



## **Corporate Parenting Panel**

**Date**      **Friday 29 April 2022**

**Time**      **9.30 am**

**Venue**     **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham**

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### **Business**

#### **Part A**

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

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2022 (Pages 3 - 10)
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
8. Children in Care Council Update - Presentation by Project Officer, Investing in Children (Pages 11 - 12)
9. Update from joint Children in Care Council / Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 19 October 2021 - Presentation by Strategic Manager and Service Improvement Manager (Pages 13 - 20)
10. Number of Foster Care Households in 2022/23 - Verbal Update from Head of Children's Social Care
11. Care Leavers Strategy and Action Plan January 2022 - December 2024 - Presentation by Strategic Manager (Pages 21 - 50)
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 51 - 64)
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  
21 April 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 C Varty

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

J Bell, L Burns, W Taylor, R Upton, K Watson

Young persons representative of the Children in Care Council

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**Contact: Jill Hogg**

**Tel: 03000 269 711**

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## DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2** on **Friday 25 March 2022** at **9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor M Simmons in the Chair**

**Panel Members:**

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, B Bainbridge, J Charlton, B Coult, S Deinali, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hood, L Hovvels (substituting for Councillor Miller), I Roberts, K Rooney, S Townsend, C Varty and M Walton

**Co-opted Members:**

J Bell, A Ferguson, C Gray, L Joseph and W Taylor

**Also Present:**

Laura Armstrong – Professional Practice Manager

Laura Counce - Strategic Manager for Children Looked After Resources

Robert Johnson - Project Manager (Investing in Children) and Caitlyn and Luke of the Children in Care Council

Melanie King - Lawyer, Children, Adults and Health

Kate Lonsdale – Lawyer, Children, Adults and Health

Melanie Stubbs - Virtual School Head

Stephen Tracey - Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager

Jayne Watson - Senior Partnerships Officer

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bell, Henderson, Miller, Robson and from co-opted member, Chris Baines.

Apologies were also received from officers K Clayton, H Fergusson, J Henderson and M Stenton.

### **2 Substitute Members**

Councillor L Hovvels was in attendance for Councillor J Miller.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

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

The Senior Partnerships Officer reported that the number of children looked after stood at 983. As reported at the previous meeting, recent changes to caselaw had resulted in delays to adoption proceedings and included within the figure of 983 were 30 young people who had been placed for adoption and were in suitable accommodation, awaiting Adoption Orders.

#### **6 Ofsted Updates**

No Ofsted inspections had taken place within the period.

#### **7 Proud Moments**

The Head of the Virtual School presented this month's proud moments, commenting on a year 11 student with an Education Health and Care Plan who had moved to the south of the country to access specialist provision. The young person had produced an outstanding piece of descriptive writing, expressing their thoughts and feelings about their new surroundings which had provoked an emotional response from staff, who were so impressed that they sent a message to the young person to congratulate their good work.

Another proud moment reported by the Head of the Virtual School was the story of a young person that she had first supported during their transition into year 7. The two met again several years later when the Head went to her first meeting of the Children in Care Council. She was delighted to report how well this young person had developed and she was touched to hear the young person acknowledge how valuable the support from the Virtual School had been to them.

Members congratulated the young people and discussed how important it is to showcase pieces of work such as the one described and retain them for posterity. Suggestions included that, with the young people's consent, work could be sent to the Poet Laureate, displayed in the new History Centre and young people's hubs and published in books or digitally through platforms such as Amazon. It was also suggested that the Council could encourage writing and poetry through competitions. Councillor Hovvels highlighted the value of incorporating young people's work into Durham County Council's marketing campaigns.

Councillor Gunn referred to innovative ways that communities have found during the pandemic to share art and literature such as using disused bus shelters as libraries and she added that this may be another avenue to consider. She spoke of the importance of consulting the young people on how they would like their work to be shared. Robert Johnson, Project Manager from Investing in Children referred to the success of the Artstop initiative and he added the Children in Care Council would welcome opportunities to explore similar projects with the Council. Melanie Stubbs, Head of the Virtual School and Laura Armstrong, Professional Practice Manager agreed to consider these suggestions for a further discussion to be held at a future Panel meeting.

## **8 Investing in Children / Children in Care Council (CiCC) Update**

Robert Johnson, Project Manager for Investing in Children and Caitlyn and Luke of the Children in Care Council delivered a presentation which focused on recent activities by the Children in Care Council (for copy of presentation see file of minutes). The update included:

- a workshop was held during half term to create a mural for the Full Circle team's new meeting room which is planned to be opened in July;
- the young people are developing a brothers and sisters film to raise awareness of how being separated from siblings can have a long-term impact and how to increase opportunities for sibling groups that do not live together, to be together;
- ten Education Fun Fund applications were successful during the period;
- funding for an additional Artstop project has been secured;
- a CiCC member had been a keynote speaker at a police event;
- a foster care training review had taken place and it is hoped that Corporate Parenting Members will be invited to see how the young people deliver foster care training in the future;
- The CiCC encouraged Members to gain an insight into the challenges faced by young people when their placement breaks down;
- the young people shared a proud moment about a young person who had initially been reluctant to participate in meetings, however, they had grown in confidence and now take an active role in group sessions and they have met with law students from Newcastle University to discuss care proceedings.

The Panel congratulated the young people on their work and Councillor Gunn spoke of the value of the information that is provided by the young people from their direct, lived experiences of being cared for.

She referred to the young people's concerns regarding placement stability and the separation of siblings and how these issues become very real when they are raised by the young people themselves. Referring to the successful Education Fun Fund applications she commented it was pleasing to see the young people's input into how the funding is allocated.

Picking up on the challenges of placement stability, Laura Caunce, Strategic Manager for Looked After Children Resources informed Members that a deep-dive analysis is underway into the issue, which is due to complete in April.

Laura Armstrong, Professional Practice Manager, remarked that the young people were underestimating their achievements and she explained that in addition to all the work they had previously described, they had also assisted to organise five events for Care Day and spoken at the Foster Carer Awards ceremony. The Professional Practice Manager took the opportunity to thank Members for their support at these events.

The Project Manager for Investing in Children paid tribute to a young person who had experienced a turbulent time recently, however, despite this, the young person had found the strength to honour a commitment to speak at a conference and the Project Manager spoke of how proud he was of the way this young person had shown great empathy for others.

Councillor Walton referred to the foster carer training review and spoke highly of the training delivered by the young people of the Children in Care Council saying their training sends powerful messages and has an enormous impact.

Members commented that they would like to see the film the young people are developing to raise awareness of sibling groups, to learn more about how they can support the young people in these situations.

The Chair thanked Rob, Caitlyn and Luke for their valuable contribution to the meeting.

## **9 Performance Update Quarter 3**

The Panel received a report of the Corporate Director of Resources which provided an overview of performance in relation to children looked after and care leavers (for copy of report and presentation see file).

Stephen Tracey, Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager delivered the presentation highlighting key areas of performance.

He explained the trend prior to the pandemic was a steady increase in the total number of looked after children. Since then, numbers increased due to delays in legal proceedings which had led to more young people staying in care.

In terms of composition, the number of children coming into care under the age of 1 had decreased whilst there had been an increase in the number of young people entering care over the age of 16. The total number of children looked after is higher than the national average but remains below regional and statistical neighbours. In terms of placements, the number of young people placed in external residential care had increased. The number of children placed outside of the county had increased slightly, however, the figure was below the national average. With regard to placement stability, the number of young people subject to three or more placement moves during a year had increased.

In response to a question from Councillor Coult, the Equality and Strategy Manager explained the decrease in the number of under 1s entering care and the increase in the number of young people aged 16 entering care, brings additional placement pressures. The increase in the number of looked after children placed in Secure Accommodation had seen a slight increase which was being monitored.

Councillor Walton expressed concern at the number of young people experiencing placement breakdowns with older children more likely to experience placement breakdown. She asked if this was an indication that increased support is required for foster carers, to help them manage the challenges posed by teenagers. The Strategic Manager for Children Looked After and Resources acknowledged the need to target resources into the training of foster carers to ensure they have support at the earliest stages to prepare them for the challenges ahead.

Councillor Gunn highlighted that the increase in the number of children subject to three or more placement moves in one year had been raised as an issue by the young people themselves. The Professional Practice Manager informed the Panel that her role includes to undertake a monthly audit of children coming into care, to investigate their individual circumstances.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **10 Fostering Update**

Councillors Walton and Simmons spoke of the success of the Foster Carer Awards ceremony which took place on 9 March, with the evening being very emotional for all those concerned and she thanked all those involved in arranging and hosting the event.

The Senior Partnerships Officer referred to the Mockingbird project to increase and retain foster carers saying the plans are progressing well and it is hoped that the project will be in progress by summer.

The Panel viewed the fostering advert currently being aired on television and noted a further advert is due to be aired in May. Councillor Townsend requested a link to download the advert on Members' social media pages, in order to increase the reach.

## **11 Annual Health Report**

Alison Ferguson, Designated Nurse for Children Looked After presented the Annual Health Report and delivered a presentation highlighting key points (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Designated Nurse explained the statutory requirements, commissioning arrangements and achievements over the year. The Panel noted the introduction of exception reports which are used to identify reasons and target improvements, when statutory timeframes are not achieved. Challenges for the forthcoming year include the ongoing impact of Covid-19 and the increasing number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

Councillor Charlton asked how children looked after were prioritised for the child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS). The Designated Nurse explained that the initial contact takes place as soon as possible and it is usually by phone, however this depends upon the age of child. The presented need is then assessed by a team of professionals. Durham has commissioned the Full Circle service which has a suite of support available and the CAMHS service is introduced if there is an increased need. The Council also commissions bespoke packages of care as and when required. The Head of the Virtual School spoke of the strong links with the Full Circle which had undertaken training for designated teachers and it also provides a helpline available to schools every day until 3pm.

### **Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **12 Care Leavers' Hub**

The Senior Partnerships Officer delivered a short presentation on the opening of the Care Leavers' Hub which took place on 28 February, attended by Councillors Simmons, Walton and Henderson. The Hub, which is located in Sherburn, is a multi-agency project which provides a safe space for care leavers. The project offers care leavers the opportunity to participate in structured group work, with a schedule of activities including a Sunday Lunch Club. The young people can also use the laundry and access support with other practical skills and job applications, in addition to spending time with friends.

The Chair commented on the impressive facilities and the range of support available. When asked if there was any other support the young people would like to see, the young people mentioned that they would like more support with travel costs to attend interviews and medical appointments.

The Panel expressed concern that care leavers had raised transport costs as an issue on several previous occasions. Councillor Gunn said how pleased she was to see this project come to fruition and emphasised how important accessibility will be to the project's success. She expressed her concern that there was more work to be done with regard to providing assistance with travel costs and commented that a corporate parent's aspirations for children looked after should be exactly the same as all parent's aspirations for their own child, adding that they should be respected and their independence should be promoted.

Councillor Charlton asked whether there was scope to offer assistance through the Link2 bus service. Councillor Hovvels pointed out that priority is given to members of the public with health or mobility issues and she added her support for more assistance with travel costs and urged the Panel to make representations for policy change. Councillor Deinali referred to the Council's recent allocation of £2 million of savings for short term support to bus services in County Durham and questioned whether some of that money could have been allocated to provide concessionary travel for young people, in addition to supporting bus services.

## **13 Virtual School Sub-Group Proposals**

Members discussed and agreed a proposal to allocate two of the four vacant co-opted member positions on the Corporate Parenting Panel to representatives from a maintained nursery provision and post-16 education and these representatives would also sit on the Virtual Sub-School Sub Group.

## **14 Any other business**

The Senior Partnerships Officer reported the following items of other business.

Feedback from the joint Children in Care Council and Corporate Parenting Panel meeting which took place in October, at which the themes of family time, support for care leavers and prejudice and discrimination, will be presented at the next joint meeting. Priorities for 2022-23 will be set at the meeting with the Children in Care Council which will be held on 12 May.

## **15 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.

## **16 Regulation 44 visits and Regulatory Body ratings of Children's Residential Homes**

The Strategic Manager for Children Looked After Resources presented the Regulation 44 visits and regulatory body ratings report (for copy see file of minutes).

The Panel commended staff of the children's residential homes and Aycliffe Secure Centre on their good work to maintain business as usual in exceptional circumstances throughout the pandemic and during the recovery.

### **Resolved:**

That the report be received.

# Presentation by Caitlyn and Luke, CiCC CPP representatives, and Robert Johnson ~ Investing in Children



## Durham Children in Care Council (CiCC) – March/April 22 Highlights

- New Art stop's project has began through the liC Art and Wellbeing Café. New CiCC members will have the option to connect with this project.
- Two CiCC members delivered training to Sunderland University social work students. One was new and one was from a DCC young people's home – amazing feedback well-done!!
- Durham CiCC are hosting the North East Regional Care Council in April – sharing ideas for a joint project.
- Both CiCC groups met with managers from children's services and care leaving services in March, to considering names and approaches for DCC teams as part of restructuring arrangements and new ways of working. Ideas and thoughts have been shared and further meetings will take place about these with the managers involved.
- Meetings and discussions are underway regarding unaccompanied and SEND y/p connecting with CiCC more.

Promoting the Rights of Children and Young People



## CiCC Highlights March/April 22

- A CiCC sub group has been set up to work with ‘looked after nurses’ to review language and health assessments. Alongside the co-development of a summer training session for all health practitioners across the County to attend.
- liC/CiCC Care Day 22 postponed to attract more attendance. New date 31<sup>st</sup> May 11am – 3pm.
- 5 CiCC members delivered training to 13 future foster carers. This involved 2 new CiCC members aged 8 and 13 years old. This group will also be connecting with the new Mockingbird model for DCC Foster Care Services.
- A quote from the training: “***All the young people involved tonight are very special individuals, they were confident, informative, very open and honest***”.
- CiCC ask of CPP this month is for as many CPP members to attend the joint CiCC/ CPP meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> May.



# Feedback from joint CICC/CPP meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2021

- Support for care leavers
- Family time
- Stigma and discrimination

# Support for Care Leavers: you said....

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- Young people are not aware that Care Leavers automatically get an interview for DCC jobs, if they meet the criteria
- Young people would benefit from some support when applying for jobs, and with preparation ahead of interviews
- Young people may need help/money to get a suitable interview outfit
- Young people do not feel that the care leavers allowance is enough to live on
- The emotional support for some care leavers is not adequate, especially if they don't have any support networks, which impacts on their mental health.
- Some young people felt that more support is needed when they transition from care to supported accommodation, and felt that this was unfair as young people who live with their families can take their time and move out at a point which is suitable for their needs
- Young people feel that transport is still an issue in County Durham, and the waiting list to get driving lessons is too long



# Support for Care Leavers: we did.....

- Our Local Offer to Care Leavers is available on the internet.
- The DurhamWorks offer included in our information to Care Leavers, includes the job interview offer. This has been shared at CiCC meetings and at the CPP meetings
- Reviewed our Local Offer in comparison with national Care Leavers offers
- The transport offer has been improved, with all but one college now offering bus passes that are not deducted from bursaries
- All young people in years 12-13 are now eligible for an all time top up bus pass, which can be used in addition to college travel
- The financial offer for care leavers is being reviewed
- Care leavers are eligible for Freedom Cards
- Dedicated Care Leavers team
- Opened a Care Leavers hub



# Family Time: you said....

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- Young people felt that the rooms where family time takes place were not always suitable
- Young people felt that the frequency and length of their family time should be considered on an individual basis. Some felt that they did not have enough time to do a nice activity, whereas some felt that their family time was too long for the circumstances / venue
- Young people said that they would like some guidance around family time as they were unsure what the rules and guidance was relating to Covid e.g. needing permission when hugging parents etc
- Young people felt that alternative options should be considered for family time, including virtual family time or phone calls which could be more frequent than in person meetings, as they often miss their families
- Young people said that sometimes, they are not given a reason for not being able to contact their family when they wanted to



# Family Time: we did.....

- Reviewed family time spaces
- Reviewed all family time plans
- Stopped using some venues
- Updated some venues
- Made requests for some new venues that we can use for family time
- Explained the every changing Covid rules (as best as we can)
- Had a renewed focus on everyone understanding their family time plan after Covid



# Stigma and discrimination: you said....

- Some young people said there are rules for them, which would not be there if they were living with their own families e.g. sleepovers
- Some foster carers do not allow sleepovers with friends without visiting the home and meeting the family in advance
- Young people are not allowed to sleep over in their foster brother/sisters' rooms
- Young people said that there are still lots of negative headlines in the news about children who are in care. Some young people also experience discrimination from other parents
- Young people stressed the importance for social works and other professional to be truthful e.g. sometimes young people are told they're going to stay with a family member / going on a short holiday etc when they are actually being taken into care.
- Young people felt there could be more awareness in schools e.g. teachers sometimes advise young people to 'leave your worries at the door'
- Young people shared their ideas to produce a film, detailing some of their life experiences and demonstrating what it's really like to be in care.



# Stigma and discrimination: we did..

- The Art Stops project, to reduce stigma of Care Experience, is expanding across the region.
- Introduced opportunities to celebrate success in 'proud moments' at each CPP.
- Use of language agenda item at social work team meetings, and six-monthly updates at CPP.
- Film produced by young people.
- Met with community midwives to discuss corporate grandparenting
- PCSO training to build positive relationships with the Police
- Foster carer training delivered to potential foster carers
- Fostering Stars Awards.
- Met with Josh McAlister as part of the care review.
- Care experience of a young person was shared on care day and with Josh McAlister.
- CPP elected members asked to share positive stories within their communities



Being Broken isn't a weakness,  
it just shows that  
you are gaining strength.

## We are also going to.....

- Send meeting notes of CICC meetings to all CLA
  - Develop a Care Leavers pack
  - School Governor CPP members will be asked to raise the profile of care experienced young people, in a positive way
  - Establish the Care Experienced Scrutiny committee
- 
- Develop a Young Inspectors programme
  - Develop an entry to Care Pack
  - Share young people's experiences in film and other media
  - Seek to broaden the attendance of children and young people at the CICC

**Corporate Parenting Panel****29 April 2022****Care Leavers Strategy and Action Plan  
January 2022 – December 2024****Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care,  
Durham County Council****Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 This report has been prepared to provide a strategy for the ambition and delivery of services for young people who have been in the care of Durham children's services.
- 2 The strategy report and action plan are attached at Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

**Executive summary**

- 3 Services for young people who have been in the care of Durham children's services are increasingly co-produced with the young people who receive the support. This is identified as the most effective way of establishing accountable services to meet need.
- 4 The Local Authority is required to provide a clear offer of services to Care Leavers and this is done nationally using the Local Offer to Care Leavers. In the development of this report a group of care leavers met to evaluate Durham's local offer against others nationally. This resulted in the development of the action plan with young people's priorities at the heart of the work.
- 5 The development of a group of young people who are care leavers to operate as a scrutiny committee to drive the priorities and progress of work in the service is a key activity to continue to progress with co-produced services.

**Recommendation**

- 6 Member of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note the contents of this report

## Background

- 7 Care Leaver eligibility is determined on the basis of the young person's care status and is as follows.
- 8 **Relevant Child:** A 'relevant child' can include those who have been detained through the criminal justice system or were in hospital on their 16th birthday.
- 9 If a 'relevant child' has returned home to their parents, they cease to be a relevant child after being at home for 6 months. However, if this arrangement later breaks down before their 18th birthday, they return to being a 'relevant child'.
- 10 If a young person has experienced a series of pre-planned respite arrangements, not lasting longer than 4 weeks, each of these will not be considered as qualifying towards 'relevant child' status. However, if a young person receives respite care on a regular basis, this may amount to the young person being classed as a 'relevant child'; the Local Authority's policy will need to be considered to determine this.
- 11 **Former Relevant Child:** If, at the age of 21, the young person is still being helped by the responsible Authority with education or training, then they remain a 'former relevant child' until a maximum age of 25. Their programme of education or training will be set out within their Pathway Plan.
- 12 Former relevant children are no longer dependent upon the Local Authority for income and housing costs. They can obtain benefits in their own right. If they become homeless at the age of 18, 19 or 20, they will automatically be seen as being a priority need. If they become homeless at the age of 21 or over, they will need to be assessed to establish whether they are vulnerable.
- 13 **Qualifying Care Leaver:** This category also includes previously 'looked after' children aged 16 to 20, who ceased to be 'looked after' on the making of a Special Guardianship Order, and:
  - (a) are either still being cared for under the Special Guardianship Order (16 or 17 year olds); *or*
  - (b) the Order remained in force until they reached 18.
- 14 The young people who form the care leaver population are children who were unable to safely remain living within their families. The children who

come into our care do so because they have suffered loss and/or harm. They need to be supported by all the adults in their lives to understand what has happened in a way that makes sure they do not assume blame or shame for what has happened. As a result of the challenges the children in our care have faced, we need to be assured that being in our care makes things better for them. Using the experiences of care leavers to inform our planning and hold us to account provides us with the opportunity to best meet their needs.

- 15 Our care leavers have amazing talents and skills, and it is our role to help them to explore these. We do this best when we will provide an environment that supports each young person to feel loved and confident to learn and to make mistakes. We want our care leavers to feel able to have all the opportunities their friends have, without being concerned that they have been in our care. In doing this we work with all the services that are in contact with care leavers to seek to remove any barriers or prejudices them.
- 16 We provide a range of services to meet assessed needs, including accommodation, education, employment and training which reflects the needs of individual young people.
- 17 We provide a dedicated service to care leavers as young adults. Every care leaver who wants to have a named Young Person's Advisor who helps them to produce a plan focused on their ambitions and dreams and works alongside the young person to achieve the steps along the way. Services are in place until the young person is 25 and young people can contact the service to request advice and support.

## **Conclusion**

- 18 Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to provide comment on the Care Leaver Strategy which provides oversight of the ambition and work of the care leaver service with the priorities for the year ahead.

## **Author**

Jodie Henderson

Tel: 03000 265759

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The services to Care leavers in Durham are monitored and reported through the work of Corporate Parenting Panel.

### **Finance**

There are cost implications for design and print services, however the Care leavers Strategy Report will primarily be shared by email, on the Local Offer to Care Leavers and Durham County Council websites to minimise printing and distribution costs.

### **Consultation**

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

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

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

### **Climate Change**

There are no climate change implications

### **Human Rights**

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

### **Crime and Disorder**

There are no crime and disorder implications.

### **Staffing**

There are no staffing implications.

### **Accommodation**

There are no accommodation implications.

### **Risk**

There are no risk implications.

### **Procurement**

There are no procurement implications.

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## **Appendix 2: Care Leaver's Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers**

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Attached as a separate document

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## **Appendix 3: Care Leavers Service Action Plan**

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Attached as a separate document

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# Durham County Council Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers

January 2022-December 2024



- 1. Contents**
- 2. Our Vision**
- 3. Part of Durham**
- 4. Our Children and Young People**
- 5. Learning from Care Experienced Young People**
- 6. Relationships**
- 7. Education Employment and Training**
- 8. The Local Offer**
- 9. Children and Young People's Voices**

## 2. Our Vision

In Durham Children's Services we want to make sure that children only come into our care when they must do so. When they cannot remain with their families because they are being harmed or the risk of them being harmed becomes too great. We will work relentlessly to support children to remain living with their families, and if a child needs to leave their parents care we will work with the child and their network to support the child to remain living with safe familiar adults.

When children are cared for within their networks, we will support the adults who care for them. We will work with the child and their family to gain a shared understanding of what has happened in their family and why the child has been cared for away from their parents.

We want any young person who is unable to live at home to live in a homely and comfortable environment. With care provided by foster carers, or staff teams who are committed to helping them enjoy their lives and grow with positive experiences of loving care by trusted and dependable adults. We want children in our care to have had consistent adult support with stable and positive social work relationships so that they don't feel the need to repeat their story. We want them to thrive with adults who have walked beside them during their care journey.



We are ambitious for the children in our care and care leavers and for the quality of service we seek to provide to them. We want children in our care and care leavers to be supported to achieve their potential with dedicated support continuing into adulthood.

We want children in our care and care leavers to be sure that their voices will be heard on an individual and collective basis. We want to make sure that regardless of communication challenges, language barriers, every care leaver is supported to share their views.

We want to provide children in our care and care leavers with safe boundaries and loving care provided by all corporate parents to make sure that the care we offer improves their circumstances now and in the future. We want to make sure that the communities in Durham work with us to help children in care and care leavers to feel they are valued as they grow.

### Areas for action

- We will only bring children into care when it cannot be made safe for them to stay at home.
- We will work with each child's network to try and keep every child within their network.
- We will support all adults who care for children to do so safely.
- We want all children to live in safe homely and comfortable homes.
- We want all children to be able to build enduring relationships with consistent adults.
- We want to walk alongside children who are unable to stay living at home to stop them having to tell their story over and over.
- We want all children to achieve their best in education, and will work with them and their school, college or workplace to support this.

### 3. Part of Durham

In Durham we believe that every child needs to be supported to develop relationships with people that sustain them through challenges in life and to share happy times.

We know, because they have told us, that the children we care for, and care leavers value the relationships they have with the people who care for them. Foster carers, social workers, children's home staff teams, teachers and nurses can all have a huge impact on a child or young person's life. It is our responsibility to make the impact positive. The children we have cared for have told us that this makes the difference to them as they have grown up.



These relationships need to be nurtured and acknowledged as special in supporting each child to understand their place in the world and to feel confident to learn and to grow.

The children in our care and care leavers have families and histories that we must respect. We must work cooperatively with each child's family as co-parents in the best interests of each child. We must allow the possibility for change and growth in families and with enduring supportive relationships help each child to maintain all positive relationships in their lives.

In Durham we do not believe that any person progresses to independence, as social beings' humans require loving supportive relationships throughout their lives to thrive. We want to support children and young people who are, or have been, in our care to develop and sustain these relationships.

#### Areas for action

We will always try to support children and young people to keep the relationships that matter to them.

- We will continue to improve the way we work with birth families.
- We will stick with children and young people through good and challenging times.

#### 4. Our Children and Young People

In Durham we currently care for around 960 children and support 300 young people with care leaver eligibility.

The children who come into our care do so because they have suffered loss and/or harm. They need to be supported by all the adults in their lives to understand what has happened in a way that makes sure they do not assume blame or shame for what has happened. As a result of the challenges the children in our care have faced, we need to be assured that being in our care makes things better for them.

Our children have amazing talents and skills, and it is our role to help them to explore these. We will provide the environment that supports each child to feel loved and confident to learn and to make mistakes. The children in our care will feel able to have all the opportunities their friends have, without being concerned that they are in our care. In doing this we work with all the services that are in contact with the children in our care and care leavers to seek to remove any barriers or prejudices them . The children in our care and care leavers will be aware that we are proud of their achievements and that we celebrate these with them.



Children are supported in having their achievements acknowledged in all manner of ways, linked to their choices. They are supported to participate in all celebration events in their school and colleges. Individual talents in arts and sports are supported alongside support for children and care leavers who choose an academic pathway into adulthood via university.

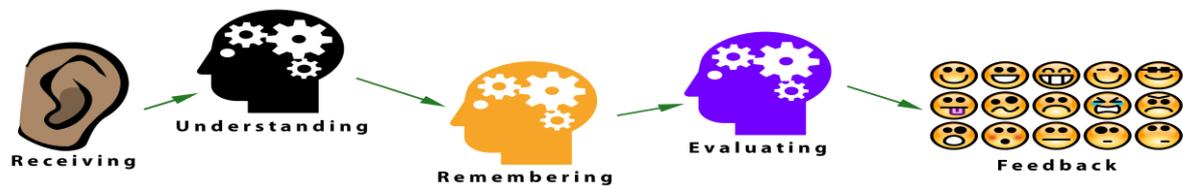
##### Areas for action

- We will hold annual celebration events for children in care and care leavers.
- We will always try to provide warm and loving care to children and young people.
- We will work with each child in care and care leaver to explore their potential and support them to continue to develop skills.

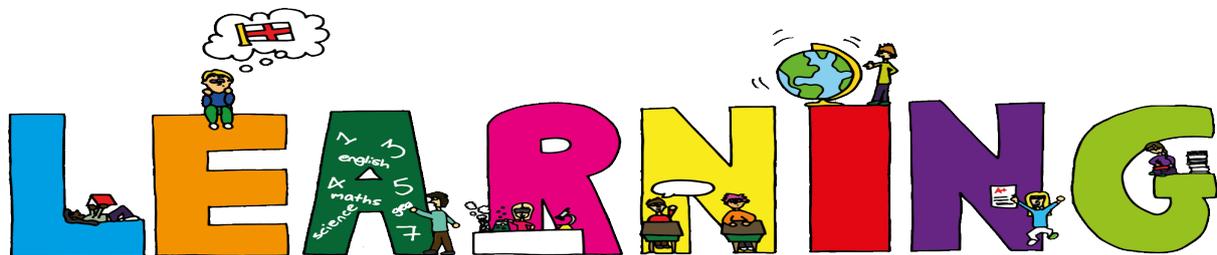
## 5. Learning from Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People

Children in our care and care leavers have told us that they are proud to be from Durham. The majority feel connected to and claimed by those adults who care for them. They do however at other times feel that their experience of being in care or leaving care creates a barrier for them and that they and their families are negatively perceived as a result.

We will continue to engage with the children in our care and care leavers to understand their experiences and improve individual and collectively the lived experiences of children and young people.



We will continue to participate in structured research where this is possible to gain insights into the positive experiences and challenges faced by children and young people to base any service developments on the outcomes identified.



We will work with local, regional, and national children in care and care leaver forums to learn for the experiences of wider groups of care experienced young people and drive practice improvements in Durham.

### Areas for Action

- We will participate in research with Care Leavers Transition from Care (CCTC) research with Reading university and the network community that supports that research.
- We will challenge discrimination towards any child in care or a care leaver.

## 6. Relationships

Without relationships human beings are unable to function. We are all social beings who require the interaction with others to thrive. In Durham we believe that the consistency of relationships is central to our ability to build trust and confidence in each other. We seek to provide this stability in carer and social worker, but acknowledge we have work to progress to recruit and retain foster carers, children's home staff and social workers to provide the stability of relationship the children and young people we care for require.

We have a clear expectation that the adults providing care to children and young people will do so with genuine affection. Our policies regarding physical contact and displays of affection include the need for this to build safe and sustaining relationships. We are working to consider the ways in which our organisation responds to trauma, not only with our children and young people but across the staff teams. This is acknowledged as hugely significant to the development of relationships of trust that support adults to be emotionally responsive to children's needs.

We have a large proportion of children in care who live in stable foster care homes. For most children and young people these homes sustain throughout the children and young people's lives with relationships that endure.

There are some children and young people who do not have this stability and we are working to increase our foster care offer so that we can provide a greater matching choice at the outset of coming into care. We acknowledge that we have too many children and young people who have moved in our care too many times. This prevents them from building the relationships that they need. We are seeking to establish smaller children's homes for children who may need care to be provided in this way. It is hoped that in doing this we will be better able to build relationships that can endure.



### Key points for action

- We will make sure that all policies, and processes will consider the need to support enduring positive relationships with children in care and care leavers.
- This will include the policies for foster carers and children's home staff as well as for children's social workers.
- We will support our staff to understand the impact of relationship-based working with dedicated training, and reflective supervision to support their capacity to build and sustain meaningful relationships with children in our care and care leavers.

## Education, Employment and Training.

The schools and colleges in Durham show strong performance in developing individual children to fulfil their academic and vocational potential. There is a wide range of school and colleges offering varied curriculums supporting children and young people's learning.

Children in care in Durham are further supported by the Virtual school which provides additional capacity to support the education of this group of children. This team co-ordinates a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which details support into schools and colleges, assistance in resolving any issues linked to education and attainment specific to each child or young person.

We recognise the importance of stability in education not only to promote learning but to aid children and young people to maintain friendships and support networks. We acknowledge the whole experience of being in education includes both the curriculum and extracurricular activities and seek to support all the children in our care to participate in activities linked to their interests and skills.

The school day involves the planning for school, the readiness for learning and the peer relationships and we seek to support young people to be able to engage with all aspects of this. Beginning with good routines of care in their living arrangements and including detail of their travel to and from school as well as their school day.

We seek to involve children's families in celebrating the successes in education wherever possible, with formal consultation evenings and school events forming part of the sharing of parental responsibility where this meets the child or young person's needs.



All young people in Durham are supported to remain in education to achieve their potential up to and including attending universities of choice and progressing post graduate careers.

Young People seeking support with employment in Durham are supported by dedicated advisors within Durham Works who seek to identify opportunities for children in care and care leavers to undertake work experience and training opportunities along with a range of ring-fenced apprenticeship and employment opportunities.

### Areas for action

All children and young people in Durham will have a Personal Education Plan.

All children and young people in Durham will be supported to remain in education to fulfil their personal ambitions

Young People in Durham will be supported into employment with dedicated support from Durham Works

## The Local Offer to Care Leavers

We have published Local Offer to care leavers in Durham which is available on our website and details the support available to young people who have been in care.

The Local Offer is divided into 5 headings covering

- Support to you
- Where can I live?
- Money
- Education Training and Employment
- Looking After Yourself



Each of these areas provides information to help guide young people to support that is available with all and any aspects of their lives as they progress into adulthood.

We want to Care Leavers in Durham to understand all the ways that we can provide help and support. We want them to be able to move into their adult lives with confidence, able to plan a future and learn from mistakes as they mature with certainty that our care for them continues.

We are committed to continuing to review and improve our offer seeking to provide as much care and support as we can to young people. We work in partnership with young people to co-produce service improvements and develop ideas linked to young people's priorities.

We seek to offer services in an inclusive way, led by young people. Every care leaver has access to a Young Person's Advisor who will work with them to produce their own plan for their future and the steps needed to help to make progress.

### Areas for Action

- We will provide a dedicated personal assistant to all young people who are eligible for leaving care services.
- We will have clear mechanisms for determining leaving care status and will explain this to care leavers and their families.
- We are committed to supporting care leavers to engage in education and employment.
- We respect the right of all care experienced people to retain the positive relationships they have established throughout their lives and accept that there may be periods of time when care leavers choose to have no communication with us, and times in their lives when they wish to do so.
- We encourage all care leavers to share their experiences, achievements, and challenges with the people they have the most positive relationships with regardless of work role.
- We retain relationships with children and young people for as long as the young person wants to. While the Local Authority is not resourced to provide financial support to care leavers over 25, we always provide emotional support and sign posting to services regardless of age.

## Children and Young People's Voices

To make sure that everything we do has children's voices at the centre we have several ways that we engage with children and young people. All social workers, young people's advisors, independent reviewing officers, will work directly with individual children and young people to build relationships and help to understand what is important to children.



In addition to direct work and fun time to build relationships all young people are supported to access the Mind of My Own app to aid them to share their views, successes, and challenges. This allows messages to be sent to the person a child or young person wishes to communicate this with.

We commit to listening to children and young people's views and responding to these or explaining why we are not able to and seeking shared ways forward. This will be supported by each child's IRO who will monitor the plan for each child and their involvement with this.

The impact of really listening and considering the views of each child will need to be monitored on an individual basis. We have small social work teams to support increased oversight and support to social worker and Young People's Advisors. This will enable managers to monitor this in supervision with social workers and support genuine reflection on the extent to which the child's wishes are included in the plan and the difference they make.

There will be times when we are not able to do what a child wants us to do, either because it is not safe, or we cannot support the risk involved. In these circumstances the child's allocated social worker will explain this to the child. If we can, we will find a negotiated way forward, often with the support of an independent advocate. All children in Care have access to independent advocacy services through the National Youth Advocacy Service.



We also work with Investors in Children who provide non directed support to individual and groups of children to express their views. This supports the Children in Care Council to participate in local, regional, and national work to identify the needs of children in care and care leavers and hold services to account for the provision of this support.

## Key points for action

- Make sure that young people in our care are routinely engaged, consulted and have a real say in their own lives;
- We will support children to explore how they make choices and express their views.
- We accept that this involves a degree of risk-taking behaviour and will work with children and young people to support this within age appropriate limits.
- We will make sure that we explain decisions to them and that we challenge any preconceived views about children in care.
- We will listen to each child's views and avoid a one size fits all service that doesn't allow space for individual choices and experiences.
- Make sure that young people in our care are routinely engaged, consulted and have a real say in their own lives;
- We will support children to explore how they make choices and express their views.
- We accept that this involves a degree of risk-taking behaviour and will work with children and young people to support this within age-appropriate limits.
- Ensure that young people in our care are properly and fully informed of their rights and offer advocacy to ensure they receive them; and
- Every child in the care of Durham Council has the right to access advocacy support and we commit to promoting this right to all children who come into our care.
- Listen to the voice of children in care and care experience people of all ages and always consult them about changes to services and support.
- We continue to work with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) to understand the care experience of children in Durham. We are committed to the views of the CiCC being presented regularly to the Corporate Parenting Forum to direct the work of the service.
- The active role of the CiCC in the region and nationally is acknowledged as a significant strength and we are keen to continue to work together to improve services.

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**CARE LEAVER SERVICE ACTION PLAN**

**2022-2023**

1 b	To evaluate the use of the Hub	Establish a user group of young people and partners to review the effective use of the hub and identify development.	28 <sup>th</sup> February 2022 Monthly meetings thereafter	LD, TS
1c	Identify next Hub location and progress to an opening.	Use feedback from usage to inform future need. Make a request for a venue.	30 <sup>th</sup> August 2022	JH
2a	Pathway plan assessment document to be reviewed.	TS,LD and LB to meet to review the document from Darlington  Meet with A.GS re the option for LL to support the document	1/2/2022  11/2/2022  To be in place APRIL 2022	LD,TS &LB  TS&LD
2b	All staff to be trained in pathway plan assessment / SOS  All documents to be written in a way that is aimed at the young person, strength based and ambitious	Development day to focus on staff's training needs  All staff to have done SOS training and network/mobility mapping Further training to be completed around assessing  Training offer to be developed for YPA's	11/2/2022  6 months (July 2022) 6 months (July 2022)  April 2022	HO, TS, LD, ES
2c	Risk Assessment document to support post 18 work to be developed in partnership with adult services.	New document to be designed and implemented within LL.  Staff to be trained in risk assessment	3 months April 2022	Service Manager HO, TJ
3	Transfer protocol – -how YPA's will be allocated, -what age they will be allocated - Transfer process/ handover at 18	-Monthly allocation meeting to look at young people who are 17 -In tray needed for cases transferring at 18	3 months April 2022	TS,LD,LB

4	Monitoring tray to be deleted from LL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- TS and LD to review cases in the in tray and close the cases that do not require a service and allocate the cases where a service is needed.</li> <li>- Service Manager Develop a process with systems and first contact for re referrals</li> </ul>	<p>3 Months (April 2022)</p> <p>Meeting to be arranged with systems in 3 months (April 2022)</p>	Service manager LD, TS
5	New name for the service	<p>Meet with young people and staff on the development day to come up with 4 options</p> <p>Meet with IIC to give the 4 options for them choose</p> <p>Write out to everybody once decision is made to launch the new service.</p>	<p>11/2/2022- new name options</p> <p>Within 1 month to go to next IIC meeting. (March 2022)</p> <p>Within 1 month to launch (April 2022)</p>	All of care leaver service and IIC
6	Consent base for work post 18 to be reviewed.	Consent forms to be completed for all 18+ cases that also needs to include consent to contact Jobcentre	31.03.2022	SWC TL/Lead YPA
7	Home starter packs - every young person to receive a home hamper from the YPS when they move into their new home	Link in with VCS and welfare assist for funding	28 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2022	LD&TS
8	Summer celebration event to be arranged for all care leavers	Young person's group to be established to lead on this supported by YPA's and managers.	To be in place and event arranged for July 2022	Group of Young People and YPA's to be established
9	CLASP panel to continue each month (multi agency meeting to include care leaving team, LB Accommodation and support co Ordinator , JB Supported lodgings, DR Housing)	<p>All care leavers accommodation to be reviewed, RAG rated and where young people are at risk of homelessness management scrutiny of plans.</p> <p>To be recorded on LL</p>	Monthly	JH/Service manager
10	EET /NEET panel	<p>All care leavers E,T,E to be reviewed, RAG rated and where young people are at risk of homelessness management scrutiny of plans.</p> <p>To be recorded on LL</p>	Monthly	JH/Service manager

11	MASH panel to be set up (Multi agency meeting to review all high risk cases, to include police, Harbour, humankind, housing, FF, to be added to)	Monthly meetings to be set for YPA' to present high risk cases for a panel to have oversight and scrutiny off  Threshold criteria to be developed	April 2022	JH/Service manager
12	Financial procedures to be reviewed	SUHA needs to be reviewed. University payments needs to be reviewed.	September 2022	Service manager JH
13	Staff profiles	Develop a profile for each staff member and team manager that can be given to a young person by their SW to introduce their YPA and the care leaving service	11 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2022 staff to write up profiles 11 <sup>th</sup> March 2022 for profiles to be written into a document that can be shared .	All of the service

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# Durham County Council Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers

January 2022-December 2024

# Our Vision

- We will only bring children into care when it cannot be made safe for them to stay at home.
- We will work with each child's network to try and keep every child within their network.
- We will support all adults who care for children to do so safely.
- We want all children to live in safe homely and comfortable homes.
- We want all children to be able to build enduring relationships with consistent adults.
- We want to walk alongside children who are unable to stay living at home to stop them having to tell their story over and over.
- We want all children to achieve their best in education, and will work with them and their school, college or workplace to support this.



# Children of Durham



- We will always try to provide warm and loving care to children and young people.
- We will work with each child in care and care leaver to explore their potential and support them to continue to develop skills.
- We will participate in research with Care Leavers Transition from Care (CCTC) research with Reading university and the network community that supports that research.
- We will hold annual celebration events for children in care and care leavers.

We will challenge discrimination towards any child in care or a care leaver.

# Relationships

- We will make sure that all policies, and processes will consider the need to support enduring positive relationships with children in care and care leavers.
- This will include the policies for foster carers and children's home staff as well as for children's social workers.
- We will support our staff to understand the impact of relationship-based working with dedicated training, and reflective supervision to support their capacity to build and sustain meaningful relationships with children in our care and care leavers.



# Education Employment and Training



- All children and young people in Durham will have a Personal Education Plan.
- All children and young people in Durham will be supported to remain in education to fulfil their personal ambitions
- Young People in Durham will be supported into employment with dedicated support from Durham Works

# Local Offer to Care leavers



- We will provide a dedicated personal assistant to all young people who are eligible for leaving care services.
- We will have clear mechanisms for determining leaving care status and will explain this to care leavers and their families.
- We are committed to supporting care leavers to engage in education and employment.
- We respect the right of all care experienced people to retain the positive relationships they have established throughout their lives and accept that there may be periods of time when care leavers choose to have no communication with us, and times in their lives when they wish to do so.
- We encourage all care leavers to share their experiences, achievements, and challenges with the people they have the most positive relationships with regardless of work role.
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# Young People's Voices

- Commitment to co-production of all service developments
- Engagement with children in care planning.
- Use of advocacy on an individual and collective level to inform service developments.
- Acceptance of a degree of risk taking in young people's choices.
- Avoidance of a one size fits all model.
- Explaining when we can't do what young people want.



# Key Priorities

- Establishing a young person's scrutiny committee.
- Using the research from the research project.
- Identify a new Hub location and open a hub.
- Every care leaver offered safe affordable housing.
- Promote education employment and training.



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