



## **Corporate Parenting Panel**

**Date** Monday 22 November 2021  
**Time** 9.30 am  
**Venue** Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham

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### **Business**

#### **Part A**

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

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2021 (Pages 3 - 14)
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 and Permanence
8. Update on Language - Verbal update from Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence
9. Investing in Children / Children in Care Council Update - Presentation of Project Officer, Investing in Children (Pages 15 - 18)
  - a) Feedback from joint CICC / CPP Meeting - Presentation of Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 19 - 22)
10. Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Update - Report of Operations Manager, Children and Young People's Services (Pages 23 - 36)
11. Progress Report on the Care Leavers' Strategy and Action Plan - Report of Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence (Pages 37 - 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 - 56)
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  
12 November 2021

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, B Coult, S Deinali, C Fletcher, J Griffiths, O Gunn, T Henderson, C Hood, C Hunt, J Miller, J Nicholson, I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, S Townsend, C Varty

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

C Baines, J Bell, L Burns, A Ferguson, W Taylor  
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**  
**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

At a Meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 15 October 2021** at **9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor M Simmons in the Chair**

**Members of the Panel:**

Councillors Adcock-Foster, Bainbridge, Coult, Deinali, Griffiths, Henderson, Hood, Hunt, Miller, Roberts (substitute Member for Councillor Surtees), Robson, Rooney, Townsend, Walton and Varty

**Co-opted Members:**

C Baines, J Bell, A Ferguson and M Green and C Putt of the Children in Care Council (CiCC)

**Also Present:**

Barbara Arbon – Adoption Team Manager accompanied by adoptive parents Robbie and Steven  
Helen Fergusson - Head of Children's Social Care  
Paula Gibbons – Head of Service, Adopt Coast to Coast  
Robert Johnson - Project Manager, Investing in Children  
Claire Morris – Strategic Manager, Looked After Resources  
Michelle Summerbell – Team Manager, Full Circle Service  
Melanie Stubbs – Head of the Virtual School  
Stephen Tracey – Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager  
Jayne Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer  
Lisa Wood – Strategic Manager, First Contact and Specialist Countywide Service

**1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, O Gunn, A Surtees and from co-opted members Caitlyn Gray, Louise Burns and Wendy Taylor. Officers Jodie Henderson and Martyn Stenton also submitted apologies.

**2 Substitute Members**

Councillor I Roberts was in attendance for Councillor A Surtees.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. The officer was thanked for the comprehensive minutes.

In relation to item 14 of the minutes it was reported that representation is being sought for three additional Regulation 44 representatives for Aycliffe Secure Centre. The matter would be discussed later in the meeting, during item 14.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

The Head of Children's Social Care reported that the number of children and young people looked after continues to reduce, standing at 905 as at Friday 15 October 2021.

### **6 Proud Moments**

The Strategic Manager for Looked After Resources spoke to the Panel about a young person resident in a children's home whose past experiences have led to that person finding it difficult to form relationships and to share thoughts, feelings and fears with others. The young person is a talented baker and enjoys making and decorating cupcakes. Of their own volition, the young person made a special cupcake as a 'thank you' for a teacher who had provided support throughout particularly difficult times. The Panel recognised that this gesture was a very brave step for the young person who was acknowledging the trust and attachment that had been formed in the relationship. The Panel sent their encouragement and best wishes to the young person for their future progress.

### **7 Actions in response to Ofsted's focused visit to Children's Services**

The Head of Children's Social Care referred to the meeting held on 24 September at which the findings from Ofsted's focused visit to Children's Services in July were discussed. The Panel noted an action plan in response to the findings was required to be submitted to Ofsted within 70 working days of receipt of the letter.

The Head of Children's Social Care delivered a presentation which outlined the response to areas identified for improvement (for copy of presentation see file).

Confirmation is awaited from Ofsted that it is satisfied with the action plan and a progress update will be provided to the Panel in due course. The Head of Children's Social Care responded to questions and comments from the Panel.

Councillor Bainbridge referred to the planned improvements in relation to ensuring good quality assessments for young people living in supported accommodation aged 16 to 17 and asked whether these improvements will apply to young people above the age of 17, up to 25 years of age. The Head of Children's Social Care clarified that the Ofsted letter referred to a specific cohort of young people aged 16 to 17, who are able to live independently, with a measure of support. The area for improvement identified seeks to ensure that the assessments for those young people are fit for purpose. The Council continues to care for young people and care leavers up to the age of 25.

Councillor Hunt referred to the strengths identified and asked what opportunities exist for staff who are not qualified social workers but have the skills required to work alongside social workers. The Head of Children's Social Care responded that these staff include family workers and staff in teams such as Supporting Solutions and Child Exploitation and they perform key roles within the service. To assist staff who have the skills to become qualified social workers, the service has partnered with the university to offer a social work apprenticeship scheme.

With reference to the sufficiency of placements, the Chair asked the Panel to be aware of an increase in fostering and adoption marketing in order to boost recruitment. The Vice-Chair commented that she would like to see more promotion on the Council's website including better signposting to the appropriate contacts. Councillor Coult drew the Panel's attention to the fostering page, adding that sharing the page through social media is a useful method of increasing the reach. Councillor Deinali added her support for the use of social media saying she had shared facebook posts which had led to enquiries.

Alison Ferguson, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children informed the Panel that her employer had recently received an award for being a fostering-friendly employer and they have worked with the local authority and health colleagues to encourage others to adopt this approach.

In response to a query from Councillor Hunt, the Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that the fostering service regularly holds 'Meet the Team' events where prospective foster carers are invited to meet informally to gain more information. These sessions are held throughout the county and at various times of the day, to ensure they are accessible to all.

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

The Panel welcomed Robert Johnson, Project Manager from Investing in Children and Chloe and Mitchell from the Children in Care Council who provided the following update on their work during the month (for copy of presentation see file).

Chloe informed the Panel that she successfully completed the peer mentor training and she is now the first Children in Care Council peer mentor. She spoke of how she had met the young person she is mentoring whilst they were taking part in an activity day and she said how pleased she is that they are gradually getting to know each other and how she is enjoying helping her peer through being there for support, whenever she is needed.

Mitchell provided details of the art café which helps young people to develop their creative talents, with a focus on wellbeing. The young people are also continuing their work to challenge stigma, break barriers and increase opportunities for looked after young people and care leavers. Initiatives such as the 'Proud Moments' Corporate Parenting Panel agenda item and the 'Celebrate Me' awards contribute towards raising the profile. In addition elected members will be asked at each meeting how they are contributing to this.

The Panel heard that funding was secured which enabled the young people of the Children in Care Council to work with partners including Durham County Council to deliver fifty boxes of summer packs to families throughout the county over the summer. This work has resulted in a nomination for a national award.

The Investing in Children Project Manager praised Chloe on becoming the first peer mentor adding that the feedback has been very positive and he hopes there will be many more peer mentors like Chloe in the future. He also highlighted how keen the young people are to give back to the community following the COVID-19, which led to their successful joint work carried out on the summer pack project.

The Panel commended Chloe for her selflessness with her peer-mentor work and the Vice-Chair asked Chloe if she had felt any anxiety at the prospect of taking on the role.

Chloe responded that she had felt nervous about the training day, however, although it was a long day, she felt the training had prepared her well and taught her how to provide friendly support to her peers.

In answer to a question from the Panel about the work to challenge stigma, Mitchell explained the work that had been done to improve the use of language to ensure it is children and young people friendly. He added that group discussions take place regularly to develop ideas to challenge stigma. The Vice-Chair encouraged the Children in Care Council representatives to continue their good engagement with the Panel and pledged to provide assistance and support to the young people with their suggestions for improvements.

In thanking Chloe for her peer mentor work, Councillor Coult commented that it was heartening to observe from her presentation that she is not only a peer mentor but she has also formed a bond and become a friend to the young person she is mentoring. Adding her support for the peer mentoring scheme, Councillor Coult expressed how important the simple act of talking and sharing experiences is for young people. The Project Manager confirmed there are plans to progress the peer mentoring scheme next year.

The Chair thanked the Project Manager for all the work he carried out to support the young people, to which he replied that it is very much a team effort.

Concluding the item, the Senior Partnerships Officer reminded the Panel that the joint meeting with the Children in Care Council will be held at 5.30 pm on Tuesday 19 October at the Sjovell Centre. Those intending to attend were asked to let the Senior Partnerships Officer know in advance in order for the appropriate COVID-19 risk assessment to be undertaken.

## **9 Performance Update**

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager presented an update on the quarter one performance which included a comparison with statistical neighbours (for copy of report see file).

The Vice-Chair, acknowledging the importance of monitoring the number of young people going missing / absent from care, requested that the information omitted from the report be provided to the Panel, for information. The Equality and Strategy Manager informed the Panel that in quarter one, 51 young people went missing from home with 206 missing episodes which was higher than the figure for the same period last year, however, due to the unique time period during COVID-19, a like for like comparison was not possible. All return to home interviews, where they were accepted, were completed.

The Vice-Chair referred to the lag in education data and expressed concern that data from 2018 was unavailable. The Virtual School Head explained that the Virtual School Annual Report for 2019 includes three-year trends and, under normal circumstances, KS1, KS2 and KS4 examination results would be reported, however, there were no KS1 and KS2 results to report due to the pandemic. Some KS4 assessment results are available and they will be included in the Virtual School Annual Report which is due to be presented to the Panel in January. KS4 assessment results and a commentary on A level results will also be included in the Annual Report. Members of the Virtual School Sub-Group are provided with academic achievement reports three times per year.

Responding to a query from the Vice-Chair, the Equality and Strategy Manager clarified that in the chart illustrating the length of time looked after by age, each child appears only once in the chart.

The Vice-Chair referred to the breakdown of social work caseload by team and thanked the officer for the useful information. She requested that future reports include the number of social workers alongside the percentage figures.

Referring to social work caseloads, Councillor Miller asked if there was a recommended maximum amount of cases a social worker should have at any one time, and, if not, had this been considered. The Head of Children's Social Care replied that the nature of the service leads to peaks in demand from time to time and there are clear policy guidelines as to what is acceptable in terms of social worker caseloads. Strategies are in place to address pressure points and the service is in the process of implementing a new team to manage demand in the area of adolescent safeguarding and exploitation, implementing a new adolescent safeguarding team to increase capacity in this area.

Councillor Coult referred to the dip in performance with regard to initial health assessments and dental checks and, referring to the number of initial health assessments which are not performed within the recommended 20 days, she asked if there is a timescale in which health assessments must be completed. The Equality and Strategy Manager responded that the pandemic had inevitably impacted on health and dental checks and this is being addressed through strategic partnership groups. Dental Practices are requested to offer priority appointments to children looked after. The Designated Nurse for Looked After Children commented that completing health checks within 20 working days is a very tight timeframe and in some cases this is not met as delays are caused when parents are unwilling to grant consent for the checks to be carried out. Delays had also been caused by self-isolation rules during the pandemic.

Councillor Hunt asked whether data was available on the number of young people who were missing from education or excluded from school. The Virtual School Head highlighted that there have been no permanent exclusions since 2014 and full information will be included in the Virtual School Annual Report. All children looked after are either on a school roll or in specialist or alternative provision. She explained that elective home education is not recommended for children looked after and it is used only when a child is considered to be too unwell to attend school. In these cases the Education Health Needs team will provide education at home for the child who will remain on the school roll, with a view to returning to school in the future.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**10 Annual Report on the Adoption Service: April 2020 - March 2021**

The Panel welcomed Paula Gibbons, Head of Adopt Coast to Coast, Barbara Arbon, Adoption Team Manager and Robbie and Steven, adoptive parents. The Panel considered the Annual Report on the Adoption Service for April 2020 to March 2021 (for copy see file).

Robbie and Steven introduced themselves to the Panel, having been invited to speak to the Panel about their fostering to adoption journey which began in December 2019. The parents informed the Panel that their journey began when they attended an informal information event which led to an initial assessment in January 2020. The onset of the pandemic did not hamper their plans and they attended a virtual training session just before the first national lockdown. Following the completion of the application they were introduced to their allocated social worker who provided support throughout the process. To their delight, they successfully gained approval and they were placed with a baby boy the following day. The formal adoption process was completed in July 2021 and the parents expressed their thanks to the team for enabling their family.

The Vice-Chair thanked the parents for their comments and asked them what attracted them to Durham's service. The parents replied that they were keen to adopt outside of their local area and they chose to approach Durham based upon recommendations from friends who had been through the process. In response to a question about the support they had received, the parents said the support had been excellent and they could not find fault.

They gave thanks to their allocated social worker, Clare Bewley, for all her support. They commented that the application process had been lengthy, however, they acknowledged that the process is robust for good reason.

Suggesting improvements, the parents said they would have found an online process for tracking their journey helpful, in order to check what stage their application had reached and what the next steps were. The parents confirmed that they attended the training provided by the young people of the Children in Care Council as part of their fostering/adoption journey.

Councillor Miller asked the parents if they could identify any part of the process which should be changed or improved. The parents responded that the most difficult part of the process was having the courage to make the first contact to register their interest. They added that as much as they were keen to convince Durham that they were good prospective adopters, they also needed the adoption service to sell itself to them, to provide them with assurance that they had chosen the right adoption service. They also highlighted that it is daunting to invite professionals into your home to scrutinise your lifestyle, however, it is an essential part of the process and whereas it is often the only time that prospective adopters will go through the process, social workers may forget from time to time how overwhelming the process can be. The parents commented that when the home visit took place, they were provided with peace of mind and were assured that they had made the right decision in choosing Durham.

The Head of Adopt Coast to Coast thanked the parents for their positive comments adding that the parents are a great asset to the Adopt Coast to Coast marketing campaign. She commended Durham's Adoption team who had worked hard throughout their busy year, approving 41 adopters. Whilst staff quickly adapted to virtual working, the increased workload brought the new challenge to maintain that high level of service. She concluded by thanking the Team Manager, Barbara Arbon and the marketing team who had played a huge part in the success over the past year.

The Panel noted that representatives are being sought for the Adoption Panel. The Adoption Team Manager explained that Adoption Panels comprise of independent members, social work professionals, medical representatives and elected members. Their role is to consider adoption assessments for approval, and, to match children and young people who are planned for adoption with approved adopters. Panel meetings are held fortnightly, on Wednesday mornings. Members interested in joining the Panel were invited to contact Barbara Arbon for further information.

The Head of Adopt Coast to Coast then answered questions from the Panel as follows.

The Vice-Chair referred to the Annual Report on recruitment and queried the percentage figure which stated the last two years had remained at 41%. The Head of Service clarified that the percentages were incorrect however the figures were correct, with the number of enquiries decreasing and the number of approvals increasing in 2021. The Head of Service confirmed that all three spokes of the Regional Adoption Agency had observed an increase in enquiries during the period.

In response to a question from Councillor Miller, the Head of Service confirmed that the process for selection for the adoption panel and the fostering panel is that there is an application form and an interview.

Councillor Deinali asked whether there are any age ranges that parents prefer to adopt and any ages that are more difficult to place. The Head of Service replied that the majority of adopters have not had birth children and therefore seek to adopt a younger child. A great deal of support is provided to encourage adoption across all age ranges and many adopters across the three spokes of the Regional Adoption Agency who have adopted older children, large sibling groups and young people with health or development needs are encouraged to share their experiences through marketing campaigns. This issue is a national challenge and the national leaders group is striving to maximise the achievement of adoption plans for all, in a timely manner. The Head of Children's Social Care added that the Regional Adoption Agency aims to address this issue by pooling resources into one organisation which is capable of operating on a larger scale to enable children and young people to be matched with the most suitable adopter as quickly as possible.

The Chair concluded by thanking the parents for attending the meeting and providing such a valuable insight into their adoption experience. On behalf of the Panel, she wished the family well for the future.

## **11 Full Circle Service Update**

The Team Manager of the Full Circle Service provided an update on the service (for copy of presentation see file).

The Panel heard that the therapeutic service which consists of a team of therapeutically trained social workers was formed in 1995, to support the mental health needs of children and young people, particularly those who have experienced trauma through neglect and abuse. The Team Manager explained how trauma in early years may have a significant impact on brain development which can last well into adulthood. The team works closely with social work teams and multi-agency work is also carried out. Over the years, the service has developed a respected reputation, providing consultation to families, foster carers and a wide range of professionals.

Direct therapeutic support is undertaken where appropriate and a large amount of training is carried out including the delivery of workshops on attachment and trauma and related care planning issues. The service also offers support and training to education staff including designated teachers to help them gain a better understand of the impact of trauma. The offer has recently been extended to children and young people who are in the care of neighbouring authorities but who are placed within County Durham.

The Team Manager said it was pleasing to see that the recent inspection carried out by Ofsted in July recognised the support provided by the service and the role it plays in supporting social workers with their plans for children and young people.

The Strategic Manager for the First Contact and Specialist Countywide Service commented on how proud she is of the team and added that the Team Manager who had begun her career as a support worker was an exemplar of how the service values and encourages its staff to maximise their opportunities. She drew parallels with the comments made earlier in the meeting with regard to the importance of peer mentoring.

The Vice-Chair asked whether the staff work exclusively for the Full Circle Service and the Team Manager informed the Panel that there are 6 full time, 1 part time and 1 temporary therapeutic social workers and all staff work exclusively for the therapeutic service.

Councillor Bainbridge referred to the 593 referrals in 2020-21 and asked how the figure compares with previous years. The Team Manager explained that the number of referrals had increased since 2018 and additional investment at that time led to the recruitment of an additional three therapeutic social workers. Referrals have remained steady over recent years with a number of enquiries being one-off consultations and requests for initial advice and guidance which may lead to accessing training. The service has recently increased their offer and a fuller range of interventions is available.

The Virtual School Head commented on the close partnership with the Full Circle, with all designated teachers including those who are outside of the area and who care for Durham children looked after, having access to the training provided by the Full Circle. This is useful to inform behaviour policies which may need to be adapted in light of trauma experienced. The feedback from schools confirms that the advice line provided by the Full Circle which is available until 1.00 pm per day is a very valuable resource.

Cllr Henderson, Portfolio Holder for the Children and Young People's Service thanked all the officers for their attendance at the meeting, acknowledging the time it takes for the preparation of reports and presentations.

He also expressed appreciation to all the officers working hard behind the scenes to bring these reports before the Panel.

## **12 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.

## **13 Regulation 44 Visits and Regulatory Body ratings of Children's Residential Homes**

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

The Strategic Manager for Looked After Resources said she would action queries from members who had not been receiving detailed monthly Regulation 44 reports and monthly reports for the home to which they are assigned.

The Senior Partnerships Officer sought three representatives for Aycliffe Secure Centre and several members indicated their interest in gaining further information on the Adoption and Fostering Panels.

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## Durham Children in Care Council (CiCC) October 2021 Highlights

- 12 CiCC members, 8 CPP elected members and 3 DCC officers attended a joint meeting on 19 October.



- They discussed family time, support when leaving care and ways to challenge stigma and discrimination, all of which were identified as being important topics to CiCC members.



## CICC Highlights October 2021.

- 2 CICC members from a DCC young people's home presented ideas to 17 social work students at Durham University, challenging attitudes. They were amazing!!
- The same young person presented to 15 Youth and Community Students at Sunderland University.
- CICC members are beginning to develop ideas for a film.
- CICC peer mentors facilitated a Halloween session to benefit 6 care experienced young people aged 6 to 10, which was fun and provided great information about care.



## Durham Children in Care Council October 21

- The Education Fun Fund project has gone live.
- The 6th CICC newsletter is being produced for December.
- Finally, a massive acknowledgement and appreciation to CJ, a young person who fundraised in memory of her foster carer, raising the amazing amount of £425 for Pancreatic Cancer UK. Anyone wishing to contribute should get in touch with CJ via the Young People's Service.



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# Feedback from joint CICC / CPP meeting on 19 October 2021

Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care



## KEY THEMES:

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- **Family time**
  - Suitable venues
  - Individualised contact e.g. in person / virtual, length, activities, venue etc
- **Support for Care Leavers post 18**
  - Jobs, apprenticeship opportunities, interviews etc
  - Financial support for care leavers
  - Emotional support
  - Transitions with accommodation
  - Transport, including driving lessons
- **Challenging stigma and discrimination about young people in care**
  - Different rules for young people who are in care, compared to those who live with their families
  - Negative headlines in the press
  - Raising awareness with teachers about life in care

## NEXT STEPS

- Operational / CPP actions are to be identified
- Action plan to be developed with young people to identify priorities and timescales
- Bi-monthly CICC meeting will be the forum for monitoring progress against the action plan
- Update to CICC / CPP joint meeting in March 2022
- Update to CPP in April 2022

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**Corporate Parenting Panel**

**22 November 2021**

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



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**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 22 November 2021.
- 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 accompanying annual reports.

## **Background**

- 4 The accompanying 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 4 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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Sharon Davey                 Tel: 03000 26621

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **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

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## **Appendix 2: Children Looked After Annual Report**

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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.

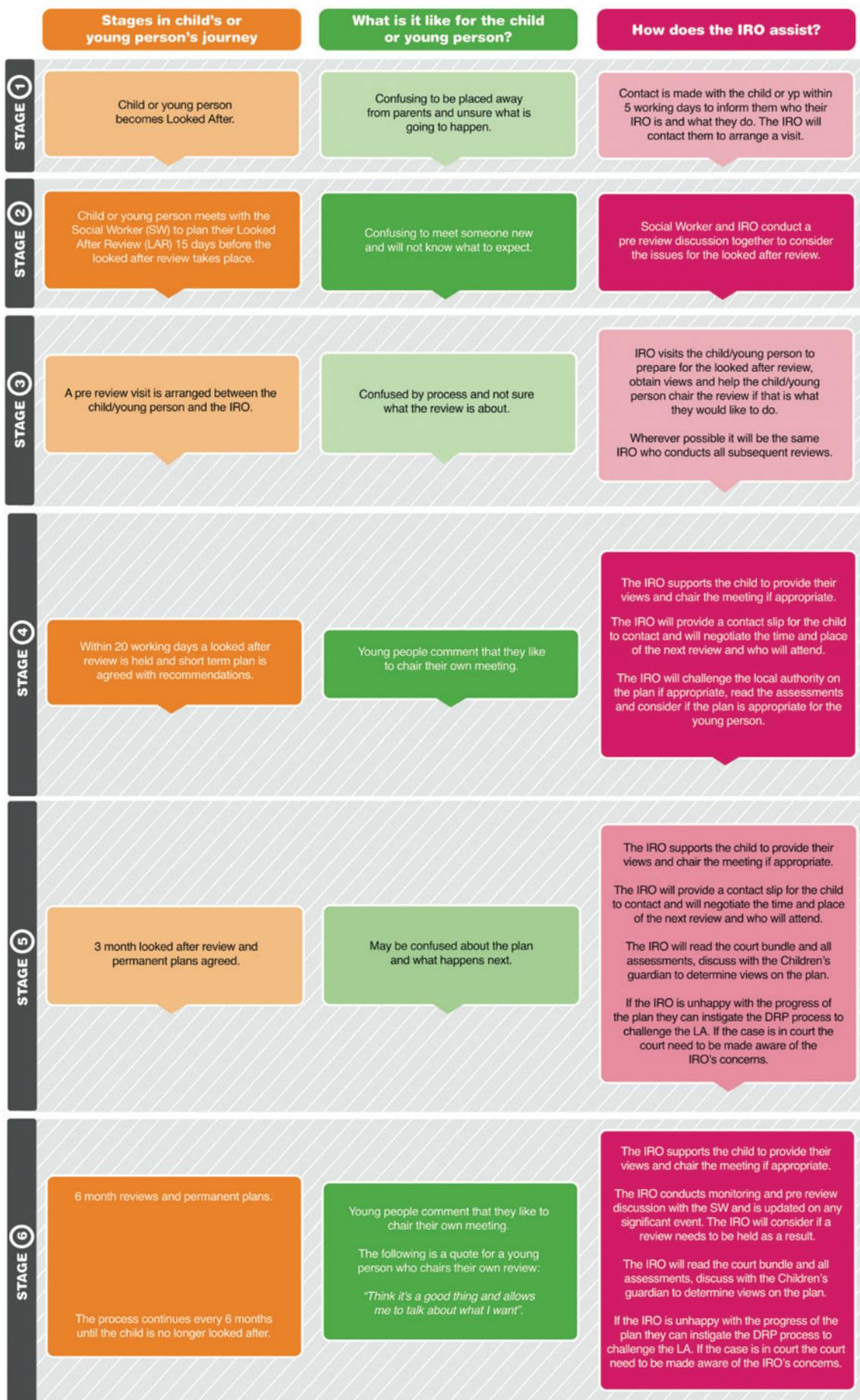
IROs in County Durham also chair child protection conferences and work within the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP).

## 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.



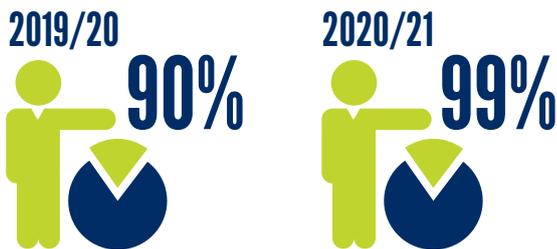
# Summary of Development Activity 2020/21

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"> <li>● IRO Performance Clinic established to offer a reflective space for IROs to work through any issues of delay in care planning.</li> <li>● Supported the reviewed of the Permanency Strategy and co-delivered briefings across the service.</li> <li>● Established communication plan between the IRO Service and Legal Services to support in setting timetables for care proceedings in line with Care Planning regulations.</li> <li>● Operations Manager attendance at Strategic Legal Panel to offer guidance and support in care planning timeframes.</li> <li>● Reporting data sets now agreed to support Team Managers and IROs future planning for the 4-month review.</li> <li>● Change to the IRO chair report to allow tracking of this to strengthen the timeliness of plans ratified.</li> </ul>
<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"> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● 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.</li> </ul>
<p>Use the Signs of Success framework to structure review meetings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Group supervision now embedded monthly.</li> <li>● Training with all IROs on the use of language was carried out.</li> <li>● Group Supervision identified a common approach to the use of 'best questioning', 'use of harm matrix' and 'introducing the use of trajectories'.</li> <li>● Some scaling questions are now seen within meetings to measure impact.</li> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● 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.</li> </ul>

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"> <li>● A working group was established across all areas of Social Care to devise better ways of working in partnership taking a strength-based approach.</li> <li>● Resolution Process Presentation delivered by Team Managers and IROs in joint approach to the full workforce.</li> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● 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.</li> </ul>

## 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.

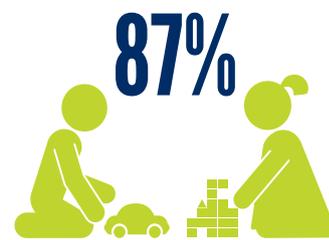
2020/21



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

## Foster Care Reviews

273 Foster Care Reviews



were within timescales



## 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"> <li>● Focus on the timeliness of plans ratified at the child's 4-month review with a clear rationale for decision making.</li> <li>● Improve on the IROs voice within Care Proceedings to ensure their views are represented in court.</li> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● IROs will promote the use of trajectories in care planning for all children to avoid drift and delay.</li> <li>● Bi-Monthly working group established focusing on the need for advocacy support.</li> <li>● 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.</li> </ul>
<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"> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● IROs will promote the use of trajectories, words and pictures and safety plans in aspects of care planning.</li> </ul>
<p>We want our children to have good prospects when leaving care.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● IROs will continue to work with the CICC in ways to promote the child and young people voice in care planning.</li> </ul>
<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"> <li>● 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).</li> <li>● 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.</li> <li>● 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.</li> </ul>

# 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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## Corporate Parenting Panel

22 November 2021



### Progress Report on the Care Leavers Strategy and Action Plan.

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

### Electoral division affected:

None.

### Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report outlines the progress of the Care Leavers Service action plan and strategy.

### Executive Summary

- 2 The Children Act 1989 places duties on Local Authorities towards 'looked after' and previously 'looked after' children as they exit the care system. The service to young people who have been in the care of Durham Children's services is delivered to all young people aged between 16 and 25 who fall within the eligibility criteria. This criterion includes:
  - (a) **eligible child**, who is a child aged 16 or 17 and is currently Looked After or has been looked after by the Local Authority for 13 weeks since the age of 14;
  - (b) **relevant child**, who is a child aged 16 or 17 who has been Looked After for 13 weeks since the aged of 14 or who has been looked after since the age of 16 but is no longer Looked After;
  - (c) **former relevant child**, who is a young person aged 18-25 who has been an eligible or relevant child prior to becoming 18;
  - (d) **or other qualifying care leavers**, who is young person who was Looked After for a period of less than 13 weeks since the age of 14 or was Looked After since the age of 16.

### Recommendation

- (a) Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note the contents of the report and presentation.

## **Background**

- 3 The offer from the Care Leaving Service is published in the Local Offer to Care Leavers which provides details of how support will be provided to young people with regards to:
  - (a) Where young people live; this includes all options, staying put, supporting lodgings, supported accommodation, living alone and university accommodation as well as advice to avoid homelessness and support for any housing issues;
  - (b) Money: help with managing money, help with benefits, setting up home money, and all other types of financial advice;
  - (c) Looking After themselves; Physical and emotional health advice and support, sexual health, drug and alcohol support, domestic abuse and healthy relationship advice, someone to talk to, smoking cessation and opportunities to get involved in things;
  - (d) Education employment and training; advice when thinking about leaving school, sixth form or college, work experience and part time jobs, learning to drive, apprenticeships or traineeships, going to university, getting a job.

## **Staffing**

- 4 Moving forwards this service will be provided from within dedicated teams working with children who are looked after up to the age of 18 and a Care Leavers service working with young adults with care leaving status up to the age of 25.
- 5 This will allow focus on the needs of the care leavers within this service from a staff group who have the skills, experience and motivation to meet the needs of this group of young people.
- 6 It is anticipated that the service will work with approximately 300 young adults at any one time with two teams of Young People's Advisors supported by two team managers and two Social Work Consultants to support the service with continuous improvement planning.

## **Care Leavers Action Plan**

- 8 A presentation of the progress of the Care Leavers Action plan is attached at Appendix 2
- 9 The action plan includes several areas of focus. The progress of these is recorded in detail in the plan but include:

- Pathway Plans;
  - Education, Employment, and training;
  - Suitable accommodation;
  - Improved health outcomes;
  - Preparation for adulthood;
  - Co-production.
- 10 Moving forwards co-production of the Care Leavers action plan is identified as an essential aspect of the planning. A group of young people is being established to meet in November and
- Review the progress of the action plan;
  - Assess the DCC Local Offer to Care Leavers against national Local Offers;
  - Develop the renewed action plan for 2022/23.
- 11 There has been continued work with the electronic recording system (LCS) used by the Young People's Service to develop the best practice Pathway Plan using the selected model of social work in Durham (Signs of Safety). A template of this has been produced and is being shared as a test within the system.
- 12 The impact of Covid 19 on the stability of the education and employment opportunities for young people across the world have been identified as significant and problematic. Within Durham the academic achievements of children in care and leaving care remain statistically positive. Care Leavers who attend university are well supported and care leavers are identified in the recruitment policies within DCC as a group who should be offered interviews. There is also additional support available to managers when seeking to employ care leaving young people.
- 13 The accommodation of care leavers in homes matched to their individual needs remains an area of high priority. Where young people have had stable fostering homes, they are supported to remain within that home under a staying put arrangement. When they are ready to move into adulthood there are a range of options available from supported lodgings, to supported accommodation and tenancy support into their own homes. The quality of this provision is monitored by commissioning services and through a supported accommodation panel where the wider service planning needs are progressed.
- 14 This aligns with preparation for adulthood and the development of programmes that promote skills and confidence but avoid the feeling of 'independence' as a concept as it is considered unhelpful to young people leaving care to push towards independence when in fact what is needed in successful adulthood is the identification of protective,

supportive and loving relationships that aid people to feel and to be safe and to engage with all aspects of their lives from this position.

- 15 The health needs of care leavers remain an area of concern and has been impacted by Covid 19 as services nationally have been stretched and many people have not reached out to services for support. The mental health needs of young people have been supported throughout with continued access to services to reduce isolation and promote communication. There is concern that there is not sufficient evidence that young people are using the health passports to engage with and promote their own health needs as they mature, and this is being progressed through the health sub-group of the Children Looked After partnership along with identification of the barriers to young people attending for dental check ups post the Covid lock down.

### **Development and Adaption during Covid-19**

- 16 The Young People's Service has continued to offer services throughout Covid-19 with some adaptations to ensure families continue to access appropriate levels of support. All young people in care have been able to access the same level of support as was available to them prior to COVID. We have been selected as one of 8 Local Authorities nationally to take part in research funded by the University of Bedfordshire to understand the impact of Covid on the experience of young people leaving care. This will allow us to understand the experiences of our young people in the context of the current climate and of their wider experiences of having been cared for by Durham County Council and of being a Durham County Council care leaver.

### **Conclusion**

- 17 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel will have an oversight and understanding of the Care Leaver Service and will be aware of the continuous developments within the service to ensure we strive to meet the needs of young people.

### **Author**

Jodie Henderson                      03000 265759

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

We are bound by duties under the Children & Social Work Act / Children's Act to act in the best interests of children and young people.

### **Finance**

None.

### **Consultation**

None

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

The Young People's Service provides care and support to young people who identify as transgender, this forms 1% of the overall service group.

### **Climate Change**

None

### **Human Rights**

Children and young people have access to the DCC complaints process

### **Crime and Disorder**

None

### **Staffing**

As detailed above the Young People's Service is currently being restructured to provide a continuous through care team for all children (aged 0-17) and an 18+ care experienced team.

### **Accommodation**

Should children and young people come into the care of the Local Authority, there is a need to ensure there is sufficient suitable placements

### **Risk**

The risk of not providing the services and supports required by young people who have care leaver status is that they could be at risk of harm, either immediately or as a result of a failure to identify their needs and best support them to achieve their potential.

### **Procurement**

None

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## **Appendix 2: Summary Presentation of Progress of Care Leavers Action Plan**

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Attached as a separate document

# Care Leavers Action Plan update

November 2021

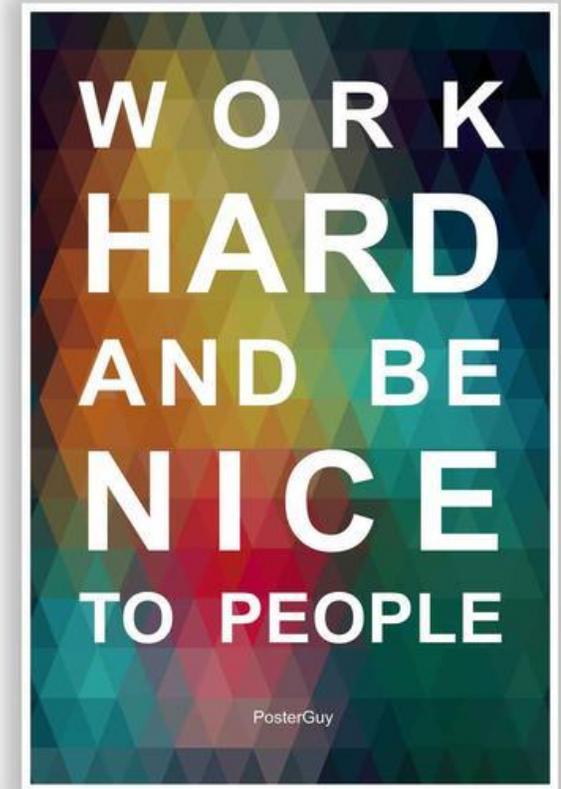
Ensure that all Pathway Plans have a clear overall objective and timely measurable actions



- Improve quality of pathway plans and ensure that the young people are fully involved in their plans

Ensure that care leavers have the opportunity to access work experience, sessional work and apprenticeships to increase their opportunities for education and employment

- Continue to strengthen corporate commitment to providing Care Leavers with the opportunity to access work experience, sessional work and apprenticeships across Durham County Council
- Develop a clear policy outlining the support available for young people/care leavers at college and university including what sort of financial support they can expect
- Identify ways of continuing to increase the awareness of employers throughout the council and beyond to the needs and vulnerabilities of care leavers



Ensure that all care leavers have a variety of suitable accommodation choices offered to them

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- Staying Close
- Supported Lodgings
- Supported Accommodation
- Student accommodation
- Semi Independent Living
- Tenancy support





## Improve the health outcomes of care leavers

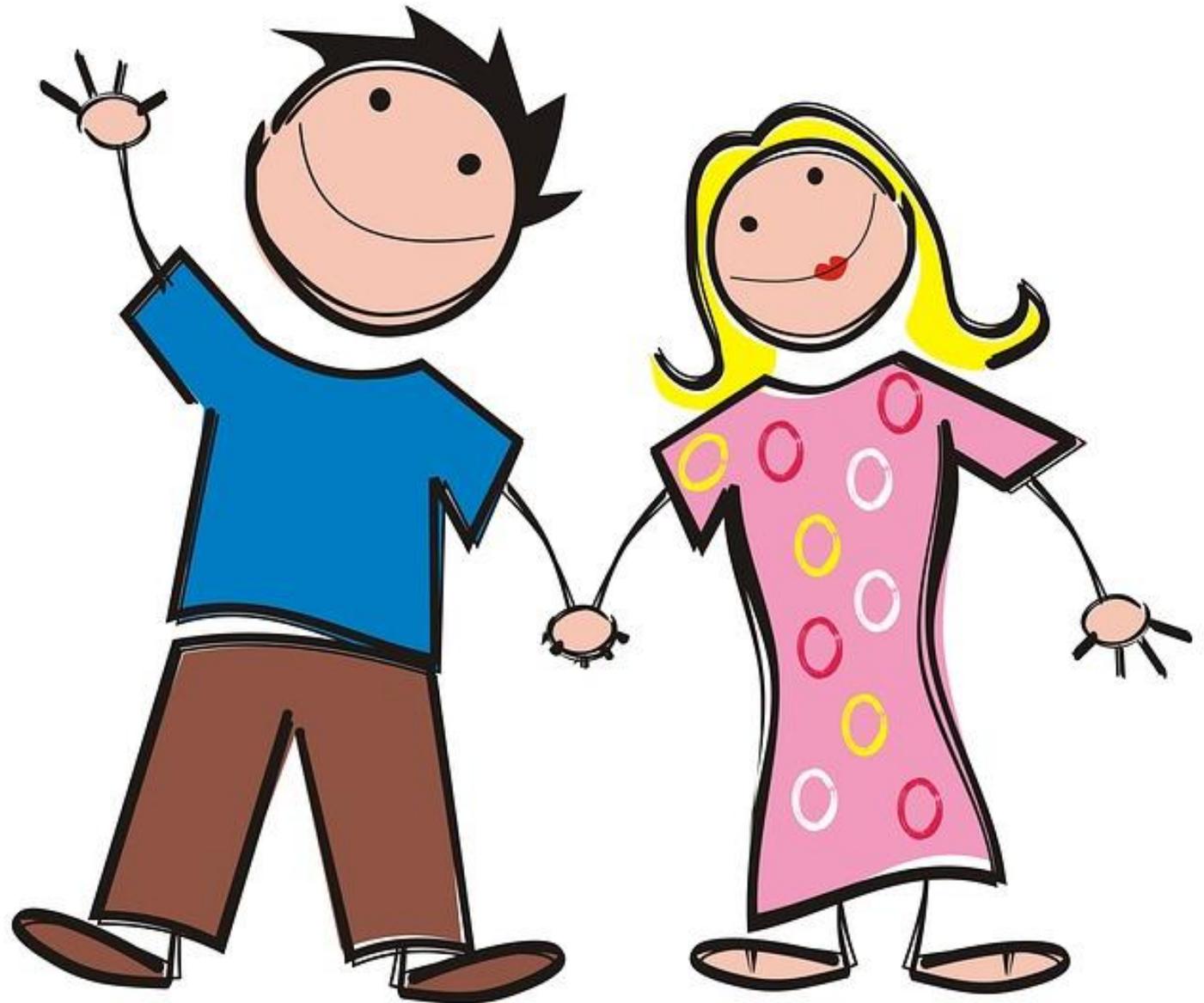
- Covid impact
- Dentist
- Health checks
- Accessibility
- Commissioning arrangements

# Preparation for adulthood

Transitions team

Increased  
awareness of need

Improved  
early planning





# Improve Co-Production

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