

**COUNCIL
26 SEPTEMBER 2019**

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.

Department for Education (DFE) – Exiting Intervention

2. In June 2019 senior leaders, received a letter informing them of DFE ceasing formal involvement with Darlington Council following the Ofsted judgement in May 2018 of 'requires improvement to be good. The DFE recognised the 'strong and committed leadership, and a clear vision for delivering high quality services'. The DFE also noted evidence 'not only that the council have embedded improvements made during their intervention, but also that appropriate steps are being made to identify and address further areas of improvement'. An improvement plan is in place.

Department for Education (DFE) – Strengthening Families Programme

3. In March Children's Services agreed to be a trail blazer in the national Strengthening Families Programme as a restorative practice. This is supported by DfE, via a partnership with Leeds City Council, it is based on an approach, working with families to encourage and build resilience, to ensure that children remain with their families, wherever it is safe to do so.
4. The programme comes with DFE investment over two years. A scoping exercise with regard took place in June and July to identify the required posts. A plan to recruit to these is now underway.

School Term Dates 2021-22

5. School term dates for Darlington maintained schools for the academic year 2021-22 were agreed for publication. The dates agreed were the ones preferred by the majority of schools and governing bodies that responded to the consultation which ended on the 24 May 2019.
6. Consultation was also undertaken with neighbouring authorities which had proposed approximately the same dates as those considered by this authority. Officer's co-ordinate with Local Authorities across the North East and Yorkshire.
7. The Local Authority will continue to work closely with multi academy trusts and neighbouring authorities to ensure that, wherever possible, terms dates are aligned across the region. Officers will engage with those Darlington schools that did not respond to the consultation to ensure as full an alignment of term dates as possible in future years.

Education

8. A number of schools were inspected by Ofsted during the Summer term. Red Hall Primary School was inspected in April and received an overall judgement of Good with some judgement aspects found to be outstanding. Harrowgate Hill Primary School was inspected in June and received an overall judgement of Requires Improvement with some aspects, including Leadership and Management, found to be good. Mount Pleasant Primary School was inspected in a short inspection July and was judged to be Good. As the inspector indicated that the school may have improved significantly overall it was recommended that a full inspection be undertaken in the next two years, which may result in an improved judgement.

Child Protection/Looked After Children Statistics

9. As at 30 July 2019 the following figures were reported:
 - 101 children were subject to a Child Protection Plan
 - 281 children were in the care of the local authority

Children's Commissioning and Contracts

10. Preparations are underway for the re-procurement of short break services for Darlington Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). New contract arrangements will take effect from 1 February 2020. This will have a more flexible structure than has previously been available enabling providers to join the contract over the life of the agreement. The service specification has been reviewed and refreshed to incorporate the experiences of Children/Young People and parent/carers. Reflective work has also been undertaken with existing providers and stakeholders. The new specification maintains the positive and valued elements of the existing service provision and creates further opportunities for tailored community short breaks provision for Darlington Children and Young People.

Fostering Services

11. Due to the improved recruitment and retention for mainstream foster carers, we have seen an increase in carer enquiries. Since May 2019 we have approved eight internal placements and six new fostering households.

Workforce Development

12. Darlington is now offering the new Social Work apprenticeship scheme, which gives unqualified officers the opportunity to obtain a professional social work qualification. This is an exciting opportunity for our dedicated unqualified social care staff, enabling them to develop their careers in adult social care.

Darlington Safeguarding Partnership

13. The new safeguarding arrangements were implemented on 1 July 2019. The new partnership will be known as Darlington Safeguarding Partnership (protecting Children and Adults). The vision for the new partnership is '*Darlington is a place where children and adults can live their lives safely*'.

14. A new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Partnership Group has been established and will meet a minimum of four times in the first year. It will include the Statutory Safeguarding Partners and members of the wider partnership and will be chaired by Ann Baxter, Independent Scrutineer/Chair, the first meeting is taking place on 7 October 2019.
15. Two sub-groups have been established to support the Partnership, taking forward the safeguarding child and adult agendas. The Quality Assurance and Performance Management sub-group will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements to highlight areas for concern as well as identifying where the partnership is performing well. The Learning and Review sub-group will oversee all child and adult reviews, take forward opportunities for learning and refresh policy and procedure to help improve the quality of multi-agency frontline practice.

Councillor Paul Crudass
Children and Young People Portfolio