



**Darlington
Safeguarding
Partnership**

Protecting Children and Adults

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report

2023-24



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1. Introduction

Foreword by Statutory Safeguarding Partners and Independent Scrutineer

Darlington Borough Council, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, Durham Constabulary and many other organisations together form the Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (DSP). We are a joint children's and adults' partnership, focussing on specific issues as well as a whole family perspective.

We welcome you to our annual report covering work for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024. The report provides a transparent overview of the year's multi-agency safeguarding activity and reflects on the hard work and dedication of all our partner agencies as they've worked together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, young people and adults with care and support needs across Darlington.

A key part of our statutory responsibility is to undertake reviews of cases where a child or adult has died or been seriously harmed as a result of abuse or neglect and there is reasonable cause for concern as to how safeguarding partners worked together to safeguard that child or adult. In 2023-24 we published our very first Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review in respect of Family H. A summary of learning from this case is outlined in section 8 of the report along with important learning points identified through a number of adult learning lessons reviews.

Self-Neglect continues to be a challenge with numbers of reported concerns highlighting a steady increase year on year. Self-neglect is a key priority, and a multi-agency task and finish group has been established to lead on the development of guidance, resources and tools to support practitioners working with the challenges of individuals who self-neglect and are resistant to engage.

We will continue to remain focused on ensuring local multi-agency safeguarding practice remains effective for our children, young people and adults with care and support needs during any changes that may arise from new legislation.

The year ended with the publication of new Working Together statutory safeguarding guidance, and we recognise there is much change ahead. We will implement the requirements relating to Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements and consider how the impact of these changes will affect Darlington as we want to retain the benefits of having a joint partnership.

The report also includes a review of our priorities for 2023-2026 as outlined in the Strategic Plan.

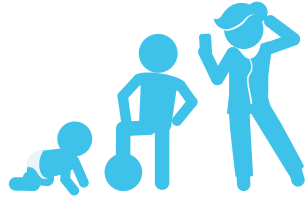
We hope you enjoy reading our annual report and that it gives you assurance about the strength and impact of multi-agency working to keep everyone safe in Darlington. We will continue to challenge ourselves to deliver better services, support those who are vulnerable in our communities and further develop the strengths of the multi-agency partnership arrangements.

We remain grateful to all our partners and their dedicated front-line staff for their support and steadfast commitment to safeguarding all of our children and adults.

Ann Baxter Independent Scrutineer/ Chair	James Stroyan Group Director for People, Darlington Borough Council	David Ashton Detective Chief Superintendent, Durham Constabulary	Chris Piercy Director of Nursing and Quality, North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
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2. Local Picture

Darlington Borough Council is a Unitary Authority in the Northeast of England which covers 200 square kilometres. Darlington is part of the Tees Valley Combined Authority.



Children and young people under the age of 25 years make up **28%** of the population, the number of children and young people under the age of 18 living in Darlington is **22,627** which equates to **21%** of the current population.



The number of people aged over 65 years old in Darlington is estimated at **21,700**

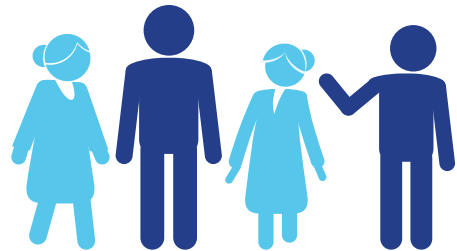
The Health of People in Darlington is varied compared with the England average and **20%** of children live in low income families.



As of 2021 Darlington has a population in excess of **107,000** individuals who live in around **48,475** households.



Of this population **64,800** are of working age (16-64 years old).



In terms of ethnicity, the 2021 Census reported 94.4% of Darlington's population as White and **5.6%** from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups.



In County Durham and Darlington the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) community form the largest single ethnic minority group, the proportion of Darlington residents who identify themselves as GRT (2021 census) is **0.3%** which is three times higher than the national average.

Overall, comparing local indicators with England averages, life expectancy for both men and women is lower. The health of people in Darlington is varied, about 20% of children live in low-income families.

3. Partnership Governance and Structure

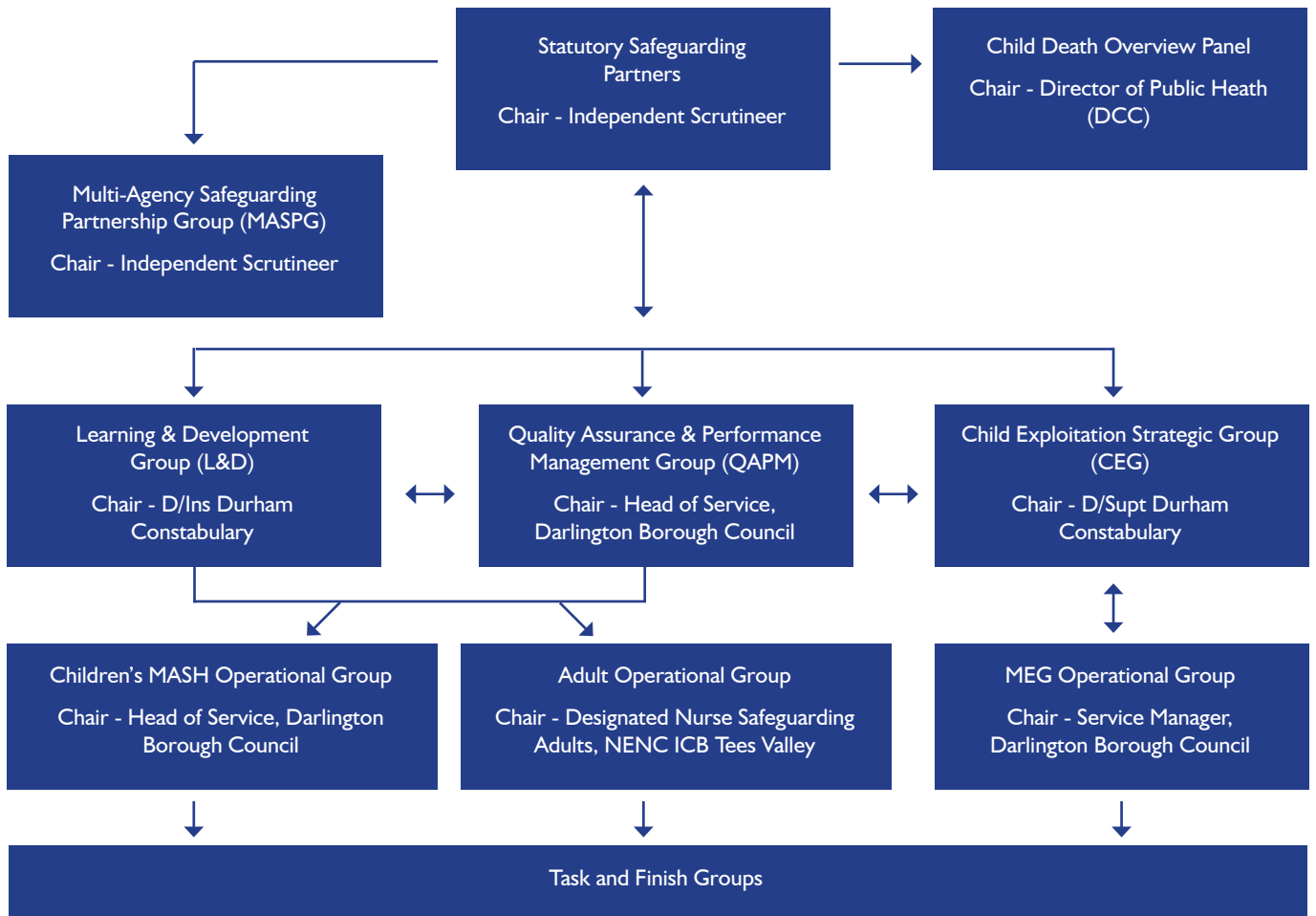


The DSP revised its governance arrangements in 2022/23 and set out the role and responsibilities of the sub-groups. The sub-groups engage in the safeguarding priorities and explore the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements. A wide range of organisations are represented on the Partnership groups and include senior leads, details are outlined in Appendix 2.

<p>Statutory Safeguarding Partners Group Chaired by Independent Scrutineer/Chair</p>	<p>The Statutory Safeguarding Partners and Independent Scrutineer have a strong collective oversight of all safeguarding arrangements to ensure fulfilment of statutory obligations.</p> <p>The Partners commission the strategic and operational groups to ensure the priority areas of the Strategic Plan are delivered and ensure effective scrutiny arrangements are in place.</p>
<p>Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group Chaired by Independent Scrutineer/Chair</p>	<p>This multi-agency group has a wide membership of key strategic leads from agencies, organisations and people who use services. Meetings are themed and focus on local and national safeguarding priorities areas are identified by data, audits and reviews.</p>
<p>Quality Assurance and Performance Group (QAPM) Chaired by Head of Service, Darlington Borough Council</p>	<p>This is a strategic group and is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding work across partner agencies and commissioned organisations.</p> <p>The group has responsibility for audits and monitoring safeguarding data to be assured that both child and adult safeguarding systems are robust, effective and identifies areas for improvement to share with the Learning & Development Group.</p>
<p>Learning and Development Group (L&D) Chaired by Detective Inspector, Durham Constabulary</p>	<p>This is a strategic group and is responsible for oversight of learning and improvement, multi-agency training and learning opportunities and policy and procedure.</p> <p>It has governance responsibility for all reviews undertaken, reviewing the learning outcomes and suggested recommendations for improvement. It establishes process for dissemination of learning and identifies any training need requirements. Any improvements identified through reviews are taken forward and shared with the Quality Assurance & Performance Management Group.</p>

<p>Child Exploitation Group (CEG)</p> <p>Chaired by Detective Superintendent, Durham Constabulary</p>	<p>This is a strategic group and is responsible for overseeing, monitoring, evaluating and improving responses to tackle children missing from home, care and education and for the reduction of child exploitation across County Durham and Darlington.</p> <p>The group ensures the action plan is delivered and monitors data and intelligence to better understand the picture of exploitation across County Durham and Darlington and directs the multi-agency response towards prevention, early identification and intervention.</p> <p>An operational group oversees individual cases of children at risk of exploitation in Darlington with a purpose to prevent, disrupt and deter individuals or groups who seek to exploit, abuse and harm children.</p>
<p>Adult Operational Group</p> <p>Chaired by Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Adults, North East & North Cumbria, Integrated Care Board (Tees Valley)</p>	<p>This is an operational group with shared responsibility for safeguarding service delivery to safeguard adults with needs for care and support.</p> <p>The group will identify key themes or practice challenges through monitoring performance data and operational practice issues and develop appropriate actions to respond to them.</p> <p>Identified trends and areas of concern are shared with the Quality Assurance & Performance Management and Learning & Development Groups by exception.</p> <p>The Group has responsibility for issues relating to provider concerns and settings who are in the Executive Strategy Process and monitor responsiveness to any identified issues and actions.</p>
<p>Children's (MASH) Operational Group</p> <p>Chaired by Head of Service, Darlington Borough Council</p>	<p>This is an operational group with shared responsibility for safeguarding service delivery to safeguard children and young people.</p> <p>The group will identify key themes or practice challenges through monitoring performance data and operational practice issues and take them forward within multi-agency focussed sessions and develop appropriate actions to respond to them.</p> <p>Identified trends and areas of concern are shared with the Quality Assurance & Performance Management and Learning & Development Groups by exception.</p>
<p>Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP)</p> <p>Chaired by Director of Public Health, Durham County Council</p>	<p>Child Death Overview Panel arrangements are undertaken cross border with Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership. The Panel continues to review all deaths of children as required in Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory Guidance (2018) with an aim to identify learning to prevent future deaths.</p> <p>The National Child Mortality Database (NCMD) gathers information on all children who die in England and shares the learning so that improvements can be made to save children's lives in the future.</p>

Partnership Governance Structure



4. How we have worked this year

Whilst this report covers the period from April 2023 to March 2024, it includes some references to work already started in the previous year which continued into this reporting period, along with the new work which has commenced, and which will continue beyond April 2024.

The DSP's vision is for *'Darlington to be a place where children and adults can live their lives safely'* and its aim is to understand what is working well in its collective safeguarding practice and identify what needs further development to ensure arrangements are effective and coordinated.

The [Strategic Plan](#) was published in June 2023 and sets out DSP's shared vision and actions that will help keep children, young people, and adults with needs for care and support safe and protected from abuse and neglect and sets out the priority areas of focus for 2023-26.

The Statutory Safeguarding Partners have a collective oversight of safeguarding arrangements and to be assured of these arrangements, the chairs of sub-groups provide an executive overview of the key issues, themes, practice issues and the narrative required. Partners are equally responsible for Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) and met to consider a number of referrals submitted throughout the year to determine if they met the criteria for serious incident notification (child) or criteria for a SAR. Details of these are outlined in section 8 of the report.

The Statutory Partners have considered the new provisions outlined in revised Working Together Statutory Guidance (2023) and acknowledged that some changes will be required to meet this guidance to ensure DSP achieves the requirements which will help strengthen the way the Partnership operates. They were all in agreement that it is not feasible to introduce those changes within the timescale of this report. A review of current multi-agency safeguarding arrangements is being undertaken alongside the implementation of new requirements, including ensuring there is adequate representation and input by education. Due to the current business support function being very small, Partners agreed to appoint a Project Manager (on fixed term basis) to lead on the implementation of the new arrangements.

The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group, met twice in this period. The forum enables critical challenge and the holding of each agency to account. Standing agendas include Chairs of sub-groups providing an overview of current activity, themes and work programmes. Meetings focus on specific themes identified through Partnership work and have included: learning identified through child and adult reviews; Local Authority Adult Inspection preparation; an overview of learning and reflection following the investigations into incidents at West Lane Mental Health Hospital and Public Health plans to strengthen collaborative ways of working on domestic abuse agenda.

The sub-groups continue to drive forward the work and through understanding those themes and trends we are better able to understand the priority areas of focus and details of the work outlined below.



Snapshot of activity from Sub-Groups

Children's MASH Operational Group

This group continued to have oversight of the Front Door practice in Children's Social Care and considers performance data and emerging patterns. In 2023/24 there was a significant increase in demand for services at the Front Door and in Children's Services generally.

Domestic Abuse continued to be the highest presenting issue in safeguarding referrals and the 4Kids service, a joint initiative to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse between Police and Darlington Borough Council now sits within the Children's Front Door to promote a 'joined up approach' to safeguarding children.

Focused sessions on identified themes included: **race, diversity and cultural competency** which highlighted the frontline workforce needed to be better equipped to help understand and be aware of the diverse cultural factors which may be influencing patterns of risk to be able to respond appropriately. The group will consider training and development of guidance and consider undertaking a deep dive to better understand the issues; **Harm away from home/Contextual Safeguarding** to understand what we are doing well, next steps and goals. The group will establish a working group to consider what is needed and to drive forward key pieces of work including **bruising in non-mobile babies and non-verbal children** following some regional cases of agencies not following multi-agency procedure and guidance.

The group continues to discuss specific multi-agency practice issues raised by agencies or identified in the weekly referral meetings to determine how they can be addressed collectively. The group also spends time focussing on key learning points from national and regional reviews to understand whether Darlington is compliant with the learning and recommendations.

The work of this group will continue into the next reporting period and is not possible at this time to evidence specific impact of this work.

Adult Operational Group

The group continues to have oversight of performance data to obtain an understanding of the changing landscape and emerging patterns coming through contacts and referrals.

The ongoing Adult Safeguarding Review within Adult Social Care is looking to improve data recording and the collation of data on its safeguarding casework system which will help improve the identification of emerging themes and trends which will support multi-agency work.

Adult Social Care has also introduced a Weekly Review Meeting to allow management scrutiny of the decision making involved in and outcomes of all safeguarding contacts referred to the Local Authority and an update is provided at meetings providing some assurance that decision making is evidenced, and safeguarding is robust.

The key theme continues to be self-neglect and hoarding. A task and finish group was established to consider whether practitioners recognise self-neglect and understand what action can be taken. The group is revising practice guidance to include guidance on Mental Capacity act assessments and a risk assessment tool and referral pathway will be developed. This work will soon be concluded, a Risk Enablement Forum is being established to facilitate decision making on complex cases where service users are reluctant to engage with services.



The group continues to monitor those settings in the Executive Strategy Process and discuss significant provider concerns and has revised its guidance. The practice guidance has been amended to ensure that learning from the Executive Strategy Process is shared with providers and organisations within Darlington.

The group continues to provide an overview of any emerging trends and patterns to ensure that any themes or emerging risks can be identified at an early stage and reported accurately to the Statutory Safeguarding Partners and the group continues to have oversight of national and regional review findings which may identify learning relevant to Darlington.

The work of this group will continue into the next reporting period and is not possible at this time to evidence the impact of this work.

Learning and Development Group

The reporting year 2023-24 was extremely busy for the Learning and Development group, mainly because of the submission of a high number of Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) referrals and Serious Incident Notifications (children) and the subsequent Learning Lessons reviews which took place which the group has governance responsibility for.

There were four new serious incident notifications in respect of children, one of which progressed to a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review. There were four new SAR notifications, one of which progressed to a Learning Lessons Review. Work also continued on three learning reviews which were notified in the previous reporting year 2022/23. Details of these are outlined in Section 8 of the report.

As a result of the recurring theme of self-neglect in local, regional and national SARs, the group has oversight of the work being considered by the task and finish group as outlined above and work is ongoing.

Darlington Borough Council participated in the Newcastle University Expert in Practice Project which examined the multi-agency response to self-neglect and captured the voice of service users in Darlington which will be considered by the task and finish group.

The group continues to monitor policy, procedure and practice guidance to ensure they reflect changing needs in practice and learning and highlight those which require revision, inviting those with the expertise in the subject matter to support where possible.

The group has continual oversight of national and regional review findings to identify any learning that may be relevant for Darlington. Partner agencies which sit across a bigger footprint have a role to play in sharing themes and learning identified through their organisation's involvement.

Quality Assurance and Performance Management Group

The group continues to have oversight of multi-agency performance data and operational information. Robust data and operational oversight of Children's multi agency performance is well embedded; however, work is ongoing in respect of adult multi-agency safeguarding performance data which is being reviewed in conjunction with the review of Adult Safeguarding Services as highlighted earlier.

The two operational groups (Child and Adult), provide an overview of any emerging trends and patterns to ensure that any themes or emerging risks can be identified at an early stage and reported accurately to the Statutory Safeguarding Partners and the group continues to have oversight of national and regional review findings which may identify learning relevant to Darlington.

The implementation by Adult Services of a Weekly Review Meeting, where senior managers review the decision making and the outcomes of safeguarding referrals, will improve the collation of intelligence and the identification of multi-agency themes to address. This process has already identified several themes which cut across child and adult safeguarding.

Adult Social Care has also seen including reports of demand for services, with an increasing rate of safeguarding referrals and an increase in complex concerns about younger adults and the data has highlighted self-neglect and hoarding and a link to child neglect and transitional safeguarding as issues. Throughout 2023/24 there has been an increase in Children Looked After (CLA) and the year saw unprecedented levels of demand on the service, which together with the complexity and volume has proved challenging.

The group has a role in ensuring that Partnership learning from reviews and quality assurance activity is evident in practice and the group will begin to conduct live audits on current cases to ensure that new practice is embedded. Work will continue to evidence the impact of the work and provide assurance on multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

Strategic Child Exploitation Group

The group continued to monitor the strategic response of partner agencies in tackling the incidence of children missing from home, care and education and the reduction of child exploitation in Darlington and County Durham.

Themes identified in the fortnightly Operational Missing and Exploited groups are reported to the CEG. The Darlington group is well established and covers both exploitation and missing children; daily meetings are held to discuss all children reported as missing and work has extended from the traditional core partner agencies with the Community Safety Partnership now involved in the identification of places and spaces where children and young people are at risk.

A new Partnership Intelligence form was developed by Durham Constabulary and training was rolled out throughout the Partnership with a view to improving information sharing. In May 2023 Durham Constabulary hosted the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme Peer Review (VKPP) which involves direct engagement with police forces and key partners to understand current practice, identify good practice and gaps in services with a view to improving the overall response to young people at risk of harm away from home, reduce the threat of harm, bring offenders to justice and improve outcomes for victims. The findings were positive, and work is ongoing within the group to implement the recommendations and a delivery plan with three priority areas has been developed based on the findings.

The Child Exploitation Matrix Tool was amended and guidance and training provided, the matrix went live in January 2023 in Darlington which has significantly improved local authority reporting and has enabled practitioners to access live data.

Child Death Overview Panel

The Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) oversees all deaths of children under the age of 18. There have been 8 deaths in Darlington during this reporting period and all of these were subject to a Child Death Review. The CDOP works closely with the Partnership to highlight any emerging themes and issues and learning from child death reviews that require further consideration. CDOP completed a [bi-annual report](#) which provides a summary of activity carried over a two-year period 2021-23.

In line with Statutory Guidance, the administration of CDOP will switch to the responsibility of Child Death Review Partners (Local Authorities and Integrated Care Boards) the administration of the CDOP will switch from the Safeguarding Partnership Business Units to the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENCICB). The process of the transition is ongoing, and the Partnership will continue to be involved in the CDOP process.





Independent Scrutineer and Chair

The Independent Scrutineer/Chair continues to ensure there is a clear focus on seeking assurance on the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements from a strategic perspective and ensures safeguarding partners and relevant agencies are challenged and supported in their roles to work collaboratively to meet the safeguarding priorities identified by the Partnership.

The Independent Scrutineer/Chair currently chairs meetings of the Statutory Safeguarding Partners and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group and encourages and facilitates an open culture of mutual, respectful challenge and support. It has been acknowledged that this arrangement will need to be reviewed considering the revisions in Working Together to Safeguard Children and responsibility being passed onto the Delegated Safeguarding Partner.

The Independent Scrutineer/Chair continues to present the Partnerships Annual Reports, outlining the Partnership achievements and effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to the Children and Young People and Adult Scrutiny Committees, Community Safety Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board.

Statutory Partners will review and develop the scrutiny arrangements in the next reporting year to ensure processes are in place for effective scrutiny of both strategic and operational safeguarding arrangements, which will help improve and reflect best practice.

Priorities for 2023-26

As outlined in the Strategic Plan, DSP has identified five priority areas of focus:

- Communication and involvement – making safeguarding everybody’s business and improving awareness of safeguarding across all communities and partner organisations
- Prevention and Early Intervention – enabling partners to work together to act early to protect those at risk of abuse or neglect
- Joint Working – ensure effective arrangements are in place to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from abuse and neglect
- Exploitation – ensuring effective multi-agency response and intervention to protect those at risk of exploitation, in all its forms
- Adult Self-Neglect - ensure all partner agencies improve awareness and understanding of adult self-neglect to ensure early identification can be achieved

The below outlines work that has been undertaken this year and work that will continue into the next reporting period against those priority areas. As outlined earlier it is not yet possible to evidence any impact that work is having, this will be reported next year.

Priorities - What have we done:

Communication and Involvement

- Use the DSP website to raise awareness to enable communities to play a part in preventing, identifying and responding to abuse and neglect and ensure everyone is aware how to report abuse – redeveloped February 2024
- Develop key resources, leaflets and newsletters to continually raise awareness – ongoing

Prevention and Early Intervention

- Multi-Agency Safeguarding Training Programme – implementation of ME Learning Platform to offer key training and e-learning modules to increase skills and knowledge across the workforce
- Development of briefing documents following findings in Family H Review, Parental Mental Health and Safeguarding and Child Exploitation

Joint Working – effective multi-agency arrangements

- Ensure clear governance arrangements are in place to underpin safeguarding practice - reviewed annually
- Continuous delivery of safeguarding training to align with DSP priorities – updated annually
- Further develop Quality Assurance Frameworks and Dashboards to be inclusive of all member agencies to seek assurance on safeguarding processes - ongoing
- Commission and undertake audit activity to ensure effectiveness and adherence – planned programme to be devised

Exploitation

- Develop resources and tools to support the identification of children at risk of missing and exploitation - ongoing
- Revision of the Child Exploitation Matrix to remove victim blaming language
- Revision of Partnership Information Sharing form to improve sharing of intelligence
- Implemented multi-agency forums to focus on spaces and places – Community Safety Check In, daily missing meetings

Self-neglect

- Established a task and finish group to take forward key pieces of work - ongoing
- Revising self-neglect practice guidance to include examples of positive, flexible approaches of engaging people who are self-neglecting - ongoing
- Develop self-neglect pathway flowchart - ongoing
- Develop self-neglect multi-agency risk assessment tool to support assessing and identifying risk - ongoing
- Developing a Risk Enablement Forum to manage high risk cases - ongoing
- Planning a self-neglect conference to raise awareness – 2 July 2024
- Consider the development of Mental Capacity Act Guidance to support practitioners working with individuals who are reluctant to engage with services

5. Partnership Activities and Interventions

Safeguarding Children

In terms of safeguarding children, the number of contacts into the Children's front Door in 2023/24 remained similar to that reported in the previous period. There were significantly more contacts made by Health and an increase in contacts from Housing, though Police continue to dominate the source of contacts in this period. The breakdown of presenting issues highlights that domestic abuse remains the highest presenting issue followed by behavioural issues, physical abuse and bullying.

There was a slight decrease in the number of Early Help Assessments started in 2023/24 in comparison to the previous year and 14.4% of these were initiated by external agencies. In response to the revisions in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, discussions are taking place to establish a multi-agency Early Help Strategic Board which will be responsible for the strategic and operational delivery of effective, targeted and coordinated preventative and early help support for children, young people and families within the Darlington locality.

The Children's Social Care Weekly Review Meetings (WRM) continue to provide a high level of management oversight and challenge to decision making at the Front Door and is the mechanism for highlighting emerging themes and trends coming through. The WRM monitors and implements changes and scrutinises decision making at the earliest point of referral. Whilst this is a social care process, it is recognised there are significant benefits in extending this to wider partner agencies to help them see how their referrals progress, including the decision making behind them to take learning back to their own organisations.

Ofsted conducted a focused visit to Darlington Children's Services in October 2023 and the inspectors looked at the Local Authority's arrangements for children in need and children subject to a protection plan. The inspection identified that relationships with partner agencies are a particular strength and enable professionals to engage in effective multi-agency information sharing which informs decision making and sound planning for children and robust child centred responses to identified risk and need.

Safeguarding Adults

In terms of adult safeguarding the patterns of concerns reported to the Local Authority have changed. Adult Social Care has experienced increased referrals for Mental Health Support which is mirrored across system partners, as well as increased homelessness and people experiencing the impact of the cost of living, which has impacted on charity and third sector organisations. There is an assumed link with these experiences, with changing patterns of concerns reported to the Local Authority within Adult safeguarding in the last year; inpatient settings reporting increased Peer on Peer altercations, bed based regulated services reporting increased acts of omission; medication incidents, falls and peer on peer altercations and community-based concerns relating to alcohol and substance misuse pertaining to self-neglect.

The areas of abuse remain consistent with Neglect & Acts of Omission within care home settings, Physical Abuse, Emotional and Psychological abuse being the highest categories.

A joint approach is taken when there is an accumulation of high-risk concerns within a provider setting with the Local Authority, Health and the Care Quality Commission providing quality assurance support. This may result in an action plan for the service which is monitored or consideration for further safeguards such as the Executive Strategy process. Information relating to concerns in care home settings is shared with the Adult Operational Group which continues to monitor the response to those identified issues and the actions required to provide assurance to the Statutory Safeguarding Partners.

There continues to be an increase in self-neglect as a reported category of abuse, this is a national issue and is a consistent theme in many Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) and is often linked to alcohol and substance misuse. The Local Authority has found that the referrals for individuals who are self-neglecting often require a more proactive approach to promote engagement. Work is ongoing to support this engagement through the self-neglect task and finish group.

It is recognised that self-neglect and hoarding can be a complex and challenging area for practitioners and not always easily identified. An adult who self-neglects may not always be at a level of risk which warrants adult safeguarding procedures to be initiated and it is therefore imperative that agencies work with the adult and each other to prevent individuals who self-neglect from reaching a point where safeguarding interventions or a type of enforcement is required to protect them.

There has been a lot of work undertaken during this reporting period following a number of Learning Lesson Reviews where self-neglect was identified as a feature. Details of actions, progress and multi-agency tools and resources produced as a result of the work are outlined in Section 8 of the report.

The Local Authority continues with its transformation review of adult safeguarding processes and is reviewing how data is collated and reported into the Partnership. The implementation of a Weekly Review Meeting (WRM) now ensures there is direct management oversight and scrutiny of reported safeguarding concerns and decision making. The WRM reviews cases which do not progress to safeguarding procedures, looking at decision making, risk assessment/protection plan and communication with the person and referrer to ensure that the individual's safety and wellbeing have been promoted. An overview of themes, issues or concerns highlighted within WRM are reported into the Adult Operational Group. The Local Authority is awaiting the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Adult Regulatory Inspection following new regulatory powers to assess local authorities outlined in the Health and Care Act 2022. Live inspections using a new framework will commence in September 2023, no date has been set for Darlington.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse concerns continue to be one of the top five reasons for contacts into the Children's Front Door. During the period April 2023 to March 2024 1,215 contacts were received regarding concerns of domestic abuse resulting in 244 referrals into social care.

To understand the local picture, DSP has oversight of the Operation Encompass Protocol which ensures the early sharing of information with schools to enable them to provide proactive support to children and young people who are affected by domestic abuse that has occurred in the family home when the incident has been assessed as high or medium risk. In 2023/24 there were 155 notifications made for 230 children. The 4Kids project, which was launched in response to a concerning rise in numbers of children becoming looked after where the main causal factor was a background of parental domestic abuse, sits in the Children's Front Door. The service supports families which would not ordinarily be visible to services through other processes, as they fall outside the usual thresholds and criteria of statutory involvement and may have declined consent to offers of support.

In relation to adult safeguarding, there were 35 reported concerns where domestic abuse was the reported category of abuse for the 2023-24 period, 8 progressed to a strategy meeting (23%).

Housing and Homelessness

2023/24 continued to be a challenging and busy year for Darlington Borough Council housing teams and partner agencies. The service has seen an 84.5% increase in people being accommodated in emergency accommodation. There has been a significant increase of 186% on last year for people presenting due to being served a section 21 (no fault eviction notice) from the private rented sector.

The Local Authority continued to carry out the monthly and annual rough sleeper counts with colleagues across the region to ascertain how many individuals were sleeping rough through the North East on a specific night. In 2023-24 35 rough sleepers were identified.

In 2023/24 1842 individuals presented to the Housing Options Service for advice regarding homelessness,



157 homeless applications were received where Domestic Violence was the main reason for homelessness. This is 11.2% of total presentations and an increase of 6% on previous year. Applications were received through Duty to Refer, individual applications, customer service referrals or referrals from other agencies such as Harbour, Children and Adult Services.

The Local Authority is updating its Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to ensure over the next five years that, with the strong partnership of agencies and organisations in Darlington, they continue to strive to minimise the risk of homelessness and effectively support those who become homeless back to a stable home and an independent life. The Local Authority will consult with partner agencies on the revised strategy to help them understand if they have identified the key issues currently affecting homelessness in Darlington.

At the time of writing the report the Statutory Partners were aware of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Ministerial Letter regards recommendations for Safeguarding Adult Boards in relation to individuals rough sleeping and will be responding in the next reporting period.

Right Care, Right Person

Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) is a national model changing the way emergency services respond to welfare and medical calls, to ensure that when someone calls about a mental health issue, the right people respond to ensure that the right care is given by the right people. Safeguarding Partners have a responsibility to monitor and ensure partner agencies carry out their roles and responsibilities. Work is ongoing to develop local policy and procedure.

Participation in wider forums

Darlington participates in a number of forums to help improve connectivity and understanding of the wider safeguarding issues and areas of common interest which include:

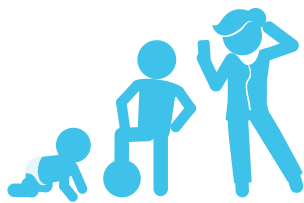
- **Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Network** - its purpose is to coordinate a response to modern slavery and human trafficking and increase support for victims.
- **North East Region SAR Champions Network** – its purpose is to identify regional and national themes, develop good practice in the submission of Safeguarding Adult Referrals (SARs) maintain a regional SAR library and share learning from SARs. The network monitors regional and national SARs to identify themes. The network has also supported the development of regional tools and resources to support safeguarding, along with development of regional protocols.
- **North East Regional Fire Task and Finish Group** - its aim is to increase fire risk awareness and partner referrals to the fire service and increase awareness of risk factors including mobility issues, memory problems clutter, hoarding and emollient cream.
- **UK Hoarding Partnership** - Its purpose is to seek to develop interventions based on research to support member organisations and practitioners in supporting individuals and their families with hoarding behaviours, though sharing information and good practice throughout the UK.
- **Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Executive Group** - is a multi-agency strategic group with responsibility for supporting Durham and Darlington local authorities in meeting their duty under Part 4 of Domestic Abuse Act 2021, ensuring victims of domestic abuse have access to adequate and appropriate support within safe accommodation and wider domestic abuse services. Work is ongoing to forge better links into the Safeguarding Partnership.

6. Snapshot of effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements in Darlington (April 2023 to March 2024)

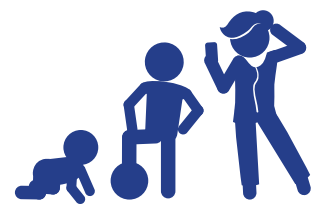
Child Safeguarding

The multi-agency Child Protection Procedures and Practice Guidance provide a framework for all organisations to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in Darlington.

The below provides a snapshot of safeguarding concerns and the outcomes achieved during the year:



5993 contacts into the Children's Front Door. Of these, **732** were referred to Building Stronger Families Service and **783** referred to children's social care



324 Children in need

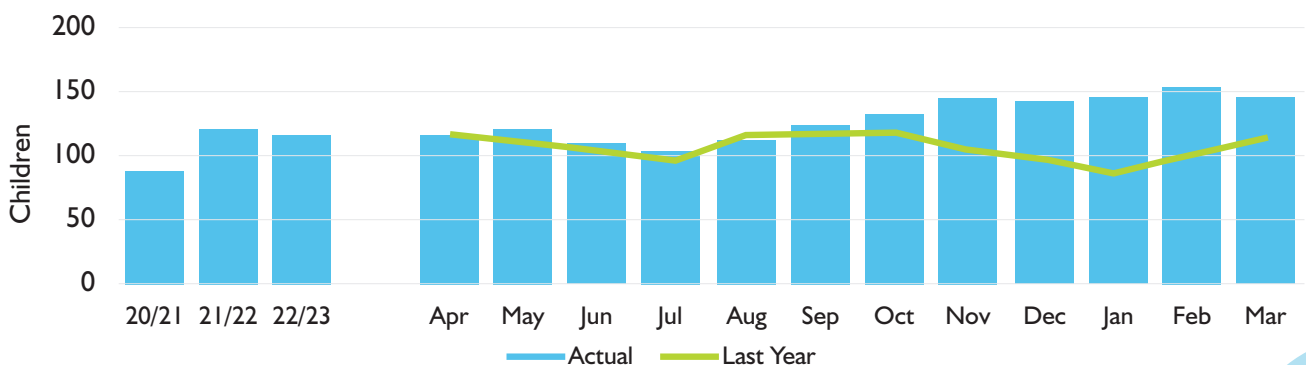


527 (963 children) Strategy Discussions started
71.4% progressed to a section 47 enquiry

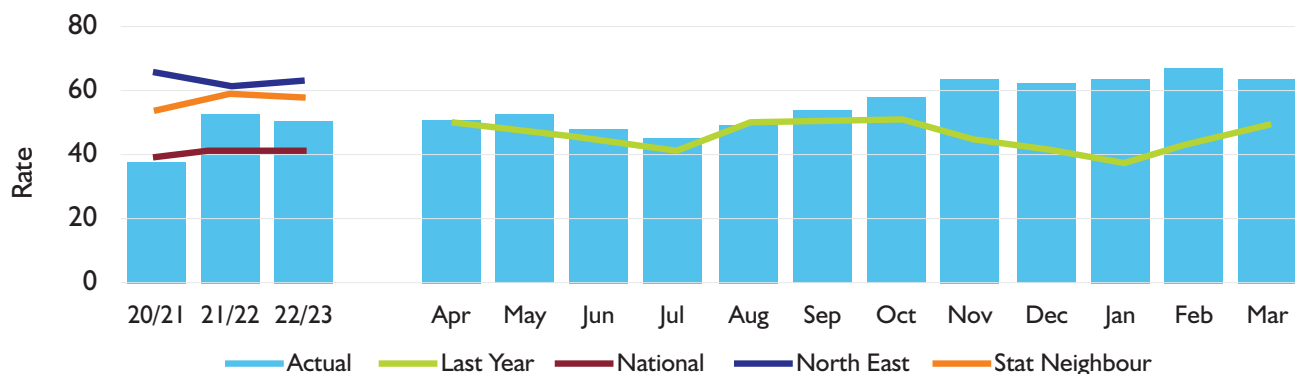


196 children had a child protection plan started.
146 subject to a child protection plan at end of March 2024

Number of Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan



Rate of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan per 10,000 population



The top five risk factors associated with Child Protection were due to:

Substance Misuse	Neglect	Physical Abuse	Domestic Abuse	Mental Health
22.2%	17.8%	14.6	13.5%	12.4%

Building Stronger Families (BSF) (formerly Early Help Service)

Provides coordinated help for children and families with a range of needs through an early help assessment or targeted programmes. There were 1417 Early Help Assessments opened in this year, of these 204 were initiated by an external agency.

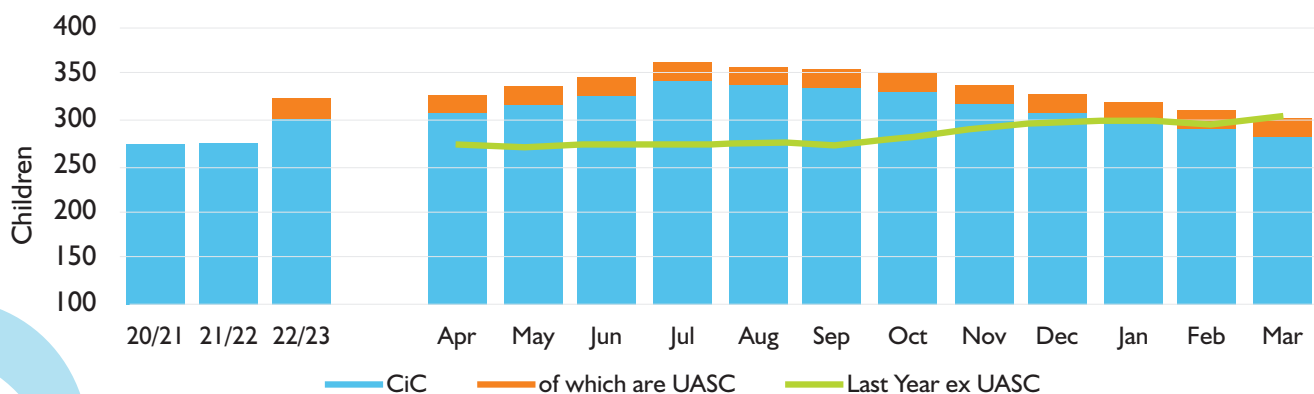
Keeping Families Together

Has an aim to support children to remain at home, where it is safe to do so. At the end of March 2024, there were 11 families open to the Keeping Families Together (KFT) Team, involving 16 individual children.

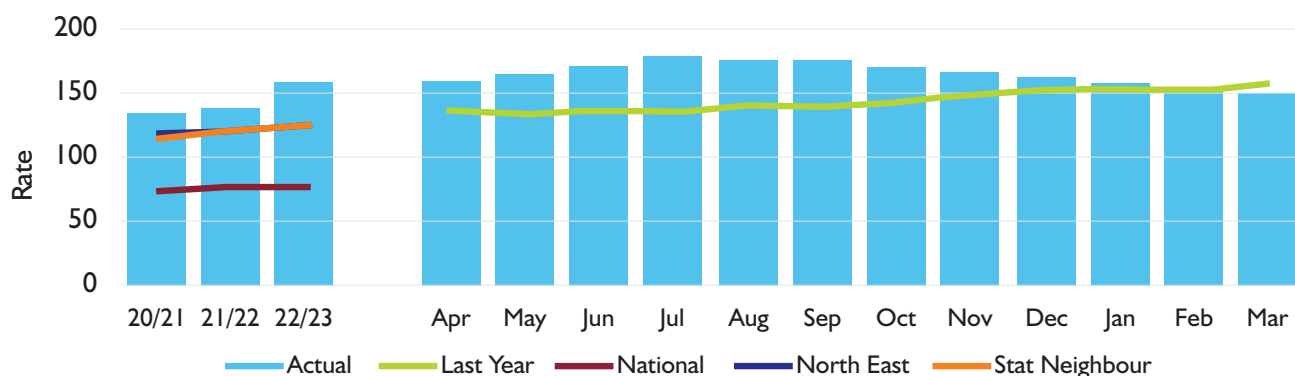
Children in Care

The total number of Children in Care (CiC) within the Local Authority at the end of March 2024 was 300, (134.8 per 10,000), of these 18 were unaccompanied asylum seekers. The primary and secondary presenting issues for children coming into care are due to substance misuse, neglect, physical abuse, domestic abuse and mental health concerns.

Total Number of Children in Care



Rate of Children in Care per 10,000 population



Care Leavers

In Darlington 98.4% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation by the end of 2023-24 and the percentage of care leavers (aged 19-21) who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) was 22.6%.

Young People Engagement and Justice Service (YPEJS)

Saw the number of young people identified as First Time Entrants (FTE) being referred increasing from the previous year. At the end of March 2024 there were 19 young people (15 Males and 4 Females) who were FTEs. The YPEJS had 57 young people (35 Males and 22 Females) referred to the service during 2023-24 for pre-caution disposals (56) and restorative disposals (1), there has been a 96% success rate in terms of young people not reoffending.

Education attendance

Autumn 2023 data indicated there was 7% overall absence across all education settings, compared with 6.7% nationally. The estimated absence rate was highest in special schools (9.6%), followed by secondary schools (8.1%), and primary schools recorded the lowest absence rate (5.8%). In 2023-24, 22.6% of pupils were estimated to be “persistently absent” (defined by the Department for Education as missing 8% or more of possible school sessions). The Vulnerable Pupil Panel is a multi-agency panel whose aim is to avoid children disengaging from education due to any cause.

Elective Home Education (EHE)

There are effective measures in place for the monitoring children who are in EHE. A full time EHE Advisor monitors and maintains the EHE database, supporting parents and ensuring evidence of suitable education is being provided. The number of children EHE remains fluid and the EHE advisor continues to support schools when children don't return at the start of the new academic term. As of 31 March 2023, there were 285 children registered on the EHE database, of these 84 were from GRT community, Darlington has a higher than average GRT population, the EHE advisor works closely with the GRT Education Service.

Children Missing from Home and Care

The total number of children who went missing from home or care during 2023/24 was 423 with 87.8% of these children being offered a return home interview (RHI) and 76.9% of children engaged in their RHI. Of these young people, Children in Care (CiC) continue to dominate the number of missing episodes.

Children missing from Education

The total number of children missing from education (CME) for 2023/24 was 31 - 11 have moved Local Authority, six children have emigrated, four children are from the travelling community and have left the area to travel, three children returned to school after a period of absence. There are seven children whereby the Local Authority has so far been unable to trace who have been out of Darlington education for a significant number of weeks.

Exploitation of children and young people

Multi-agency work around child exploitation continues to be coordinated through the Missing and Exploited Operational Group (MEG) and Strategic Child Exploitation Group (CEG).

A multi-agency Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker (CEVT) continues to be used across Darlington and County Durham to track and identify those children at high risk of exploitation. Children are scored based on the level of risk and continues to be monitored by the Strategic CEG.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the average score was 71 (down from 71.5 in the previous year), with a range of 37 to 92 across Durham and Darlington. The average score for those in Darlington was 72. A snapshot of the tracker in August 2024 (numbers are fluid), shows that there are 21 children “active” (12 of which are high risk) across County Durham and Darlington (7 in Darlington). Of these 21 children, 11 are linked to Child Criminal Exploitation (2 in Darlington), 9 children are linked to a Child Sexual Exploitation (5 in Darlington) and 1 child is linked to County Lines (0 of which were in Darlington).

Designated Officer and Managing Allegations (children)

Is responsible for the oversight of the management of allegations against employees who work with children and may have harmed or may pose a risk of harm to children. In 2023/24 the Designated Officer service received a total of 244 contacts in respect of potential allegations. It is of note that this figure is likely lower than expected due to a change in Designated Officer and differing recording mechanisms. Of the 244 contacts recorded, the main category for referral continues to be allegations of physical abuse and the largest referring group and largest allegation by staff group is Education.

Adult Safeguarding

The multi-agency safeguarding adult procedures and guidance provide a framework for all organisations to work together with the person at risk, to support them to be safe from abuse, neglect or self-neglect and is underpinned by the six Care Act Principles. The below provides a summary of safeguarding concerns and the outcomes achieved.

What is a Safeguarding Concern?

A report made to the lead agency for the safeguarding process to raise a concern of adult abuse and neglect

What is a S42 Enquiry?

The Care Act 2014 (Section 42) requires that each Local Authority must make enquiries, or cause others to do so, if it believes an adult is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse and or neglect

2995

Number of contacts into Adult Contact Team



1047

Number of initial enquiries started



24%

progressed to a S42 safeguarding enquiry



48.2% of individuals had a family representative or advocate involved at initial enquiry

46.8% of individuals providing own view

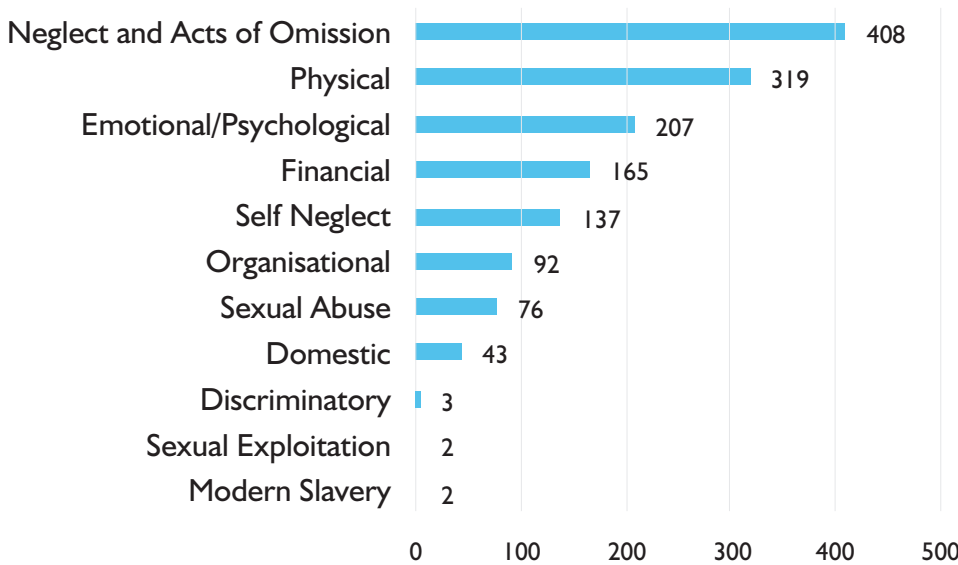


90%

risk reduced or removed

Types of Abuse

Section 42 Enquiries



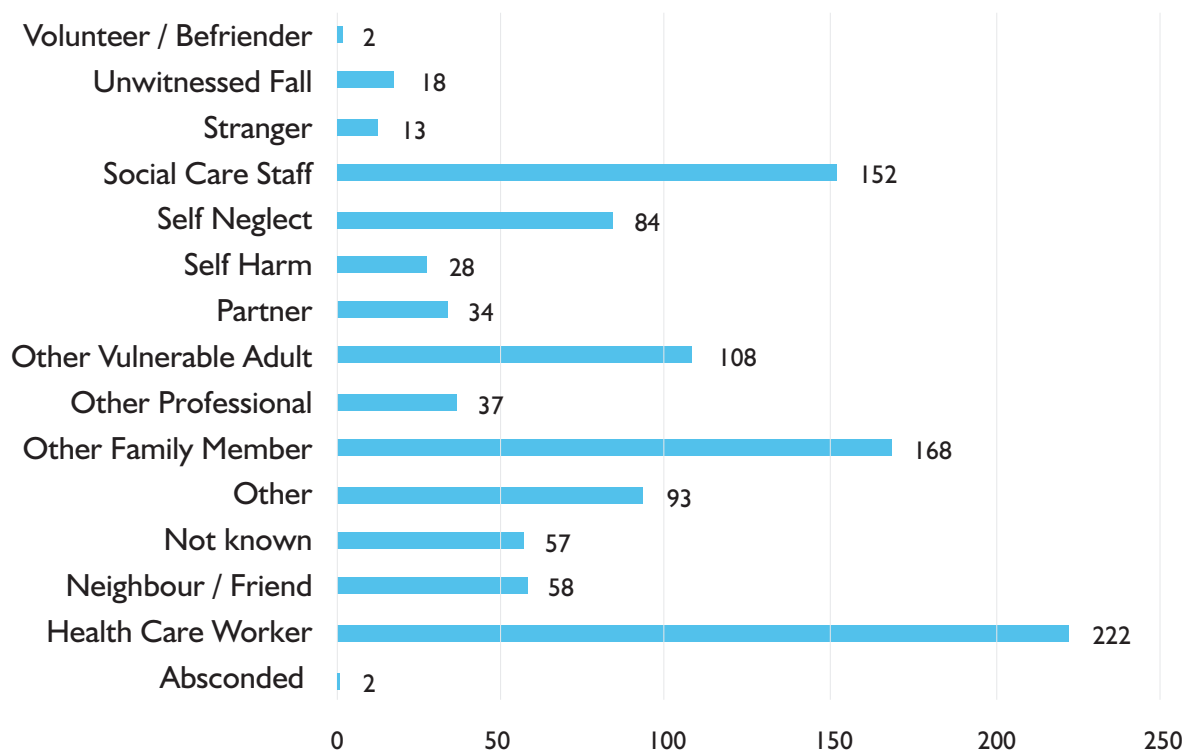
The top five areas of abuse for S42 enquiries continue to be:

- Neglect & Acts of Omission (30%)
- Physical (20%)
- Emotional (12%)
- Financial (11%)
- Self Neglect (10%)

The Highest Number for Location of abuse relates to the following:

Own home	Home of person alleged to have caused harm	Supported accommodation	Care Home Nursing	Care Home residential	Hospital Acute	Hospital Mental Health	Not Known/ Other	Public Place
34.5%	2.9%	4.6%	4.6%	33%	2.9%	7.1%	4.5%	3.7%

Person Alleged to have Caused Harm



Executive Strategy Process

Executive Strategy processes are held to address all concerns and issues relating to suspected organised or institutional abuse or neglect of adults.

	Number of settings
2021-22	3
2022-23	4
2023-24	3

Three settings entered into the Executive Strategy Process during the 2023-24 period and all three remained in this process in March 2024 due to ongoing concerns for safeguarding. The Adult Operational Group has responsibility of monitoring those settings who are in the Executive Strategy Process and will continue to monitor until it is satisfied that improvements have been made and all regulatory action had been completed.



7. Continuous improvement and raising awareness of safeguarding across all communities and partner organisations through:

A key priority for the Partnership is '*Communication and involvement – making safeguarding everybody's business and improving awareness of safeguarding across all communities and partner organisations*'.

There are a number of available options to help support this to ensure people receive clear and simple information about what neglect and abuse is and how to recognise the signs and seek help and have the confidence to report the concerns.

Communication and Engagement

The voice of children, young people and adults with needs for care and support and their families is at the heart of all partnership activity, however it is recognised it is a challenge to evidence their lived experiences and how that may help inform multi-agency working and influence service provision. This is an area that needs further exploration and will be a key area of focus in the coming year.

Making Safeguarding Personal

Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP) applies to all agencies and aims to develop a person centred and outcomes focussed approach to adult safeguarding. In Darlington, MSP and the involvement of service users or their representative in safeguarding enquiries is measured from the outset and is evaluated as part of the safeguarding process.

Independent Chair Engagement

The Independent Scrutineer/Chair continues to meet with relevant agencies of the Partnership and attend meetings such as primary and secondary education forums, Child and Adult Scrutiny Committees, Health and Wellbeing Board and Community Safety Partnership to talk about current issues and themes and what is working well and what needs to change relating to current safeguarding arrangements.

DSP website, briefings and newsletters

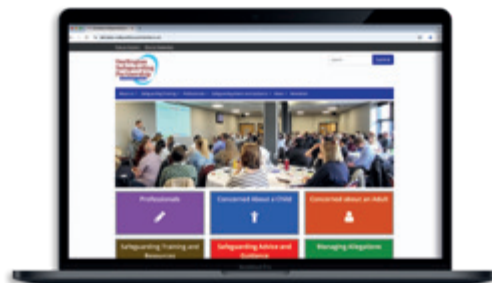
The DSP continues to use a variety of communication methods to share information to a wide range of different audiences.

The Partnership website continues to be a key forum to provide key safeguarding messages to practitioners and to the wider public as well as useful information and resources to support those working with children and adults.

The website was redeveloped in February 2024 to help improve navigation and revision of information relating to adult and child safeguarding.

Partnership website - www.darlington-safeguarding-partnership.co.uk

The Partnership's monthly newsletter continues to communicate and raise awareness of safeguarding matters and helps to keep in touch with all our agencies to provide information, signposting and guidance to those working across child and adult services.



Social Media

Whilst the Partnership does not have its own social media platforms, it regularly requests partner agencies promote key safeguarding campaigns throughout the year on their own social media platforms.

Awareness of key safeguarding campaigns – National Safeguarding Week

The Partnership continues to raise awareness of safeguarding issues by sharing details of key national safeguarding campaigns throughout the year which included Safer Internet Day in February, National Child Sexual Exploitation Awareness Day in March and Safeguarding Adult Week in November. During this week the Partnership ran a full programme of events and training sessions to raise awareness of safeguarding issues. The theme for the week was safeguarding yourself and others. A number of speakers provided sessions which covered Child Exploitation and National Referral Mechanism (NRM), Hoarding Awareness, Self-Neglect from an individual's perspective, fire risk awareness, safeguarding under the Care Act 2014, Honour Based Violence, Forced Marriage, domestic abuse and sexual abuse. The sessions were well attended by a broad range of partner agencies.



Learning and Development

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership is committed to working together to protect children, young people and adults with needs for care and support from the risk of serious harm and abuse. It seeks to review and update pathways, policies and procedures so that they are responsive to current levels of need and risk in the local area along with promoting the welfare of children and adults at risk of abuse remains the focus of learning and development activity.

Practitioners working in both universal and specialist services have a responsibility to identify the symptoms and triggers of abuse and neglect and to share that information and provide children and adults with the help they need. To be effective, practitioners need to continually develop their knowledge and skills. The Partnership is committed to delivering a high-quality inter-agency training programme to support professionals, volunteers and the independent sector.

The standards are monitored through the Learning and Development Group and ensures there is quality and consistency of single and multi-agency training. Training is reviewed and updated to ensure the lessons from learning reviews are reflected as well as identifying the local needs of the multi-agency workforce.

What did we achieve?

- During this year, there was a change in roles with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Trainer retiring meaning a gap in training provision for a period of six months. During this time there was limited training opportunities, however DSP continued to provide some limited training, resources, e-learning modules and podcasts. To address safeguarding training as an interim measure DSP implemented a child and adult safeguarding awareness workbook for Practitioners and over 400 workbooks were completed during this period.
- Following the successful appointment of the Partnership's Training and Development Officer, new training dates for a range of courses and sessions were added in September which offered training for both child and adult safeguarding from introductory level through to advanced courses for safeguarding leads and managers. There were also sessions on child exploitation, Designated Lead Safeguarding Training and Early Help Assessment Training.
- In January 2024, the Partnership implemented a Local Management System, ME Learning Platform to support with the delivery of safeguarding training and managing bookings. The system enables professionals and volunteers to select the session they would like to book individually and information and materials are sent automatically. This platform allows the Partnership to offer its core training modules through the system as well as tapping into a range of additional e-learning modules created by specialists on a range of safeguarding topics. Providing a greater opportunity for professionals and volunteers to access a wide range of training modules that would not ordinarily be on offer.
- At the time of writing this report there were over 700 users registered on the system.
- Due to the change in roles and implementation of ME Learning, it has not been possible to capture numbers of learners in this reporting period.
- It is recognised that assessment of learning is necessary to measure both the quality of training and to evidence the impact on practice. Due to the gaps in provision in this reporting year, it has not been possible to evidence the learning impact.

Development of Policy and Procedure

Enabling continual improvement and learning for partners and practitioners is important to the Partnership. The ongoing review of policies, procedures and practice guidance documents is essential to support front line practitioners with both prevention, early intervention and awareness raising. There is a clear timeline for the revision of policy and procedure, which is monitored through a policy revision schedule.

The Learning and Development Group continues to provide a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to safeguarding practice through the development, review and updating of policies and procedures for use by professionals across the partnership. All revisions are undertaken in consultation with partner agencies and who are expected to disseminate and implement within their own organisations. All documents are published on the DSP website.

During 2023/24 the following were developed, reviewed and revised by the Partnership:

- Revision to Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Serious Child Safeguarding Incident Procedures
- Revision to Safeguarding Adult Review Procedure and referral form
- The Executive Strategy Process practice guidance was revised to ensure that key lessons learned are shared with all providers
- Developed an organisational directory of key safeguarding contacts.
- Refreshed the Information Sharing Protocol.
- Revised the child exploitation risk assessment information form (Exploitation Matrix)
- Revised the Partnership Information form to report
- Multi-Agency Challenge Pledge

OUR PLEDGE

To be confident in having open and honest conversations with each other as multi-agency partners in order to do the very best we can for children, adults and their families in Darlington.

Multi-agency working is vital to maintain a focus on children and vulnerable adults while also keeping them at the heart of all decisions.

Our Pledge is an opportunity to:

- Seek out professional conversations with each other at the earliest opportunity
- Have a shared understanding of the strengths and risks within a family
- Actively listen to each other and share important information
- Respect each other's expertise
- Be open and empathetic to the professional views of others
- Be professionally curious and evidence what we say
- Use common language that everyone understands

8. Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, Safeguarding Adult Reviews and Learning Lesson Reviews

Children

There have been four Serious Incident Notification referrals submitted to the Partnership in this reporting year. When a notification referral is submitted, the Statutory Safeguarding Partners (SSP) determine if it meets the criteria for notification. The SSP agreed two of these referrals should be notified to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

The first was in November 2023 in respect of a child who died whilst co sleeping with parents. The Rapid Review recommended that the circumstances did not fit the criteria for a learning review and that the learning had been identified in the process of the rapid review which was agreed by Statutory Safeguarding Partners.

There was a similar case referred in August 2023 which partners determined did not meet criteria for notification. As a consequence of these deaths and an increase in numbers across the region, the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board carried out an extensive awareness raising campaign in December 2023 to highlight the dangers of co-sleeping.

In January 2024 a serious incident notification was submitted following the death of a child as a consequence of a non-accidental injury perpetrated by a family member. It was recommended that this met the criteria for a LCSPR, and an independent author has been commissioned. This review is ongoing, and the outcome will be reported in 2024/25.

Published LCSPR – Family H

DSP undertook and published its first Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) in November 2023. The review considered four children under the age of 16. In 2013, parents agreed to abide by a written agreement which stated aunt and her partner should have no unsupervised contact with their children. In April 2022, the children's aunt and her partner were arrested due to suspected sexual offences against children and their devices seized. Examination of the devices found indecent images of children and led police to believe Family H children were also victims of sexual abuse.

The review focussed on a number of key episodes over a ten-year period, the episodes did not form a complete history but were key from a practice perspective. The review found some examples of good practice and looked at how services had worked together to protect the Family H children.

The review made nine recommendations and themed briefing documents were circulated throughout the partnership to highlight the learning. A power point presentation has been shared throughout the Partnership as a learning resource. The report was published in November 2023 and was met with approval by the Child Safeguarding Review Panel which has indicated that the findings raise a number of issues relevant to a forthcoming national review of child sexual abuse in the family environment and will consider if it should be included in the sample of cases considered in this review.



What did we learn?

Professional curiosity and challenge

Whilst there were some good examples of professional curiosity there are several instances where this could have been improved. Some agencies were considering the link between the children's behaviour and the possibility of sexual harm, however there was a lack of professional curiosity and challenge leading to missed opportunities to identify the risk. The risks to many children are not always obvious and require continuous professional curiosity about the child and their circumstances. Practitioners need to understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or taking things at face value and remain sceptical of explanations, justifications or excuses and 'check out' what is being said.

Assessment of risk

The risks posed by the adults were never fully explored and understood by agencies involved with the family and the risk assessment was not applied to any of the work undertaken in the early intervention framework. Some agencies held information regarding the risks, however these risks were not always shared and therefore the significance of the risks was lost over time.

Information sharing and Early Help

Key pieces of information about the risks posed were not always shared and the focus was always on the health needs of the children rather than the risk of sexual abuse. Information about the written agreement was not shared.

Hidden adults

It was evident this was a busy household and adults unknown to practitioners were often present during visits. This was noted by practitioners, but not tenaciously pursued and not through the lens of additional household members posing a risk or indeed understanding how they were involved with the children's daily lives. Practitioners need to be more inquisitive. Agency assessments should be extended to include all adults involved with the children

Children's lived experience/through the eyes of a child

One of the core principles of effective safeguarding practice is a child centred approach which is focused on understanding the lived experience of children. Research identifies that a child who has developmental and communication needs can be effectively hidden from view and considerations needs to be given as to how the abuse suffered can compound a child behaviour. There is little evidence of agencies considering speaking to or carrying out a piece of work with the children to consider the wider involvement of family members in a holistic assessment to afford early identification of risk. Assessments did not place the children's lived experiences in the context of their parent's own backgrounds and their immediate and wider family and how this might impact on their ability to protect. Professionals need to be attuned to the child's world and pay attention not only to what the child says but also what they are not saying and what their behaviour is communicating.

Recognising risk of harm for children with disabilities

Maltreatment of children who are disabled or have chronic illness can be 'hidden in plain sight' with the disability being seen first and the possibility of abuse not considered. Children with learning disabilities are at greater risk of abuse and may only display their distress through behaviour. Practitioners should not assume that challenging behaviour in a child with a learning disability is due to their underlying condition or parenting and should take a holistic approach that considers possible alternative causes.

Identification and assessment of the risk of sexual harm

This review highlights the challenges professionals have, the complexities of working with child sexual abuse, and the importance of clarity regarding risk and need. Identifying sexual abuse is difficult as there is often no physical or medical evidence and children are unlikely to tell someone they are being abused, especially if it is someone they know. Practitioners rely too much on a child making a disclosure, and all front-line practitioners should recognise the signs of sexual abuse and agencies should have strong information sharing protocols, with appropriate training and supervision.

The role of the non-abusing parent and extended family

It has been highlighted in reviews that not enough attention is paid, or assessments completed regarding the needs and circumstances of a non-abusing parent or an evaluation of how to understand their willingness and capacity to keep children safe from sexual abuse and their vulnerability to grooming and exploitation which can undermine that safety. It is critical that there is an assessment of the non-abusing parent's ability to protect and believe children.

So, what next?

There are important lessons to learn from this review, these circumstances are a reminder of the need to equip all professionals with the knowledge, skills and frameworks to identify and respond to sexual harm and the need to identify hidden adults within the family home. The recommendations identified areas a number of priority areas for improvement which will be taken forward in the next reporting period:

- review the effectiveness of weekly review meetings and MASH triage processes through a multi-agency lens
- promote reflective discussion standards and map out an understanding of what this looks like across a multi-agency partnership
- introduce an Early Help Strategic Board
- launch a challenge pledge to help practitioners be more confident in having open and honest conversations
- consider implementation of a multi-agency harm matrix tool across all partner agencies to help assess risks of abuse and neglect
- seek assurance on communication and sharing of information across the Partnership
- awareness of the need to identify and document additional adults within the home and hidden persons to inform risk assessments and share within multi-agency forums
- understand the tools and processes agencies have in place to capture the lived experience of the child.
- Provision of multi-agency training on identifying sexual harm

Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SAR)

Four SAR referrals were submitted to the Partnership, and it was agreed that none met the criteria for a SAR but that one should progress to a discretionary learning lessons review.

In August 2023 County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service submitted a SAR referral in respect of two adults who died in a house fire. The occupants had needs for care and support and there were concerns about self-neglect and hoarding in the home environment. An independent author has been commissioned and the review is ongoing. The findings will be reported in 2024/25.

The Learning and Development group continued to work on two reviews which were referred in the previous reporting year where the adults who had needs for care and support died and self-neglect was subsequently highlighted as an issue.

What did we learn?

- Self-neglect was not easily identified by practitioners
- The findings relate to mental health and the adults' reluctance/non-compliance with services offered over a period of time.
- There was a presumption of capacity however lack of any formal capacity assessments being undertaken in respect of care and support and treatment along with a lack of legal oversight relating to capacity and Court of Protection.
- More should have been done if there were concerns for safeguarding and practitioners should have considered flexible approaches and appropriate communication styles to suit the individual
- Little evidence of multi-agency working, agencies did not work together collaboratively,
- Lack of communication and professional challenge.
- There was an apparent acceptance by practitioners that the situations were a 'lifestyle choice' and the lack of professional curiosity, resulting in missed opportunities to safeguard the individuals.

Self-neglect continues to be identified as a significant theme and is reflected regionally and nationally.

So, what next?

The Partnership has recognised self-neglect is a complex and challenging area and is not always easily identified. These circumstances are a reminder of the need to equip all professionals with the knowledge, skills and tools to support them to work with individuals who self-neglect. The Partnership has identified self-neglect as a key priority area of focus.

The issues raised are being addressed within a self-neglect task and finish group who will lead on the development of guidance, resources and tools to support practitioners. It was also agreed the Partnership should host a Self-Neglect and Hoarding Conference to help raise awareness and focus on some of the practice issues and challenges being experienced. Arrangements are underway with the conference planned for the summer 2024.

The partnership has considered its training offer and now provides additional training and resources which includes bespoke training programmes and e-learning modules on Adult Self Neglect and Mental Capacity Act Awareness along with a number of briefings, podcasts and videos to support practitioners.



9. Moving Forward

Looking forward to 2024/25 we will:

- Continue to raise awareness of abuse and neglect among the public and professionals in Darlington
- Apply the learning from local and national Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, Safeguarding Adult Reviews and Learning Lesson Reviews
- Develop and implement our local response to the changes outlined in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 statutory guidance and how they can be aligned to a joint Partnership and to strengthen scrutiny arrangements
- Continue to prepare for the forthcoming CQC Assurance Visit
- Continue to progress and focus on the steps needed to address the key priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan
- Further explore ways in which the partnership has sought and utilised feedback from children and families and vulnerable adults to help inform and Co- produce future work and service provision.

For more information about Darlington Safeguarding Partnership, please visit

www.darlington-safeguarding-partnership.co.uk

Or email us at: **DSP@darlington.gov.uk**

Appendix 1

Staffing and Budget

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership is supported by the following staff within the Business Unit:

- Business Manager
- Policy & Development Officer/Designated Officer
- Training and Development Officer
- Business Support Officer
- Part-time Analyst (seconded from Durham Constabulary)
- Part-time Information Officer

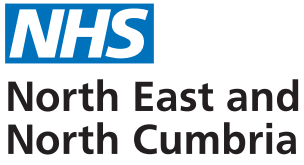
Contributions from Partner Agencies for 2021-22 period	
Darlington Borough Council	£145,493
North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (Tees Valley)	£41,310
Durham Constabulary	£34,404
Schools Forum	£10,000
Darlington College	£1,600
County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust	£16,973
Queen Elizabeth 6th Form College	£1,515
Probation Service North East	£1,846
Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust	£2,000
Total Revenue	£255, 141

Appendix 2

Relevant Agencies

- Darlington Borough Council
- Durham Constabulary
- Health agencies – North East and North Cumbria, Integrated Care Board (NENCICB), County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT), Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV), Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust (HDFT), North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (NEAS)
- County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS)
- Early Years Settings
- Education (Primary, Secondary, Further Education, SEN)
- Probation Service North East
- Darlington Primary Care General Practices
- Voluntary and third sector organisations (including Healthwatch)
- Care Quality Commission (CQC)
- Children and Families Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)
- Support organisations for issues such as Substance Misuse / Domestic Abuse / Sexual Exploitation / Sexual Abuse (SARC)
- Family Justice Board (FJB)
- NHS England (pharmacy, dentist and optometrists)
- Independent providers including private hospitals, children’s homes, nursing and care homes, domiciliary providers
- Youth groups – e.g. sport, scouts, brownies
- Faith settings
- Minority Communities
- British Transport Police (BTP)
- Chairs of other key local boards
- Representatives of other National Partners
- Darlington Partnership – which includes business and community organisations
- Coroner

This list is not exhaustive



DARLINGTON
Borough Council





