

COUNCIL
23 MARCH 2023

OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

Since the last meeting of Council, the following are the main areas of work undertaken under the Children and Young People Portfolio.

Schools Admissions 2024/25

1. In line with the School Admissions Code 2021, this authority has approved the Local Authority's admission arrangements for the 2024/25 academic year for the three maintained primary schools in Darlington and for the administration of in-year applications thereafter.

Early Intervention and Front Door

2. The Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) at the Front Door continues to be stable and is performing well. Contacts being received into CIAT are consistently increasing year on year, particularly since the re-modelling of the Front Door in March 2020. This has been positive in terms of outcomes for children and families, ensuring the right service is provided at the right time with no delay. The increase in contacts has inevitably contributed to an increase in referrals to both social care and Building Stronger Families and due to this there remains pressure in terms of workloads and casework across the whole service. In the last three months there has been growth at the Front Door with the 4Kids Service now embedded, alongside the ongoing development the new Early Intervention Worker and Domestic Abuse Worker, these are integral roles in terms of meeting the need in relation to this area of safeguarding.
3. The Missing and Exploited Team that form part of the Front Door continues to develop well and moving into 2023 there is a focus on supporting the service as a whole to work together to 'close the loop' and work in a more effective joined up way, creating opportunities to identify and target 'places and spaces' and 'people and associates' deemed to be unsafe in relation to young people vulnerable to exploitation. A sharp focus on the early identification of gangs forming is also consistently considered within all forums and a focus in terms of analysis of any information sharing and action planning.

Building Stronger Families Service

4. 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 Service

5. 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

6. 290 children supported through a Child in Need (CiN) plan as at the end of December 2022. This is a slight increase from the position in September 2022 when 275 children were supported through a Child in Need plan. This is in line with the sustained decrease from 305 at year end March 2022. 74.5 per cent of children on CIN plans had been on the plan for less than a year. 95 per cent of children on a CIN plan for over 2 years are Children with Disabilities.
7. 97 children were subject to a Child Protection plan at the end of December 2022. This is a decrease on the 118 children who were subject to Child Protection Plan at the end of September 2022. This is an increase on the 88 of children on a CP plan at the end of December 2021, but not in line with the annual trend year to date. 16.5 per cent of children on a CP plan have been so for over a year, no children have been on a CP plan for over 2 years.
8. Work has been undertaken to reduce the number of CP plans ending prior to 6 months. Our data shows that successful de-escalation to a CIN plan is much more likely at this point.
9. 41 children from 21 families came into care in quarter 3 2022/23 as a result of court proceedings undertaken by the local authority. This is an increase in the number of children from Quarter 2 (33) but a decrease of the number of families (25). This is an increase on the 26 children who came into our care in quarter 3 2021/22. It is not an increase in the number of families, which has remained relatively stable over the last 3 years.
10. The 0-17 Children with Disabilities Team is now fully staffed and supporting children and families at every point of children's social care involvement This is supported by the team being much more closely aligned to the other Safeguarding, Assessment & Care Planning teams. Transition to Adult Social Care processes are working well, overseen by the TASC panel.
11. As of December 2022, the children's Assessment and Care planning teams have been reconfigured and renamed, as part of a pilot of locality working. Children are now allocated to a team based on the area they live (North, South, East, West & Central Darlington). This is in part to support social work teams building links with local communities and schools, while also trying an alternative approach to managing the demands of a very busy duty system. Reports from staff thus far have been broadly positive and a full review of the changes, including the area boundaries, will be undertaken in April. The Children with Disabilities and Family Group Conference teams continue to provide duty workers within their remit.

Looked After and Care Leaver statistics

12. 314 children were looked after by Darlington Borough Council at the end of December 2022, 18 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 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. In particular it is challenging to find placements for younger UASC young people (under 16s).
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. 98.2 per cent of our care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation, this was due to 1 young person being in custody, and 78.2 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 have held a launch event on 30 January 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 took place 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.
15. We currently have a 26-week course on "Trauma informed Care" taking place, which began 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

16. 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 December, 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.
17. Harewood Hill Lodge was inspected by Ofsted on 22 and 23 November and maintained their grading of Good.
18. 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.

Education

19. Darlington College was recently inspected by Ofsted and achieved a “Good” judgement. Inspectors recognised the quality of the provision across a wide range of curriculum areas and age ranges, the high expectations set by staff, the extensive partnership work, and the commitment College leaders make to meet the needs of all the communities the college serves.
20. Rydal Academy also achieved a “Good” judgement in a recent Ofsted Inspection. Inspectors recognised that pupils love the school and all staff aim to make the Academy a haven for all who attend, expectations for pupils with SEND are high and work to support pupil’s mental health and well-being is impressive.
21. As part of our ongoing commitment to increasing capacity for SEND in Darlington the council submitted a bid to open a new Special Free School and we are delighted that we have been successful. To complement our existing provision, we have identified the need for a secondary provision for those pupils with a primary need of autism/ASD. The new special free school will provide 48 full time places for pupils aged 11-19 with autism, who would benefit from a specific environment and staff dedicated to a holistic approach. The capital funding for the new school will be provided from the Government’s Free School Programme. As a new build site it is proposed to utilise the opportunity to create a multi-agency hub to develop a centre of excellence to support ASD needs in Darlington. Alongside the Department for Education, we will now be seeking proposals from organisations which are interested in establishing and running the new school

Youth Unemployment

22. The Darlington 18-24 year old claimant count fell from 7.7 per cent (565 young people) in November 2022 to 7.4 per cent (540 young people) in December 2022. This is contrary to the North-East average which remained static at 5.6 per cent, and the national average which rose from 4.6 per cent to 4.7 per cent.
23. The Redcar 18-24 year old claimant rate for December 2022 was 7.2 per cent, closely followed by Darlington at 7.4 per cent, Stockton at 7.5 per cent and Middlesbrough at 7.9 per cent. Hartlepool is an outlier at 10.0 per cent. Only Darlington (-0.3 per cent) and Stockton (-0.1 per cent) saw a month on month fall in numbers, the other three Tees Valley authorities saw claimant numbers rise.

Children’s Commissioning and Contracts

24. During 2023/24 Darlington will be working in alongside with the Children's Cross Regional.
25. Arrangements Group (CCRAG) hosted by Hertfordshire County Council. CCRAG is a partnership of local authorities working together to support the sourcing, contracting, monitoring of children's placements in Independent and Non-Maintained Special Schools and Children's Residential Homes. CCRAG currently has 36 Local Authority members (six of

which are North East Local Authorities). The aim of CCRAAG is to:

- (a) Improve overall quality standards and outcomes for children and young people.
- (b) Reduce duplication and share quality assurance activity between member Local Authorities.
- (c) Work with the market to provide quality up to date information on individual services and improve sufficiency.
- (d) Focus on relational commissioning and encouraging effective communication across the partnership.

Climate Change

26. Children's Services Senior Leadership Team continue to have a service champion to Climate Change and our contribution to Climate Change is prevalent on our agenda. Our Assessment and Safeguarding Teams have recently moved to a locality based model of service delivery which it is envisaged will lead to reduced travelling for teams and workers by having them aligned to certain Wards within the town. This is anticipated to lead to a reduction in emissions from more efficient working and travelling arrangements.

Councillor Jon Clarke
Children and Young People Portfolio