



## **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Date** Monday 15 November 2021

**Time** 9.30 am

**Venue** Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham

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### **Business**

#### **Part A**

**Items which are open to the Public and Press  
Members of the Public can ask questions with the Chairman's  
agreement, and if registered to speak**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 September 2021 (Pages 3 - 12)
4. Declarations of Interest, if any
5. Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties
6. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Update (Pages 13 - 22)
7. Children and Young People's Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing - Report of the Director of Public Health (Pages 23 - 40)
8. Key Findings and Actions to Ofsted Focussed Visit - July 2021
  - a) Report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services (Pages 41 - 44)
  - b) Presentation by Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 45 - 52)
9. Corporate Parenting Annual Report - Report of the Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel (Pages 53 - 84)
10. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration

**Helen Lynch**

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall  
Durham  
5 November 2021

To: **The Members of the Children and Young People's Overview  
and Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor C Hood (Chair)  
Councillor J Cosslett (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C Bell, R Charlton-Lainé, M Currah, J Griffiths, O Gunn,  
C Hunt, L Kennedy, C Lines, C Martin, L Mavin, D Mulholland, A Reed,  
K Rooney, S Townsend, C Varty, E Waldock and M Walton

**Faith Communities Representatives:**  
Mrs C Johnston

**Parent Governor Representatives:**

**Co-opted Members:**  
Ms R Evans and Mrs P Parkins

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**Contact: Paula Nicholson      Tel: 03000 269710**

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**DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE**

At a Meeting of **Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Monday 27 September 2021 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor C Hood (Chair)**

**Members of the Committee:**

Councillors J Cosslett, C Bell, M Currah, J Griffiths, C Hunt, L Kennedy, C Martin, K Rooney, S Townsend, C Varty, E Waldock and M Walton

**Also Present:**

Councillors M Simmons

**1 Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gunn, Mavin, Mullholland Reed and R Evans.

**2 Substitute Members**

Councillor Coult was present as substitute for Councillor Mavin.

**3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**Matters Arising**

In response to a suggestion from Co-opted Member, R Evans following the discussion at the previous meeting, it had been agreed that all Members would be sent details of the previous Review of Elective Home Education that had taken place by the Committee.

#### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **5 Any items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties**

There were no items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties.

#### **6 Overview of Child Protection Process**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services which provided an overview of the Child Protection Process in County Durham and the Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice gave a detailed presentation (for copies see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice advised members of the need for timely discussions when there were suspicions of a child suffering. Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) were held with 15 days and DCC were above the national average in the timeframe. This was a multi-agency conference that was chaired by an Independent reviewing Officer.

Members were provided with statistical information regarding DCC's performance in a number of areas in comparison with statistical neighbours and national figures. This statistical information related to the number of section 47 enquiries; ICPCs held within the year and ICPCs held within 15 days of a strategy discussion. Information was also provided in relation to Child Protection Plans (CPPs) reviewed in timescale and the number of CPPs open.

The Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice provided the committee with information with regard to child protection plans by category which indicated that neglect was by far the most common primary reason for a CPP and was ahead of statistical neighbours in this category too.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice for his presentation.

Councillor Walton asked whether children on a Child Protection Plan (CPP) stayed with their own families or elsewhere and if they were monitored when the CPP had ended.

The Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice advised that the vast majority of children on a CPP were with families and there may be a very small number living with an extended family member and there may be a plan to support the families. If a child was in care, they would not require a CPP as this action removed the risk and created a level of safety.

When a young person was no longer subject to a CPP, there would be a period of support which would be monitored with a Child in Need Plan which would include a social worker would be involved to work with the family. Once the needs had been reduced, they would be then supported by One Point, with offer a lower level of advice and support. The ultimate aim was that the family would be able to sustain the changes made under the plan.

Councillor Coult referred to the reasons outlined in the report for CPP's in place and asked what the Council could do to improve the area around neglect and although there was local comparison data, she would be interested to know what the situation was nationally. In addition, she asked what the Council could do to reduce the figures for open CPP's and the percentage open for one year but less than two years.

The Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice advised that in terms of neglect, there were often multiple factors involved, however only the primary factor was recorded. He explained that there was subjective judgment involved in categorising cases and the service needed to explore this, as although there was a problem with Neglect and there was a Strategy to deal with this, the way in which cases were categorised could explain some of the difference between Durham and other Local Authorities.

In terms of what more the service could do to combat neglect, he was unable to go into any detail on the Neglect Strategy, however the Strategic Manager of One Point and Think Family Services would be able to provide further information.

With regards to reducing the length of time a child was subject to a CPP, the Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice advised that it was difficult to suggest any particular action that that could be taken to reduce the time a child was subject to a CPP as it was dependent on the level of concern, however the Council were in line with the national average. The child needed to be on a CPP for a period of time to effect sustainable change and the quality of the social worker and relationship building were factors in the success of a plan but the reasons children came to harm were multifaceted.

Councillor Martin advised that the data alluded to an issue in 2017-2018 where performance was not quite as good and then there was a steady improvement and he queried the reasons behind this and what improvement had been made. The Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice advised that in 2016 the Council had received an Ofsted inspection rating of required improvement and there were multiple actions taken to continue to improve on that rating. One of the key areas of the Ofsted framework was to know where strengths and weaknesses were and the service now had a good audit process and combining good practice with this knowledge improved the overall picture of practice, which had been reflected in the more recent inspections.

The Chair queried whether there was a particular reason for less than half of the number of section 47 enquiries leading to a Child Protection Conference. The Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice advised that at the point of the initial strategy discussion very little was known in relation to assessment work with the family and there were 15 crucial days of investigation that could lead to reassurance that the level of risk indicated at the point of the initial strategy meeting was not needed. There may still be a level of support and intervention, such as a Child in Need Plan but it may be that the case did not meet the threshold for a CPP.

## **Resolved**

That the report and presentation be noted.

## **7 Relationship Based Social Work Practice**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director Children and Young People's Services Purpose which provided an overview of the progress being made within Children's Social Care to embed high quality relationship based social work. Practice and the Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice gave a detailed presentation (for copies see file of minutes).

Members were informed that children and families were at the centre of their practice as the quality of the relationship had a significant impact on achieving good outcomes for children and young people. Embedding a good relationship was of critical importance in creating good outcomes. This practice allowed trusting relationships to be built that facilitated honest clear assessments which therefore allowed plans to be aligned to concerns.

The Strategic Manager Safeguarding and Professional Practice advised of the key to ensuring that social workers have the time to build effective relationships was manageable caseloads and that caseloads are regularly audited. This practice had led to a reduction in complaints and an increase of compliments of the service. Ofsted too provided a positive summary in their recent inspection.

Councillor Hunt asked whether schools had any qualified support for early intervention and whether any teachers were trained to spot signs of neglect, or social workers were going in to do assessments. The Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice confirmed that the service had a positive relationship with schools which assisted with early help and preventative work. There were strong locality meetings taking place with One Point who ensured that early conversations took place and if the statutory intervention threshold was reached, the case would be escalated.

There was also a Virtual headteacher, who had always supported Children in Care, but the remit has broadened to include children in need and children subject to a

CPP and this was a significant change to support and ensure that all vulnerable children had the support needed in school and were progressing educationally. In addition COVID-19 had strengthened the process for sharing of information between schools and social care.

In response to a further question from Councillor Hunt the Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice confirmed that the School Nursing Service was still in place and there was a requirement for all schools to have safeguarding leads within schools to ensure there was a good awareness and that signs were being identified.

He confirmed that the recruitment and retention allowance related to hard to fill posts and despite doing well in the recruitment of new qualified social workers, the service struggled to recruit experienced social work staff and therefore an allowance had been agreed and he would provide further details following the meeting.

Councillor Walton referred to the number of complaints and although it was good to see they were of a lower level she asked whether there was a common theme of complaints and whether any examples could be given. The Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice confirmed that often the theme was regarding communication and the way decisions were communicated which ultimately came down to the relationship that a family had with their social worker. If the relationship was more trusting, the communication was better.

The Chair referred to the report which stated that at time of writing 85% had less than 25 cases and the average caseload was 19 however it had been noted in the previous minutes that the Head of Social Care had advised that council policy restricted caseloads to around 22 at any one time. He assumed numbers fluctuated due to the complexity of each case but asked if the service had the ability to examine the numbers and provide any further detail. In addition he asked how the Council were embedding the relationship based and trauma, whether it was through practice or training.

The Strategic Manager of Safeguarding and Professional Practice advised that Signs of Safety was an international organisation and there were tools and resources that could be accessed and a significant investment was in training. There were two day courses or five day advanced courses and although training was a core part of the implementation, it ran alongside government framework within the service to ensure that each part of child's journey through the service was as child and family focused as it should be. In addition, there were over 100 practice leads who had been identified to support colleagues and ensure people were supported and able to work to towards expectations.

## **Resolved**

That the report and presentation be noted.

### **8 Developing a New County Durham SEND Strategy**

The Committee considered a report of the Corporate Director Children and Young People's Services which provided an update on the development of the new County Durham Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy and invited Members to comment and provide a contribution to the new County Durham SEND Strategy Vision and Aims (for copy see file of minutes).

The development of the new strategy's vision and aims were based around six questions that were put to service users and stakeholders across County Durham. Members were advised of a summary of response that were received so far and of the emerging headlines from specific groups.

Councillor Townsend was grateful to see the positive value of neurodiversity being mentioned - as a mother of three children, two of who were Autistic, she dreamed that they would be valued for what they brought to the world rather than as a drain on resources, which it sometimes felt like. She praised Timothy Hackworth School in Shildon for their rights respecting agenda which fostered a great nurturing environment for children with or without SEN.

Councillor Townsend advised that people should not just value neurodiverse people who learned to mask and behave in a way that was acceptable to the neurotypical status quo and to put support in where it was needed and allow people to comfortably be themselves. This required a huge culture shift and to move away from telling children to have quiet hands or requiring eye contact and the stigma surrounding fiddling which were prevalent in all areas of society, yet none of those things meant that people were not listening or interested in what was being said.

Training was needed for teachers, governing bodies and teaching assistants. Councillor Townsend acknowledged that the strategy sounded brilliant like the world she wanted to live in, but did not live in at the moment and she was concerned that the Council did not have the facilities to put it in place. There were so many other issues such as the NHS, CAMHS funding and the legal framework that underpinned how children got SEND plans and EHCP's, which was a huge obstacle. There were also families excluded from help through not having a diagnosis and many of the plans including SENDIASS, which was a specialist help service for parents with children who had SEN, could not be accessed without a diagnosis.

In addition, Councillor Townsend believed there was an additional problem of off-rolling, where children were forced out of schools. She had been told her child did not have autism and that she was neglecting him, which was why he was unable to



communicate with his peers. This was happening in County Durham and sadly the reasons were based on fear of funding and how Ofsted ratings were affected by having children with SEND. She was happy to discuss her personal situation further, after five years of trying, he had finally been given an EHCP just as he was about to leave primary school, but she could not help but wonder what situation he would have been in if he got the support that he needed five years before.

The Strategic Manager, SEND Strategy and Assessment, advised that the SEN Strategy was deliberately ambitious and there were variations in provision, but the service wanted to ensure that it was right and stable. There were 11500 young people in County Durham with a SEN support plan and generally all of the services were able to be accessed through the support plan. For those with more complex needs, there was EHCP, 3600 and rising, the rate of plans going out of the system is higher than ever, the service were committed to increase casework capacity within SEN and had recently appointed 12 new support staff.

With regards to neuro-diversity, the Strategic Manager, SEND Strategy and Assessment, advised that this was an overarching strategy and there was already an established Autism Strategy which had been running for a number of years. He advised that Council services were not based on diagnosis, but rather the presenting needs of a child. He was aware that there were some services that required a diagnosis however that was not within schools and support services, or resources provided as a Council. Councillor Townsend offered to speak to the Strategic Manager, SEND Strategy and Assessment, with regards to the experience, following the meeting.

Councillor Coult was familiar with SEND as her son was in receipt of an EHCP and she welcomed the SEND Strategy as it was well overdue. It was extremely ambitious but SEN covered such a wide range of needs and it was crucial that these children were able to have a normal life, not labelled or stigmatised. It was important that these children went to local schools with friends where they lived and she alluded to the importance of having plans in a timely manner as the longer it took, the harder it was for families. She welcomed this and was more than willing to speak to the Strategic Manager, SEND Strategy and Assessment, to give more information from her perspective.

Councillor Walton advised that with regards to the aims of the strategy, there had been feedback indicating that families wanted improved communication and she suggested that this should be included in the aims.

The Strategic Manager, SEND Strategy and Assessment, advised that there had been a slight adjustment to the vision statement, however it could be made clearer as it was good practice and to be expected across all services.

The Chair commented on the statistics for EHCP's and acknowledged the difficulty for all local authorities since the Children and Families Bill had been introduced. Not

all SEND children needed an EHCP, however he was interested to know what are response rates were like for social care and health advice.

The Strategic Manager, SEND Strategy and Assessment, confirmed that not every young person would need the health and the care part of the plan, the systems in place for health care were picked up in Ofsted and Quality Care Council visits and found to be very strong in County Durham. Any health and care needs that were identified would then be considered with regards to their impact on learning and development. This was an area that the service wanted to continue to improve and there had been good quality assurance. A self-evaluation of all services in the County was being undertaken and the Strategic Manager, SEND and Assessment offered to return and confirm outcome and any plans for improvement.

In response to a question from the Chair with regards to children who were waiting for special school provision, the Strategic Manager, SEND and Assessment, advised that there was not a waiting list for provision but that did not mean there were not children who would benefit from a specialist place. In those instances the Council supported their provision, through funding through the High Needs Block, which ensured schools could make adaptations in order to create the correct environment in a mainstream offer. That did not mean there was not a pressure for special provision but he would return with more detail if required.

Councillor Varty advised that having ran a hub in a secondary school, it was nice to see friends supporting young people with SEN and although she agreed it was better if they were in mainstream schools, there was also a case for some to be in a special school.

Councillor Varty had been assisting a number of parents to fill in Disability Living Allowance forms, who were confused at having to deal with a diagnosis and then having to deal with filling in forms whilst trying to communicate with school. There were a few where communication had broken down with the school and she suggested that improved communication between parents and schools should be a priority.

The Strategic Manager, SEND and Assessment, acknowledged the challenges when it came to being diagnosed but highlighted that in school there was no need for a clinical diagnosis to access services. When considering young people with SEN, this tended to focus on social communication and interaction or neuro-diversity. There may be a clinical diagnosis at some stage and with regards to DLA that did carry some weight and similarly CAMHS could only be accessed with such.

## **Resolved**

That the report and presentation be noted.

**9 Quarter 4 2020/2021 Budget and Revenue Outturn and Budget and Revenue Forecast Quarter 1 2021/2022**

The Committee considered reports of the Corporate Director of Resources (Interim), the first provided details of the outturn budget position and the second provided details of the forecast outturn budget position for Children and Young People's Services (for copies see file of minutes).

**Resolved**

That the reports be noted.

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# **CAMHS**

## **Overview & Scrutiny committee**

### **15<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

Michelle Trainer, Head of Service, Durham & Darlington  
CAMHS, TEWV FT

&

Jennifer Illingworth, Director of Operations

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## Overview and update

- Update on inpatient beds for young people across the North East & North Cumbria (NE&NC)
- Overview of the Mental Health, Learning disability & Autism partnership
- Waiting times for community CAMHS in Durham
- Challenges
- Opportunities & Future plans

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## Update- Specialist CAMHS in-patient provisional

- On 16 September 2020 NHS England and Improvement announced a significant step forward in restoring CAMHS inpatient services in our region.
- Having looked at a number of options, NHS England and Improvement decided that the most realistic and achievable interim solution is to restore CAMHS inpatient services using an alternative provider on the existing West Lane Hospital site. The interim provider will be Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (CNTW).
- Through consultation with young people, parents and carers the Hospital was rename Acklam road Hospital and the young people's inpatient ward on the site, was renamed Lotus ward.
- We have a clear pathway for admissions to inpatient beds, we work closely with CNTW colleague's to ensure there's a joined up approach between CAMHS inpatient and our CAMHS community services.

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# Overview of the Mental Health, Learning Disability & Autism partnership



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# Waiting times

- Referral rates are back in line with pre March 2020 levels – **approx. 120 per week over past 3 weeks**
- Initial assessments are being completed within **28 working days** of referral being received – young people with identified risks will be seen within 24 hours or 4 hours by our crisis team if required.
- Mild to moderate interventions for low mood and anxiety.
  - MHST – providing interventions within 80 schools across the county – **within 4 weeks of referral**
  - CPWP – providing interventions to young people in schools who don't have a MHST and young people not in education – **within 6 weeks of referral**
- Complex mental health interventions – waiting times to treatment following assessment range from **10-18 weeks** within the community teams
- Crisis, Intensive home treatment and positive behaviour support teams - **24/7 response**

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## Waiting times continued

- The systemwide neurodevelopmental pathway went live in County Durham in early October 2021.
- This offers CYP& families access to support within Durham to meet their needs whilst waiting for diagnostic assessment within TEWV and also post diagnosis.
- Community Eating Disorder team – have seen a significant rise in referrals over the past 18 month
  - New investment in 2021.



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## Challenges

- Recruitment of particular roles
- Waiting times for Autism & ADHD diagnostic assessments
- Winter pressures
- The continued impact of the Pandemic
  - Referral complexity
  - Staffing
  - The unknown's

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## ● Opportunities & Future plans

- Continue to develop provision for CYP & Families through the CYPMH Partnership across Durham.
- New MH roles within GP practices
- Working in partnership with CDDFT to support admissions on paediatric wards
  - New roles to support Young people in CDDFT with an Eating disorder and/or in MH crisis
- Continue with CAMHS transformation in line with national i-Thrive model
  - Getting help
  - Getting more help
  - urgent response
- Organisational restructure – Clinically led, operationally enabled
- Keeping in touch



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Thank  
You!

@LeanneWalker

The text 'Thank You!' is written in a playful, bubbly font. 'Thank' is in blue and 'You!' is in orange. The text is surrounded by colorful streamers (pink, yellow, blue) and small stars (green, orange, pink, grey).

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**Children and Young People's  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

15 November 2021

**Children and Young People's Mental  
Health & Emotional Wellbeing**



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**Report of Amanda Healy, Director of Public Health, Durham County  
Council**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 To update Overview and Scrutiny on the children and young people mental health, emotional wellbeing and resilience local transformation plan and key areas of work.

**Executive Summary**

- 2 The challenges to the UK in relation to children and young people's mental health is significant and have been impacted upon by the COVID-19 pandemic. This also applies to the children and young people who reside in County Durham.
- 3 The governance of the County Durham Children and Young Peoples Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing (CYP MHEW) Partnership Group has been reviewed and agreed, revised terms of reference are being drafted to take these changes into account, along with quarterly reporting into both the Children Young People and Families Partnership Board and the Mental Health Strategic Partnership Board.
- 4 A series of workshops have taken place with key stakeholders and children and families to review and revise the objectives and work plan for the group. A plan has been drafted and will be circulated for consultation.
- 5 A significant amount of activity has taken place during the COVID pandemic to support children and families with their mental health and emotional wellbeing and this will continue.

## Recommendation(s)

- 6 Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are recommended to:
- a) Note the content of this report
  - b) Acknowledge and endorse the work of the County Durham Children and Young Peoples Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Partnership Group

## Background

- 7 The challenge in the UK is significant. The following key headline facts in relation to children and young people mental health support this:
- 1 in 8 children and young people aged 5-19 years have a clinically diagnosable mental health need.
  - 25% of young people who require treatment and support receive it (35-50% of those with severe needs).
  - It takes an estimated 17 years for treatment options to be translated from research into practice.
  - Half of all adult mental health problems start before the age of 14 years.
  - Children in custody are three times more likely to have mental health problems, and are more likely to have more than one mental health problem, have a learning disability, to be dependent on drugs and alcohol and have experienced significant adverse childhood experiences.
  - 60% of children and young people in the looked after system have identified mental health needs.
- 8 Based on the data above this means that within County Durham at least 5,497 children aged between 5-19 years have a clinically diagnosable mental health need.
- 9 We also know that, within County Durham:
- Children with learning or physical disabilities have a higher risk of developing a mental health problem compared to the national population
  - 2.6% of school children have additional social, emotional and mental health needs which equates to over 1,000 children.
  - There are thought to be at least 8,000 16-24 year olds with an eating disorder.
  - Around 8,500 children and young people are estimated to have ADHD.



- Almost 400 children aged between 10-24 were admitted to hospital as a result of self-harm last year
  - Nearly 100 under 18s were admitted to hospital for mental health conditions last year.
- 10 There are particular risk factors which exist, some of which are highlighted above. Others relate to discrimination, socio-economic disadvantage, parental issues such as substance misuse, mental health problems.
  - 11 Protective factors can also be in place and these could relate to experience of secure attachment with a parent or carer, capacity to reflect, family stability, wider support networks, and opportunities for valued social roles.
  - 12 The challenge to the UK in relation to children and young people's mental health is significant. This also applies to the children and young people who reside in County Durham.
  - 13 The County Durham Children and Young People's Mental Health (CYPMH), Emotional Wellbeing and Resilience Transformation Plan on a Page 2018-2020 detailed how partners and stakeholders worked together to address the issue.
  - 14 The landscape has changed significantly since the introduction of the previous plan in 2018, therefore NHSE have announced that at the moment there will be no expectation to refresh CYPMH Local Transformation Plans from October 2020. Going forward NHSE anticipate that an aligned CYPMH plan should continue to be developed and fed into local and system strategic plans, as referenced in the NHS Long Term Plan.
  - 15 National CYP MH Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) have been revised into a guidance document to support systems when considering recovery and restoration, strategic CYPMH plans and delivery of future ambitions as set out in the NHS Long Term Plan. These are being considered and referenced by the County Durham CYP Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Partnership Group as part of the review of the plan.
  - 16 Following agreement by the Children and Young Peoples Integration Board at its meeting in February 2021, the previously named LTP Project Group has been renamed to the County Durham Children and Young Peoples Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Partnership Group to provide greater understanding of the purpose of the group across County Durham.

## **Covid-19 and CYPs mental health and emotional wellbeing**

- 17 PHE published a COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing surveillance report in September 2020. It highlighted growing indicative evidence that COVID-19 and associated interventions, such as social distancing and stay at home guidance including school closures, have likely had an adverse effect on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.
- 18 While many children and young people have retained some access to mental health support during this period, a lack of access to mental health support has been associated with worse mental health and wellbeing for some CYP.
- 19 The latest evidence reviewed within the report suggests that vulnerable children and other CYP with challenging home environments, are more likely to have had experiences during the pandemic associated with a risk to mental health and wellbeing such as:
  - loneliness
  - disruption to access to support
  - difficult relationships within the home
  - parental stress or poor mental health
  - a lack of access to the outside or natural environment
- 20 The County Durham Health Impact Assessment (HIA) on health Inequalities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was published in June 2020, it highlights the following key considerations for children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing:
  - Mental health and emotional wellbeing across the life course can be severely impacted by COVID-19 stay at home restrictions and lockdown.
  - Children and young people can be affected due to lack of support from schools and social networks.
  - Increases in safeguarding concerns can escalate for CYP in the home leading to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's).
  - Increasing levels of self-harm and other MH&EW issues during the pandemic – predicted to increase especially given the more recent stay at home guidance and further requirements for remote learning.
- 21 As the HIA was published a point in time there has been additional national research conducted since publication. However, the findings of these has so far aligned with what is outlined above.

- 22 A regional HIA on the impact of COVID on CYPs mental health and emotional wellbeing is currently being scoped, led by Northumbria University. Titled: Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people: Mapping evidence of public mental health services across the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System, the expected timescale for production of the research is over the next 6-8 months. This may highlight specific areas of focus for County Durham.

## **Workforce Development**

- 23 Additional mental health training has been funded through covid outbreak management funds (COMF) with the aim of providing a consistent training offer across the system; capacity within the system which will allow more effective communication with practitioners and give schools the space to engage; and the production of an evidence-based prevention and early intervention tool which will help schools and practitioners to identify earlier those vulnerable CYPs who need help and support to prevent escalation of issues. Funding is non recurrent money and is required to be spent within this financial year.
- 24 This development programme has three strands, each complimenting the other to build a complete workforce development programme.
- 25 **Strand 1 CYP MH Training** (Youth Mental Health First Aid & Bereavement training and support). In the first three months Strand 1 has started well. The funding is allocated solely for Youth Mental Health First Aid and a complete programme of courses has been developed offering 1,000 places. These places have been allocated to DCC Staff working with CYP, Education settings and to the Voluntary and Community Sector. Initial course signups are excellent.
- 26 **Strand 2 Engagement and communication** (Support payment to schools & resources, development and marketing).
- 27 The support payment underpins engagement in YMHFA & Bereavement trainings
- 28 The bereavement training offer is provided via the DCC Emotional Wellbeing and Effective Learning Service.
- 29 **Strand 3 Development of an enhanced prevention system & early intervention tool** (Additional staff costs) is the third wave of COMF spending plan and is currently being developed for delivery.
- 30 A further 275 places on Youth Aware Mental Health introductory course were funded by public health. This is targeted at senior managers and

complements the Youth Mental Health First Aid Practitioner Training ensuring a shared understanding of the need's children and young people across all levels of service delivery.

- 31 Detailed information was shared in a Senior Managers briefing (PH & CYPS). Youth mental Health First Aid governance and assurance will be via regular briefings to PHSMT & CSC Recovery Group. Feedback & case studies and evaluations have been written into the plan and will evidence the success of the course and inform a possible train the trainer model for future development.

### **The County Durham Children and Young Peoples Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Partnership Group**

- 32 The County Durham CYP MHEW Plan has been reviewed during the summer of 2020, following a number of multi-agency workshops and a draft plan for the period 2020-2023 has been produced. The draft plan is currently being finalised before wider consultation being undertaken.
- 33 The CYP MHEW Plan continues to build upon the five themes within "Future in Mind" the 2015 national report in relation to Promoting, protecting and improving our children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, and also the NHS Long Term Plan.
- 34 The agreed core principles of the County Durham CYP MHEW Partnership Group are:
- To ensure the meaningful participation and co-production with children and young people, service users, carers, families and communities are central to all activity.
  - We will work together to facilitate greater access and standards for CYP mental health services.
  - We will promote positive mental health and wellbeing for children and young people.
  - We will have greater system co-ordination to achieve significant improvements in meeting the mental health needs of children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds.
  - All decisions are based on a clear rationale for improving mental health and wellbeing, local need and a robust evidence base.
- 35 The CYP MHEW Partnership Group will continue to work together to deliver against the aims and priorities, look to sustain what we know works and create further opportunities to grow to scale across the County.

- 36 The draft vision and aims of the group are outlined below, what we will do to achieve these aims and why we are doing it. The terms of reference have been revised to create a more focused core with relevant sub groups to progress the relevant areas of work.



### Governance and accountability

- 37 A review of governance and accountability has recently taken place. At the Children and Young Peoples Integration Board in February 2021 (now known as the Children Young People and Families Partnership Board) it was agreed that the County Durham CYP Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Partnership Group would report directly into the CYPIB (now CYPFPB) on a quarterly basis along with a quarterly update into the Mental Health Strategic Partnership Board to ensure a whole view of all age mental health issues.
- 38 The terms of reference for the County Durham CYP MHEW Partnership Group have been revised to take this change into account.
- 39 A governance chart is attached at Appendix 2.

### Outcomes of the County Durham CYP MHEW Partnership Group

- 40 A significant amount of activity has taken place across County Durham during the previous plan period which will continue to be built upon.

<b>Table 1: Summary of outcomes of the CYP MH&amp;EW Partnership Group</b>		
Roll out and monitoring of Youth Aware Mental Health	Success in Wave two of the national mental	Delivery of a flexible and responsive service 24/7, 365

(YAM) universal prevention programme and Durham Resilience Project (DRP) including securing funding until September 2023.	health trailblazers fund to develop mental health support teams to work in specific areas and development of future bids.	days a year for crisis MH support delivered via CAMHS.
Continuation of the CYP Bereavement Service provided and roll out of Bereavement training to other sectors to support the offer	Enhancement of existing Community Eating Disorder Service	Continuation of the Rollercoaster project to provide parent support
Production of a directory of provision mapped against the THRIVE framework – Making Mental Health Everybody's Business: A Practitioners Guide	Development of the United Voices CYP and Parent/Carer Advisory groups to facilitate co-production and wider engagement and participation	Development and roll out of Kooth across County Durham
Development and enhancement of locally delivered MH&EW forums to enable development and sharing of learning, good practice: mental health locality networks, Schools Link Programme.	Development of a reactive and proactive COVID response through comms development, based on identified and predicted needs.	Development of and delivery within partnership arenas such as MH lessons learnt group, self-harm task & finish, resilience subgroup, etc

### Specific areas of focus during the previous 12 months

- 41 Following an initial reduction in mental health referrals during the early stages of the **COVID pandemic**, cases have increased and are now above pre-COVID levels. It is anticipated that demand for support across all tiers will continue to rise now that CYPs have returned into school and other education settings.
- 42 A significant focus of work has been on the development of **communications** to stakeholders and the wider community on the availability of mental health and emotional support services including guidance and self-help materials during the pandemic. The rainbow guides been shared widely across all networks, have been well received and will help to plan for future activity (Appendix 3).

- 43 The **Self Harm** sub-group has begun to develop a series of recommendations to take forward to improve workforce confidence in supporting cases of self-harm, with a large amount of training taking place. Some additional research and engagement work is being planned for early next year which will help inform development of recommendations for this area.
- 44 Work has been progressed in relation to developing capacity in the system to support children and young people through loss and bereavement. The HDFT 0-25 service have received specialist training from the local **bereavement** service to enable them to support families and a train the trainer model has been commissioned to roll out this training to additional services, including VCS.
- 45 The Anna Freud **School Link programme** has continued to be delivered during the pandemic with a change in focus due to the difficulties in delivering the programme virtually. A session was delivered with Anna Freud, local leads and school representatives to identify key barriers that schools were experiencing in relation to supporting CYP mental health and emotional wellbeing.
- 46 A more formalised process for communicating with schools and education settings has been developed through the use of the **CYP MH Locality Newsletters**, the next revised newsletters are issued to schools each term.
- 47 The **Mental Health Support Teams** (which following engagement with CYP are now known as **Piece of Mind**) have continued to deliver during the pandemic. Momentum continues to build with supporting posts currently being recruited to including 1.5 WTE CYP peer support worker to develop a peer support system within the pilot schools along with an education advisor, a specific SEND emotional resilience nurse and 1.5 WTE Family Navigator posts. A project team developed a further bid NHSE and one further Piece of Mind Team (MHST) is planned to come on stream in Autumn 2023.
- 48 The **Health and Wellbeing Framework for Schools and Education Settings** has now been successfully trialled by a total of 25 schools. The SWSD are actively promoting the use of the framework, with a workshop being held at the recent PEPSE conference with school leads and targeted work with the Piece of Mind Teams (MHST) and the Family Health Service.

- 49 The Service Level Agreement between Public Health and the council's Children's Services for both the **Durham Resilience Programme** and the **YAM project** and the **Strengthening Families Programme** has now been reviewed and extended for an additional 3 years.
- 50 The Parent and Carers/Children and Young People Advisory Group have developed an identity for the group. The **United Voices group** will sit alongside the CYP LTP Project Group to ensure the work of the LTP considers the voices of parent and carers and children and young people, both at a universal level and those with lived experience.
- 51 The SWSD are linking with the TEWV footprint **Whole System Commissioning Group** to establish connectivity in terms of roles and responsibilities across the TEWV footprint.
- 52 **Alternative to Crisis** work continues to be progressed with a lead officer being recruited into liC to programme manage this work. Funding has been allocated via the CCG to identify opportunities to prevent hospital admissions due to missed opportunities to intervene earlier.
- 53 DCC Education to support the development and roll out of the **Wellbeing Return for Education project** with the first meeting taking place in October 2020.

## Opportunities for improvement

- 54 There are key opportunities for improvement during the next plan period. These include:
- **Integration agenda:** Clearer role in relation to driving the integration agenda and the development of place-based work, operational links between services need to be improved and we need to develop a more integrated system of support to ensure needs are better met both preventatively and in responses to identified difficulties.
  - **County Durham Together:** The County Durham CYP MHEW Partnership Group can contribute to the development of the County Durham Together place based operating model in relation to supporting CYPs and families with their emotional wellbeing and mental health, making mental health support more accessible for all children and families.
  - **Culture and leadership:** Continue to advance progress in relation to our MH&W system, switching from being service focused to people focused. This includes the establishing of a shared



language and understanding of mental health. There are significant differences in clinical mental health diagnosed conditions and mild to moderate mental health and emotional wellbeing issues which need to be defined to ensure that they can be clearly identified and CYPs can be supported into accessing the correct provision by frontline practitioners.

- **A common approach to measuring outcomes:** defining a common approach to measuring outcomes for children and young people is key. Different immediate outcome measures are used by organisations with some overlap which makes it difficult to report progress. However, as we know building resilience and working together to improve mental health of our children and young people is a long-term change. As these CYPs progress to adulthood, we need to be able to identify demonstrable improvements in outcomes.
- **Continuation of good practice:** There is a broad range of provision available but not everything is available all of the time in all areas. We need to ensure continuation of what we know works and scale this up as a whole system to ensure equity of access across the County.

## The Wellbeing Approach

- 55 The wellbeing approach brings a shift in emphasis and resources from the delivery of wellbeing services to an approach that introduces greater devolution of decision making to communities and stronger community engagement. This can lead to better health and wellbeing outcomes for local people.
- 56 Adopting the approach to wellbeing will challenge us to deliver services and programmes in a different way. It will also challenge us to measure our performance in a different way. It will mean services and assets that are developed with people rather than consulting with them during or after the event. Doing so, is not easy, and in some cases may not feel comfortable. It means handing over control and sharing decision making. But doing so, will result in improved outcomes for our communities.
- 57 Moving forward, services and structures in place to support young people with their mental health and emotional wellbeing will be informed by the wellbeing approach and place co-production at the heart of future service design and decision making.
- 58 The wellbeing approach has also been adopted by the group which brings a shift in emphasis and resources from the delivery of wellbeing

services to an approach that introduces greater devolution of decision making to communities and stronger community engagement.

- 59 Services and structures in place to support young people with their mental health and emotional wellbeing are informed by the wellbeing approach and place co-production at the heart of future service design and decision making.
- 60 The group actively engage with CYP and families through both the United Voices Group and wider opportunities for engagement and participation. Engagement and participation coordinated through the United Voices group was used alongside feedback from voluntary, community and statutory services to inform the development of the draft plan.

### **Next Steps**

- 61 Work will continue to progress on those key work areas identified above, taking into consideration the impact of COVID.
- 62 The terms of reference, membership and sub structure of the Partnership Group will be finalised to reflect the changes in governance and delivery.
- 63 Following the workshops that were held during 2020, the draft plan will be finalised and circulated for consultation with key stakeholders and children and families.
- 64 The plan will form the work programme for the County Durham CYP MHEW Partnership Group for the next plan period and will continue to report into the CYP Integration Board on a quarterly basis.

### **Conclusion**

- 65 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact upon the mental health and emotional wellbeing of children and families. This will become a cross cutting priority of the work plan for the group, taking into account findings from the County Durham Health Impact Assessment and regional and national research documents.
- 66 The Partnership Group will continue to work together to further develop the plan and delivery against the final priorities.

### **Background papers**

- None

### **Other useful documents**

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**Contact:** Julia Bates

Tel: 03000 267659

Michelle Baldwin

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Finance**

The County Durham CYP MHEW Partnership plan sets strategic context within which financial plans are set.

### **Staffing**

Plans include strengthening staff development and support.

### **Risk**

Risks mainly relate to reputational risks should a strong strategic framework for improving children and young people's services in the County not be clearly articulated. If services do not improve children and young people will not receive the right support at the right time.

**Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty** – The Group pays particular regard to the needs of vulnerable groups, including groups protected under equalities legislation.

### **Climate Change**

Not applicable

### **Accommodation**

Not applicable.

### **Crime and Disorder**

The strategy includes a focus on the safety of children and young people.

### **Human Rights**

In placing an emphasis on engaging with children and young people and their families in shaping support services, the strategy promotes and protects the human rights of those in receipt of services and support.

### **Consultation**

The draft plan will be circulated for consultation with key stakeholders.

### **Procurement**

Not applicable.

### **Disability Issues**

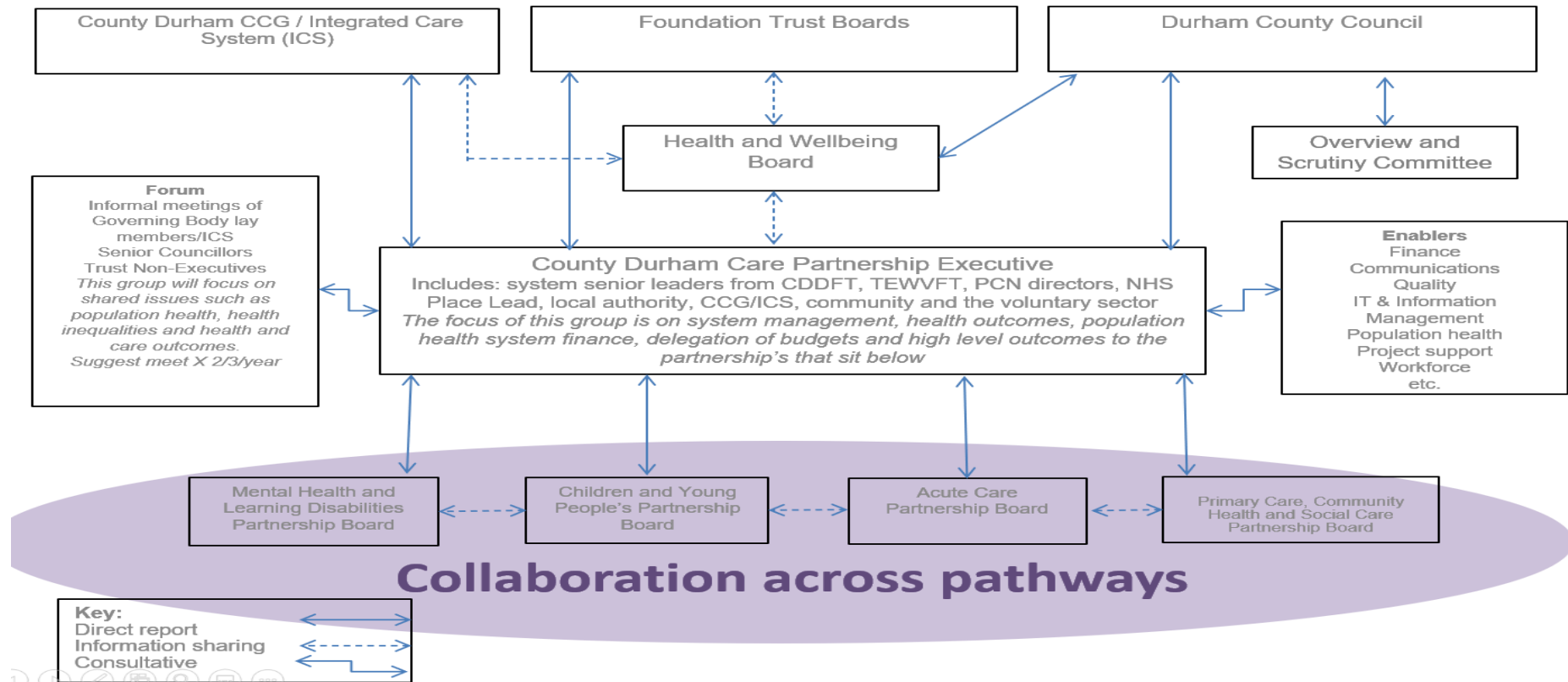
See equalities above.

### **Legal Implications**

Not applicable.

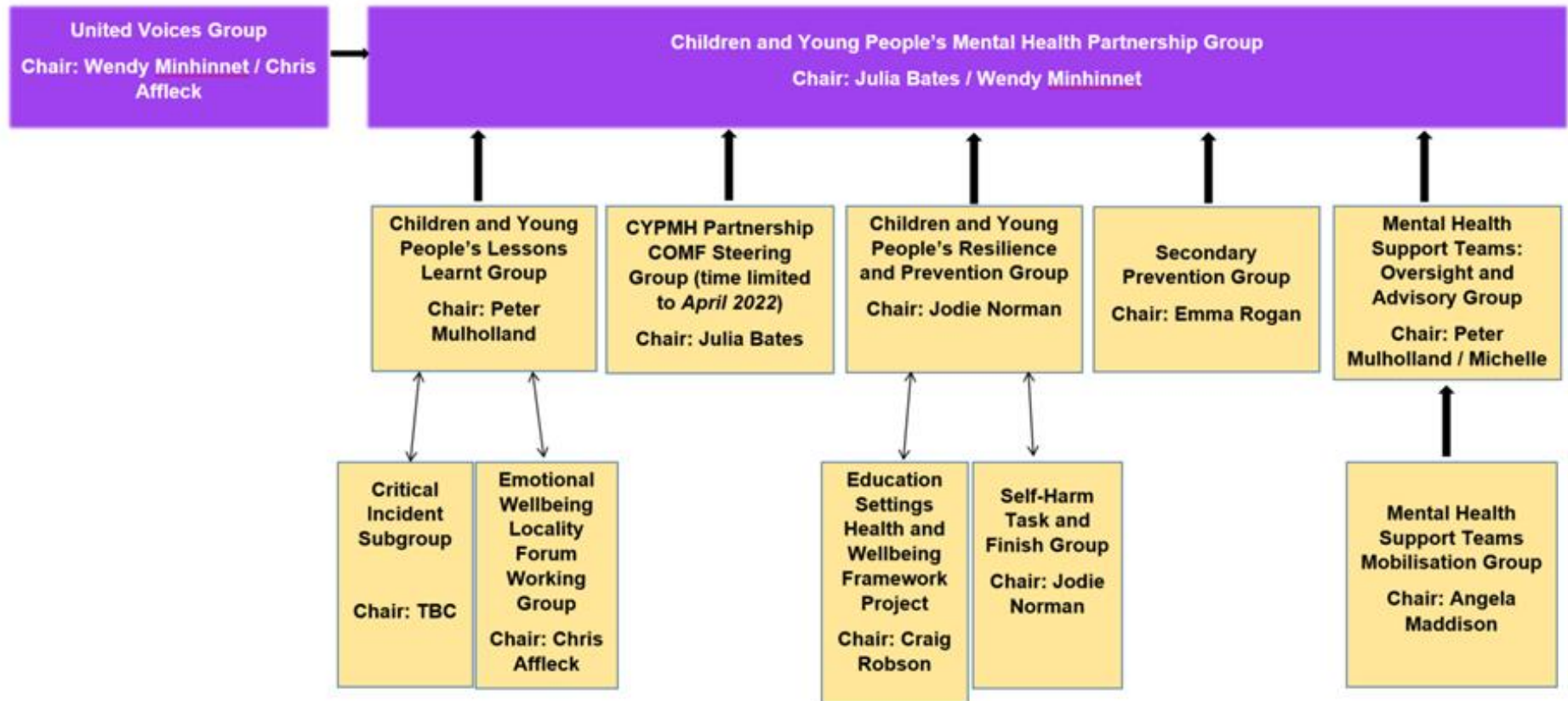
## Appendix 2 - Current County Durham CYP MHEW Partnership Group Governance Arrangements

### GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE ACROSS COUNTY DURHAM (May 2021)



The Children and Young People’s Mental Health Partnership Group reports into the Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Partnership Board and for oversight into the Children and Young People’s Partnership Board

Children and Young Peoples Mental Health Partnership Group Governance Chart



### Appendix 3 - Links to Rainbow Guides:

[Rainbow Guide for Children Young People and Families](#)

[Rainbow Guide for Adults](#)

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**Children and Young People's  
Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**

**15 November 2021**

**Key Findings and Actions in  
Response to Ofsted  
Focussed Visit – July 2021**



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**Report of John Pearce, Corporate Director for Children and Young  
People's Services**

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of the committee with an introduction to the presentation giving information in relation to the key findings and actions in response to Ofsted focussed visit in July 2021 which is appended to this report at appendix two.

**Executive summary**

- 2 The presentation sets out the key themes of the focussed Ofsted inspection which took place in July 2021. It also highlights the service' intention to build on strengths identified and any areas where actions are required.

**Recommendation**

- 3 That the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to:
  - a) note the content of the presentation and comment accordingly

**Background**

- 4 In 2017 Ofsted introduced its framework for inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS). This framework and guidance help inspectors to be consistent in inspections while being flexible enough to respond to individual circumstances of local authorities.

- 5 The ILACS inspection framework is a whole system approach that looks to take a proportionate approach. The framework includes an annual self-assessment and annual conversation with Ofsted for each local authority area; standard two-week inspections every three years for local authority's who require improvement to be good; standard one-week inspections for local authority's who are good or outstanding; and up to two shorter focused visits within each three year cycle of inspection. Whilst full inspections receive a graded judgement, focused visits include a letter summarising findings along with areas for improvement and priority action where appropriate.
- 6 Durham had a full ILACS inspection in September 2019. In July 2021, Ofsted conducted a two-day focused visit in Durham concentrating on children in care. Area of focus included:
- Quality of matching, placement and decision making;
  - Experiences and progress of disabled children in care;
  - Experiences and progress of children living in unregulated and /or unregistered provision.
- 7 The presentation at appendix 2 provides information relating to the most recent Ofsted focused visit and covers the following areas:
- Key themes;
  - intention to build on strengths identified;
  - Actions.

## **Conclusion**

- 8 Members of Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be aware of the key themes of the focused inspection, areas of strength and actions required.

## **Background papers**

**None**

## **Other Useful Documents**

- Ofsted report following focused visit to Durham's Children's Services <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50168138>

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**Contact:** Helen Fergusson 03000 266543

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Not applicable.

### **Finance**

Not applicable.

### **Consultation**

Not applicable.

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

Not applicable.

### **Climate Change**

Not applicable.

### **Human Rights**

Not applicable.

### **Crime and Disorder**

Not applicable.

### **Staffing**

Not applicable.

### **Accommodation**

Not applicable.

### **Risk**

Not applicable.

### **Procurement**

Not applicable.

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# Key Findings and Actions in response to Ofsted Focussed Visit - July 2021



## Key Themes

- Positive feedback about our great social workers and how well they know their children. Social workers spoke with real empathy about their children
- They saw examples of really good direct work with children which was sensitive to their needs
- Evidence of sound decision making for children coming into care and appropriate consideration of family networks and evidence of strong management oversight
- Good care plans which were tailored to meet the needs of children
- Good participation of children within their reviews
- They saw examples of regular supervision which made a difference to children and social workers spoke highly about the support and supervision they received from managers
- Social workers spoke positively about working in Durham and inspectors noted that the stability of our workforce is supporting good quality work with children

- Positive feedback for the work of the Supporting Solutions and erase team and the impact of their work on outcomes for children.
- Some children in supported living arrangements needed more through assessment of their needs prior to them moving to determine that the placement could appropriately meet their needs
- We told inspectors that there were some children living with carers who did not meet fostering regulations but had oversight from the court and this is an area of work that they and we agree needs to improve.
- We told inspectors that there are placement sufficiency challenges for some of our young people in identifying the most appropriate placement to meet their needs and this remains an area of priority focus for us.
- They were very positive about their meeting with our children in care council who described feeling empowered and heard by senior managers and they told inspectors that changes were being made as a result of their feedback. The young people spoke positively about their social workers and IRO's.

# Intention to Build on strengths identified

- Continue to embed the Signs of Safety Practice Framework
- Continue to implement the current, successful workforce strategy to ensure we continue to have a high quality, highly skilled social care workforce who choose to remain working in Durham
- Continued focus on ensuring every child has a good quality care plan which they understand and which makes a difference to them and improves their life
- Continued focus on supporting managers to provide high quality reflective supervision to their staff which supports good planning for children



# Action to Respond to Quality of plans for minority of children living with connected persons

- Resolve current arrangements through existing legal processes
- Training and awareness raising with social workers, managers, legal colleagues, CAFCAS and Judiciary
- Audit of assessments and decision making relating to connected carers
- Peer review

# Action to respond to increasing sufficiency of placements for children in care

- Deliver on key actions within the Sufficiency Strategy 2018 / 2021

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/19179/Sufficiency-and-Commissioning-Strategy-for-Looked-After-Children-and-Care-Leavers>

- Foster care recruitment campaign
- Focus on ensuring high quality support and training for carers to support high levels of retention including ‘Mockingbird’ model
- Work with regional colleagues to review and re procure the contract for Independent Fostering Agencies – March 2022
- Open new children’s homes: Edge of care home; 4 x 2 bed and 3 x 3 bed (2021-25)
- Develop and deliver a workforce strategy dedicated to residential services
- Work with private providers locally to develop the ‘Durham First’ approach

# Action to respond to the quality of assessments for young people living in supported accommodation

- Ensure up to date assessments for all young people living in supported living arrangements – Nov 2021
- Senior manager to chair panel to oversee these arrangements
- Work with commissioning colleagues to increase number and choice of options for young people – March 2022
- Work with Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure robust oversight of these arrangements

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## Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee



15 November 2021

### Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2020-21

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#### Report of Councillor Mamie Simmons, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

##### Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

##### Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2020-21 (attached as Appendix 2) for information.
- 2 The Annual Report 2020-21 was agreed by the Corporate Parenting Panel at its meeting on 2 July 2021, and endorsed by Council at its meeting on 20 October 2021.

##### Executive summary

- 3 To strengthen political and management oversight of the Corporate Parenting Panel and increase the voice of children and young people in our work, a number of changes were implemented. As a result, the September 2019 Children's Services Ofsted inspection report stated that 'The Corporate Parenting Panel is effective and is maintaining good political and strategic governance of children in care and care leavers'.
- 4 The Corporate Parenting Panel's Terms of Reference form part of Durham County Council's constitution and make specific reference that the Corporate Parenting Panel will prepare and provide an annual report that will be shared with Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny.
- 5 This is the fourth Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Panel, following the changes to political oversight.

## Recommendations

- 6 Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:
  - (a) note the content of the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report, which provides oversight of the work undertaken during 2020-21, and outlines the priorities for the year ahead.

## **Background**

- 7 The terms of reference of the Corporate Parenting Panel are taken from Durham County Council's Constitution with the responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Panel in relation to each of the functions clearly set out.
- 8 The terms of reference make specific reference that the Corporate Parenting Panel will prepare and provide an annual report that will be shared with Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny.
- 9 In September 2019, Durham County Council's Children's Services were inspected by OFSTED. The inspection report states that since previous inspections (JTAI in July 2018, and focused CIN visit in January 2019) 'the local authority has taken swift and decisive action to strengthen services. Pace has increased since the focused visit, and solid improvements can be seen in many service areas, including at the front door and for children in care. Firm foundations are in place to sustain and build on the improvements made'.
- 10 The inspection report also states that 'The Corporate Parenting Panel is effective and is maintaining good political and strategic governance of children in care and care leavers'.

## **Development of the Annual Report**

- 11 To ensure the voice of the child is reflected in the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel, young people from the Children in Care Council, supported by officers from the Partnerships Team, help to develop the Corporate Parenting Panel's Annual Report.
- 12 The young people work on the design, content and language of the Annual Report to ensure it is easy to read and understand.
- 13 To ensure we continue to raise the profile of the Corporate Parenting Panel, the Durham County Council Communications and Marketing Team have been involved in the development of the Annual Report to ensure it follows a more corporate format, whilst ensuring it uses language and design which is also appealing to young people.
- 14 The Annual Report will hold a more prominent position on the Durham County Council website and will again be hosted on the Investing in Children website, and the Children in Care Council website.

- 15 The Annual Report includes information on:
- (a) What a Corporate Parent is;
  - (b) The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel;
  - (c) The Corporate Parenting Panel's Terms of Reference;
  - (d) Key performance data;
  - (e) Achievements during 2020/21;
  - (f) Priorities for 2021/22.

### **Conclusion**

- 16 Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:
- (a) Note the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report for information, which provides oversight of the work undertaken during 2020-21, and the priorities for the year ahead.

### **Authors:**

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Corporate Parenting Panel's Terms of Reference form part of Durham County Council's Constitution.

### **Finance**

There are cost implications for design and print services, however the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report will primarily be shared by email and will be hosted on the Children in Care Council, Investing in Children and Durham County Council websites to minimise printing and distribution costs.

### **Consultation**

Young people from the Children in Care Council have been involved in the development of the Annual Report. The consultation has been done in the main through virtual meetings coordinated by Investing in Children, due to the Coronavirus pandemic and lockdown restrictions.

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

Looked After Services are available to all children and young people in line with legal duties.

### **Climate Change**

There are no climate change implications.

### **Human Rights**

Children and young people have been central to the development of the Annual Report to ensure that their voices are heard.

### **Crime and Disorder**

There are no crime and disorder implications.

### **Staffing**

There are no staffing implications.

### **Accommodation**

There are no accommodation implications.

### **Risk**

There are no risk implications.

### **Procurement**

There are no procurement implications.

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## **Appendix 2: Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2020-21**

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Attached as a separate document.



# County Durham Corporate Parenting Panel

**Annual Report**  
April 2020 - March 2021

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**“Every child  
is a different kind of  
flower and together  
make this world a  
beautiful garden.”**

**Shannon**

## What is a corporate parent

Local Authorities must provide the care, support, and security that young people need if they can't stay at home safely and become the young people's 'corporate parent'.

Being a corporate parent isn't just up to the Corporate Parenting Panel, everyone should be looking out for our children and young people, and every councillor and council employee has a role to play as the eyes and ears of the community.

Being a corporate parent means doing whatever we can to support young people in our care and our care leavers, to help them achieve their full potential and have the best possible outcomes.

## Why are children in care?

Young people are looked after for a variety of reasons including neglect and abuse. They could also be in care if their parents are unable to look after them because of their own complex health needs or behaviours. Some young people have no parents to care for them, or they could be unaccompanied asylum seekers.

# Message from the Chair!



Cllr Ivan Jewell  
Chair of the CPP

I would like to take this opportunity, as chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP), to thank everyone for their continued hard work and commitment over what has been a very challenging year. We could not have imagined the impact the global Covid-19 pandemic would have on delivery of services across England. In Durham our staff, partners, volunteers and the young people themselves played a key role in helping us to respond to the outbreak to ensure that all children, young people and their carers received the best possible help, advice and support during this difficult time.

During the pandemic, we have tried new ways of communicating with our children and young people using apps, Microsoft Teams and Zoom as well as socially distanced walks and picnics when the restrictions allowed. We have also sent interpreted coronavirus fact sheets to unattended asylum-seeking children who needed them.

Amongst the challenges, there have also been successes with some of our young people having had the poems they published about life in lockdown re-tweeted by the Children's Commissioner for England.

I will not be standing for re-election as a Councillor in the May 2021 elections, so will be stepping down as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

I have enjoyed my time in this role and really appreciated being able to work with children and young people to understand how we can support them to achieve the best possible outcomes.

I wish everyone all the best for the future and take great pleasure in introducing the Corporate Parenting Panel's fourth annual report. **April 2021**

Councillor Mamie Simmons will become Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel from May 2021, with Councillor Michelle Walton as Vice Chair.



Cllr Mamie Simmons  
Chair of the CPP



Cllr Michelle Walton  
Vice Chair of the CPP

## Where are children in care?

Children and young people can be in care in a range of settings, including foster care, children's homes, supported lodgings, and secure accommodation – the council is corporate parent to all of them.



## Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards

In November 2019, the Corporate Parenting Panel was shortlisted for the LGC Awards 2020 in the Children's Services category. The awards ceremony was due to take place in March 2020, however this was postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic with a virtual event taking place in October 2020. It was a huge achievement for the Panel to be shortlisted as a record number of entries were submitted.

## Message from Children in Care Council (CICC) co-opted members

"I attend Corporate Parenting Panel to represent young people from the CICC. We have been giving feedback on all the wonderful things us young people have been able to achieve within the CICC.

"Due to the circumstances of Covid-19 we have been able to still achieve changes, one being the children's homes that have had improvements to their Wi-Fi which was very important because of online learning. Another is adding a positive story so, at every meeting, we hear about something that has been positive which is now many of the members favourite part of the meeting.

"I've had a very positive experience when working with the Panel and I'm looking forward to seeing all the changes that we are able to make together."

**Lesley Caulkin**

"I have been a representative at Corporate Parenting Panel meetings on behalf of CICC for a long time now. At these meetings, we get to feedback what we have discussed in our meetings, any training sessions we have taken part in, and the amazing stories about what children and young people have achieved or created through great art work.

"Due to Covid-19 we have been unable to attend our meetings face to face at County Hall and some decisions and improvements have taken longer to process. For example, faster Wi-Fi for children in our children's homes around the county which was to help with their education, social needs, and family time. However, at the end of our meetings we always have a positive story about what a child or young person has been up to during the pandemic such as arts and crafts and podcasts, which has always been members of the council's favourite part of the meetings.

"In my time so far, I have enjoyed being on the Panel and it has grown my confidence.

**Mitchell Green**

**“I am so proud of all the changes we have made to improve services for children and young people who are cared for in Durham, and I want to see more positive changes and new ideas going forward.”**

# Role of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)

The CPP is a group that is part of the council, which is called a committee. It has 21 councillors as well as council officers. There are also 10 other members, including school representatives and young people's representatives to make sure there's a broad range of experience and knowledge and that children and young people are heard, and actively responded to.

Corporate parents have responsibility to act for the children and young people in our care as a parent would for their own child, and should ask three key questions:



## CPP responsibilities




There are a number of things which the CPP must do:

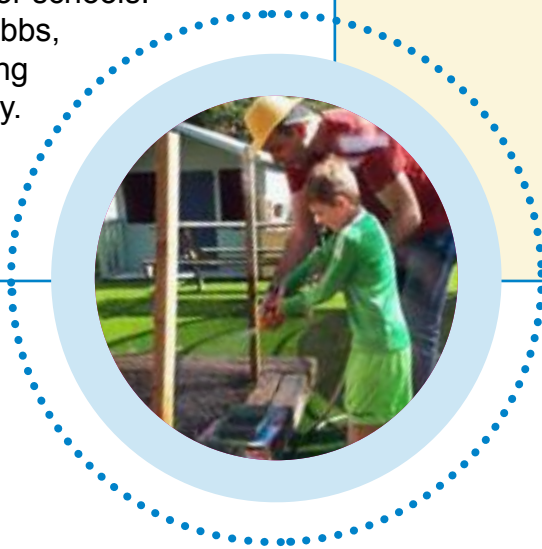
- ✓ Make sure the Council acts as a good corporate parent to children and young people in care and care leavers, including:
  - Young people in residential care, foster care and supported lodgings
  - Young people placed for adoption or placed at home under care planning, placement, and case review regulations
  - Young people in secure homes or in custody
- ✓ Engage and listen to the views of children, young people and their carers.
- ✓ Work in partnership with other agencies to make improvements for our children and young people in care.
- ✓ Oversee the virtual school for looked after children and young people. For more information visit [www.durham.gov.uk/durhamvirtualschool](http://www.durham.gov.uk/durhamvirtualschool). A sub-group has been established to lead on this work.
- ✓ Oversee Aycliffe Secure Services. A sub group has been established to lead on this work.


More information on the Corporate Parenting Panel can be found in Durham County Council's constitution at: [www.durham.gov.uk/constitution](http://www.durham.gov.uk/constitution)



# Updates against 2020/21 priorities

What we said we would focus on	Where we are now	What young people think
Subsidised transport	<p>We have had lots of meetings with the providers, but due to the number of different providers and services across County Durham we are unable to offer subsidised transport for all care leavers.</p> <p>We took steps to liaise with higher education colleges to discuss their approach to supporting students with paying bus passes whilst colleges were closed or delivering lessons virtually.</p> <p>We continue to look at transport support on an individual basis for our young people, and John Hewitt, the Council's Interim Chief Executive will discuss further with senior managers to re-visit this.</p>	
Extension of Freedom Card for care leavers	<p>Exploration into the expansion of Freedom Cards to establish a discount scheme for care leavers.</p> <p>Some discounts have already been offered, and young people have access to Durham County Council discounts and free access to council leisure centres.</p> <p>Unfortunately, this work was postponed due to the pandemic as many shops and services were forced to close as part of lockdown restrictions.</p>	
Teacher training	<p>Two young people from the Children in Care Council (CICC) attended the designated teacher network meeting on 24 November 2020. They presented a workshop "We are no different" to more than 80 designated teachers from schools both in Durham and across the country. This was well received, and discussions took place afterwards about the child/young persons' voice and how their thoughts and requests could be shared in schools. As a follow on from this we have decided to produce a Children Looked After Policy for schools. The CICC have worked with Melanie Stubbs, the Virtual Head to ensure the Child/Young Person's Promise is reflected in the policy.</p> <p>We are also producing a series of podcasts to support training with teachers in the future.</p>	



What we said we would focus on	Where we are now	What young people think
Care Experienced Young Inspectors	<p>It was agreed that Care Experienced Young Inspectors would help us to shape the services we provide in Durham County Council children’s residential homes.</p> <p>The inspectors will be developing a framework and toolkit, accessing training and support to allow them to carry out the role of a young inspector. The role will involve them visiting residential homes and sharing their views and observations on the services provided to the young people and their home.</p> <p>This work has been postponed due to Covid-19 but will be picked up again soon.</p> <p>In the meantime, we have been supporting our care experienced young people with opportunities to take part in interviews. This approach has seen a number of our care experienced young people lead in part of the interview process across a range of jobs by asking questions, leading discussions, rating presentations and making comments as part of the interview process. The skills built up through the interviewing process will be transferable as well as all the valued added to the interview process.</p>	

## Care Leavers Challenge

In February 2020, two councillors and two Durham County Council officers took part in the Care Leavers Challenge, living on £57.90 per week, which is what care leavers not in employment received.

Everyone found the challenge hard and it was agreed that we would use the learning from this to improve how we can support young people.

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 response took priority over this work in 2020 so we have not been able to make any progress, and the Care Leavers Challenge didn't happen in 2021 either. We hope to pick this up again in 2022.

Moving forward we will look at the key issues that came from the 2020 challenge:

- Direct debit payments for electricity and gas
- Transport



# Children in Care Council (CICC)

The CICC is a group for children and young people who are looked after in County Durham and is supported by Investing in Children. The CICC members meet monthly to talk about issues which are important to them, highlight what works and share stories of the support they have received. This forum is well established, with senior managers from within Children and Young People's Services and elected members who are on the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) regularly attending CICC meetings.

More information on the CICC can be found at [www.durhamcicc.co.uk](http://www.durhamcicc.co.uk)

## Co-opted positions for CICC members

Two young people from the CICC have co-opted positions on the CPP providing panel representation from the CICC. They attend each meeting (supported by Investing in Children) to share feedback from the CICC. In addition, the CICC have a standing item on each CPP agenda, where they provide feedback from CICC meetings, ensuring members of the CPP hear real unfiltered feedback directly from the young people. The young people are involved in decision making within the CPP, which is fed back to leads to influence service decisions and developments as necessary.

## Joint CICC/CPP meetings

In addition to the formal CPP meetings, children and young people from the CICC (supported by Investing in Children) host a joint meeting with the CPP every six months.

The young people set the agenda for the meeting and invite members and officers of the CPP to attend to meet with the CICC. During 2020 these meetings were postponed but will be re-started from July 2021 using Zoom instead of having a meeting. We also hope this will encourage more councillors to take part as they won't need to travel to attend the meetings.

These meetings are less formal than the CPP meeting and provide an opportunity for all of the young people who are part of the CICC to raise issues which are important to them and have discussions directly with members and officers of the CPP and have their ideas, suggestions and comments heard.

Feedback from the discussions is collated by Investing in Children and key issues are presented by the young people from the CICC at a formal CPP meeting, for further discussion. Work takes place to address these issues within the service, and feedback is provided to the CICC at the next joint meeting.

## CICC catch ups

During 2020 CPP meetings were cancelled so virtual monthly meetings were set up with the CICC, the Chair and Vice Chair of the CPP, the Head of Children's Social Care and some of the senior managers from the service so that young people were still able to have contact with the Panel on a regular basis.

When the CPP meetings were re-started they were virtual and every two months instead of monthly, so that regular contact with the CPP could be maintained.

Some of the things we discussed at these meetings were:

- Activities young people had been getting involved with during lockdown e.g. cooking, exercise, DIY and water fights
- The importance of seeing friends, which is now included in young people's plans
- Paying for bus passes while colleges were closed/ deductions from bursaries
- Pets in residential homes, and also about pets being included in safety plans (more info on page 22)



- Use of language including the term 'vulnerable' (more info on page 23)
- Pocket money/varying amounts (more info on page 22)
- Intergenerational work
- Podcast (more info on page 11)

## CICC newsletters

Young people from the CICC produced newsletters during lockdown. These were shared across the service, with children and young people and with the CPP. They were also shared with the Children's Commissioner for England.



We continue to support CICC with the newsletter on a monthly basis and have provided a link with Durham County Council's marketing team to support young people to understand the editorial role and become a 'young editor' for the newsletter.

More information on the CICC can be found at: [www.durhamcicc.co.uk/cicc-newsletters](http://www.durhamcicc.co.uk/cicc-newsletters)

## Monthly Corporate Parenting Panel briefings

To ensure members of the CPP remained sighted on the work taking place across the service to support children and young people in response to the pandemic, monthly newsletters were produced and circulated.

These included updates from all partners of the CPP including Aycliffe Secure Centre, the Virtual School and health colleagues. Updates also included key performance data.

## What happened in lockdown

- A virtual Children in Care Council (CICC) quiz night took place.
- Some of the children in foster care had fun online with their social workers during their one to one's including playing virtual hide and seek, reading stories together, finding shapes in the clouds, discussing blogs and talking about TikTok.
- Investing in Children hosted an easter egg competition and young people sent in photos of their entries. Here are the top three:



- CICC members supported Investing in Children with a successful funding bid, securing £2,500 to fund summer packs at £50 per pack, which went to children, young people or families who needed additional resources during the summer holidays while we were in lockdown. The packs were personalised based on the young people's interests e.g. paint brushes, outdoor games, sketch books, notebooks etc.



CICC members really wanted to impact on the Covid-19 crisis and worked on the project to do something nice for others and were nominated for a High Sheriff Award because of this work.

More information about the summer packs can be found in this short film on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)



- Young people from one of our children's homes raised money for Stray Aid, a local dog shelter. They set up a Just Giving page and raised over £600 to help support the dogs by doing a sponsored bike ride, which was over 30 miles!
- CICC members met with workers from the Children's Commissioner for England's Office and the National Police Chief Council to discuss their experience of coming into care and their experience of the police, which will feed into the review of the National Police Chief Council strategy.
- Young people in residential care receive Christmas gifts from a Durham company, and they were particularly generous this year. The young people were so pleased with the gifts they received that they used their 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 was moved when she viewed the montage and impressed 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 to the company.

- Young people have developed podcasts:
  - One young person from the CICC launched his podcast 'We are No Different Episode 1' on [Spotify.com](https://www.spotify.com) good news will be shared in the podcast and members of the CPP and staff within the service are invited to take part in future to share interesting stories.

- Two CICC members have done a podcast called 'Experiencing the care system' where they talk openly about their experiences of care and everyday life. They discuss the benefits that foster carers bring to the lives of young people in County Durham, along with valuing the contribution carers and staff have made during Covid-19. Listen to Episode 1 on [Spotify.com](https://www.spotify.com)

If you have any ideas for future podcasts, please get in touch.



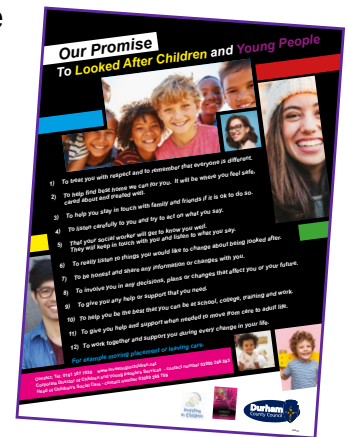
- Mini-Corporate Parenting Panel meetings have been introduced to enable young people to comment on events over the last twelve months. This initiative has been very well received.



- Young people's experiences of the pandemic were captured through creative activities, such as the production of videos, poetry and photographs. An e-book called Lockdown Diaries was produced to capture this work, which you can view at [www.issuu.com](https://www.issuu.com)

# Local Offer for care leavers

- Young People from the CICC are involved in supporting us with Durham County Council's promise. The promise launched officially on Friday 26 October 2018 and is regularly reviewed to make sure it is fit for purpose, and that we are doing what we have said we will do. If we are not, the young people can raise this at a CICC meeting so that action is taken.
- In response to the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, when care leavers were approaching 18 years of age and their current placement was due to end, we extended this where possible in line with their wishes.
- In Christmas 2019, members donated money from their budgets to pay for our care leavers to go for a Christmas meal. This was due to be repeated in 2020, however due to lockdown restrictions it was not possible – so instead the money was put towards hampers for the young people.
- We continue to pay young people who are on income maintenance allowance an additional £20 a week to match the government's additional £20 Universal Credit payment. This is in place until September.
- Work is ongoing to develop the Staying Close project where young people leaving care can continue to live close to, and access support from, their former children's home.
- A drop-in centre for care leavers is being developed.
- The care leavers hub at Sherburn Hill has been refurbished to offer cooking, shower and laundry facilities. We continue to work with care leavers and staff to develop the hub to meet the support needs of our young people.



## Drive project

The project supports young people by providing driving

lessons, up to the value of £500. The project pays for one lesson, the young person pays for the next lesson, and so on then the project pays for the first theory test and one practical test. This is available for looked after young people

aged 17+ and care leavers up to the age of 21 (25 if in full time education).

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic restrictions the project was on hold last year but Investing in Children are working through their database to see which young people are in a position to start their lessons when restrictions are eased.

# Regulation 44 inspections



The Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 requires that an independent person should undertake an unannounced visit to all children's homes at least once a month (Regulation 44). The independent person must produce a report about the visit which sets out whether:

- Children are effectively safeguarded, and
- The conduct of the home promotes children's wellbeing.

Regulation 44 reports come to each Corporate Parenting Panel meeting highlighting any issues or concerns.

In March 2020, we moved from onsite Regulation 44 visits to virtual visits using Microsoft Teams enabling all of our children's homes to continue to benefit from a monthly visit.















During the virtual visit there is an opportunity for the visitor to interview the registered manager, in the same way as they would when on site, ensuring oversight and evidence for the monthly report. The visitor can also see the home by a virtual tour and through photographic evidence which is sent by the registered manager.

During the virtual visit there is also an opportunity for the visitor to speak with the young people to gather their views as well as being able to speak with members of the care team, parents and social workers etc, in much the same way as they did before using emails, phone calls and Microsoft Teams when needed.

Elected members who are aligned to each home receive copies of the monthly reports to ensure they receive regular updates and retain oversight.

**New inspectors will be identified after the local elections in May 2021.**

# Councillors responsible for Regulation 44 inspections April 2020 – March 2021

Home/Councillor	
<b>Tow Law</b> Cllr Anne Reed	
<b>Park House</b> Cllr Ivan Jewell	
<b>High Etherley</b> Cllr Christine Wilson	
<b>West Rainton</b> Cllr Jude Considine	
<b>9 Cedar Drive</b> Cllr Pauline Crathorne	
<b>Coxhoe</b> Cllr Liz Maddison	
<b>Moorside</b> Cllr Beaty Bainbridge	
<b>New Lea House</b> Cllr Jude Considine	
<b>Framwellgate Moor</b> Cllr Mamie Simmons	
<b>(Auckland - secure)</b> Cllr George Richardson	
<b>(Barnard - secure)</b> Cllr Ivan Jewell	
<b>(Lumley - secure)</b> Cllr Eunice Huntington	
<b>(Walworth - secure)</b> Cllr Joe Makepeace	
<b>(Durham House - secure)</b> Cllr Elizabeth Scott	

# Key performance data 2020/21

- There were 950 children in care at the end of March 2021, with the long-term increasing trend continuing. The rate of children looked after per 10,000 children remains lower than the North East average.
- **Although the overall number of children looked after has increased, fewer children entered care in 2020/21 but Covid-19 impacted on the number of children leaving care during most of the year.**
- 55 children were adopted in 2020/21. This equates to 18% of all children leaving care which is higher than in England and the North East in 2019/20.
- **Around eight in ten of our children in care are placed in foster care or with friends and family. We have seen a reduction in children placed with in-house foster carers during the year, as Covid-19 had a direct impact on foster carers, for example choosing not to take on new placements or to deregister for their own health reasons.**
- 86% of children looked after who had been in care for at least 12 months had an up-to-date health assessment, but there was a significant reduction in dental checks as a direct impact of Covid-19. It has slowly began to increase as dental surgeries reopen.
- **92 children looked after were recorded as missing, accounting for 483 missing episodes. A return to home interview was completed for over 80% of missing episodes, an increase from last year. A child/ young person can refuse this.**
- 66% of our care leavers aged 17-18 were in education, employment and training, above the 2019/20 national rate of 64%.
- **63% of our care leavers aged 19-21 were in education, employment and training, above the 2019/20 national rate of 53%.**
- 94% of our care leavers aged 17-18 were in suitable accommodation, above the 2019/20 national rate of 90%.
- **96% of our care leavers aged 19-21 were in suitable accommodation, above the 2019/20 national rate of 85%.**
- Due to Covid-19, KS2 SATS's were cancelled, therefore there is no KS2 data to report this year.
- **There were 35 young people in the KS4 reporting cohort. 11 of them attended specialist provision, 5 attended alternative provision or independent school, 18 attended mainstream secondary and 1 was in a young offenders institute. Our cohort has continued to perform well at GCSE (grades 9-4) and significant improvements have been made in Maths.**
- We are delighted to report further improvement from 2019, with a positive 3-year trend in pupils achieving Maths at Grade 4+. English grades 9-4 results showed a slight dip, but this follows significant improvements made over the last two years. There was a very positive 3% increase in pupils achieving the higher grades in Maths, with young people achieving grades 9-5 basics rising.
- **43% of Durham looked after children had an identified special educational need (SEN) in 2019-20 with 19% of them supported by an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP). This has remained static over the last two years.**





# Education, employment and training

## Work with further education providers

DurhamWorks and the Young People's Service have strong links with local colleges and meetings take place throughout the year to support transition events. Activities take place to share information and ensure early identification of young people with care experience to prevent disengagement of vulnerable students. Employment, education and training meetings are held monthly and have representation from the further education and regional higher education sector.

## Transition support

Looked after young people are supported to make an effective sustained transition into post-16 education, employment and training through our new DurhamWorks Programme for Schools. They are offered one-to-one mentoring support, as well as the opportunity to participate in group activities in identified schools, which focus on transition support, improving motivation, as well as work related learning and enterprise.



## Post-16 support

Looked after young people and care leavers receive wrap-a-round support from their named specialist progression adviser in order to sustain their progression into education, employment or training or to re-engage them in learning if they are NEET.

## Apprenticeships

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Durham County Council was forced to reduce its apprenticeship recruitment programme during 2020-2021, which also impacted on the number of care leavers who were recruited. However, plans are currently being developed for 2021-2022 recruitment, which will again include ring-fenced positions specifically for care leavers.



As part of the Government's Covid-19 recovery plan, Durham County Council is offering a number of positions to unemployed young people through the Kickstart Scheme. Up to nine positions have been ring-fenced for care leavers, covering a broad range of occupational areas.

Supporting more young people in care and care leavers into sustained post-16 education, employment and training is a key priority for Durham County Council and is a recognition of its importance in improving the life chances of young people in our care and care leavers in terms of their future income, health, sense of wellbeing and purpose.

## DurhamWorks

Additional support is provided to our young people in care and care leavers aged 16-24 through the DurhamWorks Programme. This is a European funded, Durham County Council led partnership project that supports young people aged 16-24 who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training) and resident in County Durham to progress into education, employment or training. The funding which will provide additional support to our young people in care and care leavers through DurhamWorks is available until December 2023.

Further details of DurhamWorks can be found at [www.durhamworks.info](http://www.durhamworks.info)

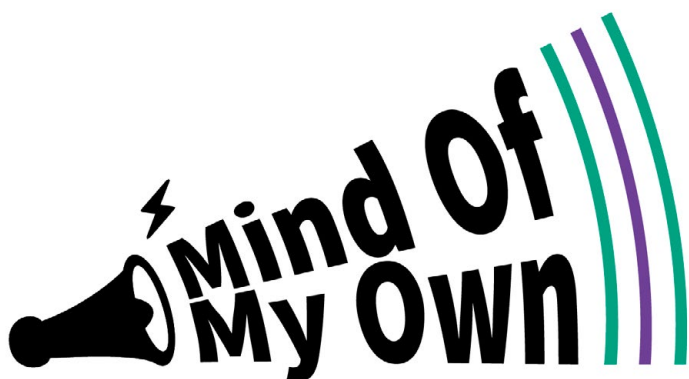
# Celebrations

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, we were unable to host any awards or celebration events in 2020/21.

For the future, young people have asked us to consider hosting virtual 'Celebration events' now that people are getting better at using IT. They also suggested that people they know should present their awards, not important people who they don't know.



## Mind of My Own app



We started using Mind of My Own which is a unique digital communication tool for children and young people that supports Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Mind of My Own has been co-produced with children and young people to give a platform for them to easily share their lived experiences at a time that is convenient for them and to have their voices heard.

There are two apps which allow children and young people to communicate with their workers:

- The 'One App' is aimed at children and young people aged 8 years+ who can use the app more independently to prepare for and reflect upon meetings, visits, life events, achievements and problems.

- The 'Express App', for children aged 7 and under and for children and young people with additional needs, can be accessed through the support of a worker to create a one-page profile which shares their views, wishes and feelings.

Some of our young people are ambassadors for Mind of My Own and designed a leaflet for the children and young people's launch event on 9 April.

More information can be found at [www.mindofmyown.org.uk](http://www.mindofmyown.org.uk)





Melanie Stubbs' first year in post as virtual head has been an eventful one. Despite the constraints of Covid-19 and the impact it has had on education, there have been many opportunities to support our children in care to achieve the best possible outcomes for their future. Communication with carers and social workers has been an important part of the process to support children back into education following two lockdowns.

In Durham, school attendance is good for our children in care, and there have been no permanent exclusions since 2014.

The Personal Education Plan (PEP) process has been met favourably by all who use it and has enabled the virtual school caseworkers to monitor the progress of children and young people and champion for the best outcomes. This process allows the PEP's to move with the child electronically as they move through each Key Stage.

Training has been offered to designated teachers and governors to support the implementation of the new PEP system. Early years and post 16 are now part of this system, which has supported smooth transitions to the next phase for children.

Caseworkers work with schools to identify what is best for the child and can advise them about the range of interventions we can put in place to best meet the needs of the child. The Virtual School recognises the effects of attachment and trauma and has worked with the different therapeutic services within the County to ensure we offer schools the best advice at the right time. We have developed our links with Full Circle to provide a helpline to schools for advice and training. With the support of Durham Counselling

services and Education Psychology, children who are looked after should receive support in a timely manner. In addition to this we offer occupational therapy support through Future Steps, giving schools access to assessments when a need is identified.

The Virtual School Head has attended meetings with the young people from the Children in Care Council (CICC) and is forging close links to help them get their voice heard in education. CICC have led a training session for designated teachers and have contributed to a Children Looked After Policy to be shared with schools in May 2021. Further work is planned with CICC as we move into the future.

During lockdown the Virtual School worked with schools and gave an additional £50 for each child to purchase a licence for home learning, or other materials to support carers with home schooling.

A transition workbook was also prepared and posted to all Year 6 children who were moving to secondary school in September 2020.

A circular callout with a yellow center and a light green outer ring, containing the text: 

**In Durham,  
school attendance  
is good for our  
children in care, and  
there have been no  
permanent  
exclusions since  
2014.**

# Aycliffe Secure Centre



Aycliffe Secure Centre was judged “outstanding” in all areas at its full inspection in September 2019, and an assurance visit by Ofsted in November 2020 found high standards had been maintained despite the difficulties posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Aycliffe Secure Centre provides secure accommodation for up to 38 young people, 8 of whom are sentenced or remanded by the Youth Custody Service. In addition to this there is occupancy for 30 young people accommodated for their own or others safety, under Section 25 of the Children’s Act 1989, commissioned by Local Authorities.

The background experiences and needs of all our young people are usually very similar irrespective of their legal order therefore, the

living accommodation and socialisation for all young people is determined by the risk assessment of the individual and the current group. Young people are not placed in a specific house, solely on whether they are here on welfare or a custodial sentence/status. The centre operates a single sex house for girls, one for boys and one home for young people with particularly complex needs. Gender on the other two houses is decided by the market demand of referrals. Over this period, the centre has only had four houses in operation due to Covid-19 restrictions and the impact on staffing.

The philosophy of the centre is one of ‘Exceptional Parenting’. We aim to ensure that all our young people have opportunities to enrich their lives. The centre also follows the SECURE STAIRS

framework and is now in the early stages of working towards Enabling Environments.

As a result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, there has been considerable change in managing referrals, admissions and discharges and the direct care and education of young people. The centre has also started to look at its recovery and an Aycliffe specific roadmap is in place, aligned to national milestones.

The centre has faced many challenges throughout this period of uncertainty and no practice has remained unaffected in some way. Key highlights and achievements include:

- The Covid-19 recovery plan is fully implemented, and a roadmap has been developed to continue to aid this positive direction of travel.

- Nationally recognised Butler Award commendation awarded to the lead nurse for her excellence in maintaining a Covid-19 safe environment.
- No positive Covid-19 cases within the population of young people.
- Despite restrictions, all families were offered a face to face visit at Christmas.
- Implementation of lateral flow testing facilities.
- A significant and maintained reduction in incidents.
- The school has remained open throughout this entire period.
- Contribution to the final Anna Freud evaluation.
- Significant improvements in the physical environment of the centre.
- Continued utilisation of digital solutions to facilitate young person contact with parents and professionals and to ensure Mental Health (Kolvin) and Substance Misuse (Humankind) services.
- The local SECURE STAIRS implementation plan is now fully implemented.
- 108 multi-agency staff have attended 5-day Trauma-Informed Practice for Children and Young People training.
- 64 psychological formulation meetings and 598 attendances.

- Positive feedback from young people, parents and professionals.
- Recognition for achieving the Investor in Children award for 10 consecutive years.

Aycliffe Secure Centre has continued upgrading facilities during the pandemic as well as working on plans for the transition home, which will be a registered children's home, accommodating young people from the centre who are no longer on secure orders as it can be difficult to find places for children once they have been in secure accommodation.

Marking celebrations and occasions has almost become more important during this period, there have been individual celebrations of significant milestones as well as special dates in the calendar. This has included:

- Birthday parties, including an 18th birthday celebration
- Winter wonderland ball
- Centre-wide Christmas buffet
- Pets and animals being brought into the centre
- Christmas house decoration competition
- Special end of term assembly
- Visit from DJ



We also work with our catering company to ensure that food is both nutritious and meets the tastes and needs of all our young people, and one of the suggestions they made was to have a themed night where food from different countries and cultures is tried. This has been established on Wednesday nights - so far, the Indian curry night has been the favourite! These activities have been embraced and enjoyed.

**“To all staff, I just want to say a big thank you. Thank you for always being there to listen to my problems. Also, I just want to say thanks for trying to make Christmas as good as possible. Many Thanks, love [young person].”**

## Children's homes

We offer residential services for children and young people, providing support and care for young people who cannot live at home or who require a short break away from their family or carer.

- The children's home in Sacriston was registered with Ofsted in early January 2021 and the young people who now live in their new home love their new posh pad, especially the bedrooms which they designed as part of the moving in plans.
- The move from Cedar Drive has happened and the young people are settling into their new home in Aycliffe enjoying their swanky rooms and all their new space and lovely garden.
- Park House, our short break home was closed temporarily from March 2020 due to Covid-19, but it reopened in June 2020 when the guidance and restrictions allowed and welcomed back their children and young people along with some new children and young people who have settled right in.
- After much searching, a property for the edge of care provision has been identified and we are hoping that all goes well with the purchase and plans to ensure we are supporting our children, young people, families and carers.
- The children's home at Coxhoe is currently going through the planning process.

## Fostering and adoption

- During the pandemic, foster carers received additional telephone supervision from their fostering social worker to explore any issues or concerns for the families and the children/young people in their care. For example, if someone got Covid-19, or if people had to self-isolate, a Covid-19 plan was developed with each foster carer.
- Newsletters and links to resources and activities were regularly shared with foster carers and their foster children.
- Many examples of positive feedback from foster carers and the other professionals were received.

**“ We really do feel privileged to be prioritised so early in having the covid injection/protection by the Fostering Service. We think it does show how much the service does value us as Foster Carers. ”**

- As part of Foster Care Fortnight (11-24 May 2020), the National Association of Virtual School Heads Board asked Virtual School Head Teachers to share what foster carers were doing during the lockdown to help children in care with their learning.

- Young people's guides which help children and young people to understand what foster care is and what they can expect to happen when they first come to live in their new foster family have continued to be sent to carers of children in care.



- The Adoption Team responded to increased enquiries over the last year and the preparation groups for prospective adopters were delivered virtually. One prospective adopter said:

**“ I feel I now know more about the correct way to help the child (whilst keeping in mind that every child and situation is different). The training was creative, with a mix of slides and personal experiences, which stuck in my head.... very informative and enjoyable, it was clear the amount of effort that has been put into the new format of this training and I'm grateful to be involved.”**

**adopt**  
Coast to Coast

launched virtually on 1 April 2021. The three spokes, Cumbria, Durham and Together for Children will continue to provide their current adoption services from first contact. The key priority areas for 2021/22 are:

- ✓ To establish Adopt Coast to Coast as the 'go to' agency for those interested in adopting,
  - ✓ To develop branding so it is recognisable alongside and separately to the Local Authority partners,
  - ✓ To continually review the outcome of marketing activity to ensure best value and best return on investment,
  - ✓ To ensure the prospective adopter's 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.
- Full Circle staff adapted the training packages so that they could be delivered virtually, and the helpline funded by the Adoption Support Fund provided immediate support to adoptive parents and Special Guardianship Order carers struggling with the experience of lockdown while caring for children who have experienced trauma. This service was positively received by those who accessed it.



# Achievements

- Young people highlighted the importance of pets and animals in their lives, and how this helps with relationship building and their mental wellbeing.



On the back of this, discussions took place within the service and staff were asked to be less risk adverse and try to accommodate animals or consider what changes could be made to support this.

Young people had been asked to be mindful to ensure that all those in the home were receptive to having pets and as a result, a number of children's homes have introduced pet hamsters.

Some of the children's homes have also implemented 'dog-fostering' when staff members bring their dogs into the home for a few days, enabling the young people to care for the dog and participate in walking, feeding and grooming.

One home has an allotment with chickens, one young person is helping a horse owner to care for their horse and another is volunteering at a local animal shelter.

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.

The importance of animals is being discussed with foster carers, to try and accommodate young people's wishes around having pets or being with animals.

- Young people shared details of the Coram Voice 'Positive Matters' campaign at a Corporate Parenting Panel, to challenge stigma and share positive stories about children in care. As a result, we have added 'Proud Moments' to each meeting agenda

where we share positive stories about our young people.

We are very proud that a young person from the Children in Care Council was selected as one of only 25 young people nationally to become a National Voice Ambassador for Coram Voice. Coram Voice is a national charity for the rights of children who are either in, or, leaving care, which aims to ensure children's rights are upheld, and, that their voices and experiences inform and improve the systems that care for them.

- Young people highlighted that there were disparities in pocket money and other entitlements in residential homes across the County.

A working group was formed to look at all money and incentives including pocket money, birthday money, Christmas presents, college attendance, good behaviour rewards, presents for families etc.

As a result of their work, a decision was made to keep the current system of pocket money and incentives to encourage young people to pull their weight in the home.

Pocket money will be increased, and an annual review will take place for pocket money and incentives, which will be led by the young people, supported by staff within the service. It is anticipated that the review will take place in September / October each year to coincide with the budget cycle.

A similar activity will be undertaken within foster care groups, with benchmark guidance produced for pocket money and incentives, then the information will be included in the updated Young People's guides.

- Young people raised concerns about the Wi-Fi in our children's homes.

Work took place with young people to establish what the problem was, and to discuss the solution and as a result it was felt that a full Wi-Fi upgrade was needed for all the homes.





This work was undertaken around the Covid-19 restrictions and, moving forward, any new homes will have the new Wi-Fi requirements built into the specifications from the outset.

- Laptops were delivered to children and young people who were identified as requiring one under the national government scheme. This includes children in care including those out of county in foster care and residential children's homes. Where children did not have internet access, they were also provided with a 4G router.

This helped young people to stay in touch with friends, family and workers during lockdown, and to help with schoolwork during virtual lessons.



- Looked After Reviews were facilitated on Microsoft Teams, and the Independent Reviewing Officer service devised five questions to be sent to the children, young people and their carers/family after every meeting to capture their views and feed into any improvement work for the service.
- The number of children and young people attending meetings increased by a third in April 2020 in comparison to March 2020, which was really good to see.

- Digital family time sessions were supported and were able to continue in line with Covid regulations. The following feedback was received:

**“We are so grateful we are getting to see him like this and see how he’s changing. We know every day when we’re getting up that we’re getting something from him. It’s getting us through the week, we don’t know what we would do without this.”**

**“Thank you so much for the regular updates about my children, I miss them and love them more than anything in this world! I’m so very grateful for all communication the Local Authority allow me to have with them.”**

**“It has been brilliant just to see their faces during this awful time, I am so pleased your service offered this to us so I could still get to see them.”**

- Although lots of work has been done around language, young people felt that the word ‘vulnerable’ was being overly used during the pandemic. The young people don’t like to be referred to as being vulnerable, because many of them do not feel as if they are actually vulnerable.

Work will take place to look at the use of the word across the service, and it is hoped that this will improve as we move on from the pandemic.

- Young people have continued to deliver training sessions.
  - Children in Care Council (CICC) members delivered development sessions to 48 Durham and Sunderland University social work students about the importance of language and gave an overview of what Durham County Council have done to develop relationships with the young people.
  - Between October 2020 and March 2021, training has been delivered virtually by the CICC to 32 future foster carers over three sessions. Younger CICC members shadowed this training so that they will be able to get involved in the delivery in the future.
  - Over 50 designated teacher leads participated in virtual development sessions, led by CICC members, amplifying key messages about how education and support should work best for the young people. The future aim for CICC is to support the development of a school-based education policy for care experienced young people in line with Durham Virtual School Team.
- Investing in Children are working with 45 Durham County Council teams, who have achieved the Investing in Children's membership award or are working towards this, including Children Looked After Teams, Families First Teams and One Point Centres. 18 of these teams have the Investing in Children Gold Award, for being awarded membership over a 10-year period.



- In terms of the health and mental health of our children in care, the County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) increased its workforce by appointing a dedicated Designated Nurse for looked after children adding to those already in designated safeguarding and looked after children roles.

The CCG has continued to work with health and council colleagues to improve the timeliness of initial health assessments and the availability of health plans at the first looked after review.

The CCG has also been working with the Fostering Network towards achieving a Fostering Friendly Employer Award.

- County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust (CDDFT) has continued to deliver initial health assessments during the pandemic, initially these were virtual assessments, but each child has also had a follow up face to face appointment to ensure a thorough health assessment was undertaken. An audit was also undertaken to compare what was discussed in the virtual and the face to face appointments and learning will be shared.
- Harrogate and District Foundation Trust appointed two specialist nurses for children in care, which has enabled us to:
  - engage with a young person in a residential care home who had previously refused to participate in their last two review health assessments,
  - support a young person with a complex hospital appointment to ensure all health needs are being met,
  - support all children in residential care homes and children at home placed with parents on a care order on a regular basis.
- Young people suggested that 'social worker profiles' are created for young people so that they have their work contact details but also get to know a little bit about their social workers e.g. if they have children, if they have any pets, any likes or dislikes, what their favourite food is, what movies they like etc. It was felt that this would help give young

people something to talk to them about in the early days.

The young people said that they would like the cards to have a picture of their social worker on so that this can form part of their care experience journey.

- We received a request from the Children's Commissioner for England's Office to gather the views of our children in care and care leavers to inform an update of the National Police Chiefs' Council's strategy on policing children and young people. The aim was to ensure the strategy is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and has children's rights front and centre.

The Children's Commissioner's office hosted focus groups with the CICC to get young people's views. From these, a number of recommendations were pulled together by the Children's Commissioner's Office and handed over to the National Police Chiefs' Council to use to inform their strategy. Feedback from this work will be used to inform service decisions moving forward.

Young people said that in some cases the police had said to them that they were going 'on holiday' when in fact they were being placed in care.



- Five CICC members were involved in a collaborative project with South Tyneside Council, Blue Cabin and Liverpool Hope University (funded by the Department for Education) to work with Children in Care Councils to understand what has happened during the Covid-19 pandemic. The aim is to establish what worked well/not so well and share this learning.
- The young people shared how the Durham CICC and Durham County Council's Corporate Parenting Panel connected virtually and maintained good communication channels during this difficult period.



# Priorities for 2021/22

- Transport – again following the Care Leavers Challenge, how we can support young people with their transport issues and costs which eat up a large proportion of budget and are a significant barrier to travel for education, work and social activities.
- Ensure that we consistently use child friendly language across our services based on the feedback from children and young people.
- Care Experienced Young Inspectors – roll out the programme which has been on hold due to the pandemic – as outlined on page 8.
- Sessional employment – paid opportunities to be involved with County Council activities such as events to gain skills and experience.



## Contact details

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