

COUNCIL
25 JANUARY 2024

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 the second quarter of this year the Children's Initial Advice Team (CIAT) have continued with a consistent high workload of contacts and referrals to social care with the normal reduction during school summer holidays. In Quarter 2 there were 2208 total contacts. Following the regional data highlighting our high conversion rate in terms of the number of contacts that become a referral to social care, refresher training and staff development has been completed and the conversion rate is being closely monitored and has fallen which is positive.
3. In terms of staffing there is one member of staff on maternity leave for which there is agency cover and there is also another agency Social Worker in post due to workload and capacity needs.
4. The 4 kids project was developed in early 2020. The project is a partnership development between Police and DBC to help reduce the number of children becoming looked after, this was to be achieved by identifying those at risk at the earliest possible opportunity so that interventions and preventative measures could be put in place, the focus is on domestic abuse in the household and the impact this has. The feedback received is very positive:

'I really appreciate the honesty and reassurance when I have been in contact. I feel like the door will be open for as long as I need it. A massive thank you.'

'I would like to say that the service received by 4kids, Christopher Horner and Harbour have been brilliant. They have all done a marvellous job and cannot thank them enough.'

5. We continue to work closely with our colleagues in Police to ensure that we have sufficient representation within morning meetings and to collate the MASH information that informs our decision making. The Police Representative has now been located in the Durham MASH office so we are monitoring the work closely to ensure that we continue to receive the effective service and response that we require.
6. The survey monkey has provided excellent feedback for the Children's Initial Advice Team within Qtr 2.
 - (a) 100% of callers said they felt that their wishes and views were listened to during the call.
 - (b) 100% of callers felt that their expectations with regard to the call being respectful and polite were met.

- (c) 100% of callers felt that the call would have a positive impact on the child, young person or family.

'I have dealt with many other agencies during my career and it was a pleasure to speak to someone who was so helpful and friendly, who listened to my concerns and offered advice in such a supportive way. Hayley Carey is a credit to your organization'.

'A great service in that I can discuss my concerns with a duty social worker, rather than having to complete a lengthy referral form which is how the rest of Durham Children's services operate. This is a far better service'.

7. The Missing and Exploited Team continues to provide oversight with regard to all of our missing and young people in Darlington. The embedding of Harm Away from Home (the approach taken in Darlington to respond to contextualised safeguarding) continues along with our colleagues throughout social care and work is beginning with IT/Liquid Logic system.

Building Stronger Families Service

8. The drop-in sessions at Daisy Chain (organisation that supports autistic and neurodivergent children, young people and adults) have been going well, and staff attending have been able to divert some of the families who are raising concerns about their children presenting with autistic type behaviours to Building Stronger Families instead, with some taking up early help assessments to try to address the root cause of behavioural challenges first before being placed on the neurodevelopmental pathway. The staff are also giving advice and guidance about de-escalation of extreme behaviours, which families are finding helpful.
9. Targeted groups continue to develop and are delivered from the Children's Centres (Mount Pleasant; Dodmire/Maidendale; Skerne Park) that act as Family Hubs and are situated across the whole town. There is good attendance from children and families at the Families Together group based at McNay Street. The group focuses on positive parenting, led by parents to identify what their greatest needs are. Themes around parenting practice have been focused on the impact of trauma on children's behaviour, as well as positive reward and quality time to promote behaviour, and parents accepting they play a part in shaping how children do behave. At the same time, groups of children and young people are working with practitioners skilled in therapeutic interventions, regulating emotions, and also helping them build positive self confidence and self-esteem.
10. Plans are underway for early next year to develop a baby group from Mount Pleasant School, alongside health colleagues who will be delivering a well-baby clinic. The aim of the baby group will be to support parents to promote speech and language in children, with our First Words Together programme, which is accredited, and serves to help parents build confidence with sharing books, stories and songs with their babies. Speech and language is something that the head of the school has identified as a problem for some of the children entering the school nursery at age 2. The hope is to develop something similar from Skerne Park next year too, this will ensure that programmes reach across the whole town, and are inclusive for all.

11. The BSF team continue to lead on high numbers of early help assessments supporting families across Darlington, working closely with partners to ensure best outcomes for children, with a whole family approach in line with the Supporting Families Program.

Young People's Engagement and Justice Service

12. The service has now recruited a Reparation Officer and a Family Worker to deliver on the Immediate Justice requirements set down in the ASB Action Plan. Performance is being reported to the PCC Office and Home Office on a monthly basis which shows a steady number of young people engaging in reparative intervention. The independent evaluation of this programme has commenced and the service are represented in this.
13. Developing Resilience Programme – this is an intervention for early support for vulnerable children and young people to help them become more resilient to life's challenges, this helps build stronger and safer communities and means they are less likely to need or instigate 'blue light' services. The Young People's Engagement and Justice Service have been working in partnership with Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Service of the delivery of a Developing Resilience Programme. The target group are those aged 13 and who are at risk of ASB/criminal activity. Each young person will work towards achieving The Prince's Trust level 1 Award. Eight young people have successfully graduated and attended their passing out ceremony in relation to The Princes Trust Award, this ceremony was held on 30 November and our young people were accompanied by their family and friends. Each young person has developed a portfolio which will be submitted to The Princes Trust for a level 1 qualification in the coming weeks.

Safeguarding Assessment and Care Planning including Children with Disabilities

14. 190 referrals, involving 341 children were started in Q2 2023/24. This is a slight decrease on the referral numbers for Q1 23/24, reflective of the school summer break and reduction in referrals. Whilst this is an 8.6% reduction on the referrals received in Q2 22/23 it is an 50.5% increase (the largest in the region) on the pre-COVID rate in 2019/20. Analysis has been conducted to understand the continued rise in referrals. Domestic Violence remains our single largest presenting referral issue, however, there has been a marked increase in 'Child behaviour' referrals in Q2 23/24.
15. Analysis of the North East ADCS Benchmarking report for quarter 2 informs that our referral rate per 10,000 saw a slight decrease from 2022/23 levels (from 725.7 to 663.3), although it remains significantly higher than levels in 2021/22 (445.8). However, for the last five 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 continues on a downward trend; reducing by 10.2% at the end of Q2 2023/24, compared to the end of Q2 2022/23.
16. We have seen a slight decrease in re-referrals this quarter in comparison to quarter 1 with 78 children being re-referred within 12 months. Year to date figures however indicate that re-referral rates for 2023/24 are likely to be similar to those of 2022/23. 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.

17. 376 C&F Assessments were completed in Q2, which is a slight decrease on numbers completed in quarter 1. Year to date figures indicate that the projected year-end figures will be similar to 2022/23. 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.
18. 79 children went on to have a Child In Need plan, two children proceeded to a strategy meeting, the majority of strategies being undertaken prior to completion of the C & F Assessment. 62 stepped down to BSF/Other actions and 227 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.
19. Significant efforts to reduce out of date work has been completed locality teams continues. 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.
20. 293 children were on an open CiN plan at the end of Q2. 99 children had their CiN plan started within Q2 and 87 children's CiN plan ended. There is good flow through CiN processes for children with timely interventions with 87.8% of children having their plan in place for less than one year.
21. 16.4% 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.
22. 113 strategy discussions were started in Q2 2023/24 involving 210 children, and 11 children had a strategy whilst on an open CP plan. Whilst this is a slight decrease on the numbers of strategies held in Q1 (164), over the past three 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.
23. The Sector Led improvement work on strategies, section 47 investigations and Initial Child Protection Conferences commenced in quarter 2. This work is now complete and the findings will be shared internally and with partners in the new year.
24. Twenty-seven Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) were held in Q2 2023/24 for 59 children, which is broadly similar to Q1 2023/24 which had 28 ICPC's for 54 children. 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.
25. 76.3% (45/59) of children who had an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) in Q2 2023/24 became subject to a Child Protection plan (CP). This is this is a slight decrease compared to previous quarters.

26. 123 children were subject to a Child Protection plan at the end of quarter 2. 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 55.3.
27. Thirty-nine children and young people came into our care in quarter 2; four Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, five Placed with Parent, one residing with Connected Carers, seven residing in foster care, two into residential care, two into supported living and 20 in unregulated family placements.
28. Our commitment to family placements is further evidenced by the 19 children who ceased to be in our care due to a Special Guardianship Order or returning to the care of their parents.
29. Two children were placed for adoption in Quarter 2.
30. Arrangements for transferring young people from our Children with Disabilities team to Adult Social care are increasingly well embedded through the Transfer to Adult Social Care 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.
31. 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. An increase in referrals from the North Road area has led to a recent revision of the boundaries of our North Team, to ease pressures within that team.

Looked After and Care Leaver statistics

32. All children in our care have an allocated social worker.
33. At the end of October 2023 we had 346 children in our care. 19 of which were Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child.
34. 67 children also ceased to be cared for since April 2023 to October 2023 during this period with the children returned home.
35. Statutory visits are carried out by the social worker to children in our care on a child protection plan. They have a set minimum frequency, 6 weeks for children in our care and 15 working days for children on a child protection plan. There has been an decrease in Statutory visits recorded in timescales from previous quarter to 82.7% and this continues to be an area of focus.
36. Numbers of moves, i.e. 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 10 young people living in unregulated provision at this time the majority being older 17+ unaccompanied asylum seekers.

38. Problems with registration at dental practices for our UASC have now been resolved and they are registered with 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 54.2% of our Children have had a dental check-up completed which is not 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, 10 children in our care were suspended for 85 sessions a total of 61 days.

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 October 2023. This was due to four young people (one aged 19-21, and three aged 22-25) being in custody.
41. Thirteen young people, aged 19-21, were engaging in education at university and 33 young people were in training or employment.
42. We know all of the young people who are not in training and education and reasons around this, for example, poor mental health or parenting children. NEET figures are 19% for 19–21-year-olds which is positively 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. This is reviewed monthly in supervision with the Team Manager. We are intouch with all our Care Leavers.

Fostering and Supported Lodgings

43. Foster carers consultation has 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. Following the decision taken by Cabinet on 5th December 2023, consultation has begun with foster carers regarding the suggested offer. Together with officers, I met with foster carers on 15th December, where the proposals were well received. It is this Administration's ambition to use the increased financial incentives to boost numbers of our in-house foster carers. This will lead to better outcomes for children in our care, as well as reducing the need for more expensive private sector placements.
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 do not think I would have continued as a foster carer”. Work is commencing to launch a second constellation in February 2024.
47. 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. Year to date we have received 43 enquiries and have 21 open applications. Some data cleansing of this is required but we have nine ongoing form f assessments (assessments of foster carers).

Residential Services

48. 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.
49. Harewood Hill Lodge provides short break care for Children with additional needs and had 68% 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 a.m. 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 has seen a significant decline in the number of children missing five children had 27 missing episodes from our three mainstream homes. In the same period as last year, eight children had 271 missing episodes.
50. 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.
51. 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.
52. 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.
53. 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.
54. 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.

55. The new and updated Child Exploitation Matrix has been rolled out to all staff and this is being incorporated electronically onto Liquid Logic on 1 January 2024.
56. The contact team are now known as the 'Children and Family Time Service' with the workers being called 'Children and Family Time Workers'. We continue to support work in other areas of the service with the wide range of skills and experience within the children and family time service. Moving into 2024 we shall be analysing their workload, role and capacity across all service areas in order to ensure that we are utilising their skills and experience to the maximum whilst considering the most efficient and effective way for them to function.
57. For the festivities the family time service have created a Santa's Grotto to enable our children and their families to visit Santa together, receive a gift and make photographic memories.
58. Moving into 2024 discussions are also underway for a Community Shop to be created within Harewood that can support our vulnerable and needy children and their families.

Education

59. Hurworth Primary School was recently inspected by Ofsted and retained its "Good" rating. Inspectors recognised that school is a place of calm and kindness, pupils quickly become skilled readers and writers and leave school as well-rounded individuals, well equipped for the next phase of their education.
60. Holy Family Catholic Primary School was also recently inspected and retained its "Good" rating. Inspectors recognised leaders ensure that every person is valued, nurtured and respected as an individual, provision for personal development is exceptional and pupils thrive at this ambitious school.

Youth Unemployment

61. **Youth Unemployment Claimant Count** - The Darlington 18-24 year old claimant count has fallen slightly from 7.4% (555 young people) in August 2023 to 7.1% (530 young people) in October 2023. This compares with the North-East average which has remained static at 6.0%, and the national average which has risen by 0.1% to 5.0%
62. The figures for the Tees Valley were as follows:

Hartlepool	9.5%
Redcar and Cleveland	8.6%
Middlesbrough	8.4%
Stockton -on-Tees	7.8%
Darlington	7.1%

63. **Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and other employability programmes** - Since that start of the YEI programme at the end of May 2016 up to the end of November 2023 the programme supported 1,584 16-29 year olds. Of the 1,584 participants 1,471 (92.9%) of

those progressed into employment or training and 848 (57.6%) of those who started the programme were still in those destinations six months later.

64. 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 to bridge the gap between funding streams and help retain staff. 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.
65. 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. Some YEI staff will be redeployed onto the UKSPF programme. UKSPF cannot be used to replicate existing DWP programmes such as that offered by Restart.
66. 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

67. All Darlington-based providers of supported accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers aged 16 and 17 years old had validated registration applications with Ofsted ahead of the 28 October 2023 deadline.
68. Darlington children's commissioners have led a subregional procurement for the provision of the SEND mediation services. The successful contractor was "Why Mediate" who will provide SEND mediation services effective from 8 January 2024.
69. Children's Commissioners have continued to work with key strategic partners to maximise the range of supported accommodation available for young people in Darlington who are transitioning to adulthood. Children's Commissioners have worked in conjunction with colleagues in Housing Services and the local VCSE provider, Humankind to submit a bid to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for an additional eight units of dispersed supported accommodation in Darlington for young people aged 18-24.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

70. The Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report has now been published. The report summarises and reflects on the work of the Partnership over the period 2022/23, drawing upon a range of data and information. The report was presented to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 8th January 2024 and is available on the Partnership website.
71. The Partnership has also published its Family H Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR). Family H are a sibling group and enquiries led police to believe they were victims of sexual abuse. The review focussed on a number of key episodes over a ten-year period and identified a number of instances where opportunities to assess the risk to the children

were missed and this information was not shared with partner agencies. The final Report and Executive Summary are available on the Partnership website.

72. The Statutory Safeguarding Partners have not met in this period and therefore, there are no further child safeguarding updates to provide at this time.

Councillor Nick Wallis
Children and Young People Portfolio