

COUNCIL
30 NOVEMBER 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 23/24 there has been a significant increase in contacts received into the Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT). In total there were 2282, this being a 13.4% increase on contacts received during Q1 in 2022/23 and 30.3% increase on Q1 2021/22. This is to be expected from the implementation of the Prof Thorpe model that promotes a conversation being held between the social worker and the caller, rather than relying on a written referral, this model helps build relationships with partners and is effective in ensuring that conversations capture and explore concerns carefully so that the right service can be agreed upon.
3. Survey software (SurveyMonkey) is offered after every call and feedback is consistently very good with 100% of callers in Q1 23/24 reporting their expectations were met, the call handler was polite and respectful and important they believed their call would have a positive impact on the child and family. Of the contacts received into CIAT during Q1 23/24, 397 children were referred to social care and 365 Early Help Assessments (EHAs) commenced, during Q2 23/24 there is work ongoing to increase the number of external EHAs being carried out as during the pandemic many of the assessments that could have been led on by external partners were initiated by Building Stronger Families and the focus on working with partners to support them in initiated EHAs is a key focus for the rest of the year.
4. In terms of children who go missing and/or are at risk of exploitation, there was an increase in the number of missing episodes in May, this was in the main due to 3 young people who were missing more often than usual, the warmer weather during that month has an influence over children not returning to their family home or care arrangement as early as they usually would. All children and young people reported as missing are offered a Return Home Interview carried out by the Missing From Home Worker and this helps understand the reasons for the missing episode, identify risks and build on strengths to reduce episodes moving forward. The number of young people going missing and also deemed to be at risk of harm by way of exploitation has decreased and in part this is due to a reduction in missing episodes of 3 young people who in Q4 22/23 were missing more often.

Building Stronger Families Service

5. BSF Managers have met with the new regional lead for Daisy Chain and we now have a practitioner present at each monthly multi-agency event held at the Hippodrome.

6. This was well received at the last event, practitioners were able to give on the spot advice and resources around emotional regulation as well as sign posting to our universal and targeted group offers which includes Parenting workshops, sensory seekers etc.
7. Positive progress is being made in our relationship with health and some joint working is shaping nicely. We are looking to expand health clinics into other community venues that we utilise and health visitors attending our early years programmes on rotation providing advice and guidance to parents.
8. Staffing wise we are struggling but despite this we are maintaining our full offer of programmes and promoting attendance at these as much as possible.

Young People's Engagement and Justice Service

9. 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. The service remains on track and identification of families eligible remains constant via the referral route.
10. **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.
11. On the evening of Tuesday 19 September our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker group and our young victim and vulnerable group were rewarded for their hard work in engaging with the Summer Activity Programme and received their awards. It was a wonderful evening to highlight success and the young people loved it!
12. 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. There have been numerous days spent fishing with some real big fish being caught! Whilst this programme is coming to an end due to the weather, due to its success, it will be an activity that will be offered in the new year given the interest from the young people.

Safeguarding Assessment and Care Planning including Children with Disabilities

13. 226 referrals, involving 397 children were started in Q1 2023/24. This is an increase compared to the 192 referrals for 324 children in Q1 2022/23 and a further increase when compared to earlier Q1's – 99 referrals for 179 children in Q1 2021/22 and 114 referrals for 204 children in Q1 2020/21. Analysis has been conducted to understand the continued rise in referrals. The analysis suggested that a reason for the increase referrals is likely due to the increase in 'violent' concerns identified in the contact. These types of contacts are more likely to progress to a referral due to the increased risk to the child.

14. Analysis of the North East ADCS Benchmarking report 2022/23 informs that our referral rate per 10,000 saw a sharp increase in 2022/23. However, for the last 5 reporting years Darlington has been consistently below all benchmarking measures. The North East rate of referrals at the end of 2022/23 (664.8) is 3.2% higher than in 2021/22. The regional rate of referrals was 4.2% higher than in pre-Covid 2019/20 (638.2). Darlington sits at 4th highest out of the 12 authorities for 2022/23, although physically we have received the least number of referrals. 7 of the 12 authorities have seen an increase compared with 2019/20. Darlington has the 2nd highest percentage of referrals being received from the Police, with only Durham above us who share our Police force area. The primary presenting issue at referral was domestic violence.
15. We have continued to see an increase in re-referrals this quarter in comparison to previous years with 86 children from 53 families. In Q1 2022/23 we saw 52 children from 24 families re-referred, 18 children in Q1 2021/20 and 35 children in Q1 2020/21. Service managers review the re-referrals each month to identify any reoccurring theme or how we can improve our processes and decision-making to reduce the need for families to come back into our service.
16. 412 C&F Assessments completed in Q1, which continues to be an increase on past data trends. This figure continues to be impacted by delayed assessment completion within the Assessment & Safeguarding Service as work to write up and close off these assessments continues.
17. 67 children went on to have a Child In Need plan, 8 children proceeded to a strategy meeting, 85 stepped down to BSF/Other actions and 252 concluded C&F as No Further Action. A NFA C&F review meeting is being Instigated up so this can be further explored and understood on a regular basis.
18. Significant efforts to reduce out of date work has been completed locality teams and work remains ongoing with the localities. Service Managers oversight continues to be in place around caseloads, workflows and timeliness of work being completed to ensure delay does not continue to grow in this area.
19. 285 children were on an open CiN plan at the end of Q1. 108 children had their CiN plan started within Q1 and 89 children's CiN plan ended. There is good flow through CiN processes for children with timely interventions with 71.2% of children having their plan in place for less than 1 year.
20. 17.9% of CiN plans are Children with Disabilities who remain eligible for continued support from the team. Eligibility is reviewed a minimum of 2 x per year to ensure good oversight of these plans remain in place and plans are supporting development and independence.
21. 162 strategy discussions were started in Q1 2023/24 involving 274 children, and 4 children had a strategy whilst on an open CP plan. Over the past 3 years we have seen a continued rise in the number of strategies held with a further rise this quarter when compared to 92 strategy discussions (for 156 children) in Q1 2022/23, 79 (for 128 children) in Q1 2021/22, 64 (for 134 children) in Q1 2020/21.

22. An increase in the number of strategy discussions undertaken and an increase in those outcome as 'no further action' has prompted some further scrutiny of our process. Funding has been secured through the Sector Led Improvement program to commission and independent review.
23. 28 Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) were held in Q1 2023/24 for 47 children, which is an increase when compared to Q1 2022/23 which had 12 ICPC's for 28 children, but comparable to Q1 2021/22 (29 ICPC's) and Q1 2020/21 (25 ICPC's). Although we have not seen a percentage rise in section 47 enquires outcoming to an ICPC, we have seen an increase in referrals and those requiring a strategy and section 47 enquiry which would result in this increase compared to last year.
24. 89.4% (42 / 47) of children who had an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) in Q1 2023/24 became subject to a Child Protection plan (CP). This is comparable to previous quarters.
25. 109 children were subject to a Child Protection plan at the end of quarter one. This is broadly similar to the numbers in June 2022 but our rate per 10,000 population remains below that of our statistical neighbours at 49.
26. 45 children and young people came into our care in quarter one; 2 UASC, 7 Placed with Parent, 8 residing with Connected Carers, 8 residing in foster care, 1 Mother and Baby placement and 19 in unregulated family placements.
27. Our commitment to family placements is further evidenced by the 18 children who ceased to be in our care due to a Special Guardianship Order or returning to the care of their parents.
28. 2 children were placed for adoption in Quarter one.
29. Arrangements for transferring young people from our Children with Disabilities team to Adult Social care are increasing well embedded through the TASC panel process and young people are starting their preparation for adulthood at an earlier stage. Ongoing scoping exercise to broaden the scope to be a preparation for adult pathway for the wider SEND population.
30. The Locality model of working for the Assessment and safeguarding teams is now in place and functioning well. The team managers have begun to develop links with their local Secondary schools. The demands on the teams are constantly reviewed and boundaries adjusted accordingly
31. The Assessment and Safeguarding teams now have a dedicated office space within the town hall, and duty colleagues from Children with Disabilities and the Family Group Conferencing team are co-located with them. This has helped to support team morale through the continued increases in demand.

Looked After and Care Leaver statistics

32. All children in our care have an allocated social worker.

33. At the end of June 2023 we had 343 children in our care. 17 of which were Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child. This is an increase of 21 children since April 2023
34. 25 children also ceased to be cared for with these belonging to 20 families during this period with the children returned home. Also 4 children were adopted, 3 children became subjects of a Special Guardianship Order SGO and 1 child became a care leaver by virtue of age (turning 18 years old)
35. There has been an increase in Increase in Stat visits recorded in timescales from previous quarter to 86.3% (n Last Q 83.5 %)
36. Numbers of moves ie 3+ in the last 12 months has increased slightly to 13.7% of the looked after children population when the target is less than 10% and also the amount of children we care for who live more than 20miles away from home has decreased slightly to 11.6% when we aim for no more than 10%.
37. We have 16 young people living in unregulated provision at this time the majority being older 17+ un accompanied asylum seekers. We have 2 young people who are aged 15-17 years placed with Moonrise and are court ordered to meet there needs. This is an increase by 1 from last Quarter
38. **Dental** for our UASC now resolved they are registered the smile clinic at Shildon. However some of our looked after children continue to be on a waiting list for NHS registration. To date only 38.5% of our Children have had a dental check up completed which is on target.
39. **Education** attendance remains good and on target for primary 95.5% down 0.5% and Secondary almost 81.6 % up by 0.01%. However, 15 children in our care were suspended for 122 sessions a total of 61 days over 36 incidents of these 86 were females and 36 were male pupils

Care leavers

Accommodation

40. 98.4% (remains the same as previous Quarter) of our care leavers aged 19-21 and 95.2% of our care leavers aged 22-25 were in suitable accommodation at the end of June 2023. This was due to 4 young people (1 aged 19-21, and 3 aged 22-25) being in custody.
41. 13 young people, aged 19-21, were engaging in education at university and 33 young people were in training or employment.
42. We know all YP who are not in training and education and reasons around this. For example, poor mental health or parenting children NEET figs are 19% for 19–21-year-olds which is well below the target of a maximum of 30% for this age group. This is achieved by knowing our children and supporting them into training and employment when at all possible. Each young person has shared the reasons why if this cannot happen. This is reviewed monthly in supervision with the Team Manger. We are in touch with all our Care Leavers.

Fostering and Supported Lodgings

43. Foster carers consultation have continued with carers advising of an increase in satisfaction in service and carers feeling their voice is heard and management following through on actions. 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.

44. Work has commenced in increasing the financial offer for Darlington's Foster carers recognising increase in cost of living. It is our ambition to use the increased financial incentive to increase numbers of our in house foster carers.
45. 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. Blue Cabin are preparing music bags for all cared for children in Darlington aged 0 -3, this will support the music making sessions with instructions on how to use sensory items and songs.
46. Mockingbird continues to offer stability of placement for our cared for children. The constellation meets monthly for social events and biweekly coffee sessions are offer to carers. Feedback from the constellation "without the Hub Carer and other carers in Mockingbird, I would not have a support network and I don't think I would have continued as a foster carer". Work is commencing to launch a second constellation in February 2024.
47. We await a decision on our expression of Interest to the Youth Music Catalyser fund 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.
48. We received 19 Fostering enquiries in Q.1, 7 through social media, 3 as a result of events the team attended, 2 words of mouth, 2 via website. 11 of these enquiries received inside LA Boundary.
49. We continue to contribute to the creation of Foster with Northeast; this is a collaborative partnership between 12 local authorities from across the Northeast of England. Fostering services all across the region are joining forces to recruit much-needed prospective foster carers. For the first time, anyone considering fostering in our region will benefit from a united, single support hub. The hub provides additional support for prospective foster carers and is supported by the Department for Education.

Residential Services

50. All of our children's homes, Eldon Street, Dunrobin and Gilling Crescent, are at full capacity with three children placed in each home with no planned or emergency admissions.
51. Harewood Hill Lodge provides short break care for Children with additional needs and had 67% % of beds occupied with 19 nights utilised by children from other authorities which generates income. Eldon staff and young people moved to new home Lancaster Close on 29 June 2023. Eldon will repurpose into CEDARS which will offer short breaks and emergency provision for our young people from Friday to Monday am. From the most recent Ofsted grading, all our mainstream homes have been graded as Requires Improvement and HHL has been graded Good. Of note are the improvements Dunrobin has made rising from inadequate last year. Multi agency work hs seen a significant decline

in the number of children missing 5 children had 27 missing episodes from our 3 mainstream homes. In the same period as last year, 8 children had 271 missing episodes.

52. 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.
53. 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.
54. 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.
55. 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.
56. Eldon Street, Dunrobin and Gilling staff continue to receive 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.

Family Group Conferencing

57. 28 Family Group Conferences (FGC), seven reviews and two emergency network meetings were held in Q.1 2023.
58. At the end of Q.1, 81 children from 40 families were open to FGC and 60 families were closed. 28 of the 60 (46.7%) families who closed to FGC did so following the completion of all interventions, seven (11.7%) reported their concerns had been resolved prior to the conference, 12 (20%) withdrew consent and 10 (16.7%) conferences were stood down. Two families (3.3) closed due to non-engagement and one child (1.6) entered care 1 child came into care.

Keeping Families Together &

59. 38 children from 21 families had a KFT episode started in Q.1. 31 children from 17 families were closed.
60. 24 requests were made in Q1, only 1 of which was declined at panel, this was due to not being deemed edge of care, with 66.7% (16 / 24) of requests discussed within timescale. The reason for the delays were due to KFT capacity and social worker availability.
61. 45 reviews were conducted, 82.2% (37 / 45) of which were within the 2-week timescale.
62. 153 children were seen through 67 home visits and direct work was completed with 234 children and 141 adults.
63. KFT duration of support in Q.1 was 718 days. This is a slight reduction on the same period last year, this is a result of the team being asked for short pieces of work which have not required 12 weeks of support.

Education

64. Wyvern Academy was inspected by Ofsted in the summer term 2023 and was judged a "Good" school. Inspectors recognised that Leaders have achieved their ambitious vision of giving the community the school it deserves, and that Wyvern Academy is a place where pupils are happy, safe and learn well.
65. Corporation Road Academy was recently inspected by Ofsted and was judged to be a "Good" school with outstanding features. Inspectors recognised that pupils are very proud of their school and its community and that the school has high expectations for all. Staff and pupils embody the school's virtues of 'kindness, respect, resilience, honesty, independence and courage' and the school's exceptional personal development curriculum enables pupils to become well-rounded individuals.
66. Harrowgate Hill Primary school was recently inspected by Ofsted and judged to be "Requires Improvement." The leadership of the school has put plans in place to ensure that the curriculum development is fully realised. Officers will work closely with the school's leadership team to support the improvement plans they have in place.

Youth Unemployment

67. The Darlington 18-24 year old claimant count has risen slightly from 7.3% (545 young people) in June 2023 to 7.4% (555 young people) in August 2023. This compares with the North-East average which has also risen by 0.1% to 6.0%, and the national average which also rose by 0.1% to 4.9%
68. The figures for the Tees Valley were as follows:

Hartlepool	10.1%
Middlesbrough	8.5%
Redcar and Cleveland	8.2%
Stockton -on-Tees	8.0%
Darlington	7.4%

Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and other employability programmes

69. 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.
70. 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. Beyond that there is currently no funding available to continue this programme.
71. Unemployed young people will still be able to access other Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) programme, such as Restart operated by People Plus in Darlington.
72. In conjunction with the other Tees Valley Authorities, Darlington has secured UKSPF funding from TVCA to deliver an employability programme for all ages. Funding for that programme is targeted at those who are economically inactive and are; early retirees aged over 50, those looking after the family or home, or those who are short-term sick (under

12 months). That funding will run until 31 March 2025. It is hoped that a couple of the YEI staff will be redeployed onto that programme. It should be noted that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has also refocused their efforts more towards getting early retirees back into work to fill the current skills gap.

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

73. The voice of Darlington Young Carers and their parents has directly shaped and developed an updated Service Specification for the Young Carers Support Service ahead of a service re-tender which commenced at the end of October. New contracting arrangements will take effect on 1 April 2024, service mobilisation arrangements are being overseen by Children's Commissioners. This will ensure there is continuity of support of Young Carers and the service continues to develop and progress in line with needs and requirements of Darlington Young Carers.
74. Work has been undertaken with the Council's Housing Services and local Registered Providers to maximise the number of units of Care Leavers accommodation to be used as preparation for adulthood taster accommodation. Through this work, an additional 3 units of accommodation have been secured which will be available for use by the Looked After Through Care Team by January 2024.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP)

75. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners met in October and were provided with a draft report on the findings of the Family H Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) and proposed recommendations. Partners agreed to accept the report and recommendations. The findings and learning from this review will be published once the report is finalised.

Councillor Nick Wallis
Children and Young People Portfolio