

COUNCIL
28 SEPTEMBER 2023

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. During Q1 2023/24 there has been a continued rise in contacts and referrals. A rise in contacts is expected as this is promoted with the use of the Prof Thorpe Relational Front Door model, whereby we encourage telephone contact from partner agencies as opposed to email contacts. However the rise in referrals has placed pressure on the whole service. Work to refresh and reignite the use and success of the Prof Thorpe model is underway and early signs are that by focusing on the use of the model and engaging partners more in discussion about outcomes, referrals have decreased. It is too early to understand whether this will be a consistent pattern.
3. Staffing in the Children's Initial Advice Team remains stable and there is currently only 1 vacancy which is a member of the team who works 3 days each week and has recently taken maternity leave. During Q1 2023/24 excellent feedback for the Children's Initial Advice Team has been received with 100% of people surveyed said they felt their expectations of the call being polite and respectful were met; 94.7% felt that the outcome of the call would have an impact on the child/young person/family and 94.7% felt that their wishes and views were listened to in the call.
4. The 4Kids Team who form part of the Children's Front Door were recently featured in an article that focused on the success of the project and the Police and Crime Commissioner, Joy Allen met with the Team. Some brilliant feedback has been received from families who have engaged with the Team.
5. The Missing and Exploited Team continues to provide oversight with regard to all of our children who go missing and the focus remains on decreasing these missing episodes and where children are going missing ensure that any 'Harm Away From Home' is understood and responded to in the most effective way.

Building Stronger Families Service

6. BSF have provided a robust summer offer to continue to support families during the school holidays. This has been in partnership with Health, Head of Steam and Wilmott Dixon who are completing the building works close to the centre. Learning and Skills are also involved alongside Daisy Chain, who provide tailored support to autistic children, young people and their families, in our last session planned for 24 August. The activities on offer have included some Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics with Wilmott Dixon for older children, and some craft activities for all children and their parents/carers. Families have also turned up and feedback has been positive. The offer has also included some

advice and guidance drop in session for parents who are struggling over the summer months.

7. A baby event was held on 17 August and we were able to engage 20 families in the event, from these 20 families many were new families to the service. Due to the success of this event there is a plan to hold more, this is a wonderful way to help and support families access services from the earliest point in their child's life.
8. Older children have been accessing Being Me and I am Me which are groups to support confidence, self-esteem and risk-taking behaviour.
9. Work is underway to develop the targeted program for September and the Universal offer is now in place ready to go and has been advertised across the borough, including on the media pages via the LA Communications department.

Young People's Engagement and Justice Service

10. The service are continuing to engage with **Turnaround**, which is a Government investment project to support Youth Offending services to provide earlier intervention to support young people to avoid the Criminal Justice System. Data returns for Y2 Q1 have been submitted, numbers engaged remain on track with **10 active families**. Provision reliant on names from Civic Enforcement and Police that meet the criteria. Referral route from Police needs some attention.
11. **Immediate Justice** – Immediate Justice pilot has begun, this is to be implemented with all cases referred from Civic Enforcement and Police (inc those eligible for Turnaround), contact to occur within 48 hours and a community reparation element to be part of the planned work. We are aiming to advertise for a reparation role and an intervention (Case Manager) role to meet the needs of this pilot, job adverts have been submitted but confirmation from PCC regarding funding meant there has been a delay in the adverts going live. The pilot itself has started, we are hoping to deliver despite the roles not being filled.
12. Expeditions completed for both our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker group and our young victim and vulnerable group, both groups engaging in a day a week summer activity programme to complete their awards. The Awards Evening is scheduled for Tuesday 19th September at the Forum.
13. Summer activities alongside the YMCA were very successful, with lots of young people engaged in activities over the course of the summer. We have recently invested in some fishing equipment and uptake for sessions has been high alongside our two workers who are competent in the activity.

Safeguarding Assessment and Care Planning including Children with Disabilities

14. Over April and May the increased referral rate for children and families in need has continued to be sustained, this continues to impact on workloads across the Assessment and Care Planning Service. Recruitment and focused activity has supported the management of this work. Specific areas are highlighted below:

- (a) 125 children were referred in April and 143 children in May for support from a Social Worker within the Assessment and Care Planning Service. 53 of these children were re-referrals to the service within the last 12 months. Each of these referrals are reviewed by Service Managers to explore the presenting reasons and ensure that learning takes place within the service when the same presenting issue is noted.
- (b) 113 Child and Family Assessments were completed in April and 122 completed in May. This is relatively comparable with the numbers from the year 22/23, but remains an increase on previous years. The increase in assessments is due to the increase in referrals but has impacted on the timeliness of the completion of assessments within 45 working days.
- (c) 288 children are currently supported through a Child in Need (CiN) plan which remains consistent with the figure at the end of 2022/23. 70 children have started a period of support under CiN since April 2023. 17.7% of these children are open to the Children with Disabilities Team and receive regular and ongoing support to meet their needs linked to their disability. This figure remains consistent with previous years. Only 10.1% of children on a CiN plan have been supported by the service for over 12 months and less than 2 years, CiN support is achieving timely outcomes within 12 months for children.
- (d) There continues to be an increase in the number of strategy discussions undertaken (33 in April and 64 in May). The plan for this to be reviewed further following a successful funding bid for peer review of this process will aid the ongoing work to reduce this figure. Focused work has also taken place within the Children's Information and Advice Team to ensure that referrals can be received where appropriate with consent.
- (e) 120 children are currently subject to a Child Protection plan at the end of May 2023. This is comparable to the 120 children who were subject to Child Protection Plan at the end of March 2022 and March 2023.
- (f) 332 children are currently living in the care of the Local Authority. 23 children have come into our care since April 23, with 13 children leaving our care. 31.7% of children in our care currently reside with their parents or an extended family member under a Connected Care Arrangement. We remain committed to children being able to return to the care of their family or extended family and of the 13 children leaving care 8 returned home, 2 moved to the care of their extended family and 3 children left care at 18 and will be supported by the Leaving Care Service.
- (g) There is one child currently living in an unregistered provision. Extensive efforts to provide a regulated provision nationwide have not been successful. This young person's plan is reviewed weekly by the service and there is oversight of the court in place. Regular, open discussions take place with the local area Ofsted Inspector which has been well received.
- (h) The Children with Disabilities Team and Assessment and Safeguarding Teams remain co-located in the Town Hall across two office spaces. Staff morale is good and there has been an increased presence of staff within the Town Hall which has contributed to this. The Family Group Conference Duty Worker continues to be co-located within

the main duty space alongside the service which is supporting with awareness and requests for support from this service.

- (i) The Locality model of working for the Assessment and Safeguarding teams continues to function well. There has been a small change to some locality boundaries following a 6 month review taking place to ensure that workloads continue to be equally distributed.

Looked After and Care Leaver statistics

- 15. 332 children were looked after by Darlington Borough Council in May 2023, 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, three of whom were UASC. 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. As unaccompanied children reach 18 (currently 5 young people) they remain open to the leaving care service and Darlington becomes eligible for further unaccompanied children.
- 16. All looked initial looked after reviews and 97.6% of subject reviews were carried out within timescale.
- 17. In May 2023 2 UASC became looked after. There were two children placed with connected carers, 4 children placed in our internal fostering service, three children placed in residential care or independent living and seven in 'other placement' which may include unregulated connected care arrangements.
- 18. All 187 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 (100%) care leavers. 95.2% of our care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation, this was due to 3 young people being in custody, and 73% of care leavers were in education, training or employment at the end of June 2023.

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

Fostering and Supported Lodgings

- 19. On 3 July 2023, I attended a consultation with Darlington's foster carers in the Dolphin Centre. Officers have been working to re-establish good communication with our foster carers after the dislocation of Covid, and this meeting was part of that process. Evidence makes clear that children and young people who are looked after by Darlington's foster carers and in our residential homes tend to experience longer and more stable placements than those offered by external agencies – it is vital that we support our foster carers who deliver a caring and dedicated service.
- 20. Since 11 January 2023 we have worked with support from Blue Cabin on a music project for toddlers titled "This is the Place". The project is aimed at supporting foster carers and pre-school children to engage in making music together to help develop skills and

relationships. Blue Cabin is in a phase of evaluation which we are awaiting. Foster Carers have fed back the sessions have allowed them to build relationships with fellow carers which in turn has opened their support group. Carers also report the sessions have supported babies and toddlers to regulate and build attachment through music. Carers have continued to use the songs and music therapy outside of the sessions.

21. Mockingbird was officially Lunched on 30 January with a reflective event held at the Hippodrome. Feedback from carers at launch was “in joining Mockingbird, this is the best decision we have made, I feel supported from Hub Carer and fellow carers and now have a support group which I wished I had years ago”. All carers and children meet once per month for a social event and separate coffee morning are attended around the social event. Funding for a further constellation has been secured.
22. A further Expression of Interest to the Youth Music Catalyser fund is submitted for a joint partnership between Darlington, this is The Place and Redcar & Cleveland for a 3-year period 2024-2027. This bid is for a total budget of £295k to continue to offer weekly music session to toddlers and young people, offer each young person a bag including instruments and music to use outside of the sessions and offer music sessions to our wider care for children during school holidays. This bid has been progressed.
23. Our Fostering Service have commenced migration over to the Liquid Logic IT case management system; currently we have a live pathway for our mainstream carers with work ongoing to migrate Connected care onto Liquid Logic. In doing so, Liquid Logic will more greatly support with Quality Assurance and offer greater management oversight of timings of carers journey from initial enquiry through to panel approval.
24. 9 enquiries were received in May 2023 and 11 since 1 April 2023. There continues to be a lower than hoped conversion from enquiry to assessment. The regional fostering pathfinder work is ongoing and is likely to be live in September 2023. The fostering pathfinder will take initial calls and pass those interested to the LA to progress.

Residential Services

25. All of our children’s homes, Eldon Street, Dunrobin and Gilling Crescent, are at full capacity with three children placed in each home. We supported 6 planned admissions into our homes during last year. Eldon Street Children’s Home have now moved to Lancaster Close. Eldon will repurpose into CEDARS which will offer short breaks and emergency provision for our young people from Friday to Monday am. Harewood Hill Lodge provides short break care for Children with additional needs and had 74% of beds occupied with 68 nights utilised by children from other authorities which generates income. Our overall bed occupancy was affected due to an outbreak of bed bugs which required a whole home heat treatment. This reduced the number of children attending short breaks.
26. Harewood Hill Lodge was inspected by Ofsted on 22 and 23 November 2022 and maintained their grading of Good. No assurance visits have taken place.
27. Gilling was inspected by Ofsted on 12 and 13 May 2023 and gained the grading of Requires improvement to be Good. An assurance inspection on 8 March 2023 identified no safeguarding concerns, we do not receive gradings on assurance inspection.

28. Dunrobin was inspected by Ofsted 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. The outstanding compliance notices have been addressed and removed from the home. No assurance visits have taken place. Ofsted have complimented the team on the improvements to the home.
29. Eldon was inspected by Ofsted on 23 March 2022 and has gained the grading of Requires Improvement to be good. An assurance inspection on 7 March 2023 identified no safeguarding concerns.
30. 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. Work is ongoing with Quality Assurance and Performance colleagues to support performance across all our homes and capture learning and development from inspections.
31. Eldon Street, Dunrobin and Gilling staff have all attended introduction to Dyadic Development Psychotherapy training delivered by Leon Crook and Alan Welsh. Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy is a form of psychotherapy that can help form and repair connections and attachment between children, young people and their parent/carers. Monthly support sessions are diarised to support staff to reflect on interactions with our young people and implement the basics of PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy). Alongside this work, training is being delivered to all homes focusing on relational practice, and supporting strength-based case notes which are recorded to the young person.

Keeping Families Together & Family Group Conferencing

32. 11 Family Group Conferences (FGC), three reviews and an emergency network meeting were held during May 2023.
33. 97 children from 51 families were open to FGC at the end of May. There have been 22 families opened during the month and 22 families were closed. 11 of the 22 families who closed to FGC did so following the completion of all interventions, two reported their concerns had been resolved prior to the conference, four withdrew consent and three conferences were stood down. One family closed due to non-engagement and one family experienced escalating negative behaviour from the eldest child resulting in them coming into care.
34. 30 children from 14 families were open to KFT at the end of May. However, only six children from four families were opened during the month and 14 children from six families were closed.
35. All the children were discussed at panel within timescale and 15 out of the 16 reviews were held in timescale.
36. 49 children were seen during 23 KFT home visits during May, and direct work was completed with 72 children and 35 adults.

Education

37. The Department for Education has published data on local authority performance on Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) for young people with SEND for the 2022 calendar year.
38. The whole process of EHC needs assessment and EHC plan development, from the point when an assessment is requested (or a child or young person is brought to the local authority's attention) until any final EHC plan is issued, must take no more than 20 weeks. The relevant legislation provides for exceptions to the time limits in certain situations.
39. Nationally in 2022 of those plans where a decision to issue a new plan was within the 2022 calendar year, 50.7% were issued within the twenty week time limit. This is a reduction from 59.9% in 2021. In Darlington 90.24% of plans were issued within the twenty week limit in 2022, a performance level significantly above both national and regional average.

Youth Unemployment

40. The Darlington 18-24 year old claimant count has fallen 0.6% from 7.7% (580 young people) in March 2023 to 7.1% (530 young people) in June 2023. This compares with the North-East average which only dropped 0.3% from 6.2% to 5.9% and the national average which only dropped 0.1% from 4.9% to 4.8%.
41. The figures for the Tees Valley were as follows:

(a)	Hartlepool	9.7%
(b)	Middlesbrough	8.3%
(c)	Redcar and Cleveland	7.7%
(d)	Stockton-on-Tees	7.5%
(e)	Darlington	7.1%

Youth Employment Initiative (YEI)

42. The DWP/ESF external funding for the YEI programmes ended on 31 July 2023. However, funding was put in the MTFP to continue this programme until 31 March 2024. It was anticipated that the additional funding will be recouped if a successful bid for the successor funding stream is successful. Unfortunately, the new funding stream is not targeted at young people, but instead is designed to help older people back to work. I am working with Cabinet colleagues and with Darlington voluntary sector organisations to investigate how the Government cut of the YEI programme can be mitigated here in Darlington.
43. Since that start of the YEI programme at the end of May 2016 up to the end of July 2023 the programme supported 1,363 16-29 year olds. Of the 1,363 participants 1,334 (97.9%) of those progressed into employment or training and 790 (58.0%) of those who started the programme were still in those destinations six months later.

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

44. The Disabled Facilities Grant has been positively utilised to replace the previous summerhouse at Harewood Hill Lodge known as the "Ranch". The previous "Ranch" had been in place for a considerable number of years was no longer weatherproof and couldn't

be utilised. The “Ranch” is an integral part of the support offer for disabled children and young people having a short break at Harewood Hill Lodge. It provides a multifunctional space for regulation and 1:1 support activity. The new “Ranch” is spacious and vibrant incorporating new paving and ramping. The new Ranch has had very positive feedback from young people and families.

45. The Supported Accommodation regulations require all forms of supported accommodation for 16 and 17 year old Care Leavers and Looked After Children to be regulated with Ofsted. The Children’s commissioning manager has been working alongside operational colleagues to progress Darlington Borough Council’s application for the operation of the taster flats and supported accommodation, whilst also closely monitoring the progress of applications from all external providers operating supported accommodation in Darlington. At this stage all applications are on track for registration ahead of the October deadline.
46. As part of the Written Statement of Action there is a requirement to review Darlington’s Independent Travel Trainer offer as part of the broader work around transition to adulthood for children and young people. Independent Travel Training enables disabled young people to travel independently and without fear so they can get to school or college, work and for social and leisure activities. The review will be undertaken over the coming months with findings being reported into the SEND Implementation group.
47. Following issues with a building material called reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) the Department for Education (DfE) asked all responsible bodies (local authorities and academy trusts) to undertake a visual survey of their buildings to check for the presence of RAAC. The local authority commissioned a visual inspection of all the maintained schools in September 2022 and the external surveyors determined that it was highly unlikely that RAAC was present in any of our maintained schools. Following a recent change in government guidance a further survey has been commissioned. This intrusive survey will cover the small area of fixed ceilings in maintained schools which were not accessible during the first survey. This will allow us to absolutely rule out the presence of RAAC, although the surveyors have assured the local authority that it is highly unlikely that they will find any. That survey is expected to be completed very shortly.
48. Academy trusts were responsible for undertaking their own surveys and responding to the DfE. To date the local authority is only aware of two Darlington academies where RAAC has been identified. Carmel College have identified RAAC in their kitchen and library but are educating all pupils in school. Following a late start, and a further intrusive survey, St Teresa’s have been able to accommodate all bar two classes in the school. The remaining two classes are being taught at Firthmoor Community Centre Both schools have the support of a DfE caseworker.

Climate Change

49. People Services are engaging as a directorate with Sustainability and Climate Change Lead Officer to support the Council’s updated climate change response plan. Regular updates will be provided in terms of how Children’s Services and the wider People Directorate are supporting the new priorities.

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Children and Young People Portfolio