Outstanding" in its services for Children in Care and Care Leavers. This is a tremendous achievement which recognises the hard work and dedication of the staff team and the high quality relationship based services they provide to children and their families across Darlington.
2. In addition to the recent inspection, there has continued to be a great deal ongoing within the service and the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Children and Young People Portfolio.

Early Intervention and Front Door

3. The Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) remain stable and settled following their move from the Police Station to the Town Hall. Since moving we have been able to progress with the growth of the multi-agency team with the addition of a health representative and an additional early help worker. Moving into 2023 we are working towards our police representative also moving to the Town Hall which will further develop our existing multi-agency approach for children in Darlington. CIAT played a significant role within the recent ILACS Ofsted inspection and good outcome with comments such as *'timely and effective response', 'robust discussions with partner agencies', 'clear and detailed', 'understand risk and provide consistent clarity'*.
4. The Missing and Exploited Team has developed at pace over the last 6 months and early identification of missing and exploited remains our focus. The Community Safety Check In Meetings are now fully embedded, the Early Intervention Exploitation Panel is developing well and moving into 2023 we will be focusing on closing the loop in terms of working together to improve the identification of risky 'places and spaces' and 'people and associates'. The Missing and Exploited Team also played a pivotal role in the recent Ofsted inspection with comments such as *'children at risk of exploitation are judiciously identified and supported', 'robust risk assessments', 'enhanced place assessments used to identify and respond to risk effectively'*.

Building Stronger Families Service

5. We have reviewed our current Facebook page and have updated our usage to appeal to a wider age range, and to promote our offer of services. We are seeing positive uptake of new parenting workshops as a result of this.

6. 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. As part of post Covid recovery Staff have trained in "First Words Together" and this is now being embedded as a Theme throughout targeted and universal groups and can be used 1:1 to promote speech and language.

Young People's Engagement and Justice Services

7. An Intervention Worker is now in post and working closely with the Civic Enforcement Team in strengthening the pathway. This will be enhanced further in the coming months with the commencement of the Ministry of Justice - Turnaround Programme, this will see the introduction of assessment and planning within the pathway, taking a whole family approach to prevention of ASB and Offending.

Safeguarding Assessment and Care Planning including Children with Disabilities

8. 287 children supported through a Child in Need (CiN) plan as at the end of November 2022. This is a decrease from the position in June 2022 when 291 children were supported through a CiN plan. This is part of a general decrease from 305 at year end March 2022.
9. 105 children were subject to a Child Protection plan at the end of November 2022. This is similar amount to the 104 children who were subject to Child Protection Plan at the end of June 2022. However, is a return to the more usual amount for the last 18 months, after a dip in July this year.
10. 101 children from 71 families came into care since April 2022 as a result of court proceedings undertaken by the local authority. 66 children from 49 families have ceased to be in care during this time.
11. The Assessment and Safeguarding duty team is now office based within the Town Hall, and duty colleagues from Children with Disabilities and the Family Group Conferencing team are co-located with them. A report exploring the options for a virtual locality model is in progress.

Looked After and Care Leaver statistics

12. 308 children were looked after by Darlington Borough Council on 2 December 2022, 17 were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). This is an increase in the position at year end March 2022 when 273 children were looked after, 3 of whom were UASC. We are at cycle 24 of the National Transfer Scheme, and Darlington will receive a further 4 referrals in cycles 25-28. The duration between completed cycles is dependent upon the number of UASC reaching the UK. Although we have been able to find placements for the UASC young people this is becoming increasingly difficult, with several young people placed outside of Darlington. This is impacting on the capacity of the Looked After Through Care team to manage caseloads
13. All 178 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, this

was due to 1 young person being in custody, and 80 per cent of care leavers were in education, training or employment at the end of October 2022.

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

Fostering and Supported Lodgings

14. 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.
15. We have held a pre-launch event on 28 October for Darlington’s first “Mockingbird” constellation. Mockingbird formally went live on Monday 14 November – and foster carers within the constellation have met and have an event planned in December 22 and January 23 for children and carers. 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.
16. We are also planning a 26-week course on “Trauma informed Care”, which will begin in January 2023, for both fostering social workers and foster carers – which will equip the team and a small group of carers with knowledge and skills which we hope will improve relational practice between carers and children – and improve placement stability.

Residential Services

17. Dunrobin Children’s Home continues to have three young people in placement, so is at capacity. Eldon Children’s Home has two young people in placement; however, one young person is currently in a secure welfare placement and the bed is being held open while planning is ongoing. Gilling Children’s home has two young people in placement, and one young person was successfully rehabilitated to the care of a parent. Harewood Hill Lodge, Short Breaks Unit provided care to 26 children in September, which represents 89% 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.
18. Harewood Hill Lodge was inspected by Ofsted on 22 and 23 November and maintained their grading of Good.
19. Dunrobin has been inspected on 29 and 30 November and has gained the grading of Requires improvement to be Good which is an improvement on the grading of inadequate from their last inspection. Ofsted have complimented the team on the improvements to the home. The outstanding compliance notices have been addressed and removed from the home.
20. A task and finish group has been established to support an improvement plan across the homes, and to ensure developments are consistent across all children’s homes. Key members of the task and finish group have been identified and a plan of work has been created.

Education

21. Mount Pleasant Primary School was recently inspected by Ofsted and maintained its “Good” grading. Inspectors recognised the high expectations of leaders and staff for all pupils including those with SEND, the strong sense of community, strong relationships with local families and exceptional behaviour. St John’s Church of England Academy was found to be “Outstanding” at its recent Ofsted inspection. Inspectors recognised the outstanding provision, that children flourish at St John’s, staff have high expectations and children achieve extremely well.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

22. Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish Review Group of childcare sufficiency and the general supply within the borough and the barriers to the provision of childcare provisions.
23. We agreed to provide assistance in communicating the availability of jobs in the childcare sector and include this communication of jobs in Events Planning, Jobs Initiatives, Publications and Digital communication; and make local Members of Parliament aware of the concerns highlighted by Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with regard to the provision of sufficient childcare to meet the needs of our families.

Youth Unemployment

24. The Middlesbrough and Redcar 18-24 year old claimant rate for October 2022 was 7.3 per cent, closely followed by Darlington and Stockton at 7.6 per cent. Hartlepool is an outlier at 9.5 per cent.
25. The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) programme runs until 31st July 2023 and it is planned to take referrals right up until project closure. To date the DBC YEI team has had; 1,219 starts, 1,167 completions, 1,136 progressions and 646 sustained outcomes (measured at six months after leaving the programme).
26. TVCA are due to put out an open call for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) early in the new year as part of the people and skills element. It is understood there will be some funding for ‘employment support for the economically inactive’. DBC intend to bid as a consortium of the five Tees Valley local authorities.

Children’s Commissioning and Contracts

27. In line with the priorities of our Looked After Children and Care Leaver Sufficiency Strategy a new residential children’s home opened in Darlington on 16 October 2022 operated by Evolve. This home is specifically for children who require the additional support of a residential care home for a time lime period before moving on into foster care. This home is a really positive addition which diversifies the range of Ofsted registered Darlington based care and accommodation for local children.

Climate Change

28. Children's Services SLT continue to ensure that our contribution to Climate Change is prevalent on our agenda, through these discussions we were able to feed back where the Heating of the Town Hall was not at its most efficient and this has resulted in positive changes to the heating which reduces our Carbon Footprint. All services remain committed to identifying proactive changes, even small ones, which make a positive contribution.

Councillor Jon Clarke
Children and Young People Portfolio