



## **Corporate Parenting Panel**

**Date**      **Friday 30 April 2021**  
**Time**      **9.30 am**  
**Venue**     **Remote Meeting - This meeting is being held  
remotely via Microsoft Teams**

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### **Business**

#### **Part A**

#### **Items which are open to the press and public**

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2021 (Pages 3 - 12)
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Number of Looked After Children - Verbal update from Head of Children's Social Care
6. Investing in Children / Children in Care Council Update - Presentation by Project Officer, Investing in Children (Pages 13 - 16)
7. Adopt Coast to Coast Update - Presentation by Head of Regional Adoption Agency (Pages 17 - 20)
8. Children who go Missing from Home and Care - ERASE - Report of Strategic Manager, First Contact and Countywide Specialist Services (Pages 21 - 28)
  - a) Presentation (Pages 29 - 34)
9. Independent Visitor Service Update - Report of Independent Visitor Service Coordinator (Pages 35 - 44)
10. Proud Moments
11. Regulation 44 Commissioning Arrangements Update - Verbal update from Head of Children's Social Care
12. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

13. Any resolution relating to the exclusion of the public during the discussion of items containing exempt information.

### **Part B**

#### **Items during which it is considered the meeting will not be open to the public (consideration of exempt or confidential information)**

14. Regulation 44 Visits and Regulatory Body Ratings of Children's Residential Homes - Report of Head of Children's Social Care and Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children (Pages 45 - 50)
15. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

### **Helen Lynch**

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall  
Durham  
22 April 2021

To: **The Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel**

Councillor I Jewell (Chair)  
Councillor H Smith (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Carr, J Charlton,  
J Considine, P Crathorne, P Jopling, M McKeon, J Makepeace,  
O Milburn, C Potts, S Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, E Scott,  
M Simmons and C Wilson

#### **Co-opted Members**

C Baines  
A Ferguson  
W Taylor  
Young person representative of the Children in Care Council  
(CiCC)

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**Contact: Jill Hogg**

**Tel: 03000 269 711**

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**DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Corporate Parenting Panel** held on **Friday 26 February 2021** at **9.30 am** via Microsoft Teams

**Present:**

**Councillor I Jewell (Chair)**

**Panel Members:**

Councillors B Bainbridge, J Charlton, J Considine, P Crathorne, M McKeon, J Makepeace, C Potts, S Quinn, A Reed, G Richardson, E Scott, M Simmons, H Smith and C Wilson

**Co-opted Members:**

C Baines, A Ferguson

**Other Members:**

Councillor O Gunn, Chair of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Also in attendance:**

Kelsey Clayton - Legal Services Manager

Helen Fergusson - Head of Children's Social Care

Carole Gill – Operations Manager for Children Looked After and Care Leavers

Robert Johnson - Project Manager (Investing in Children) and Mitchell Green (Children in Care Council)

Laura Malone – Strategy Team Leader

Selwyn Morgans – Centre Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre

Claire Morris - Strategic Manager, Children Looked After Resources

Mark Smith – Strategic Commissioning Manager

Melanie Stubbs - Virtual School Head

Jayne Watson - Senior Partnerships Officer

**1 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Wendy Taylor.

**2 Substitute Members**

No substitute members were present.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 18 December 2020 were agreed as a correct record to be signed by the Chair.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **5 Number of Looked After Children**

Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that the number of children looked after remained stable at 959, however the impact of delays caused by COVID-19 are likely to be reflected in the figures over the forthcoming months.

### **6 Update on Residential Children's Homes**

The Head of Children's Social Care reported that work is ongoing to identify a new property to replace the provision at Tow Law with a fit-for-purpose, smaller property. A progress update will be provided in due course.

Following on from the discussion at the previous meeting on plans to increase the number of specialist provisions for those young people with complex needs, the Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that a two-year lease had been agreed on a property at Coxhoe, with a view to purchasing a property within that timeframe, for continuing care. The leased property will care for a specific young person and the care will be provided through the Council direct. A recruitment process for the home manager and staff is underway.

The Panel noted the new provision at Sacriston provides for two young people and formal registration with Ofsted is well underway. The work on the re-provision of the home on the Aycliffe site is progressing well, with young people expected to move in soon, following the Ofsted registration process.

### **7 Regulation 44 Visits - Commissioning Arrangements**

The Panel considered a report presented by the Strategic Commissioning Manager, Mark Smith, which outlined the plans to carry out a commissioning exercise to outsource Regulation 44 visits for Durham County Council maintained Children's Homes and the rationale for arriving at this decision (for copy see file of minutes).

## **Resolved:**

That the report be noted

## **8 Investing in Children / Children in Care Council update**

Robert Johnson, Project Manager, Investing in Children (IIC), and, Mitchell Green of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) delivered a presentation which focused on activities by the Children in Care Council from March 2020 until February 2021 (for copy see file of minutes).

Taking the Panel through the presentation, Mitchell and Robert highlighted areas of activity including the following:

- The production of four Children in Care Council newsletters which include articles and stories written by the young people.
- A number of Children in Care Council members had been involved in a feel-good project, the 2020 Summer Pack project, during the pandemic.
- Funding has been secured to work with the Full Circle Team to enhance therapy support centres, which will be carried out with input from the young people.
- The young people are continuing their work with the Social Work Academy, with the Children in Care Council taking care messages to trainee social workers.
- Training with foster carers is going well, with further opportunities to introduce younger members of the Council to this training.
- Young People are attending and presenting at Independent Review Officer team meetings and a sub-group of younger members, new to Investing in Children, has been formed to meet with IROs, to share ideas and reflect on experiences.
- The young people of the CiCC continue to raise its profile with the website being launched on Care Day, Friday 19 February. The young people have also been developing a podcast.
- Work to develop poetry skills is ongoing and a poem written by one of the young people had been re-tweeted by the Children's Commissioner for England.

- 'Mini-CPP' meetings have been introduced to enable young people to comment on events over the last twelve months. This initiative has been very well received.
- Links with the Virtual School and designated teachers has played a vital role during the period and will continue to do so as young people return to education establishments following the pandemic. Young people had attended a session with designated leads, to deliver key messages.
- As a result of discussions at CiCC meetings regarding the importance of seeing friends, this is now included in Care Reviews. The young people have also continued their discussions on the importance of pets and animals and how this aligns with relationship building.
- Awareness has increased in relation to travel bursaries and the Council has taken steps to liaise with higher education colleges to discuss their approach to supporting students.
- Child-friendly policing work is being done to develop training with the police in County Durham.
- A 'Positive Matters' campaign was launched at a meeting with the Corporate Parenting Panel, to challenge stigma.
- Engagement with the Regional Care Council is ongoing.
- Members were encouraged to read to an impressive article written by a young person published in the latest Children in Care Council newsletter, entitled 'Video Games, Good or Bad?'

The Chair thanked Robert and Mitchell for all the good work being carried out.

Picking up on the work with pets, Councillor Charlton commented how she had observed the positive impact a dog had on pupils at a local school, particularly those experiencing emotional issues. The Chair responded that an update on pets was to be provided later in the meeting.

## **9 Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children and Young People 2020-2022**

The Head of Children's Social Care presented the Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children and Young People 2020-2022 for information, noting that the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy was considered in detail at the Panel meeting held in October 2020 (for copy see file of minutes).

## **Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **10 Care Leavers' Strategy - Annual report**

Carole Gill, Operations Manager for Children Looked After and Care Leavers presented the Care Leavers' Strategy Annual Report which provided an update on progress against the objectives set out in the Care Leavers' Strategy 2019 to 2023 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Panel noted performance against strategic priorities remains strong, despite the impact of the pandemic.

Outlining areas of performance against the strategic priorities, the Operations Manager reported on the appointment of a dedicated Accommodations and Support Officer, and, an increase in the number of 'Staying Put' arrangements in place. The Panel noted the good progress with respect to the number of young people in suitable accommodation and the Operations Manager paid tribute to the excellent partnership working taking place. Performance in relation to participation of care leavers is in line with, or, above that of comparators, with 30 care leavers at University or other higher education establishments and 7 care leavers in apprenticeships with the Council, one of whom hopes to secure a full time post as a Young Person's Adviser in the future. The Council continues to work with DurhamWorks and colleagues in Human Resources, to increase opportunities for care leavers.

To continue the good work of the former Chief Executive, a meeting is to be held with the Interim Chief Executive to discuss future plans to support children looked after and care leavers. The Panel noted areas for future development include the roll-out of the ClearCut communications tool, the establishment of the Care Leavers' Hub and the development of a 'Staying Close' pilot.

Councillor Reed thanked the Operations Manager for the good work which is clearly benefiting the young people and asked what support is available for young people who choose to move from foster care to independent living. The Operations Manager explained that work begins early to ensure that the individual needs of the young person are matched to pathway plans, with the aim being for a clear pathway plan to be identified well before the young person reaches the age of 18. Support is ongoing up to the age of 25 and each young person has access to a Young Person's Adviser until they reach the age of 25, should they wish to do so. 'Staying Put' arrangements are available for those young people who wish to remain with their foster carers. For young people with highly complex needs, whose plan is to move into the care of Adult Services, work is carried out with the Transitions Team.

The Operations Manager spoke of the increasing range of accommodation options and the support provided by the Edge of Care Service and Supporting Solutions, for young people who require additional support.

Councillor Richardson congratulated the achievements of the young people, particularly those studying at University and higher education establishments.

**Resolved:**

That the report be received.

## **11 Performance update**

The Panel considered the Performance Update report presented by Laura Malone, Strategy Team Leader for Children and Young People's Services, which provided an overview of performance in relation to looked after children and care leavers during quarter three of 2020-21 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Strategy Team Leader highlighted the relatively stable number of children looked after, with the number of children leaving care reducing, due to delays caused by the pandemic. The figure for initial health assessments had reduced slightly during the quarter and work is being done with NHS colleagues to identify the cause for this issue. Noting that the number of health assessments and dental checks had reduced during the period, the Strategy Team Leader pointed out that the pandemic had led to reduced access to these services.

The slightly lower number of young people in in-house foster care may also be a result of the pandemic, with foster carers exercising caution with regard to increasing their households during the lockdown periods. The Strategy Team Leader commented that the number of children looked after reported missing represents a small proportion of the looked after population.

In response to a question from the Chair as to whether the number of missing incidents was a cause for concern, the Strategy Team Leader reassured the Panel that the number of missing incidents had remained relatively low during 2020-21, and, clarified that within the 45 missing incidents, some young people had gone missing on more than one occasion. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that a dedicated member of staff is now in post to provide a single point of contact to coordinate all the work on missing children and to provide young people with the opportunity to discuss their issues in respect of their return home, with an independent person. This also assists the service to examine any emerging patterns and share intelligence with police colleagues, if necessary.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**12 Any other business**

The Strategic Manager for Children Looked After and Resources, Claire Morris, gave an example of how the young people looked after had made her proud over the Christmas period. The young people regularly receive Christmas gifts donated by a Durham company and the company had been particularly generous this year. The young people were so pleased with the gifts they received that they used excellent IT and creative skills to produce a montage of images of themselves enjoying their presents over Christmas, which they sent to the company as a gesture of thanks. The Strategic Manager expressed how moved she was when she viewed the montage and how impressed she had been at the amount of effort the young people had put in to such a professional piece of work, which they had taken upon themselves to produce, to show their appreciation.

Following the discussions with the Children in Care Council regarding the importance of pets, the Strategic Manager was pleased to report that a number of children's homes had introduced pet hamsters. She spoke of how the young people had been mindful to ensure that all those in the home were receptive to having pets. Other pet activities include children's homes holding 'dog-fostering days' which enables the young people to participate in dog-walking and dog-grooming, one home has an allotment with chickens and one young person is helping a horse owner to care for a horse. Young people's Safety Plans now include a section on pets which details the pets young people would like to keep in contact with, in the event of moving on, and relationships with pets is now a part of social work training, with the work being replicated in the fostering service.

Carole Gill, Operations Manager, thanked the members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, and all those who had provided support throughout the year. She remarked on how generous people had been this Christmas, which had been greatly appreciated. She thanked Judge Scully of Newcastle Combined Court and her colleagues, who carried out fundraising for care leavers over Christmas which resulted in such a large amount of gifts that the service had been overwhelmed by the kindness.

Councillor Scott spoke of how heart-warming these good news stories are, particularly at this time, and she paid tribute to the staff for all their efforts.

Councillor Gunn, Chair of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee echoed the sentiments, adding that staff and young people had clearly made an extraordinary effort during this difficult year.

Councillor Gunn thanked the Corporate Parenting Panel for their work and reported that in her role as Chair of North East Regional Children and Young People's Service Lead Members Network, she and Councillor McKeon had delivered a presentation to one of the meetings, on Durham's Corporate Parenting Panel model. The feedback from that has led to aspects of Durham's model being adopted by other authorities, which is testament to the excellent work of the Panel.

The Chair, on behalf of the Panel, thanked all officers, not only for the reports presented to the formal meetings but also for the regular briefings and updates from the service provided between meetings. The Head of Children's Social Care emphasised how important the support of the Corporate Parenting Panel is to the service.

The Chair noted Councillor Tucker's resignation from the Corporate Parenting Panel and placed on record the Panel's thanks to Councillor Tucker for her valuable contribution.

### **13 Exclusion of the public**

#### **Resolved:**

That under Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

### **14 Regulation 44 visits and Regulatory Body Ratings of Children's Residential Homes**

The Panel considered the report of the Head of Children's Social Care which provided a monthly update on Regulation 44 visits and regulatory body ratings (for copy see file of minutes).

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the capacity of the external provider market, the Strategic Commissioning Manager commented that a significant rise in the number of children's homes across the country has led to a rise in the number of organisations delivering independent Regulation 44 visits, with the provider market being in a healthy position.

The Chair assured the Panel that the situation is kept under constant review.

In response to a question from the Panel referring to the options for the future delivery of Regulation 44 visits, the Head of Children's Services clarified that reciprocal arrangements with another local authority had been rejected. The preferred option is a private provider, with the necessary expertise to ensure that the regulatory requirements required by Ofsted are maintained.

**Resolved:**

That the report be received.

**15 Any other business**

The Head of Children's Social Care asked members to consider if they would like to represent the Corporate Parenting Panel on the Care Leaver's Steering Group which meets quarterly. Any member wishing to be part of that work was asked to contact the Senior Partnerships Officer.

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# CICC Update

Presentation by Mitchell and Lesley - CICC/ CPP representatives and Robert Johnson - Investing in Children.

Funding from #Iwill has been secured to support older members of CICC/Care Leavers to lead on a Positive Relationship Project.

The purpose is to impact on domestic abuse and other forms of abuse, educating people at an early age through peer lead awareness workshop sessions in schools.

CICC members and the Virtual Heads Team.

Care experienced young people will be applying for funding to undertake educational activities via a CICC working group, who will oversee the project development. This is an exciting project as it increases the participation of young people to decide how the pupil premium is spent.



- The first CICC face to face meeting since Covid-19 has taken place among the younger CICC group, developing art for the Full Circle service and planning additional meetings. 8 young people attended and some of their work can be viewed below.



- CICC members have supported the launch of the Mind of Mine Own App.
- CICC members have undertaken interviews for new social workers.
- The first in a series of podcasts has been launched called ‘ **We are no different**’, focusing on the experiences of the care system by two young people.

- CICC members are developing the first ever Police Training session, which will be facilitated by young people and is being used as a pilot scheme to take place in May. Future training plans will be developed after the pilot session has been reviewed.
- Peer mentoring training is be offered to some young people in children homes, along with continuous professional development training to staff via Investing in Children. A further 6 young people from CICC have also signed up to become peer mentors for the younger group.
- Positive story: A young person has positively connected with the Children in Care Council, coming from Coxhoe children’s home, and has been developing information and undertaking the peer mentor program.
- She said “ ***Every Child is a Different Kind of Flower and together make the world a Beautiful Garden***”.







# Adopt Coast to Coast

Virtually launched 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021

Paula Gibbons

Regional Adoption Agency, Head of Service



## Spokes

- The 3 spokes, Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children will continue to provide their current adoption services from first contact.

## Hub

- HoS – oversight of performance and practice to improve outcomes.
- Communications and Marketing Officer – lead for centralised recruitment activity. Year 1 budget is £40K. Supported by new website, Facebook and Instagram.
- Enquiries and outcome system records interests in adoption and automatically allocates to relevant spoke.
- Telephone number hosted by Durham.

## Performance in 2020/21

- 77 Prospective adopters approved
- 24 Prospective adopters in stage 1
- 23 Prospective adopters in stage 2
- 18 Prospective adopters approved and not linked
  
- 57 Children with ADM/SHOPA
- 36 Children with Placement Order and no link/match
- 11 Children with Placement Order for 6 months or longer
- 20 Children who were placed via FfA/Concurrency
- 130 Children matched
- 60 Children placed via interagency agreement



## Key priority areas for 2021/22:

- To establish Adopt Coast to Coast as the 'go to' agency for those interested in adopting
- To develop the branding so it is recognisable alongside and separately to the LA partners
- To continually review the outcome of marketing activity to ensure best value and best return on investment
- To ensure the prospective adopters journey is reviewed and streamlined through review and sharing of best practice
- To establish early linking and matching
- To embed models of early permanence for example Fostering for Adoption in Durham
- To work across the partnership to develop the post adoption support offer



**Corporate Parenting Panel**

**30 April 2021**

**Children who go Missing from Home  
and Care - ERASE**



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**Report of Lisa Wood – Strategic Manager, First Contact & County  
Wide Specialist Services, Durham County Council**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 This report outlines the recent activity and development of ERASE Team which includes children who go missing from home or care, since the service was reviewed in 2019 and includes performance data from the last two reporting years.

**Executive Summary**

- 2 The Child Exploitation - ERASE team as a result of a review in 2019 has expanded its remit and reach to include support to young people who are experiencing all forms of child exploitation.
- 3 A dedicated Missing from home Co-ordinator has been recruited into the Child Exploitation - ERASE team to improve the response to and children who go missing from home or care in Durham alongside an additional team member to provide interventions for children and young people who are victims or at risk of child criminal exploitation (CCE)
- 4 The service has worked creatively and innovatively during Covid-19 to minimise the risk of young people disengaging, and develop interventions using digital platforms as well as continuing to meet young people face to face to minimise the risks of further harm to those who go missing from home or care.
- 5 Increased Partnership development and oversight via the DSCP, Strategic Child Exploitation Group (CEG) as well as the implementation of a number of additional dynamic meetings all help to provide a timely and appropriate response to children who go missing from home or care as well as those vulnerable to exploitation.

## **Recommendation**

- 6 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
  - (a) note the contents of this report.

## Background

- 7 Following a multi-agency response to growing concerns about child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Durham, the ERASE team was launched as a pilot in September 2015. The remit of the team was to work with Durham Constabulary to develop multi-agency responses to the problem of child sexual exploitation and missing children Durham.
- 8 In 2017 the ERASE team following an evaluation of the pilot was developed and funded as a partnership between Durham Constabulary and Durham Children's Services.

## Ofsted Feedback – Inspection of Durham's Children's Social Care Services - September 2019

- 9 The report in 2019 noted the positive impact of the service and the report stated, "*The strength of the local authority's and partners' response to missing children and children at risk of exploitation is helping to reduce risks, disrupt the activity of perpetrators and protect children. Children who go missing from home or care are routinely offered return home interviews. Information is well shared and well used. Actual and potential risks are carefully considered, regularly reviewed and closely monitored.*"

## Children who go missing from home or care

- 10 As part of reviewing the remit of the DSCP Strategic Child Exploitation Group in the summer of 2019, it was identified that each partner organisation had different criteria to record if a child was missing and when a return to home interview was required. A task and finish group undertook work to develop an agreed definition and criteria across the partnership and developed a joint scorecard to support data collection and analysis. This supports an improved understanding of the Durham picture of children who go missing and develop services to respond.
- 11 In order to further this work a dedicated DSCP partnership analyst was recruited to support the development of this work.
- 12 In order to continue to improve the quality of return to home interviews and provide a single point of contact within children's social care, a dedicated Missing Co-ordinator was appointed in Children's social care services in April 2020.
- 13 Following a review in November 2019, a daily dynamic missing children's meeting is now in place. The missing co-ordinator from Durham Constabulary and the Missing co-ordinator from Durham children's Services meet every morning to discuss any children of

concern who have been reported missing and share any information/intelligence to support an appropriate and timely response.

- 14 Where a child is looked after and living in our care, the missing co-ordinator now undertakes an independent return to home interview (RTHI).
- 15 Depending on volume and demand, the missing co-ordinator can also undertake a RTHI for children not known to services or identify the best lead professional to undertake the RTHI. This has improved the quality of risk information gathered during RTHI's and improved the experience for young people and their families of the RTHI, which is now automatically shared with the ERASE Police Analyst and recorded on the young person's electronic case file. The Social Worker is notified of any harm the young person has suffered when missing or potential risks from adults who could exploit the young person, with a view to facilitating a missing child multi-agency strategy to formulate actions to keep the child safe and prevent any further missing episodes.

## **Governance and Multi-Agency Involvement**

- 16 The DSCP strategic Child Exploitation Group (CEG) meets on a quarterly basis and provides governance for all of the work across the partnership associated with all forms of child exploitation and children who go missing from home and care. Historically, the group had a narrower focus on child sexual exploitation, but as our understanding of extra-familial risk and harm to children increases, the scope and remit of the work is expanding accordingly.
- 17 The strategic CEG membership includes senior managers from across the partnership and also includes representatives from the voluntary and charitable sector and LGBTQ services, as well as a number of representatives from within Children Services including SEND, YOT and education. There have been a number of task and finish groups identified and feedback through the strategic CEG to help drive service improvement, understand the changing landscape of child exploitation, as well ensuring we provide the right response to children. These include:
  - (a) **Insight and analysis sub group** – the aim of the group is to look at the data and intelligence gathered across agencies in relation to children who go missing from home and care and subsequent return to home interviews, to build an up to date picture in Durham and to inform the partnership on where to target resources, awareness etc.

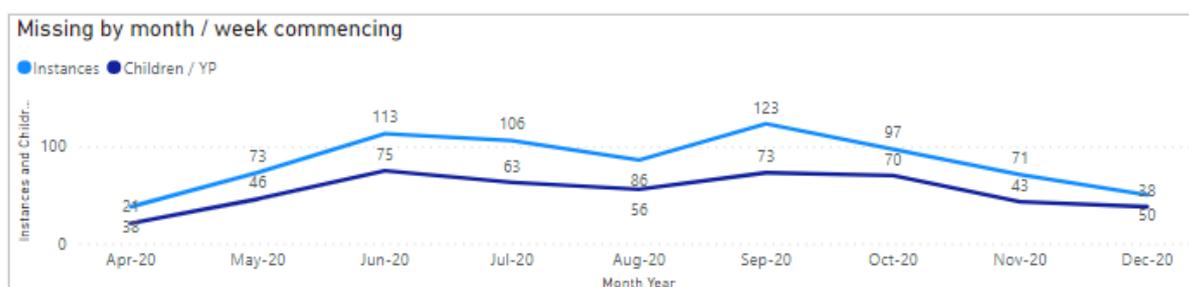
- (b) **Contextualised Safeguarding sub group** – the aim of the group is to research and design a multi-agency framework and practice guidance to safeguard children and young people who are experiencing or at risk of harm outside of their family home.

## Performance

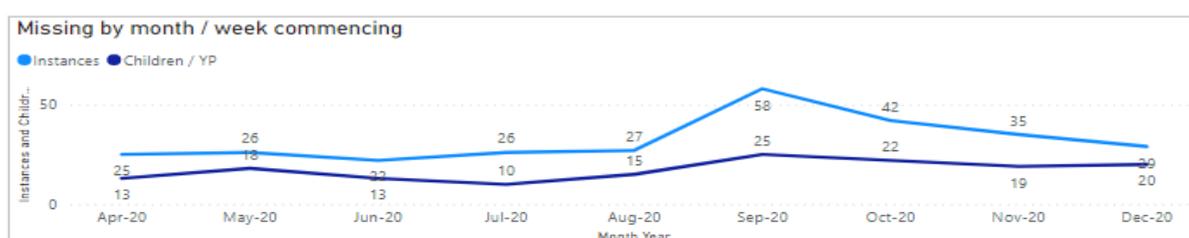
- 18 The table below shows comparative data for Q1-Q4 in 2020 and same period in the previous year. (performance data taken from Liquid Logic)

	2019/20	2020/21
Number of missing episodes (total)	435	757
Number of individual missing young people (total)	156	312
Number of missing episodes of Durham children looked after	211	290
Number of children who went missing who are our Durham children looked after	51	73
Offered RTHI ( <i>% of all episodes</i> )	385 (89%)	743 (98%)
Accepted RTHI ( <i>% of all episodes</i> )	336 (77%)	635 (84%)
Completed RTHI ( <i>% of those accepted</i> )	306 (79%)	629 (99%)

### All Durham Children Missing / Episodes (Apr-Dec20)



### CLA Missing / Episodes (Apr-Dec20)



- 19 It is important to note that the recording criteria of reporting children missing and when a RTHI is required has changed and now in line with Police definitions, which may have inflated the numbers in 2020,

however we know nationally there has been an increase in the reporting of children who go missing as a direct result of covid.

- 20 As of this reporting year , we will also be recording what care arrangement our children looked after are living in when they go missing, which will help us analyse and identify where we need to focus our services in the future.

## **Covid Response**

- 21 The Child exploitation - ERASE team including the missing from home co-ordinator have continued to deliver a service to children and young people with minimal disruption since March 2020 and throughout lockdown. Often children who go missing or are victims of exploitation are hard to engage and therefore the development of trusting relationships with professionals is key to keeping children safe.
- 22 The team have continued to see children and families face to face since March 2020, adhering to government covid-19 guidance and accessing appropriate PPE where appropriate. Where there is a well-established professional relationship, the team have made use of video calls to keep in contact with young people and have also been incredibly creative in providing alternative places to meet with young people where traditional venues were closed during periods of lock down. This approach has reduced the drop out rates due to non-engagement during the pandemic.
- 23 Additional focus was given from across the partnership to help identify young people who may have been at risk of exploitation, particularly during the period of lockdown where schools were closed, knowing that schools are safe places for children, and that children not engaged in any services are more vulnerable to exploitation and going missing. In response to this a weekly dynamic ERASE meeting was implemented to discuss any children of concern attended by all members of the ERASE Team and is still meeting weekly as a covid response.
- 24 The service was awarded additional covid funding to provide additional support to children who go missing and at risk of exploitation. The service has appointed an additional child exploitation interventions worker and an additional missing co-ordinator until Mar 2022.

## **Learning from Audits and Inspections**

- 25 In July 2019 IICSA - Independent Inquiry into Child sexual Abuse launched an Inquiry into institutional responses to the sexual exploitation of children by organised networks. 6 geographical areas were chosen to provide evidence to the national enquiry which included

Durham. Colleagues from Durham Constabulary and Durham County Council have provided evidence to the enquiry in recent months.

The 8 themes chosen by the enquiry to explore further were:

- (a) Disruption and profiling;
  - (b) Empathy and concern for child victims;
  - (c) Risk assessment, protection from harm and outcomes for children;
  - (d) Missing children, Return Home Interviews, Looked after children;
  - (e) Male Victims;
  - (f) Children with a disability;
  - (g) Partnership working on child sexual exploitation;
  - (h) Audit, review and performance improvement.
- 26 The inquiry is due to conclude in November 2020, any learning identified from the report (expected spring 2021) will be added to the DSCP delivery plan and monitored via the Strategic CEG to improve outcomes and positive impact for children and young people.
- 27 A DSCP multi-agency audit of RTHI was undertaken in early 2020. Areas identified for improvement included
- (a) Consistent use of the “Philomena Protocol” for children looked after – at risk of going missing.
  - (b) Increased completion of RTHI shared with Police
  - (c) Clearer understanding and definition of when strategy meetings should be implemented for children who are missing.
  - (d) Consistent use of language to describe risk and vulnerabilities of children who go missing from home or care.
- 28 All recommendations from the audit have been included in the Child Exploitation development plan for 2021.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

None.

### **Finance**

Temporary funding currently covering additional roles to meet demand as a direct result of Covid. This will be monitored going forward to review volume, demand and needs of children.

### **Consultation**

None.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

None.

### **Climate Change**

None.

### **Human Rights**

None.

### **Crime and Disorder**

None.

### **Staffing**

Temporary funding currently covering additional roles to meet demand as a direct result of Covid. This will be monitored going forward to review volume, demand and needs of children.

### **Accommodation**

None.

### **Risk**

Meeting the demand of surge in missing episodes and children vulnerable to exploitation continue to be monitored.

### **Procurement**

None.



# Children Who Go Missing From Home or Care

# Service Improvement and Progress since 2019

Data – Partnership Definition and criteria

Appointment of a Partnership Data Analyst (Police)

Appointment of a LA Missing from Home  
Co-ordinator

Daily Dynamic Meeting

Children in our Care – Independent Return to Home  
Interview (all)

Sharing of intelligence - risk information gathering

# DSCP – Strategic Child Exploitation Group - Governance

Membership includes Senior  
Managers from across the Partnership

Expanded to include LGBTQ, SEND,  
YOS etc

Task and Finish Sub-groups

Insight and Analysis

Contextualised Safeguarding

# Performance

	2019/20	2020/21
<b>Number of missing episodes (total)</b>	435	757
<b>Number of individual missing young people (total)</b>	156	312
<b>Number of missing episodes of Durham children looked after</b>	211	290
<b>Number of children who went missing who are our Durham children looked after</b>	51	73
<b>Offered RTHI (% of all episodes)</b>	385 (89%)	743 (98%)
<b>Accepted RTHI (% of all episodes)</b>	336 (77%)	635 (84%)
<b>Completed RTHI (% of those accepted)</b>	306 (79%)	629 (99%)

# Covid Response

Minimal disruption in our service to children and families/carers

Creative ways of working – virtual – “talk and walk sessions”

Reduced drop out, promoted positive relationships and engagement

ERASE weekly dynamic meetings – all team members

Children of Concern – targeted work

2 x additional posts - covid money till March 2022

# Learning from Audits and Inspections

ICCSA – Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

DSCP – Multi-agency audit – Return home interviews

Consistent use of the “Philomena protocol” for children looked after – at risk of going missing.

Increased completion of RTHI shared with Police

Clearer understanding and definition of when strategy meetings should be implemented for children who are missing.

Consistent use of language to describe risk and vulnerabilities of children who go missing from home or care.

**Corporate Parenting Panel**

**30 April 2021**

**Independent Visitor Service Update**



**Report of Mark den Hollander, Independent Visitor Service Coordinator, County Durham Youth Justice Service**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 This report provides an update about Durham County Council's Independent Visitor (IV) service for children and young people who are looked after.
- 2 The report highlights the challenges experienced during the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdowns whilst outlining the steps taken to manage risk during this period ensuring that the IV service resumed with some degree of normal functionality.
- 3 The report outlines the progress made in the recruitment and training of IV's, and the wider targets set for the service.
- 4 This report also responds to the questions posed by the National Independent Visitors Network in an '*Open letter to Chairs of Corporate Parenting Panels and Children and Young People's Committees*' on 26 February 2021 (attached as Appendix 2).

**Executive summary**

- 5 The role of Independent Visitor (a volunteer) was first introduced as a statutory service for '*looked after children*' in the Children's Act of 1989. The Act outlined the statutory responsibility of local authorities to offer an Independent Visitor to any child that they are looking after.
- 6 The volunteer's role is to visit, befriend and encourage participation in positive activities. The appointment of an Independent Visitor is considered within the child / young person's care plan and is subject to ongoing review in the child / young person's Looked After Review.

- 7 Like many services, the IV Service experienced difficulties throughout 2020/2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and national lockdown measures. This directly impacted the services' ability to retain existing volunteers, recruit new volunteers and to grow the service.
- 8 A Covid Risk Assessment was developed which reviewed visiting arrangements for the small number of children / young people (7) who were matched with a volunteer, to ensure these took place outside and were delivered in line with Covid-19 guidance.
- 9 As of March 2021, there were 17 children and young people accessing an Independent Visitor, with a projected target of 30 children and young people accessing this service by September 2021.
- 10 Given the successful recruitment of new volunteers since September 2020, which has increased from 7 volunteers to 31 currently, further work is now starting to take place with teams across the Children and Young People's Service to promote the IV Service and its benefits.

## **Recommendations**

- 11 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to:
  - (a) Recognise the impact that the restrictions imposed due to Coronavirus have had on the service since April 2020
  - (b) Acknowledge the progress made over recent months and the wider targets for the service.

## Background

- 12 Prior to April 2020, Durham County Council commissioned its statutory IV service with an external provider, through a regional commissioning arrangement. Due to the challenges the provider experienced in relation to the recruitment of IVs in the Durham area, the number of children and young people accessing an IV was always very low (under 10 children and young people).
- 13 Whilst the regional commissioning arrangement continues to be in place, with Durham using this contract for children living outside of County Durham, work was carried out to explore the possibility of developing an in-house IV service which would enable an increased number of children and young people to access an IV when it is in their best interests to do so.
- 14 A business case was developed by the Commissioning Service, and funding secured to support the implementation of the new in-house IV service, which commenced on the 1 April 2020. A comprehensive service specification and service delivery plan were subsequently developed in 2020/21 by the newly appointed Independent Visitor Coordinator, who is responsible for delivering the new in-house service and overseeing the commissioned service. The Commissioning Service continue to have strategic oversight of the Independent Visitor Offer in Durham.
- 15 The appointment of an IV is considered by a child / young person's Social Worker when it is in their best interest. The child / young person must give their consent before a referral is made to the service, with their wishes and feelings fully considered as part of the process for appointing an IV.
- 16 When a child / young person consistently accesses the support of an Independent Visitor, we strive to achieve a range of outcomes. These are dependent on the individual needs of the child / young person, with examples captured below.
  - (a) The establishment of a consistent supportive relationship
  - (b) Building trust with a consistent adult
  - (c) Gaining a friend / trusted adult
  - (d) Establishing a broader outlook on life
  - (e) Increased self-esteem and confidence
  - (f) Development of social skills

- (g) Increased emotional wellbeing
- (h) Increased opportunity to access a range of cultural, leisure and sporting activities which promote emotional wellbeing
- (i) A greater awareness of keeping themselves safe and understanding risks.

## **Current Position**

- 17 Similar to other services, the Independent Visitor Service has experienced difficulties throughout 2020/2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and national lockdown measures. This has impacted the services ability to retain existing volunteers, to recruit new volunteers and to grow the service.
- 18 As of the end of March 2021, there are 17 children / young people matched to a volunteer and one young person waiting to be matched.
- 19 During the pandemic a risk assessment was developed which clearly outlined how both children / young people and volunteers would be protected from Coronavirus whilst ensuring that a statutory service operated. Each visit required an individualised COVID Risk Assessment, social distancing observed, PPE used, transport guidance observed and all visits taking place outdoors. Since the roll out of the vaccination, all active volunteers have been offered and accepted the opportunity to be vaccinated. This positive take-up has supported the effective recovery of this statutory service.
- 20 The IV Service has recruited new volunteers over recent months, using a range of methods, increasing the number of volunteers from 7 to 31, with a total of 42 volunteers in place by the end of April 2021.
- 21 The service opened to new referrals in September 2020, however referral numbers have continued to be lower than expected, particularly as the country entered a second lockdown in January 2021.
- 22 At the end of March 2021, the IV service had matched with 1.8% of Looked After Children living in County Durham. If working towards matching 10% of CLA in County Durham as outlined in the Right Friend campaign, this would reach 95 CLA.
- 23 Due to the restructure of the service and as all matches with a volunteer are new, there are plans in place to capture the impact that the service has on children and young people. All IV's complete a visitor report form for each visit they carry out. The views of children and young people accessing the service will also be gathered, to collectively understand the overall impact and benefit to children and young people.

- 24 The service specification for the IV service is guided by the principles and standards of National Independent Visitor Network including training and practice.
- 25 The IV service is currently offered to young who have reached school age to the age of 18. If a young person is matched with an IV when they reach care leaving age, the IV may continue to support the young person if this is the young person's wishes. An extension of this offer to 18-25 can be investigated to understand any impact it may have to children looked after aged 4-17.
- 26 As volunteer capacity has been grown over recent months, work is now starting to take place with teams across CYPS to promote the service and to understand the anticipated demand for an IV, so the supply and demand model can be effectively managed.

## **Conclusion**

- 27 The appointment of an Independent Visitor Coordinator coincided with the first national lockdown in response to the Coronavirus. The role diversified to conduct an overall review of the current service resource, assess current matches, and contact existing volunteers to establish their continued interest.
- 28 The service has successfully recruited new volunteers with 42 active volunteers available for children and young people by the end of April 2021.
- 29 Whilst the target of 30 matches has not been achieved by the 31 March 2021, due to the Covid Pandemic, the closure of the service to new referrals and limited volunteer capacity, the in-house Independent Visitor Service is now in a strong position to reach 30 matches by September 2021.
- 30 Work is being planned with teams across CYPS to understand the likely demand for the service and to encourage more referrals to the IV service in a planned way.

## **Authors**

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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## **Legal Implications**

It is a statutory duty of the Local Authority to ensure that all children and young people who are looked after, can access an independent visitor if they request one and it is in their best interests. The requirements of the service must however fully take on board the current pandemic situation and local and national restrictions in place which set out how individuals in different household are able to meet up socially, both inside and outside.

## **Finance**

NONE.

## **Consultation**

NONE.

## **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

NONE

## **Climate Change**

NONE.

## **Human Rights**

NONE.

## **Crime and Disorder**

NONE.

## **Staffing**

NONE.

## **Accommodation**

NONE.

## **Risk**

This report identifies the ongoing risks in relation to Covid-19 in the context of the IV service and how these risks are being mitigated.

## **Procurement**

NONE

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## **Appendix 2: Open letter to Chairs of Corporate Parenting Panels and Children and Young People's Committees**

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Attached as a separate document

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**Championing every care-experienced child's right to  
an Independent Visitor**



**Open letter to Chairs of Corporate Parenting Panels and Children and Young People's  
Committees**

26<sup>th</sup> February 2021

The **National Independent Visitor Network** ([ivnetwork.org.uk](http://ivnetwork.org.uk)) is writing to all Chairs of Corporate Parenting Panels and committees that provide leadership and scrutiny to corporate parenting.

We wish to ensure that panel and committee members are aware of the statutory duty placed on Local Authorities to make Independent Visitors (IVs) accessible to their children in care.

All Corporate Parenting Panels are responsible for reviewing and monitoring the provision of services for children in care within their own Local Authority (LA). This includes reviewing and monitoring IV provision and ensuring that statutory responsibilities are being met and children in care are receiving the support they are entitled to.

A recent Freedom of Information request showed that access to IV is a postcode lottery, with some LA's having a very limited IV provision or no service at all ([ivnetwork.org.uk/national-independent-visitors-data-report-2019](http://ivnetwork.org.uk/national-independent-visitors-data-report-2019)).

***NIVN are contacting you to request your support to review and improve access to this vital statutory service in your LA. We kindly request you ask the following questions at your next Corporate Parenting Panel or committee meeting. The NIVN Project Team is available to provide support to help you develop your IV scheme:***

1. Duty was imposed by The Children Act 1989 and then expanded in the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, for the provision of Independent Visitors for children who are looked after. Does your LA have an IV provision? If not, are you aware of the reasons for this?
2. NIVN is campaigning to achieve a minimum 10% access rate of eligible children nationwide, that is adequately resourced. We hope you will join us to support the *Right Friend* campaign vision. Access to and resourcing of IV services varies considerably around the country and impacts on capacity to achieve this vision and make a positive impact on the lives of looked after children and young people.  
Are you aware what percentage of your eligible children in care are matched with an IV?  
Are you aware of the value this service has given to them?
3. Do your panel or committee members and your Children in Care Council know everything they should about IVs and IV entitlement? We recommend you visit:  
<https://ivnetwork.org.uk/national-standards/>.

4. Who is running your scheme and is this provision working well and following the National IV Standards? (IV schemes are run in-house or contracted out with some LAs spot purchasing).
5. Is IV provision on your panel/committee agenda at least once a year? Does your LA receive an annual report from your IV service? This will help you ensure that children in care in your area are getting the support they are entitled to.
6. Do you have an action plan to ensure that your IV service in your area is well run, adequately funded and has sufficient capacity to ensure no child misses out?
7. An NIVN campaign objective is to extend statutory provision of IV beyond 18 to 25-years, to reduce social isolation and build a positive pathway to independent adulthood. There are many examples of good practice in relation to continued and new IV relationships for care leavers, in line with the Children and Social Work Act 2017 corporate parenting principles. Are you aware of an IV offer to care leavers in your LA?

Thank you for your help in reviewing and addressing this important responsibility on behalf of your Local Authority. Please contact the NIVN if you would like any further information or support to develop your IV scheme further.

**NIVN Project Team, Hosted by Barnardo's**

[ivnetwork@barnardos.org.uk](mailto:ivnetwork@barnardos.org.uk)

[ivnetwork.org.uk](http://ivnetwork.org.uk)

<https://ivnetwork.org.uk/national-standards/>

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