



Corporate Parenting Panel

Date **Friday 18 February 2022**
Time **9.30 am**
Venue **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham**

Business

Part A

Items which are open to the press and public

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2022 (Pages 3 - 12)
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Number of Looked After Children - Verbal update from Head of Children's Social Care
6. Ofsted Updates - Verbal update from Head of Children's Social Care
7. Proud Moments - Verbal update from Strategic Manager, Looked After Children Resources
8. Investing in Children / Children in Care Council Update - Presentation by Project Officer, Investing in Children (Pages 13 - 16)
9. Place Based Approach to Early Help for Children and Families in Durham - Report and Presentation by Strategic Manager, Early Help and Think Family Services (Pages 17 - 36)
10. Children Looked After with a Disability Annual Update - Report and Presentation by Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 37 - 54)
11. Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service - Report of Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 55 - 68)
12. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

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

Part B

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

14. Regulation 44 Visits and Regulatory Body Ratings of Children's Residential Homes - Report of Head of Children's Social Care and Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children (Pages 69 - 80)
15. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

Helen Lynch

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
10 February 2022

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

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)
Councillor M Walton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, B Bainbridge, C Bell, J Charlton, B Coult, S Deinali, C Fletcher, J Griffiths, O Gunn, T Henderson, C Hood, C Hunt, J Miller, I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, S Townsend and Varty

Co-opted Members

C Baines, J Bell, L Burns, A Ferguson, W Taylor
Young persons representative - Children in Care Council CiCC)

Contact: Jill Hogg

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DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 28 January 2022** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Simmons in the Chair

Members of the Panel:

Councillors Adcock-Foster, Bainbridge, Charlton, Coult, Deinali, Griffiths, Gunn, Henderson, Hunt, Roberts, Robson, Rooney, Townsend, Varty and Walton

Co-opted Members:

C Baines and J Bell

Also Present:

Stephen Crass – Progression Coordinator

Helen Fergusson - Head of Children's Social Care

Robert Johnson - Project Manager, Investing in Children, and Caitlyn Gray from the Children in Care Council

Heather McFarlane - Designated Nurse, Safeguarding and Looked After Children

Alison Middleton – Solicitor, Childcare Team

Martyn Stenton - Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children

Melanie Stubbs - Head of the Virtual School

Jayne Watson - Senior Partnerships Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bell, Fletcher, Hood and Miller, Co-opted Members Alison Ferguson and Wendy Taylor and from officers Kelsey Clayton, Jodie Henderson and Claire Morris.

2. Substitute Members

No substitute Members were in attendance.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. The Senior Partnerships Officer reported the following matters arising:

- Item 6 - An email of thanks had been sent to Selwyn Morgans, Anne Haigh and Claire Morris in recognition of the good Ofsted inspection findings in respect of Aycliffe Centre and High Etherley and Framwellgate Moor Children's Homes.
- Item 8 - The language document had been circulated to the Panel for information and six-monthly updates on the use of language had been added to the future work programme.
- Item 9 - Family Time location pictures, before and after, had been shared with Councillor Miller. The Communications team had increased media coverage relating to positive news stories of the care experience and the promotion of fostering. The charity fundraising link which had been shared with the Panel had succeeded in reaching the target.
- Item 11 - The Care Leavers' Hub will be launched in February, to which the Chair, Vice-Chair and Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People had been invited.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Number of Looked After Children

The Head of Children's Social Care updated the Panel that the number of children looked after stood at 929 which was a slight increase on the previous figure, however, figures over recent months remained fairly stable.

6. Ofsted Updates

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children was pleased to report that Aycliffe Secure Centre had retained its outstanding rating at the Ofsted inspection in November, a rating held since 2019. The inspection found warm and supportive relationships exist between the young people and staff and extremely effective partnership working takes place within the Centre. The inspectors commented that managers dealt with the challenges of the pandemic diligently and effectively which ensured the care, wellbeing and safety of the young people had not been compromised. The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children informed the Panel that a press release had been issued which also included information on the plans for the new transition unit at the Centre which had benefited from DfE funding.

The Head of Children's Social Care updated the Panel on the good Ofsted outcomes for Coxhoe, Framwellgate Moor and High Etherley children's homes. Feedback from inspectors acknowledged the high quality relationships between staff and young people and, in particular, the inspectors commented on the quality of the rooms which had been designed by the young people.

The Panel heard that following a recent recruitment drive, several new managers had been appointed and further developments in the pipeline include new deputy manager roles within each home. Further information on these developments will be presented to the Panel in the future.

The Chair congratulated all those involved.

Councillor Gunn remarked on the excellent work carried out at Aycliffe Centre in extremely challenging times. Referring to the transition unit, she commented that she was looking forward to seeing this project progress and she referred to the amount of work that had been carried out in order to secure DfE funding. The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children acknowledged that this had been a complicated piece of work which began in 2019 and he agreed it was pleasing to see that a funding package is now in place. He thanked the previous and present Portfolio Holders for Children and Young People for their support.

Councillor Gunn commented that she was pleased that the recent staff recruitment drive had been successful and she asked if further information was available on the impact of the fostering recruitment campaign and whether the service had given consideration to a television marketing campaign. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that a television advert for Durham's Fostering Service was being produced and it was expected to be aired for two weeks, one week in February and one week in May. In another new initiative, the display boards in the grounds of County Hall will be utilised to support the fostering campaign. Feedback on the impact of these initiatives will be shared with the Panel in due course.

The Head of Children's Social Care was pleased to report that this year will see the return of the annual Foster Carer Awards ceremony and the event, which Members will be invited to, is planned for early March.

The Head of Children's Social Care referred to the increasing digital presence via social media platforms and Members were provided with marketing materials which support specific fostering campaigns including children with disabilities and special needs, teenagers, unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and larger sibling groups.

In response to a question from Councillor Hunt as to whether Aycliffe Centre had returned to pre-Covid levels, the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children explained that staffing issues were being carefully monitored in light of the new COVID-19 variant and plans were being developed to review the reopening of the fifth home in March.

Councillor Varty spoke of how she was pleased to be part of the Fostering Panel which had given her the opportunity to witness the fantastic work carried out by foster carers and officers. The Chair echoed Councillor Varty's comments on the valuable work and congratulated all those involved in the work.

7. Proud moments

The Head of Children's Social Care shared stories that had made the service proud in recent months. The first story related to a project by young people at New Lea Children's Home. The young people were aware of a 'toilet-twinning' project and they secured £100 of donations for a toilet for a family in Afghanistan. The Head of Children's Social Care thanked the young people for their proactive work to help children living in more difficult circumstances and also thanked those who kindly donated.

The Panel also heard of a young person who is preparing to move into supported living arrangements and how she had been reflecting on the past whilst preparing for the future. She had commented that she feels loved and prepared for the next phase of her life, knowing that her family will continue to support her, just as they had done throughout the years. Her carers spoke of how proud they are of her and how they are pleased to see such a positive outcome for this young person.

The Head of Children's Social Care concluded by thanking the Chair for donating a 'corporate grandparent' gift of hand-knitted baby clothes which would be donated to a Care Leaver who had recently become a mother. The Head of Children's Social Care thanked the Chair for the kind gesture.

8. Investing in Children / Children in Care Council Update

Robert Johnson (IIC Project Manager) and Caitlyn Gray (CiCC representative) presented an update of the work of the CiCC since the previous meeting in November (for copy of presentation see file of minutes), including the following:

- Caitlyn reported that she had recently been appointed Head of the Children in Care Council.
- Referring to the Artstops project, twelve care experienced young people now have their art displayed in bus stops. Additional funding had enabled a wellbeing café to be held on Monday evenings at the Sjovell Centre and the young people are developing self-portraits. Durham County Council's Chief Executive is investigating further opportunities to develop the project as it has proved such a big success and Councillor Miller's request to extend the project into his electoral division is progressing.

- Two young people had been involved in delivering training to Sunderland University Social Work students, reflecting on their care experience, the support they had received and areas for improvement. The young people received excellent feedback and one of the young people is interested in undertaking similar work with the Fostering Panel.
- The young people are continuing their work on care plans and the use of language.
- The younger members of the CiCC are looking at identity and how they are viewed as individuals in a project called 'All About Me'. They hope to present this work to the Panel in the future.
- Caitlyn gave a big 'thank you' to Laura and Steph who are coordinating the celebration of Care Day this year and the young people are arranging a separate event to take place in April, to which the Panel Members will be invited.
- The CiCC is working with Newcastle University Street Law project, where 'Street Law Ambassadors' work with youth groups and schools to deliver sessions on legal policies and procedures which affect young people.
- One young person who had been particularly committed to working with the police and had participated in training sessions with the police had used the experience and positive feedback she gained from this work to help secure a full time job.
- A further peer mentoring session is being planned to be held during February half term and the CiCC would like Members to attend the session to offer their support, as the wider group members have expressed that they would like the opportunity to spend more time getting to know Panel Members.
- The sixth edition of the CiCC will be circulated to the Panel.

Councillor Hunt congratulated Caitlyn on her promotion and, referring to the artwork, asked how copies may be purchased. The Project Manager advised that Members wishing to purchase copies from the artist could do by contacting him.

Councillor Walton echoed Councillor Hunt's congratulations to Caitlyn and thanked her for informing the young people about the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel. She added that the Panel will welcome the opportunity to attend their events. Referring to the success of the Artstops project she asked how the young people involved in the project felt about having their artwork displayed. Caitlyn responded that they had been thrilled to see their art on display and for some it had provided a boost to their confidence.

Councillor Townsend commented on Caitlyn's commitment and leadership adding that she should be proud of the work she is doing to help and encourage others.

She spoke of how much she had enjoyed the recent event she had attended and reiterated Councillor Walton's comments that Members will be keen to attend future events.

Councillor Gunn added her thanks and congratulations to Caitlyn and spoke of how she is proud of all the work that Caitlyn and the young people are carrying out. She suggested that in the future, the young people may wish to consider linking up with Durham's Police and Crime Commissioner as there would be much to be gained from this partnership.

Referring to the fostering marketing campaign, Heather McFarlane, Designated Nurse for Safeguarding and Looked After Children suggested that the artwork could be featured in future television adverts. The Head of Children's Social Care responded that this suggestion would be considered in the future.

Councillor Coult asked whether digital copies of the artwork were available. The Head of Inclusion and Vulnerable Children responded that digital images were available and the details would be recirculated to the Panel.

The Senior Partnerships Officer informed the Panel that a full list of dates of future events would be compiled and circulated to Members, with the Artstops information and the CiCC newsletter.

9. Virtual School Annual Report Summary

The Head of the Virtual school presented the Virtual School Annual Report for 2020-21 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that the report covered the Academic Year from September 2020 to July 2021. The Head of the Virtual School explained that as of July 2021 there were 573 Durham Looked After Children of statutory school age, up to the age of 16 and the work of the Virtual School extends post-16, to provide a smooth transition. Some young people attend schools outside of the County due to care arrangements or specific needs, however, this does not disadvantage them as they have access to the same support as those attending schools within the County.

The Head of the Virtual School highlighted that 61% of young people attended a school rated by Ofsted as good or better and explained that some schools had not been inspected since 2018 and that some had recently converted to an academy therefore their current Ofsted rating was unavailable. The Virtual School places extra scrutiny on schools which are rated as 'requires improvement' or below, to ensure that the young people within the school are well supported. The need for stability is a key consideration therefore a child who is settled and happy in a school would be moved only for safeguarding reasons.

The Virtual School Head referred to the 49% of Durham children looked after who had an identified special need and provided information on the strategies in place to support these children.

The Panel noted difficulties in reporting attendance over the last academic year, due to Covid measures and school closures, with overall attendance for children looked after being 89.3%. As the cohort fell into the group required to continue to attend school, if carers felt it necessary for their children to stay at home, this was classed as unauthorised absence. However, attendance for the autumn term for the current academic year was 93% which reflected that, under normal circumstances, children looked after have good school attendance. The Panel noted there had been no permanent exclusions since 2014.

The Panel heard that the COVID-19 pandemic had also impacted upon assessments and exams with no Key Stage 1 or 2 results available and outcomes for Year 11 students being based on teacher assessed grades. The Panel noted the 2020 -2021 cohort achieved well.

The Virtual School Head outlined areas for development which include to continue to raise awareness of early trauma on behaviours and learning and to work with the Children in Care Council, school governors and designated teachers to ensure a consistent approach. The Virtual School Head stressed the importance of stability within the school setting as, in cases where placements break down, school may be the only stability in a young person's life.

The Panel noted Durham had been selected as part of a pilot scheme to receive Pupil Premium Plus funding to support Care Leavers attending further education colleges.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10. Supporting Care Leavers into Education, Employment and Training

The Committee received a report on the support available to Care Leavers to enable them to progress into Education, Employment and Training presented by Stephen Crass, Progression Co-ordinator (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Progression Co-ordinator outlined the wide range of support available including:

- the DurhamWorks programme, which assists Care Leavers to progress into and remain in education, employment and training;

- the new DurhamWorks Programme for Schools and other transition support from year 11, to post 16 learning;
- the DurhamEnable supported employment scheme for Care Leavers aged over 18 with learning, physical or mental health barriers;
- support for Care Leavers through Durham County Council's Pathway for Young People, including a new sessional employment programme, opportunities to access paid work experience, ring fenced apprenticeships and guaranteed interviews for those who meet the essential criteria of advertised posts;
- the Government's Kickstart scheme which assists young people whose employment prospects have been negatively affected by Covid through providing employment for 6 months for those claiming Universal Credit;
- the establishment of youth hubs in Stanley and Peterlee and the plans to launch a hub in Bishop Auckland;
- Durham County Council's involvement in the six month Pupil Premium Plus scheme, and the 'Keep in College' £20 weekly incentive payment for Care Leavers who achieve over 80% authorised attendance.

The report also presented performance data and provided information on future priorities including maximising the new European Social Fund programmes being delivered through DurhamWorks to ensure Care Leavers continue to benefit from these opportunities.

The Progression Co-ordinator answered questions and comments as follows.

Councillor Walton observed that some of the programmes had been successfully adapted to continue throughout the pandemic and asked if there were plans to continue the new ways of working. The Progression Co-ordinator responded that the hybrid approach will continue as it had led to stronger links with the young people and their wider support group.

Councillor Walton commented that she was pleased to see increasing opportunities for Care Leavers within the Council and referring to the recent briefing sessions for tier 4/5 managers with regard to the role of the corporate parent, Councillor Walton asked why managers required additional training to feel more confident in this regard. The Progression Co-ordinator explained that some managers had requested additional support when dealing with complex issues and as a result, managers now have points of contact if they require assistance.

Councillor Deinali referred to those young people who are continuing in education after the age of 19 in order to achieve basic skills and asked what financial support in respect of living costs is available to these young people who may not be eligible to access the benefit system. The Progression Co-ordinator explained that funding is available through the Government's adult education funding stream and financial support is offered through DurhamWorks up to age of 25. Further information on support with living costs would be circulated to the Panel following the meeting.

Councillor Gunn thanked the officer for the comprehensive report and commented that DurhamWorks had been hugely successful adding that she was pleased to hear about the new DurhamWorks Programme for Schools. Noting that DurhamWorks is European Union funded, she asked how hopeful the service is for the future of these projects. The Progression Co-ordinator responded that the current programme is funded until the end of December 2023, however, the Youth Futures Fund is not European Union funded and DurhamWorks Futures may extend beyond December 2023. It is hoped that the positive impact of the current DurhamWorks programme will stand it in good stead in terms of future bids for the UK Prosperity Fund.

Councillor Coult referred to the lack of data in respect of those aged 19-21 who were classed as 'not known' and queried what more could be done to obtain this information. The Progression Co-ordinator replied that he would endeavour to obtain and circulate recent data published by the DfE. He pointed out that there are difficulties in gathering data on those within the 19-21 age group as they may be less inclined to inform on their whereabouts.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

11. Performance Update

The Panel received an update on performance, for information, which included caseload breakdown as requested at the November meeting (for copy of report see file of minutes).

12. Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Update

The Panel received the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) Annual Report, for information (for copy of report see file of minutes).

13. Any other business

A selection of Fostering Service marketing materials were displayed, and Members were encouraged to take these and share them within their communities, to encourage people to enquire about fostering if this was something they were considering.

14. Exclusion of the public

Resolved:

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

15. Regulation 44 Visits

The Panel considered a report of the Head of Children's Social Care and Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children which provided an update on Regulation 44 visits and Regulatory Body Ratings of Children's Residential Homes (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Durham Children in Care Council (CiCC)

December/January 2022 Update

Presentation by:

Luke and Caitlyn CiCC CPP representatives, and Robert Johnson Investing in Children.

- Hello I am Luke the new member CiCC/ CPP representatives
- Two CiCC meetings took place in January. 19 y/p attended in total. 5 attended the younger CiCC meeting, and 14 attended the older CiCC. Both groups shared CiCC expectations for this coming year. A report will be shared outlining CiCC expectations for 2022.
- Younger CiCC group continue to focus on the 'All About Me project'. They will be discussing ideas and ways to present it at the next meeting. 'The ask of CPP' is that these young people can present to members about the project, key messages and ways to progress it further.
- A further two CiCC members facilitated an awareness session to Sunderland University Social Students.



CiCC December 2021 /January 2022

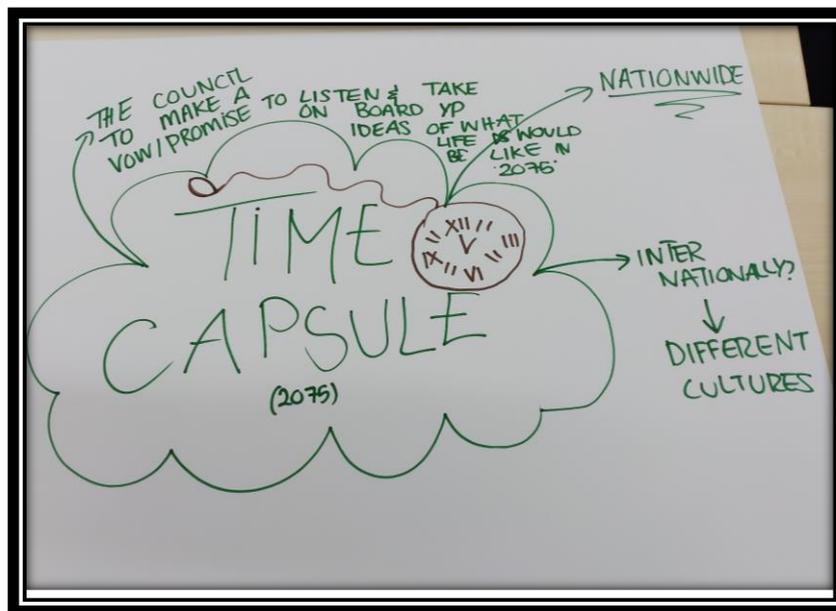
- 9 CiCC members are finalising the Full Circle Project to enhance the new therapy rooms and spaces, via a graffiti workshop in February half term based on previous designs and work.



- 5 care leavers from CiCC connected with a Strategic Manger to review the Local Offer based on their experiences to inform strategic planning – feedback to share with them. *'The ask of CPP'* is to continue to enhance the Local Offer further with an ambition to make it the best in the Country.

CiCC December 2021 /January 2022.

- 14 CiCC members attended a City Of Culture meeting to share ideas for the future. They will receive feedback about how their ideas are taken forward.
- One of the ideas was a time capsule 2075 – ‘pledges and ideas’ - future commitments by Durham County Council in 2075.



The 'ask' is for the CPP to back this time capsule idea

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Corporate Parenting Panel

18 February 2022

**Place based approach to early help
for children and families in Durham****Report of Karen Davison, Strategic Manager, Early Help and Think Family
Services, Durham County Council****Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The report provides Durham's Corporate Parenting Panel with an update on Durham's place-based approach to early help for children and families. The report will accompany a presentation delivered by Fiona Smith, Operations Manager from the One Point Service.

Executive Summary

- 2 Durham's place based approach to early help is underpinned by Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help and nationally driven by the Supporting Families Programme, known in Durham as Stronger Families. Early Help in County Durham is governed by the Prevention and Early Help Partnership which is overseen by the Children, Young People and Families Partnership.
- 3 The approach asks partners to work with the 'whole' family, draw on our shared assets across the Early Help System to respond proportionately to a family's needs, have a co-ordinated approach with one whole family assessment, a single multi-agency child and family plan, be outcome focussed, empower families and better connect families to their natural networks and communities.
- 4 Durham's approach to early help recognises the uniqueness of local communities and that not one size fits all. Working closely with partners within smaller geographical areas and using local intelligence and data to understand community and family need has led to the successful development of Locality Early Help Conversations, Team Around the School models and Early Help Forums (to be renamed Prevention and Early Help Forums).
- 5 Durham County Council's Children and Young People's Service adopts a strength based practice approach known as Signs of Safety/Wellbeing which is being shared with partners to provide a model for a shared language and approach in working with children and families.

- 6 Throughout all of Durham's Early Help developments engaging partners, and service users is critical, and this report shares examples of when engagement has influenced and shaped service design and delivery e.g., Reducing Parental Conflict Website, Early Help Assessment, Early Help Video.
- 7 An effective, 'inclusive for all' Early Help offer and additional support for families with children who are looked after, and their carers is driven by the Prevention and Early Help Partnership. This report provides examples of specific work to support Kinship Carers with parental conflict, pathways to provide Post Adoption support and financial help for these families.
- 8 Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help will be further reviewed in 2022 and will be driven and led by the Prevention and Early Help Partnership overseen by the Children, Young People and Families Partnership.

Recommendations

- 9 Durham's Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to:
 - (a) receive the progress of Durham's Place Based Approach to Early Help for children and families living in County Durham and
 - (b) make further recommendations of how best to support the early help needs for families with children who are looked after and their carers.

Background

- 10 Durham's Early Help approach is underpinned by County Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help and the national Supporting Families Programme, known in Durham as Stronger Families.
- 11 [County Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help](#) recognises that Early Help is essential to helping children and young people get the best start in life, so they are able to make the most of opportunities throughout their childhood and adolescence. We know that the needs of parents and the family environment have a significant impact on children, therefore our early help approach takes account of the whole family's needs. We want to better support families, to help them to cope with the difficulties they face and to support families to be resilient and thrive. In County Durham, Early Help is not a single service or team, but a way of working with families that all of our key partners and stakeholders working with children and families can put into practice. This is promoted through a partnership induction programme known as the 'Durham Way'. The partners who contribute to the Early Help System can be found in **Appendix 2**. Durham's Prevention and Early Help Partnership (PEHP) is committed to achieving this vision.
- 12 Furthermore, the National Supporting Families Programme (governed by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - DLUHC), known in Durham as 'Stronger Families' has been running since 2015. Following the Spending Review in November 2021, LAs were informed that the programme will be extended for a further three years. The County Durham Stronger Families programme continues to drive the service transformation required to ensure vulnerable children, young people and families in need of early help receive coordinated, 'whole family', outcome focussed support which reduces duplication, reduces demand on high-cost statutory services and maximises impact of our collective resources.
- 13 The Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) sees this programme as providing the framework to progress its vision for the delivery of effective early help for children and their families. DLUHC define early help 'as the total support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse', which requires all partners within the early help system to embed better ways of collaborative working to mainstream the 'whole family' outcome focussed approach. LA's and partners are required to:
 - (a) know and target children and families in communities most vulnerable to poor outcomes.
 - (b) ensure the use of evidence-based approaches to help children and families achieve positive change; and
 - (c) as partners, work collaboratively at the earliest opportunity to maximise impact and reduce duplication in an attempt to stop the need for high-cost services.

- 15 Durham's Stronger Families programme performance is good. Between April 2015 and September 2021, Durham has seen positive outcomes for 5,851 families which means reductions in children and parents/carers being involved in crime, anti-social behaviour or reoffending, more children accessing appropriate full-time education, improvements in family relationships, a reduction in domestic abuse, fewer families are in financial hardship and more finding sustainable employment and the health needs of families have improved. At the end of quarter 3 (2021/22) Durham has already met its annual target of 761 families with sustained outcomes.

County Durham's Approach to Early Help

Place Based Approach

- 16 In March 2020, a county-wide place based approach was rolled out in Durham. This was developed with partners from the PEHP to improve the way in which professional requested early help for children and families. Locality Early Help Conversations (LEHC) were developed in all 7 One Point Service Team localities and brought together a number of partners from those areas to have a conversation about a child and family, share appropriate and relevant information, share decision making and to draw on our collective resources from across the Early Help System to effectively respond proportionately to a child and family's needs. A review of this new way of working was carried out in March 2021 and found that this continued to be an effective partnership approach in supporting Durham families with early help needs.
- 17 This approach helps provide the right support, at the earliest opportunity by the right service. It enables partners to provide a proportionate response from providing information, advice and guidance to intensive whole family support and more effectively utilising the rich provision Durham's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) has to offer. An example being the LA's early help service, One Point which is part of the broader Early Help System having 15 Family Centres offering group work, parenting programmes and support for low level needs and 7 Intensive Family Support Teams providing intensive family support to families.
- 18 This new partnership response to early help has also strengthened relationships as partners tell us they feel better connected to each other and have a better understanding of each other's roles, responsibilities and service offers. This has meant partners feel empowered and better equipped to 'hold' families as can apply their knowledge and learning without the need to make unnecessary referrals for a formal Childrens Service.
- 19 In 2021 Early Help, in line with Childrens Social Care, introduced 'themes' in which they asked professionals making Early Help requests to state their 'main' worry for a family. This information is shared with partners and helps us

collectively better understand the needs of our families and local communities helping partners more effectively plan and focus their resource.

- 20 A new Team Around the School (TAS) model was introduced in Durham in July 2020 following a pilot with a Social, Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH) school which provided a blueprint for a sustainable TAS model across County Durham. The TAS model supports schools to have the skills to identify issues, undertake early help assessments of need, make appropriate requests/referrals for additional multi-agency support and ultimately to provide support themselves. The pilot found that the pilot school became more confident in identifying need and delivering empowering interventions following professional advice before the use of external universal, targeted and specialist support services.
- 21 A place-based approach was taken recognising the individual needs of the school, its pupils, parent/carers and its local community. A multi-agency TAS Steering Group has been established to progress these developments in 2022. The Steering Group is made up of Early Help and Think Family Services, SEND, Educational Psychology, Virtual School and Childrens Social Care.
- 22 Prior to the pandemic County Durham had established Early Help Forums in the north, south and east of the county which brought together a range of professionals working within those geographical areas to discuss and address local community needs, emerging issues and action plan collaboratively. It also provided opportunity for professional networking, sharing good practice and information sharing with useful updates on partner's developments and services. These were suspended due to the pandemic but will be reinstated in 2022 and renamed Prevention and Early Help Forums to reflect the name of the PEHP.

Strengths Based Approach

- 23 Signs of Safety/Wellbeing is a practice approach which has been adopted across Childrens Services. It aims to put children, families and those important to them at the heart of planning and decision making, empowering and honouring them in what is working well and guiding and supporting families to make sustainable plans to provide safety and wellbeing for their children by drawing on their own family support network and that of their community. Partner briefings and training opportunities have been available to partners to engage them in this approach to help in having a shared language and a more consistent approach for families.

Engaging the Workforce and Service Users

- 24 Early Help Newsletters for Education and Health partners were introduced in 2021. These provide a useful mechanism to communicate to a large proportion of the workforce early help developments and key messages. The PEHP have encouraged partners to share useful articles showcasing integrated working practices for future editions and all recipients are asked to provide feedback and offered the opportunity to inform future content.

- 25 Children, young people (CYP) and parent/carers (P/C) are regularly asked for service user feedback from Childrens Services and partners which is used to inform and improve how services are delivered. CYP and P/C are also invited to help shape service design and delivery with recent examples being a Community Engagement Commission for Reducing Parental Conflict/Relationship Matters which led to the development of a public facing website where CYP, P/C can access self-help tools, information, advice and guidance on the importance of healthy relationships co-parenting relationships. Another example is a group of CYP, P/C from 'United Voice/Investing in Children' who have helped shape a new Early Help Assessment to be used by partners and are in the process of co-producing a video/animation publicising early help to families in Durham. **Appendix 3** offers feedback from families and partners in relation to County Durham Fun and Food programme and Durham's Early Help practice.

Support for Children in Care and Carers

- 26 The Prevention and Early Help Partnership recognise the importance of ensuring children in care and their carers have access to a range of resources available in local communities at the earliest opportunity.
- 27 Kinship Carers are represented at the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) Working Group with staff within the Kinship Carers Team trained in RPC. It was recognised that specialist support to address parental conflict between Kinship Carers and Birth Parents was a gap in provision not just in Durham but regionally. Durham's lead for RPC is working closely with Durham's Kinship Carer Team Manager developing a service specification which is due to be commissioned.
- 28 The Post Adoption Support Pathway has recently been reviewed ensuring clear identification of family need and that appropriate support is delivered at the right time by the right service.
- 29 Poverty can affect every area of a child's development: social, educational, health and personal. Child poverty in County Durham continues to be on the rise and we know that children who are looked after and their carers may need additional support to address this. The County Durham Child Poverty Working Group has continued to be proactive and responsive to the impact of poverty on children and families and the additional burden COVID-19 has had through the development and implementation of a range of support. This has included the County Durham Fun and Food programme, the promotion of Healthy Start as well as providing additional help and support for some families including children looked after and their carers with food parcels and access to the Household Support Fund. A DCC web page [Helping families manage their money](#) has been developed specifically to help families manage their money, apply for grants and seek further debt advice/financial help. Future work lead by the CPWG will focus on supporting vulnerable children including those in care to better access leisure and cultural opportunities which meet their needs.

Conclusion

30 This report has provided an update on Durham's place-based approach to early help aiming to meet the diverse and often complex needs of all families living in County Durham including children and young people who are looked after and their carers. We continue to aim to ensure across the early help system we offer integrated, whole family, outcome focussed support delivered at the earliest opportunity utilising the support of local VCS support wrapped around a child and family. The national Supporting Families programme is providing the policy driver and service transformation to help us deliver on this aim in County Durham. The PEHP are committed to working with partners and service users to better understand the early help needs of all families and to influence and shape service delivery to improve support offered to families.

Next Steps

31 The PEHP will continue to drive Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help and will review its current strategy in 2022. Feedback from the Corporate Parenting Panel on how to further improve our offer is welcomed.

Authors:

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Stronger Families Programme is Durham County Council's response to the Government's Guidance on "Working with Troubled Families". The aims of the Supporting Families Programme are to get children back into school, reduce youth crime and anti-social behaviour, put adults on a path back to work and bring down the amount public services currently spend on them. This is achieved by providing effective family intervention and encouraging relevant agencies to meet as a "team around the family" to provide the relevant 'whole family' support.

Finance

Risk to an element of funding from Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) if service Early Help transformation progress is not demonstrated.

Consultation

Work on Stronger Families and EA is progressed through the Prevention and Early Help Partnership and involves working closely with a range of partners including the voluntary and community sector and local families.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

Risk to ongoing funding if LA does not show sufficient progress as determined by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

Procurement

None

Appendix 2: County Durham Early Help System



Appendix 3: Feedback from families and partners

County Durham Fun and Food Programme

“We’d love to do it all again, especially as it’s all free!” (Parent)

“it was so nice not to have to think of activities everyday – you’ve really helped me out this summer, with something to do every week and the food was a bonus” (Parent)

“We had such a magical time just exploring the nature in the fresh air” (Parent)

“I really enjoyed the woodwork and trying something new...I can sometimes get bored over the summer holidays” (Young Person)

“I liked making flowers with my friends the best” (Child)



Early Help

“they were lovely and helped me through everything. K was a school refuser, now leaps out of bed on a morning and is itching to go to Endeavour” (Parent)

“S is an angel; she turns up when she says she will, and O is now more trusting of professionals as previously they have let him down” (Parent)

“you are both such a massive help to us, we could have done with you guys years ago”. (Parent)

“Our jobs can be demanding and challenging and when this is the case, it is always reassuring that we can trust colleagues around us to do their absolute best for the children we work with” (School)

“X was easy to talk to and I don't really like talking to people, she listened to me about what I thought was right and wrong and then explained it all to my Dad. X always told us when she was going to speak to my Dad, what he said to her, and what was going to happen next. X always put us first and never got us into any trouble” (Young Person)

“I like having new friends and playing out in the street now” (Young Person)

“Chill Kids has made my anger better I have calmed down but still feel angry sometimes, J and L are really helpful and really help me calm down when I am angry, now the most I do is slam the door” (Young Person)

“A has helped me to improve my attitude at home & school. A has helped me to also understand risky behaviours & how to keep myself safe. I feel so much better in myself, I feel really happy again and can smile and be giggly. because I feel good, I am able to cope better at home when things are going wrong, I can just ignore it instead of getting so upset.” (Young Person)

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Place Based Approach to Early Help for Children and Families in Durham

**Corporate Parenting Panel
February 2022**

Fiona Smith – Operations Manager One Point

Background

- **Durham's Strategic Partnership Approach to Early Help**
- **National Supporting Families Programme, known in Durham as 'Stronger Families'**
 - **Between April 2015 and September 2021, Durham has 'Turned Around' 5851 families**



The Early Help System

Acute & Targeted

Universal

Community Support



Early Help is defined 'as the total support that improves a family's resilience and outcomes or reduces the chance of a problem getting worse', which requires all partners within the early help system to embed better ways of collaborative working to mainstream the 'whole family' outcome focussed approach.

Durham's Early Help Approach

Page 32

- ✓ **'Whole' family working**
- ✓ **Draw on our shared assets across the Early Help System**
- ✓ **Response proportionate to need**
- ✓ **Co-ordinated multi-agency approach**
- ✓ **One whole family assessment and multi-agency Child and Family Plan**
- ✓ **Outcome focussed- use of a multi agency 'Family Outcome Framework'**
- ✓ **Empower families and build family resilience**
- ✓ **Better connect families to their natural networks and communities**
- ✓ **Strength based practice approach (Signs of Safety/Wellbeing)**
- ✓ **An effective, 'inclusive for all' Early Help offer**



Place Based

- **Not one size fits all - recognises the uniqueness of local communities**
- **Locality Early Help Conversations – right support at the right time, best use of collective assets including the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)**
- **Utilise local intelligence and data – Early Help Themes**
- **'New' Team Around the School (TAS)**
- **Prevention and Early Help Forums (re-established 2022)**
- **Engaging the Workforce and Service Users**

Support for Children in Care and Carers

Page 4

- **Kinship Carers** are represented at the **Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) Working Group**
- **Post Adoption Support Pathway**
- **Special Guardian Review Panel – Early Help representation**
- **Helping Families Tackle Poverty –**
 - ✓ **Helping families manage their money**
 - ✓ **Household Support Fund**
 - ✓ **Food Hampers**
 - ✓ **County Durham Fun and Food programme (including free swim sessions)**



Conclusion and Next Steps

- **The Early Help System offers integrated, whole family, outcome focussed support delivered at the earliest opportunity utilising local support wrapped around a family.**
- **The Prevention and Early Help Partnership (PEHP) will continue to work with partners and service users to better understand the Early Help needs of all families and to influence and shape service delivery to improve support offered.**
- **Corporate Parenting Panel asked to note the place based approach to early help for families including children in care.**
- **Elected Members can support by promoting the services and resources available which include links with other local services and voluntary groups, help with finances and Fun with Food programme.**



Any questions to

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(One Point Operations Manager)



Corporate Parenting Panel

18 February 2022

Children Looked After with a Disability Annual Update



Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children' Social Care, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel will receive a summary of the work of the Children with Disabilities Team with Children and Young people who are Children in our Care (CIC) and Care Leavers, for information.
- 2 To inform members of the Corporate Parenting Panel of the remit and the number of children currently open to the Children with Disabilities Service (CWD) who are in our care.
- 3 The report outlines the progress made since the ILACS Ofsted inspection (September 2019) when Ofsted told us the Quality and performance of social work practice was too variable.
- 4 The report provides an update of the Transition's arrangements for 14 - 25 years and their preparation for life as a young adult, which are provided by the 14-25 Navigation Team (Adult Services) alongside the CWD team.

Executive Summary

- 5 There have been significant changes to services for Children and young people with disabilities since 2019 which includes additional investment in front line staff as well as a remodelling of the service to create a 0-18 children's service and a 14-25 navigation service within adult social care services, focused on supporting the transition for these young people from children's to adults services. Whilst there are clear criteria for the children and young people receiving support from this services, the team works hard with partners to ensure that children are signposted to other appropriate services and sources of support where appropriate.

- 6 Work has developed with a wide range of partner agencies to support these practice improvements to ensure the needs of our children and young people are met and they are in receipt of high-quality support and services.
- 7 A Governance Improvement Board for Disabled Children has been created which has supports oversight from a children's and adults services perspective and includes commissioning colleagues who are key to service development and innovation for children and young people with disabilities. The board is jointly chaired by Heads of Service in CYPS and ASC.
- 8 We have strengthened the voice of our children so they along with their parent/carers are informing their care plans, reviews. This means they influence the development of the services they receive and can be more confident that they are the right services for the child.
- 9 All our children have up to date assessments which are reviewed yearly. The CWD team see our children regularly.
- 10 The CWD team procedures and guidance has been updated and is reviewed annually.
- 11 We have managed some of the challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic by reviewing services and working with our commissioning colleagues to think differently about service delivery for families.
- 12 Improvements in the service can be evidenced by the increase in compliments from families and professionals and a reduction in complaints.

Recommendation

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

Background

- 14 The functions (including powers and duties) of the local authority to children who are looked after by us are set out in the 1989 Children's Act as principally amended by the children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, the Adoption, Children Act 2002, Young Persons Act 2008.
- 15 The associated Regulations and guidance in relation to those functions. Section 22 (3) of the 1989 Act sets out the general duty of the local authority looking after a child to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. This duty underpins all activity by the local authority in relation to looked after children.
- 16 A child is looked after by us either by reason of a Care Order or is being provided care by us under Section 20 of the 1989 Act for more than 24 hours with the agreement of their parents or carers with parental responsibility, or if the child is over 16 years old or over (section 22 (1) and (2) of the 1989 Act).
- 17 The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (**DoLS**) are part of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. This piece of legislation aims to make sure that young people in care homes and hospitals are looked after and safeguarded in a way that does not inappropriately restrict their freedom. A consideration of this legislation is key in planning for the safe care of our children and young people.
- 18 We undertake Parent/Carer assessments using Children Act 1989 section 17ZD (10). The Parent carers assessments are to support and understand the well-being of the parent / carer, and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the disabled child who is cared for and any other child for whom the parent carer has parental responsibility. This parent/carer assessment can lead to the provision of services which support families, including short breaks.
- 19 Criteria of the CWD service is to offer support to the following children and young people who identify as having:
 - Substantial physical disabilities that significantly impact on the child's wellbeing.
 - Substantial learning disabilities.
 - A diagnosis of Autism with a substantial learning disability.
 - Multiple or substantial disability.
 - Substantial sensory impairment in conjunction with a substantial learning disability.
 - Complex physical disability and health needs, this would usually involve support from the continuing health care team (health

services). (There will be an assessment from the continuing health care service if required).

- 20 There are a total of 227 children open to the Children with Disabilities Team.
- 21 28 children are Children in Care.
- 22 The remaining children receive social work support and services under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Many receive packages of respite support to enable them to meet and socialise with other young people in the community and to enable their parents/carers to have a break from their caring responsibilities.
- 23 There have been clear and sustained improvements both in performance and quality of practice within this service since the Ofsted ILACS inspection of children's social care services in 2019. All the children currently open to the service have had an assessment in the last 12 months. This means our children have an up-to-date assessment and that the services are the right ones for them as their needs are understood.
- 24 As of 24 January 2022, all children in care within the CWD Team were visited within statutory timescales.

Staffing in the CWD Team

- 25 The Team structure has expanded as the service has been reviewed and strengthened within the last twelve months and received additional investment to increase social work capacity.

Support that the Children with Disabilities Team offer

- 26 We aspire to support families to care for their own children, and we do this by promoting the local offer www.durham.gov.uk/localoffer
 - (a) All our children who are children in care, have regular meetings with annual health and dental checks and regular multi-agency care team meetings;
 - (b) Each child has an independent review officer. Children with a disability or who have a special educational need will receive support from the IRO to help ensure these needs are identified, assessed, and met. They will read the Education Health Care Plan and the Personal Education plan and use this to influence the care plan alongside the CWD team;
 - (c) Our children express their views through observations, one to one work and play. They have access to an advocate from NYAS, an opportunity to have a Young Carers assessment and to use **Mind**

of My Own (you will hear more about this on the day of the corporate Parenting panel from some of our children);

- (d) Our CWD can be some of the most vulnerable children therefore strong multi-agency working is critical to ensuring children are safe and there is good evidence of this in the work of the service, both within child protection strategy meetings, child protection conferences and care planning;
- (e) The CWD team ensure our children's voices are heard using direct work. One of the ways we have done this is by investing in digital technology this is call Mind of My Own and referred to by our children as MOMO;
- (f) We believe that young people should always be able to participate fully in their lives and it should be easy for them to speak up anytime they want. The Mind of My Own app was designed with young people for young people;
- (g) Our children in the team use MOMO Express. Momo Express helps them share their views, wishes and feelings in a fun way that's easy for workers to understand and evidence. Express is for very young children or those with additional needs. Express helps children express their views, wishes and feelings;
- (h) The design and function of MOMO enables children's participation in to create one-page profiles for placement matching, before health checks, assessments to build rapport and gather crucial information, our statutory visits, foster care reviews, Looked after reviews, Education, health and care plans, Transition planning, CIN reviews, short break services and Communication passports. The CWD team have all now completed their MOMO training and moving forward we will see our children's voices strongly represented within all conversations;
- (i) An example of this is a young girl who used Express with her residential worker she took great pleasure in filling out a statement, which was lovely to see. 'All about me' starts off with basic questions that workers sometimes stop asking, such as 'What do you like to eat' and this young person gave so much detail it was lovely for the worker to see. She gave loads of details about what she liked and what she didn't and then what makes her happy and what makes her sad and how workers should communicate with her. She took a long time to complete this profile of her but what was also interesting is that Express asks 'What you would like for tea', she talked about a worker, Michael, who cooks Sunday breakfast and how that was her favourite food. What was evident is that the young girl was so appreciative of the

care her home was providing and that these are the things she will remember;

- (j) Our children have access to services – In addition, the Local Authority delivers a short break respite service for children, young people, and their families. The work in these services is delivered in partnership with the wide range of agencies who support children with disabilities and complex needs;
- (k) Community support services are available to them;
- (l) Our children looked after are monitored through children in care procedures. Statutory visits take place and children are regularly seen by school and health professionals;
- (m) All aspects of safeguarding are completed by the social workers on the team;
- (n) Our children have a pathway plan to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood, this is done with the 14-25 years transitions team and by looking at what the needs of the children are into adulthood.

Partners We Work With

- 27 There is close joint working between the CWD team and the Families First Safeguarding Teams, we have open dialogue with our partners in Education – special schools, Health i.e., Occupational Health services, Continuing Care Services, Police, Local Authority Commissioning Teams, Health Commissioners, Early Help colleagues and the voluntary services, Advocacy service and the Carers centre.
- 28 We work closely with the Durham Virtual School Head, and she describes that her team works closely with the CWD team to support CIC into the best provision to meet the child's needs. We provide advice to social workers and attend meetings to ensure the education provision the child attends are the right one. In consultation with the SEND caseworker, we are part of discussions when a child's care arrangements change, and a school placement is required. The CIC Personal Education Plan caseworker continues to support the young person into Post 16 and is part of the initial conversations with Durham Works in supporting the young person into adulthood.
- 29 We work together with all our partners to identify the needs of families and listen to family's aspirations for the care of their family members and the children's voice for their wishes and feelings to determine demand and gaps in provision and consider what provision can best meet needs and achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

Our Commissioning partners

- 30 We have a commissioner who is dedicated to working with Children's Services to understand the needs of children with disabilities and their families to ensure there are services that can be accessed to allow 'short breaks' from caring when needed to improve outcomes and prevent family breakdown.
- 31 We are working in partnership with providers of services to help them recover from Covid. This includes working together to help attract staff who want to work with disabled children and young people and ensure they are trained to provide specialist care and support to meet the needs of our most complex children.
- 32 We have worked jointly with Family Centres to develop a number of local 'inclusive community hubs' across the county. These hubs will aim to support families when they need the break these tend to be after school and weekends, delivering safe services to children and young people with complex needs from the hub into their local community. The specialist hubs have mobilised within Chester le Street, Aycliffe, Bishop Auckland, Fishburn and Horden so far.
- 33 Commissioning also supports the team's statutory assessment of family need for specialist services and direct payments Outreach services, community hubs, home care, overnight respite care. We have worked across the region to develop a framework of providers who can provide over-night short break care for children and young people within residential settings to enable over-night short breaks for parent/carers.
- 34 We will shortly be recruiting - Enabling Inclusive Communities Officer who will be working with any families who identify they would like to access something but there is a barrier. This person will work with the family and the providers to remove the barrier, extra training etc.
- 35 We appointed a short breaks solutions officer – who is working to research what is already on offer for families and help signpost to these. Working with Voluntary Community Sector and providers to develop this offer. Work with families to understand what the barriers are to accessing community activities
- 36 For parent/ carers who need a break from caring, but their disabled child is unable to access activities due to their disability in the community/ mainstream provision we have a commissioned – short break offer (without an assessment). We have a range of activities targeted with additional training. These include.
- Physical activity sessions on weekends
 - Youth groups
 - Community projects

- Sports clubs
 - Family activities
 - Buddy scheme
 - We have a commissioning group with early help for Children with Disabilities and parent/ carers who decide on the menu of services.
- 37 We have worked jointly with Adult Commissioners to re-commission an all-age Domiciliary Care Support Framework.
- 38 Where there have not been the appropriate solutions in place, we have worked together to develop bespoke off-framework arrangements, including for example making appropriate changes to a family home to enable children to remain living there.

Respite provision for our Disabled Children in Durham who live with Parent Carers

- 39 Park House is a short break provision based in Sherburn Village, in Co Durham. Park House offers Durham's young disabled people, between 5 years & 18-years short breaks. A short break is defined under Section 20 Children Act 1989, where the short breaks exceed a total of 17 days per placement/75 days per 12-month period and/or take place in more than one setting.
- 40 Park House provides short break care for young people who have a learning disability, but may also have complex physical or health needs, who may require specialist equipment, specific communication needs and a sensory impairment. In emergency situations Park house is registered and can support children in the longer term whilst alternate placements are identified.
- 41 Park House currently has 30 children accessing the service with another 9 young people currently being introduced, our age range is from 5 to 17 with young people leaving us the day before their 18th birthday.
- 42 We maintain close working relationships with our health professionals who help to provide the specialist individual training that our children often require.
- 43 Park House provide overnight short break to children and their families, giving children the opportunity to have a "sleep over" make new friends and hopefully gain new experience and independent skills in an enjoyable, safe, and caring environment. This allows parents and carers to spend time with their other children or just have time to sleep and recharge their batteries which is often needed to support them in their caring role.

14-25 Navigation Team (Adult Services)

- 44 The Navigation Team is an adult services team which responds to the needs of disabled children and young persons aged between 14 – 25 years during their transition from children to adulthood. The team reflects the requirements of the 2014 Care Act, 2014 Children’s and Families Act, Special Educational Needs (SEN) 2014 reforms and Mental Capacity Act (2005) so that young people and their families receive appropriate support to plan for adulthood with the care, health, and education services they need. There are 8 children Looked After in the Navigation Team. The Navigation Team also work with Care Leavers.
- 45 The teamwork with children (from the age of 14 years) and young adults with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, sensory needs, mental health, autism and acquired brain injury and will require a statutory intervention in adulthood i.e., commissioned service.
- 46 Where there is no formal diagnosis of a learning disability the 14-25 Navigation Team can support with arranging an initial screening assessment.
- 47 The 14-25 Navigation team have 17 young people open to the Navigation Team all of whom are aged 17 or over. This includes one child in care and 3 care leavers. The remaining 14 young people are child in need. The Navigation Team ensures effective joint working between Children and Adults Services. Team Structure
- 48 The Navigation team structure is an integrated team with expertise in social work, learning disabilities and mental health.
- 49 The ethos of the team is to:
- Avoid unnecessary delays and duplication
 - Deliver appropriate care and support plans
 - Develop a sustainable pathway into adulthood.
 - Embed shared understanding between Children and Adults Services
 - Provide continuity between Children and Adults Services
 - Provide appropriate and cost-effective services for the long-term future.
 - They will support and lead on Education, Health and Care Planning for young people with special educational needs, promoting the use of personal budgets so that young people have more control over the type of support and services they need and want.

- Undertake core legal work e.g., Care Act, Mental Health Act, Mental Capacity Act and consider the need for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and applications to the Court of Protection
- Consider the needs of Parent carers and Young Carers.
- They assist children's services in both health and social care to navigate complex adult provision and establish whether the young people will require an adult provision in the future.

Over 18 years

50 Individuals prior to their 18th birthday will be assessed in accordance with the national eligibility criteria set out in the Care Act 2014. This states that an adult meets the eligibility criteria if.

- Their needs arise from or are related to a physical or mental impairment or illness
- As a result of the adult's needs, they are unable to achieve two or more specified outcomes
- Therefore, there is or is likely to be a significant impact on a person's wellbeing.
- Pathway plans are in place for all children looked after with the Navigation team which support them into adulthood. The Navigation team work jointly with the Young Peoples service where they are care leavers. Children's services would be responsible for completing documentation related to this but with input from the 14-25 Navigation Team

Practice Improvements

51 We continue to improve practice/quality in Children with Disabilities team by the implementation of the CWD Governance Group which has been established to focus on service improvement this is jointly chaired by Helen Fergusson Head of Children's Services and Lee Alexander Head of Adult's Services the membership is health, commissioning, children's services, and adult services where the focus is practice improvement and service development.

52 We continue to implement the Signs of Safety practice model. All current members of the Disabilities Team have completed their 2-day SOS training. 6 members of the Disabilities Team have completed their Advanced training. This has meant that we have been able to focus on practice developments to improve the quality of service and outcomes for our children and families within the team using this practice model.

- 53 The CWD team has its own audit programme where we can identify themes of practice improvement and celebrate good practice within the team.

Conclusion

- 54 The CWD team will continue to embed the service improvement plan within the team and develop and identify themes of practice improvements to do this we will continue to use direct feedback, audits, thematic audits, complaint outcomes, and the child's voice to direct this work.
- 55 The CWD team will continue to work with our partners to create the best services with and for our children and families.
- 56 The CWD team will continue to work with commissioning regarding the recovery from the pandemic and this will be a focus for us and our families so that our families have the support they tell us they need. This will also bring new opportunities to how we work with families and deliver service i.e., community hubs.
- 57 In the next year the CWD team priorities are to continue to develop the work identified in this report and to develop co-production with our children and families.
- 58 The CWD team will ensure the voice of the child will continue to grow and influence the practice improvements within the team.
- 59 We will champion the use of all our direct work tools including Mind of My Own, so we see our children influencing all the information and decisions made with them.
- 60 The CWD team will continue to complete yearly assessments for all the children in the team so that they know the children well. When we cannot offer a service, we will support the family to find someone or a service who can. The CWD team will ensure the children's needs are understood and regularly discussed by people who know them best.

Author

Jane Ayres

Tel: 03000 26597

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

There are legal duties on the Local Authority to implement the disability and special educational needs reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. As Corporate Parents, there is a legal duty to care for our Children in care under the Children Act 1989.

Also, The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) are part of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. The safeguards aim to make sure that people in care homes and hospitals are looked after in a way that does not inappropriately restrict their freedom.

Finance

No direct financial implications.

Consultation

None.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The Local Authority under Equalities Legislation and the Children's Act have a duty to provide access to services for Children and Young People with SEND. The needs of all young people are considered on an individual basis

Climate Change

Wherever possible we seek to provide services and support close to where families live, and this seeks to reduce travelling.

Human Rights

Children and young people with disabilities have the same right to a family life (HRA S8) as any other young person whom CYPS deliver services and support.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

CWD service is suitably staffed, to ensure that the service offers appropriate staffing levels based on current need.

Accommodation N/A

Risk N/A

Procurement

We work with Commissioning Services and follow the agreed procurement procedure if specific service is required.

Children with Disabilities Team

what our children and their families tell us we need to do more of

February 2022



Ensure we have a voice

- Improve our voice, hear our wishes and feelings, know and understand our day to day experiences.
- Access to advocacy via NYAS.
- Use Mind of My Own Express and One App.
- Access to young carers support for brothers and sisters. Alongside Parent Carers assessments.
- That our Independent Reviewing officer asks us what our wishes are and check everyone is doing their best for us.





Ensure our needs are understood and regularly discussed by people who know us best

- We are visited regularly by our named social worker.
- Annual assessments focusing on what's working well for us and our families/carers, what we are worried about and what needs to happen to meet our needs.
- Ensuring we have a robust plan to meet our needs and/or keep us safe. That these are reviewed and updated regularly by us, our families and our carers.
- Our parents/carers have access to carers assessments.
- When we are ready to move into the Navigation team it is done in a timely manner and our transition to adulthood is really well planned.



That you know us well. When you can't help you help us to find someone who can

- Ensure that team culture promotes building good relationships with us , our families and our carers.
- That we will, where possible have the same social worker throughout our childhood.
- When you cannot help us as we do not meet the criteria you will endeavor to provide advice, support and guidance to help to meet our needs.

We want to influence the help you give us

Making our services be the best they can be for all the children and young people

- Specialist community hubs (short breaks)
- CICC development
- MOMO feedback
- Family Satisfaction Surveys
- CWD Governance Group
- CWD Disability Steering Board





FEEDBACK FROM CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES



Corporate Parenting Panel

18 February 2022

**Annual Report of the Independent
Reviewing Officer Service**



**Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care,
Durham County Council**

Electoral division(s) affected:

None.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to introduce the Independent Reviewing Officer, Children in Care, Annual Report Summary, covering the period 2020/21 which will be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel at its meeting on 18 February 2022. This was initially scheduled to come to the meeting on 22 November 2021, but due to unforeseen circumstances on the day, needed to be postponed.
- 2 The Annual report is attached as Appendix 2 of this report.

Executive summary

- 2 This report highlights the key messages that are contained within the accompanying IRO Service Annual reports and sets out 4 key priorities that have been identified to address these.

Recommendation

- 3 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are required to:
 - a) Note the contents of the annual report.

Background

- 4 The annual report set out the performance and the direction of travel for the IRO service.
- 5 The IRO service is required to play a critical role in supporting and challenging the work of Children's Social Care in relation to Children who are In Our Care who are subject to a Child Protection Planning process.

Key messages within Annual Report

- 6 In 2020/21, the timeliness of children Looked After (CLA) reviews increased to 99%.
- 7 100 % of children under a Private Fostering arrangement had their review within timescales.
- 8 87% of Foster Care reviews were held within timescales.
- 9 The IRO Service has been successful in achieving Investors In Children (IIC) Status and 10 year award. The positive feedback from this report is within the Annual Report.

Key Priorities for 2020/21

Children who are Looked After

- a) To improve on the quality of care plans for children and young people and ensure these plans are formed with children and their families.
- b) Continue to support social care and the IRO service to embed Signs of Safety as the practice model.
- c) We want our children to have good prospects when leaving care.
- d) To support Social Care to make continuous improvements to the service they provide for children and young people.

Conclusion

- 17 The four priorities identified within the Annual Reports will be taken forward by the IRO service and form a critical part of the Social Care response to the ILACS inspection in September 2019.

Authors

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The statutory duties of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) are set out in section 25B (1) Children Act 1989 with further statutory guidance contained in the IRO handbook, which sets out the IRO in relation to case management and review for looked after children.

There are two clear and separate aspects to the function of the IRO:

- i. chairing the child's review; and
- ii. monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis.

Finance

There are no Direct Financial Implications within this report.

Consultation

None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Climate Change

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

None

Procurement

None

Appendix 2: Children Looked After Annual Report

Attached as a separate document



Independent Reviewing Officer

Children in Care

Annual Report Summary

2020/21

What do IROs do?

The law states that all children and young people that become looked after must be appointed an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO Handbook (2010) sets out the requirements of the IROs in supporting children and young people who are in the care of the local authority. An IRO has an important role in making sure that children and young people's care plans meet their needs. IROs are there to make sure that reviews are run properly, that children and young people's views are listened to and their best interests are protected, and to ensure that children are only looked after as long as necessary.



IROs also make sure that they talk to the local authority when they are worried about whether plans are progressing for children or young people. IROs will challenge the local authority if they disagree with the local authority's plan for a child or young person. IROs will also tell the local authority about things that they are doing particularly well.

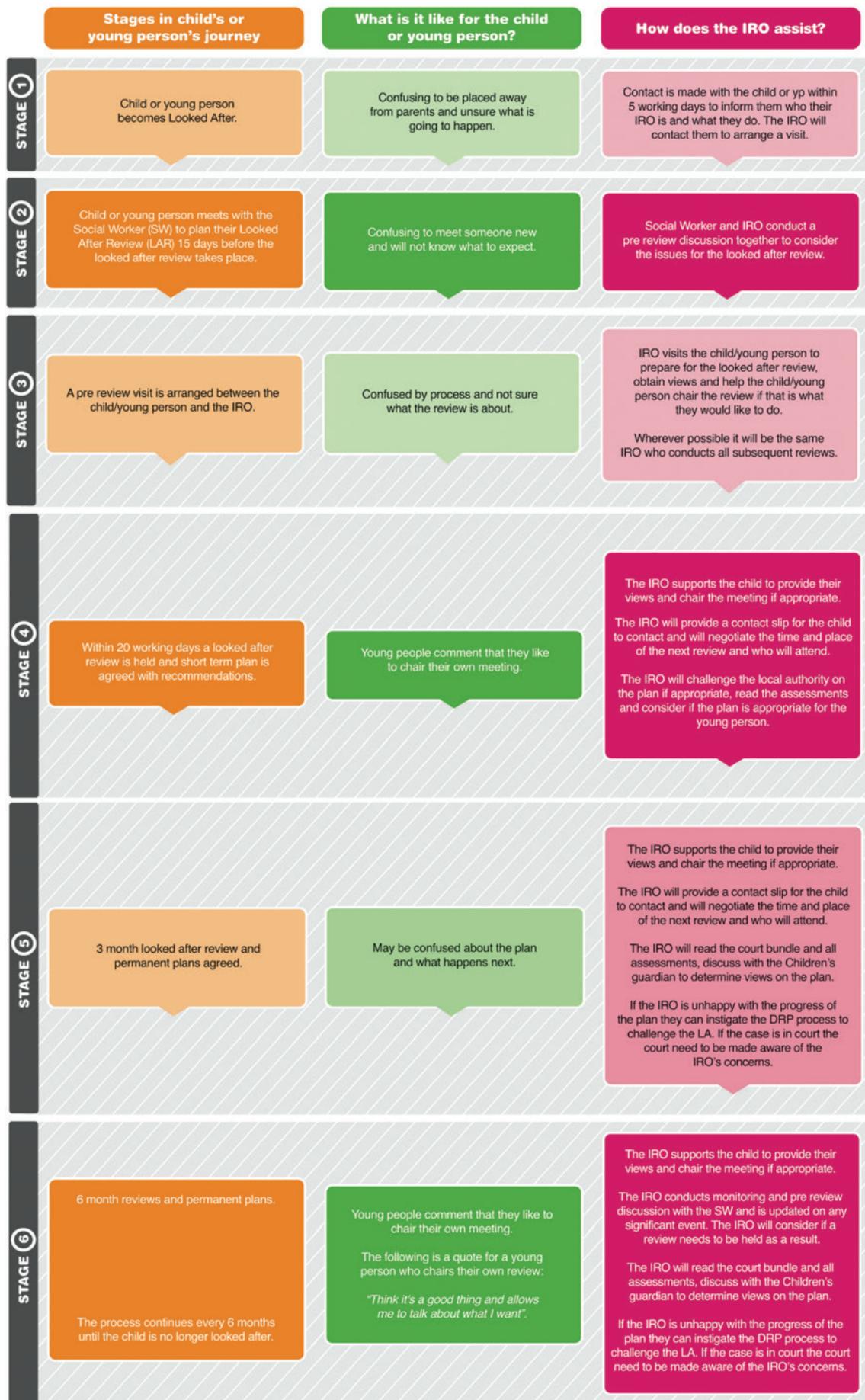
IROs in County Durham also chair child protection conferences and work within the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP).

Children and young people in the care of County Durham

The IROs chair Child Looked After Reviews (CLAs) for all children, including those placed for adoption, those in short break respite care, young people who are remanded into the care of the Local Authority.

The Child's Journey

The information below contains the key stages in the child's journey when being care for by the Local Authority and how the IRO assists the child or young person in this process.



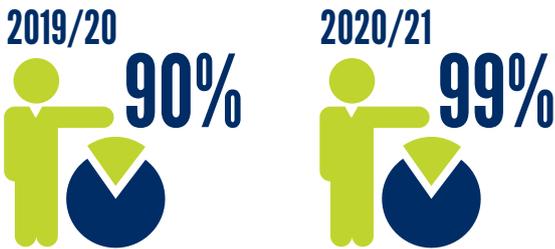
Summary of Development Activity 2020/21

Issues identified 2020/21	Response
<p>Need to increase the timeliness of children's plans of permanence being ratified</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● IRO Performance Clinic established to offer a reflective space for IROs to work through any issues of delay in care planning. ● Supported the reviewed of the Permanency Strategy and co-delivered briefings across the service. ● Established communication plan between the IRO Service and Legal Services to support in setting timetables for care proceedings in line with Care Planning regulations. ● Operations Manager attendance at Strategic Legal Panel to offer guidance and support in care planning timeframes. ● Reporting data sets now agreed to support Team Managers and IROs future planning for the 4-month review. ● Change to the IRO chair report to allow tracking of this to strengthen the timeliness of plans ratified.
<p>Use the Signs of Success framework to ensure that care plans are developed with children, young people and their network and that children and young people are more involved in the care planning process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We have remained consistent involving children who have been involved in the reviewing process and their CLA reviews. This has included face to face visits, virtual video call visits and some children report that the virtual meetings have been much more in line with their lifestyles thus attending their meeting. ● Covid-19 has hindered our ability to carry out face to face meetings consistently, however, we have had some lovely success stories where children have engaged with the reviewing process via video links showcasing educational skills and life skills within their meetings. ● There has been an increase in IRO activity on case files, with more pre-review discussions taking place, children speaking with IROs prior to their meetings and engaging in conversations with IROs in-between meetings. ● The IRO Service have taken the lead in creating an Advocacy Working Group, chaired by the IRO Operations Manager. There has been a drive in increasing the accessibility of an advocate and Independent Visitor for all children. A work plan has been established and reviewed by commissioning services.
<p>Use the Signs of Success framework to structure review meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Group supervision now embedded monthly. ● Training with all IROs on the use of language was carried out. ● Group Supervision identified a common approach to the use of 'best questioning', 'use of harm matrix' and 'introducing the use of trajectories'. ● Some scaling questions are now seen within meetings to measure impact. ● All children who are permanently matched, placed over 2 years and/or the IRO feels should- receive a letter to the child as the notes of the meeting, rather than in impersonal set of notes. ● A working group has been established to review the most appropriate way to review the child's Care Plan, Personal Education Plan (PEP), Strength Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ) and Looked After Health Assessment as a holistic approach. Further developments will be part of the forthcoming year.

Issues identified 2020/21	Response
<p>Review the Dispute Resolution Process so that when there is a challenge made by IROs it makes a genuine difference for children and young people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A working group was established across all areas of Social Care to devise better ways of working in partnership taking a strength-based approach. ● Resolution Process Presentation delivered by Team Managers and IROs in joint approach to the full workforce. ● Review of IRO dashboard to enable quantitative and qualitative data to be produced about nature of challenge IROs make and how these are resolved to make a difference for children and their families. ● Resolution Process has brought about more reflective conversations with a focus on practice and needs of the child to agree outcomes for children in real time, unlike the built-in delay created by email exchanges and systems.

Timeliness of reviews

Despite the impact of Covid-19 we have continued to review Care Plans for all children in a timely way. 99% of our Children’s Reviews were held within timescales, an improvement from the 90% in 2019/20.



Children’s Reviews held within timescales

A new approach to the Dispute Resolution Process

The IRO service continues to have a Dispute Resolution process, however as Durham has adopted a strength-based relational practice model (Signs of Safety) we have reviewed our Dispute Resolution Process and renamed this the ‘Resolution Process’. The aim is to have a greater number of challenging but effective conversations between IROs and social work teams that make a real difference for children.

The number of resolution conversations that have taken place this year has remained relatively static. The primary reason for a resolution conversation has been delay in achieving a plan of permanence for a child or young person.



The number of resolution conversations

Secure Reviews

The IRO Service provides the Independent Panel Chair for all Secure Reviews. This is a separate IRO to that of the child’s allocated IRO. Of these 2 children, 1 child has left Secure in a planned way at the time of this report.



2020/21

2 children have required secure accommodation

Private Fostering Reviews

The IROs carry out Private Fostering Reviews on an annual basis. There have been 13 children between March 2020 - April 2021 who have required a Private Fostering review. 100% have all been held within timescales.

13 children who have required a private fostering review



have been held within timescales

Disruption Meetings

The IRO Service chair disruption meetings for children who have moved in an unplanned way who have been in their placement for 2 years or more, permanently matched or the issues are complex and require an independent chair.



The IRO Service have chaired 4 disruption meetings within 2020/21

Foster Care Reviews

273 Foster Care Reviews



Feedback from children and young people

The participation of children and young people in their own reviews is vitally important and the table below shows how successful we have been in promoting this participation:

How child participated in their CLA Review

Total Number of children

Child was under 4 years of age at the time of the meeting

663

Child attended and spoke for themselves

971

Child attended and advocate spoke

112

Child attended and gave views non-verbally
(Children with Disabilities)

8

Child attended without contribution

15

Child did not attend, advocate shared views

475

Child did not attend, views sent

741

Child did not attend or share views

51



We have established a CICC IRO consultation Group which meet termly on a Saturday morning to review changing practices within the IRO Service. This group has developed an IRO information leaflet to share with children and young people prior to their first meeting. This explains the role of the IRO, IRO profile and contact information for the IRO allocated to the young person. The consultation group is currently making an animation video to explain what a looked after review is and what to expect from the IRO Service. This is hoped to be live on the CICC website in May 2021.

The IRO Service has been successful in achieving Investors In Children (IIC) Status Gold award for 10 years' service to children and young people.

Key Priorities for 2021/22

Issues identified 2021/22	Improvement Plan
<p>To improve on the quality of care plans for children and young people and ensure these plans are formed with children and their families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on the timeliness of plans ratified at the child's 4-month review with a clear rationale for decision making. ● Improve on the IROs voice within Care Proceedings to ensure their views are represented in court. ● Clear reviewing processes to be established for all children who are living at home under a Care Order to ensure this is not longer than necessary and does not exceed 18 Months. ● IROs will promote the use of trajectories in care planning for all children to avoid drift and delay. ● Bi-Monthly working group established focusing on the need for advocacy support. ● Animation video is being created to explain the child looked after review meetings and how children and young people can feed into this reviewing process.
<p>Continue to support Social Care and the IRO Service to embed Signs of Safety as the practice model.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The IROs will continue to have monthly Signs of Safety group supervisions, with a focus on 'Best Questioning', 'Use of Harm Matrix' and 'Use of trajectories' when reviewing care planning and managing risk. This is something which will be a key priority for the service moving into 2021-22. ● IROs will promote the use of trajectories, words and pictures and safety plans in aspects of care planning.
<p>We want our children to have good prospects when leaving care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The IRO Operations Manager is researching across the partnership, into the merit of the IRO offering up to two care leaver reviews for young people who are more complex or require that higher level of scrutiny and oversight when making that transition to care leaver. ● Work with the Pathways/Young Peoples Service towards ensuring transitions for care leavers have a trajectory for leaving care with aspirational goals. This will include looking at care arrangements such as 'Staying Put', 'Supported Lodging' and reunification with family. ● IROs will continue to work with the CICC in ways to promote the child and young people voice in care planning.
<p>To support Social Care to make continuous improvement to the service they provide for children and young people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The IRO service will provide updated on lessons learnt from disruption meetings, dip samples, outcomes from informal and formal resolutions meetings and audits- to Social Care regarding any themes, trends and learning from these meetings at the Quality Improvement Board (QIB). ● The IRO Service is working with the Residential Quality Improvement Manager to review how the resolution process could be replicated for children who move when living in a residential care home to build on placement stability. ● A Quality Assurance Framework will be devised looking at how the role of the IRO can support the improvement of quality of practice in Social Care.

Feedback

““ The review meeting was well planned and managed in a professional manner by the Designated Independent Reviewing Officer (DIRO).

Panels consideration was thorough, reflecting on matters which led to the most recent admission, previous placement breakdowns and exploring risks. Panel members were given appropriate time by the DIRO to discuss, question and clarify any queries or concerns. The DIRO ensured that our discussions were fair, considered risks to all options, and were relevant.”

Feedback from an independent person on a secure review

““ I really wish I had communicated with you when all this started in the very beginning. It is evident that you care about your job role just from the brief conversations we have shared. You have shown me empathy and compassion when others haven't which goes a very long way.”

Feedback from a mum to an IRO

““ She listened to him and she answered the best way she could so he is happy and not on edge as much. Thank you for dropping everything to listen to him, this means a lot to me, from my heart thank you.”

Feedback from a mum to an IRO about her son

For further information or to discuss anything in this report please contact

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