

Corporate Parenting Panel

19 April 2024

Children with Disabilities Annual Update



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, CYPS, DCC

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides an update on the progress of the Children with Disabilities Team within the last 12 months and vision of how to continue moving forward.

Executive summary

- 2 Any child or young person with additional need is entitled to an assessment of need as set out under S17 of the Children Act 1989. The children's parents and carers are also considered as part of the assessment. The child or young person's level of need will determine which team is responsible for completing this assessment.
- 3 The Children with Disabilities Team (CwD) undertake assessments with the purpose of meeting the needs of children and young people, who have a permanent or severe disability. The team are a specialist service targeted at those children and young people who are aged 0 to 18.
- 4 Durham aspires to support families to care for their own children, and we do this by promoting the local offer, www.durham.gov.uk/localoffer.
- 5 The local offer is designed to help families find the very best support for children and young person, from 0 to 25 years with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). It provides information, advice and guidance about the types of services and support available.
- 6 Our children are some of the most vulnerable children therefore strong multi-agency working is critical ensuring children are safe and there is good evidence of this in the work of the service.
- 7 We believe that young people should always be able to participate fully in their lives and to share their views when decisions about them are

being made. The Children with Disabilities team strive to ensure our children's voices are heard using a range of direct work tools.

- 8 The Children with Disabilities team have designed a leaflet for the children and young with disabilities who are open to their service. The development of the leaflet involved hearing directly from children and young people and how they have a voice and contribute to changes in the work of the Children with Disabilities team.

Recommendation

- 9 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to:
 - (a) note the contents of this report.

Background

- 10 The Children with Disabilities Team has an eligibility criteria that means they support the most complex of children and young people whose needs are so specialist they cannot access the targeted provision within the Local Offer.
- 11 As of the 21 March 2023, there are a total of 293 children open to the Children with Disabilities Team of which 27 are Children in Our Care. There are 3 children subject to child protection plans and the remaining children receive social work support and services under Section 17 (Children Act 1989). Many children receive packages of short breaks support to enable them to meet and socialise with other young people in the community and to enable their parents/carers to have a break from their caring responsibilities.
- 12 The Navigation team no longer have case responsibility for children 0 -18. The Children with Disabilities team and the Navigation Team work closely together to ensure effective joint working to support young people to transition into independence in a planned way for our children and young people.
- 13 Over the last 12 months there has been a focus to better evidence the involvement of the Navigation team. There is now a navigation forum, which enables an opportunity to discuss children and young people who would require a Care Act Assessment and added to the Navigation team's allocation of work.
- 14 Work is underway to ensure this is accurately reflected within children's case recording system.

Communication with children and young people with disabilities

- 15 The Children with Disabilities team continue to seek innovative and creative ways of communicating with children who have complex needs and this is something that continually can improve and is the vision of the service.
- 16 A great number of the children within the Children with Disabilities team do not use words to communicate, therefore it is essential that staff have a vast range of skills to enable them to communicate with children effectively and seek their views. Staff have undertaken specialist training including British Sign Language (BSL), we have a communication champion and monthly communication sessions to share best practice and any skills gained or good examples of direct work.

17 Figure 1 below is a leaflet that has been created by the family support workers and children and young people. This is a visual aid to help families better understand a bit more about the Children with Disabilities Team and what they may do to support them.

Children with Disabilities
1665 TEAM 018 YEARS

children with disabilities team

Through the voice of the children,
young people, parents, Carers &
professionals

services we can offer

GWP
Cheesy Waffles Project

sportworks

Short Breaks

A child / young person can benefit from development of new interests, keeping fit, social networks with peers and taking part in hobbies.

The frequency and duration of short breaks can vary, such as:

- A virtual activity
- Family days out
- Attending a leisure facility for a few hours per week
- Attending after school clubs

Telephone: 03000 260 270
Email: shortbreakssolutions@durham.gov.uk
County Durham Local Offer - Durham County Council

Integrating Children
"Positive about Inclusion"

Overnight Stays

Park House

Park House offers young disabled people, between 9 and 18 years, a short break service that is not available through family-based care services. A short break is defined as one, two or three overnight stays. We provide short break care for young people who have a learning disability and:

- *complex physical needs requiring specialist equipment
- *specific communication needs
- *a sensory impairment.

Grove House

Grove House offers specialist overnight short break service for children aged from six to seventeen years of age who have physical and/or learning disabilities or autism.

+

Vists and

Team around the family meetings

Your Social Worker will visit you every 4 weeks and have a team around the family meeting, until a care package is set up and working well.

When everything is going well and you have a care package in place. You will move into Monitor and Review and your family Worker will then visit you every 3 months to see how you are doing.

Direct Work wishes and feelings

Sometimes, when your social worker and family worker come to see you at home or school, they may do some direct work with you. This means doing some activities together.

spending time with my social worker and family worker

"I like it when my social worker and Family Worker visit me at home and sometimes at school".

our Feelings

"I like going out and doing lots of activities with the workers".

daisy,
kind
Lovely
Caring
neerful

Loyal
Monkeys
listening

"I like spending time with my social worker because we get to go out for tea and get to listen to music in the car".

Figure 1

- 18 The Children with Disabilities team ensure our children's voices are heard using a range of direct work tools. We have done this is by investing in digital technology this is call Mind of My Own, using picture exchange communication and widget technology (a symbol-based software).
- 19 We believe that young people should always be able to participate fully in their lives and it should be easy for them to speak up anytime they want. We work with the most complex children and young people who do not often have words and we have to make use of a range of skills to understand their experiences and reflect this in their assessments of need.

One Child's story

- 20 Below describes how Emily's social worker helped her to understand what was happening when she moved to her new home to be closer to her family. Emily is a 14 year old child in our care. She was living in a residential home in London and it took her family a full day of travelling to visit her. The plan was to find a residential home closer to the family home, this took us time to find the right home for Emily.
- 21 Emily has communication difficulties and uses visual aids to help her communicate and understand what is happening. The social worker recognised that the move would be confusing for Emily and may cause her some upset. The social worker prepared a social story (figure 2) to explain what was happening when she met the staff from her new home.
- 22 The social worker then brought a transitional football mascot soft toy who featured in photos throughout pictures of her new home and visiting the new staff. This football mascot was left with the young person so it could be a transitional toy as part of the move. Symbols like this below can help us tell children stories that are visual and often are used to these from school and can support in embedding words when we share them with young people.
- 23 This demonstrates the commitment and dedication of the practitioners within the team. (It is noted that Emily and her parents gave permission to share her story and picture board.).

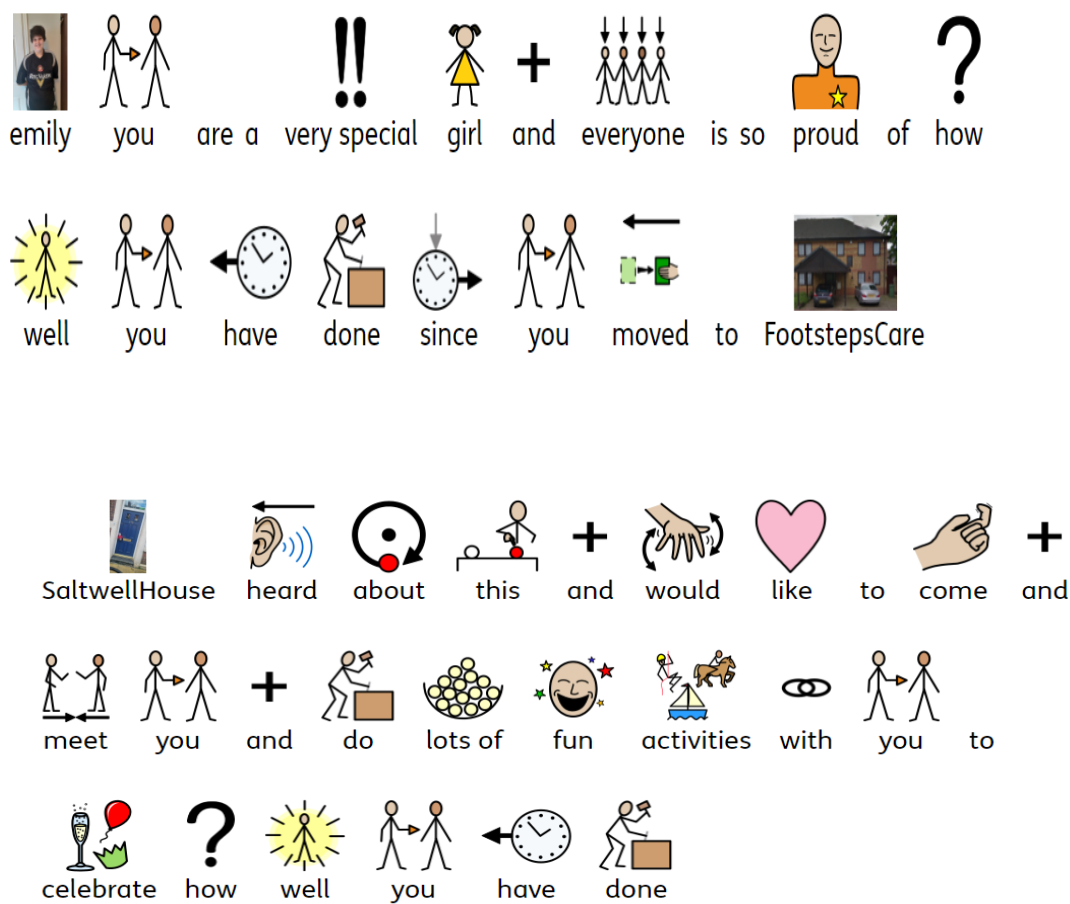


Figure 2

Education Health and Care Plans

- 24 The Children with Disabilities team have undergone some significant improvements in how we ensure social care advice is clearly evident and updated annually. We have always been a part of Education Health and Care Plans and provided advice upon request, however there were times when these were not provided in the review process. Processes are now in place to ensure full social care advice is provided at every annual updated assessment and this then is shared with our specialist schools where our children attend.
- 25 There was some recent audit activity that identified some very positive feedback about quality of social care advice and reflected the child's voice.

Short Breaks for Disabled Children

- 26 Short Breaks for children and young people with disabilities can be sometimes the only social opportunity for children to engage with their peers. This not only provides the children to have social opportunities but allows parents and carers to have much needed respite. Having

regular periods of respite often means that children can remain to be cared for at home by their parents, carers, or foster carers.

- 27 We now have a dedicated commissioner who works alongside the Children with Disabilities team to understand the needs of children with disabilities and their families. This is to ensure there are services that can be accessed to allow 'short breaks' from caring when needed to improve outcomes and prevent family breakdown.
- 28 Commissioning have reached out to local providers with a view of improving and widening the pool of much needed services for children and young people with disabilities. This has been a huge task which will hopefully result in better outcomes for the children and young people who we support.
- 29 The short breaks statement continues to work well with an emphasis on a graduated response and made this clearer for families including introduction of visual short break offer and an animation clip. The short breaks statement outlines what Durham's short breaks offer is, what type of support is provided within the short breaks offer and how it can be accessed. It includes details around advice, signposting, additional support and specialist support that is available within Durham.
- 30 The 'SEND Empowering Inclusive Communities – SENDEIC is now working well to grow capacity and increase access to universal community activities, expand the offer and remove any barriers to access. This is Durham's local offer around providing better access for disabled children to mainstream services. If a disabled child would like to access a community group, our empowering inclusive communities co-ordinator will support to overcome these barriers, this may be providing a changing table, or additional support within the service, if there is a barrier preventing access, the purpose of SENDEIC is to remove this.
- 31 We have worked jointly with Adult Commissioners to re-commission an all-age Domiciliary Care Support Framework. Feedback to date has been positive.
- 32 The Children with Disabilities Team continue to believe that children and families are the expert in their care and strive to support in provided person centred care and where there are assessed needs that can be met through a direct payment, we will support this to be utilised. Where a child lives with parents, meets our eligibility criteria and has assessed needs for short breaks, a direct payment can be offered for them to recruit a support worker on their own behalf, this allows families to also be more creative in how their support needs can be met and also provides more flexibility.

Working alongside partner agencies

- 33 Many children with disabilities, have complex health needs and their care packages are often co-ordinated jointly with the Children with Disabilities team and Children's Continuing Care. The packages of support can be jointly funded and supported by a social worker alongside a continuing care nurse. This can include a specialist trained professional coming into the home for overnights and specialist hospice care. Like short breaks, this provides the same opportunities with specialist trained staff on hand to keep our children and young people safe.
- 34 There is close joint working between the Children with Disabilities team and the Families First safeguarding teams, Navigation team, Countywide services, and First Contact colleagues. The Children with Disabilities team provide valuable support and guidance to other teams when a child or young person does not meet the criteria for the Children with Disabilities team.
- 35 We have established good and effective working relationships with our partners in Education – special schools, Health i.e., Occupational Therapy services, Continuing Care Services, Police, Local Authority Commissioning Teams, Health Commissioners, Early Help colleagues and the voluntary services, Advocacy service and the Carers centre.
- 36 We work closely with the Durham Virtual School Head, and she describes that her team works closely with the Children with Disabilities team to support Children in Care into the best provision to meet the child's needs. They provide advice to social workers and attend meetings to ensure the education provision the child attends are the right one. In consultation with the SEND caseworker, they are part of discussions when a child's care arrangements change, and a school placement is required. The Post 16 Children in Care Personal Education Plan caseworker supports the young person into Post 16 and thinking about supporting young people into adulthood, many of our children and young people will access education post 18 and their Education Health Care Plan can remain in place and reviewed annually as needed until 25.

What others think

- 37 As a team we encourage feedback from other's experiences This enables us to assess the quality of our working relationships between children, families and practitioners. It also enables the team to celebrate good practice, build on strengths and take steps to make improvements where needed.

- 38 Feedback from a parent who we jointly with health commission a short break for in St Oswald's hospice:

"St Oswald's has been a lifeline for us, helping to cope through some incredibly difficult times. The staff are extremely well trained, professional and caring. Our daughter gets a huge amount of enjoyment out of her stays there and it helps us to relax knowing she is safe and well looked after"

- 39 Feedback from a child about their social worker

"My social worker helps to make sure I am safe, looked after and help me go to activities. My social worker comes to see me at my house or at school to see how I am doing"

- 40 Feedback from a specialist foster carer:

"The social workers in the disabilities team have supported a number of children in our care and our experience of the team has been very positive in the last few years and I speak very highly of them"

What is next

- 41 The Children with Disabilities continue to strive to make improvements to ensure good outcomes for children and young people with disabilities, the priority for the next 12 months are:

- (a) Preparation for Adulthood to be a focus on every child and family assessment for 14 plus and focussed, in all plans for disabled children;
- (b) Social Care advice to be completed alongside every annual reassessment and shared with education provisions;
- (c) Continue to develop new and creative ways of communicating and getting the voice of our most vulnerable disabled children who do not have words to communicate;
- (d) Continue to develop opportunities for disabled children for short breaks through our commissioned services and personalised pots of funding to support specialist creative packages;
- (e) Continue to work closely with our home finder team around identifying specialist homes for our disabled children close to home.

Conclusion

42 The report reflects a great deal of positive and effective working. The team are passionate and committed about achieving good outcomes for children and young people with disabilities.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Children Act 1989 sets out the legal requirement on the local authority to support children in need and to carry out safeguarding investigations and where necessary, issue care proceedings to ensure that children are protected from harm.

The Children Act 2004, requires that all higher education institutions do not discriminate against disabled students and prospective students. The Act establishes clear standards for promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people and for providing high quality services that meet their needs.

The Equality Act 2010 for disabled children covers disabled children and young people whether or not they have SEN. For the purpose of avoiding discrimination, anticipating and making reasonable adjustments, and meeting wider responsibilities, schools need to know who their disabled pupils are

The Children and family Act 2014, Part 3, sets out how local authorities work with children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

Finance

No implications.

Consultation and Engagement

No implications.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

No implications.

Climate Change

No implications.

Human Rights

No implications.

Crime and Disorder

No implications.

Staffing

No implications.

Accommodation

No implications.

Risk

No implications.

Procurement

No implications.