



## **Corporate Parenting Panel**

**Date**      **Tuesday 19 July 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 24 June 2022 (Pages 3 - 10)
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Number of Children Looked After - Verbal update from Head of Children's Social Care
6. Ofsted Updates - Verbal update from Head of Children's Social Care
7. ILACS (Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services) Update - Presentation by Head of Children's Social Care and Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children (Pages 11 - 56)
8. Children in Care Council Update - Presentation by Project Officer, Investing in Children (Pages 57 - 58)
9. Annual Report on the Adoption Service 2021/22 - Report of Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 59 - 86)
10. Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2021-22 - Report of Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 87 - 128)
11. Proud Moments - Verbal update from Strategic Manager
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 129 - 140)
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  
11 July 2022

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

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

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

### **Co-opted Members**

J Bell, L Burns, S Neale, W Taylor, 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, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 24 June 2022** at **9.30 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor M Walton (Chair)**

### **Members of the Panel:**

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, J Charlton, B Coult, S Deinali, C Fletcher, J Griffiths, C Hood, C Hunt, B Kellett (substitute for Cllr C Varty), L Mavin (substitute for Councillor Simmons), I Roberts, K Robson and S Townsend

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

Caitlyn Gray, Sarah Neale, Wendy Taylor and Karen Watson

### **Also Present:**

Laura Counce – Service Manager for Children and Young People

Helen Fergusson – Head of Children’s Social Care

Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager

Robert Johnson - Project Manager, Investing in Children

Jamie Paddock – Lawyer, Children, Adults and Health

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

Melanie Stubbs – Head of the Virtual School

Stephen Tracey – Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager

Jac Tyler – Strategic Manager, Children and Families

Jayne Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer

## **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Bell, I Cochrane, O Gunn, T Henderson, C Rooney, M Simmons, A Sterling and C Varty.

Apologies were also noted from co-opted member Luke Joseph and officers Laura Armstrong and Jodie Henderson.

## **2 Substitute Members**

Councillors B Kellett and L Mavin were in attendance for Councillors C Varty and M Simmons respectively.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair reported the following matters arising.

- Calendar invites had been sent to Members for the visit to MASH in July.
- Further marketing materials had been supplied to Members and the impact of fostering campaigns and the suggestions for fostering promotion through parish / town councils and AAPs will be addressed at the September Panel meeting.
- The current Children in Care Council newsletter had been circulated and an update on the use of language was to be provided later in the meeting.
- It was noted that data relating to social worker stability is not collated as part of the key performance indicators, however, this would be addressed within the performance update.
- Consideration is being given to arranging further joint events with the Children in Care Council and Members were asked to give thought to forthcoming events in their own division that would be suitable for the young people to be invited to.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

The Head of Children's Social Care reported the number of children looked after was 988 which included 25 young people whose plans for adoption had been affected by court delays as a result of the Somerset ruling and those plans were progressing.

### **6 Ofsted Updates**

The Head of Children's Social Care updated the Panel that the outcomes of the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services and the inspection of Framwellgate Moor Children's Home will be shared upon publication of the reports in July.

## **7 Proud Moments**

The Head of Children's Social Care was pleased to inform the Panel of a ringing endorsement of the quality of care provided by a new foster care couple, which had been received from a Children's Guardian. The Guardian praised the new foster carers saying they had the competence of foster carers with years of experience, adding that their warmth, attention and child-centred home environment had led to a significant positive change for the children in their care.

The Panel agreed to consider agenda item 9 as the next item of business.

## **8 Language that Cares**

The Panel received an update on the work done throughout the service to ensure the language used in speech and writing can be understood by children and young people. The Panel noted the 'Language that Cares' document is undergoing a refresh with the help of young people and the revised document will be shared with the Panel in due course. The use of plain English is also encouraged through workforce development and ClearCut communication training.

The Service Improvement Manager spoke of how the messages from the young people are respected by partners and health colleagues and she spoke of a recent Children in Care Council meeting which was attended by two health professionals who were keen to gather the young people's views, to inform the language used in health reviews. The Service Improvement Manager highlighted the increase in requests from young people wishing to access their case files and spoke of the stark contrast in the language used in historical files, some of which would be regarded as inappropriate in contemporary times. Members heard that work had taken place with young people to improve their understanding of accessing their records and the matter had also been addressed in training for social workers, to encourage them to be mindful of language used and the impact this may have on those reading their case notes in years to come. The Service Improvement Manager commented on how she was pleased to see practitioners were writing with insight and compassion, for example, in the form of a letter to the young person.

The Service Manager for Children and Young People described the circumstances of a young person who was extremely apprehensive about moving from their children's home into adult provision. The young person had kept a daily diary which included details of a heart warming conversation between the young person and their key worker.

The diary entry spoke directly to the young person's level of understanding, using language which showed empathy to reassure the young person that they would be fully supported on their journey into adulthood.

The Head of the Virtual School explained that all Virtual School staff are required to use the ClearCut tool to assess each young person's level of understanding and establish whether a child requires specialist support from other agencies. Members heard that the Virtual School works closely with the Children in Care Council and representatives from the Children in Care Council attended a designated teacher network meeting and led a group entitled 'We are no different', with their views being fed back to all teaching staff. The young people had also been engaged to help to improve their understanding of personal education plans and had been involved in the production of the Children Looked After Policy.

The Panel formed groups and discussed the use of the words 'bossy', 'demanding', 'oppositional' and talkative and considered alternative words that could be used in order to take a more positive, supportive approach.

## **9 Children in Care Council**

The Panel received a presentation from Caitlyn of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) on activity during May (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

Within the presentation, Caitlyn highlighted that a member of the CiCC was shortlisted for the CORAM Voices Creative Writing Competition and a link was provided for Members to view further details. Also during May, the young people hosted their own Care Day which was a great success, promoting positivity and providing the opportunity for the young people to showcase their poems, art and photography.

Caitlyn reported that the Artstops project is continuing and an increasing number of young people are joining the project. Members praised the work of the young people and expressed interest in purchasing prints. The Project Manager for Investing in Children replied that consideration is being given to making digital prints available and to exhibiting the work in the future. Members expressed support for exhibiting the work and a suggestion was made that prints could be displayed in community health centres and rehabilitation centres, to inspire and encourage others. The Head of the Virtual School suggested the designs could be made into postcards, to be used by practitioners when sending 'thank you' or 'good luck' cards and it was suggested that the Project Manager for Investing in Children could look to progress this.

Another event that took place during May was a meeting with Ofsted inspectors facilitated by the young people, at which they shared details of the work they have undertaken with Durham County Council. Caitlyn spoke of how much the young people enjoyed the meeting and how they are looking forward to receiving feedback from Ofsted in July.

The young people also met with Corporate Parenting Panel representatives to discuss future actions and they discussed how important it is that they are familiar with the workers in their circle of care. The young people had developed aids such as 'One of Me' and 'Top Trumps', to share information about their likes and dislikes, hobbies etc with their carers, in order to get to know each other better. The Service Manager for Children and Young People commented on the consideration being given to the recruitment of children's home staff and how this could be more home-specific and how the young people resident in children's homes could become more involved in recruitment processes for the staff in their homes.

## **10 Performance Update**

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager presented performance for the final quarter of 2021-22 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

It was reported that 982 young people were in care at the end of the quarter which represented an increase on the same period last year. Whilst the number of children becoming looked after had returned to pre-COVID levels, a reduction in the number of children leaving care was reported, with delays to adoption proceedings. Placement stability had been impacted by older children being more susceptible to placement breakdowns. Referring to the 35% increase in the number of 14-17 year olds, the Strategy Manager explained the figure reflected the number of young people staying in care for longer.

In response to an observation that only 60% of children in care were undergoing an Initial Health Assessment within the target of 20 working days of the young person becoming looked after, the Panel noted that the paediatric team had suffered particularly badly from Covid related sickness absence, which had been unexpected and led to clinic delays. It was clarified that a number of health assessments were falling short of the target by only one or two days and the Head of Children's Social Care explained the assessment process requires consent from the person/s with parental responsibility which may be a cause of delay. Karen Watson, Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children informed the Panel that staffing levels had returned to normal and catch-up clinics were being held.

## **Resolved:**

That the report and presentation be noted.

## **11 Pre-Birth Service Update**

The Panel received a report and presentation from the Strategic Manager for Children and Families on the Pre-Birth Intervention Service (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Service Manager delivered the presentation and provided additional information, responding to questions and comments. The Panel noted that new criteria implemented in May 2021 aims to target intervention towards those parents who will benefit from intensive support and the criteria includes care leavers resident in County Durham up to the age of 25 and where the unborn baby meets the requirement for a statutory pre-birth assessment. The Strategic Manager explained that statutory pre-birth assessments are required where there are child in need or safeguarding concerns in respect of an unborn baby.

The Service Manager presented a breakdown of the current cohort, highlighting the early intervention, as referrals must be made prior to 21 weeks gestation. Members received information on the nature of the intensive intervention which includes emotional and practical support and specialist support through a network of multi-agency professionals. The officer explained practitioners visit expectant mothers two to three times per week and the programme works with both parents, with fathers-to-be included in the process.

The Head of Children's Social Care highlighted the positive progress made, as observed in the reduction in the percentage of under 1s looked after start rate, which reduced from 29% in 2020 to 24% in 2021.

The Strategic Manager also reported on the Pause service in Durham which has secured funding to in-source the service, with plans to integrate it with the pre-birth intervention service. The Strategic Manager explained the service offers women support to 'pause' in order to break the cycle of repeated pregnancies, in circumstances which have resulted in children being removed from their care.

Referring to the Pause programme, the Panel observed that a total of 83 children had been removed from the care of 21 women and asked how this figure compared nationally. The Strategic Manager responded that the figure was comparable to the national average, with each woman having approximately 3 or 4 children removed at the point of Pause intervention.

Highlighting the case studies, Members acknowledged the value of the work of the teams within the Families First Service to ensure the best outcomes and asked that their thanks be passed to staff.

**Resolved:**

That the report and presentation be noted.

**12 Any other business**

The Chair asked members if they would benefit from a refresher session of the CPP training, now that they are settled into their roles. The Panel agreed that this would be beneficial and details of the training will be circulated in due course. The Chair asked members to let Jayne Watson know of any particular topics they would like to be focused on, in the session.

**13 Exclusion of the public**

**Resolved:**

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

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

The Panel considered the monthly report on Regulation 44 visits and regulatory body ratings of children's residential homes (for copy see file of minutes).

**Resolved:**

That the report be received.

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# ILACS Inspection Durham

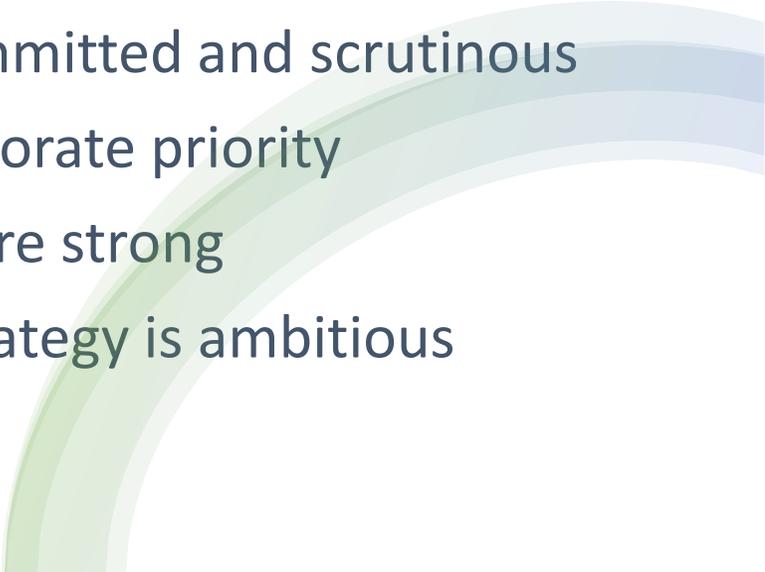
May 2022

## Outcome of the Inspection

- Impact of leaders on social work practice - **OUTSTANDING**
- Experiences and progress of children who need help and protection - **GOOD**
- Experiences and progress of Children in care and care leavers - **GOOD**
- Overall Effectiveness - **GOOD**



## Key headlines and themes

- Services have improved since 2019
  - Swift and purposeful response to the areas identified for priority action in the focused visit in 2021
  - Leaders have an acute and accurate knowledge of the needs of children in Durham with an accurate self assessment
  - Effective and responsive services have been developed
  - Political leaders are committed and scrupulous
  - Children are a high corporate priority
  - Strategic partnerships are strong
  - Corporate parenting strategy is ambitious
- 

## Key headlines and themes

- Highly innovative and specialist teams are providing high quality support to the most vulnerable children
- Core social work practice is effective
- Relationship based practice is a strength
- Partnership work with families to achieve sustained change is a strength
- Children and families are making sustainable progress



## Areas for improvement

- The response to children who go missing from home and care
  - Sufficiency of short break placements; respite and sessional care for disabled children
  - Pathway assessments and planning for care leavers
- 

## Children in Care - Feedback

- Children are brought into care at the appropriate time
- Well supported by committed social workers
- Early consideration given to permanent care options
- Children live in caring and stable homes where they make progress
- IRO's know their children well
- Parents, carers and children are encouraged to participate in review meetings
- Opportunities for children to share their views and opinions in different forums
- A vibrant and enthusiastic CICC



## Children in Care - Feedback

- Children speak highly of their social workers and feel listened to
  - Children are making good progress
  - Virtual School is championing the educational needs of CIC
  - Leaders are working hard to increase sufficiency and choice of placed for CIC
  - An increase in the number of foster carer households
  - Recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers is rigorous
  - LA has widened the pool of adopters via the RAA
  - Children aged 16 and 17 are well supported in supported accommodation
- 

## Care Leavers

- Strong relationships with Young People's Advisors (YPA's)
- YP described feeling cared for and were exceptionally positive about their YPA
- Education, employment and training needs are identified
- Vast majority live in appropriate accommodation of their choice
- Staying put arrangements are increasing
- Care leaver's hub is a positive achievement and YP are proud of its development



## Impact of leaders on social work practice

- Strong practice model – Signs of Safety
- A drive to achieve sustainable change for families
- Good understanding of the needs of Durham’s children
- Development of highly innovative, specialist teams
- Service restructures have been welcomed by children and staff and have significantly enhanced social work services
- QA programme is comprehensive

## The workforce..

- Inspectors met a range of highly skilled and motivated social workers with aspirational aims for their own practice and are proud that this practice is achieving positive outcomes for children
- They like working for Durham
- The workforce offer is substantial
- Ambitious aims for Durham to be an employer of choice locally
- There is mutual respect between leaders and social workers that creates a positive and open working culture
- This is having a direct and positive impact on services for children



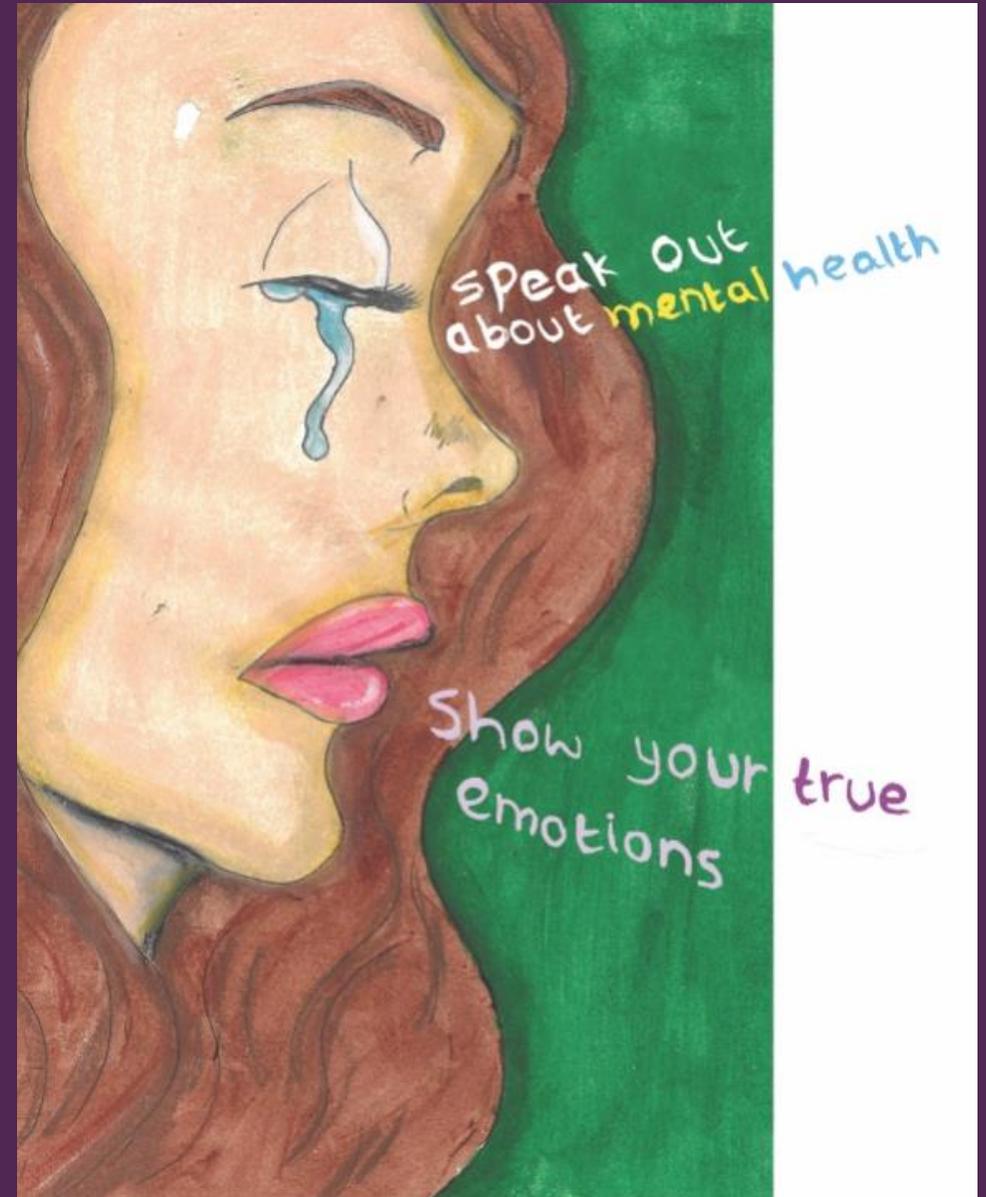
“Sensitive and proportionate early help”



“Timely allocation of a social worker”

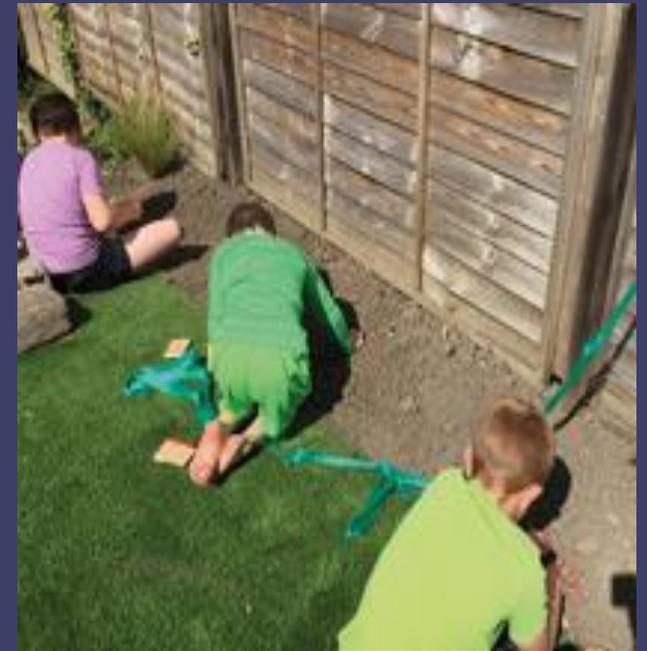
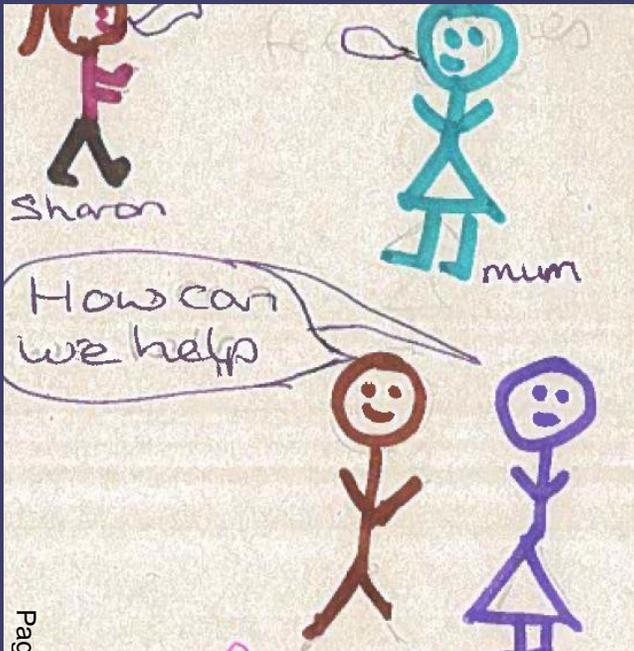
“Effective use of family network meetings”

“Robust and helpful family led support plans”



# “Robust management oversight and grip of children in legal proceedings”

## “Prompt assessments of children who present as homeless”





“Children receive  
an effective and  
proportionate  
response”

“Risks reducing”

“Circumstances  
improving”



“Strong pre-birth assessments”

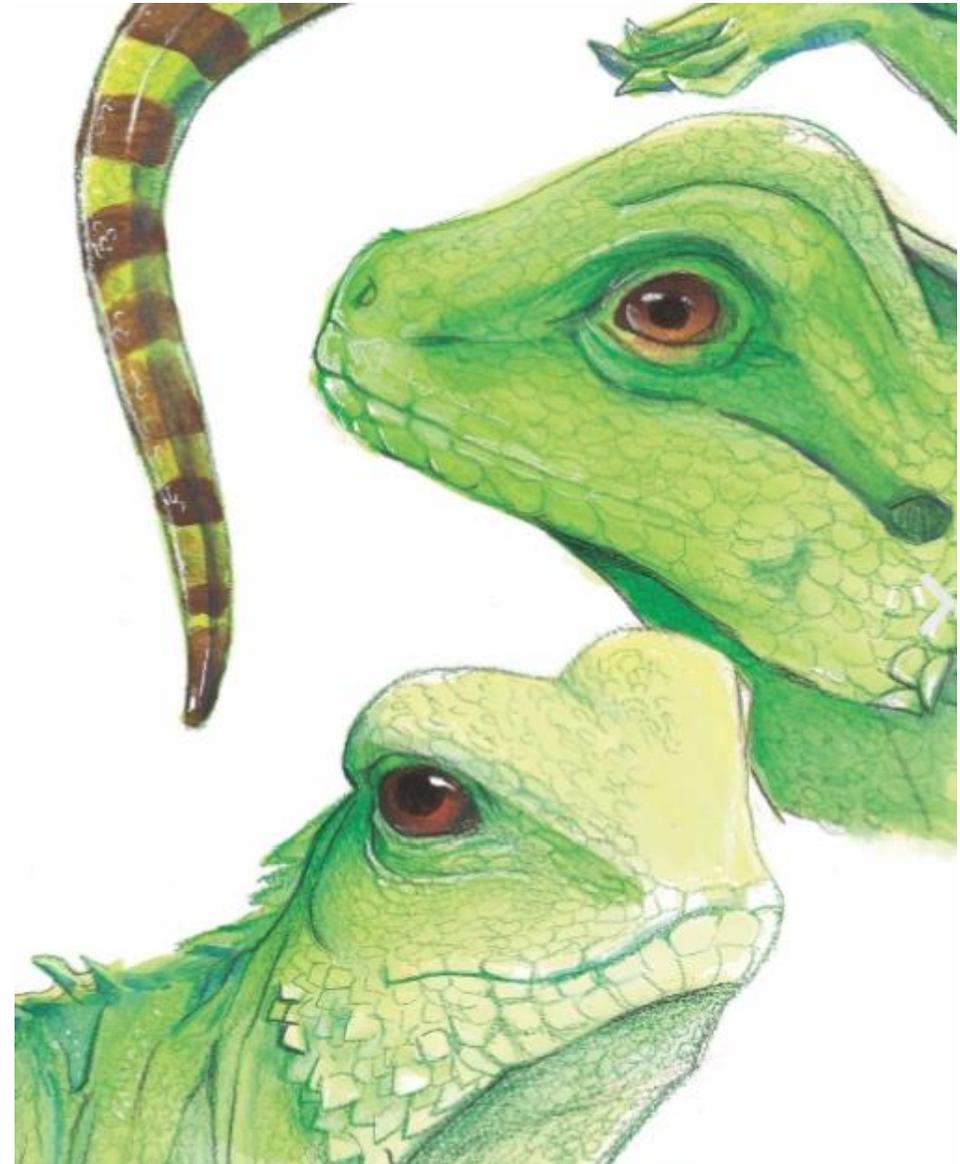


“Rigorous pre-birth planning”

“Partnership with families”

“Robust analysis of risk and strengths”

“Achieve real sustainable change”





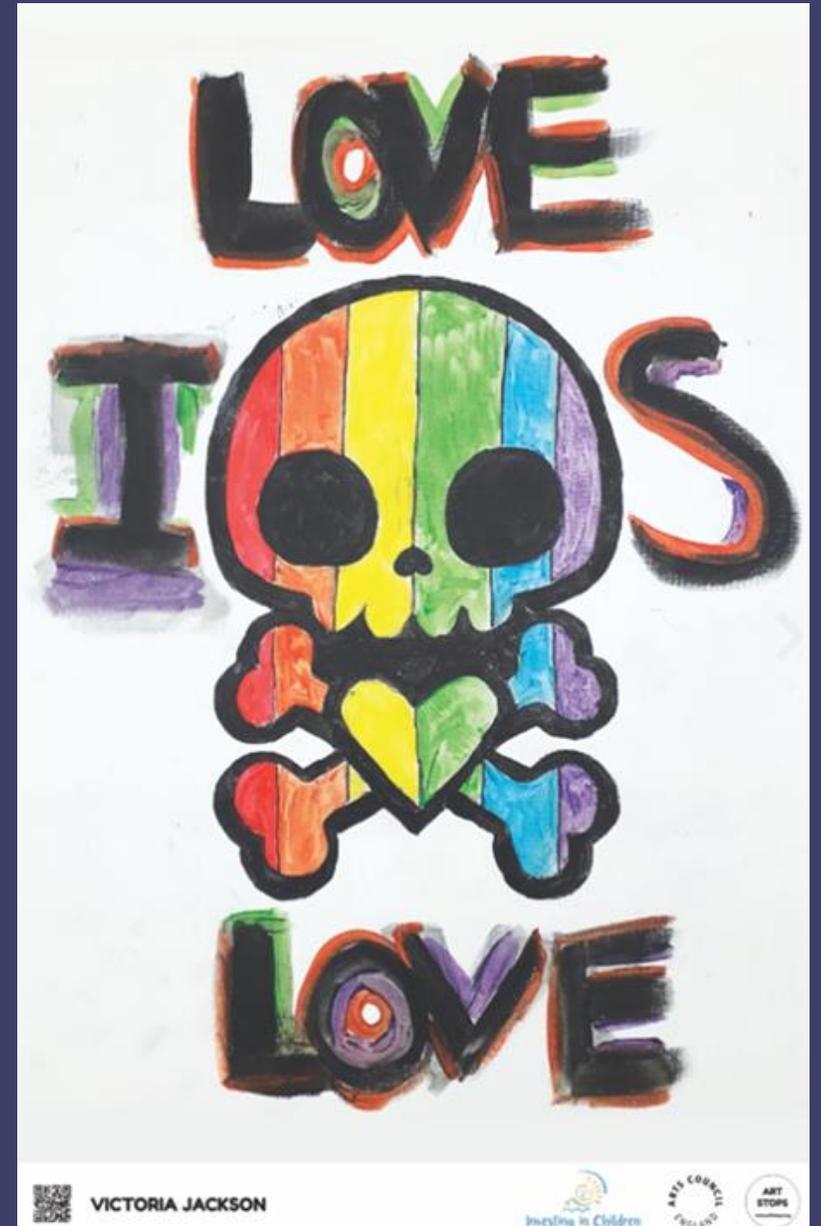
“Highly  
innovative  
specialist teams”

“High-quality  
support”

“Children make progress and their circumstances improve”

“Proactive culture”

“Track children’s and families’ progress accurately”



VICTORIA JACKSON





“Improve children’s circumstances in the longer term, preventing multiple re-referrals”

# “Timely and robust decisions about children’s long-term arrangements”



“Children at risk of exploitation are appropriately identified”





“Working hard  
with local  
partners”

“Shared  
understanding of  
the model of  
practice”

“Children are involved in a wide range of hobbies and interests”



“Children meet their full potential”





“Tailored and effective support from the ‘Full Circle’ team”

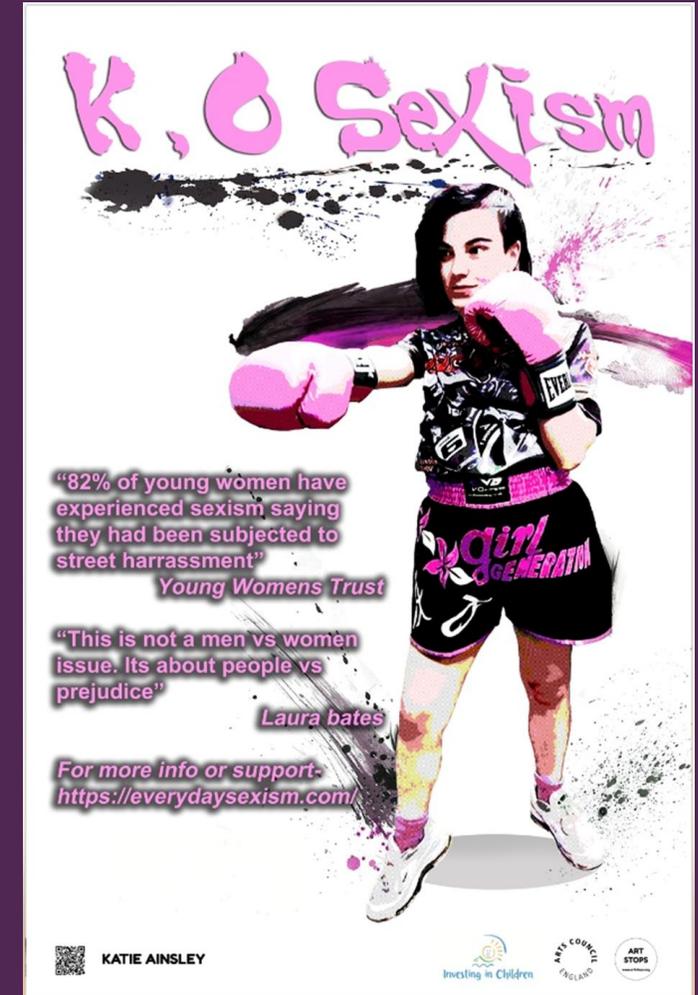
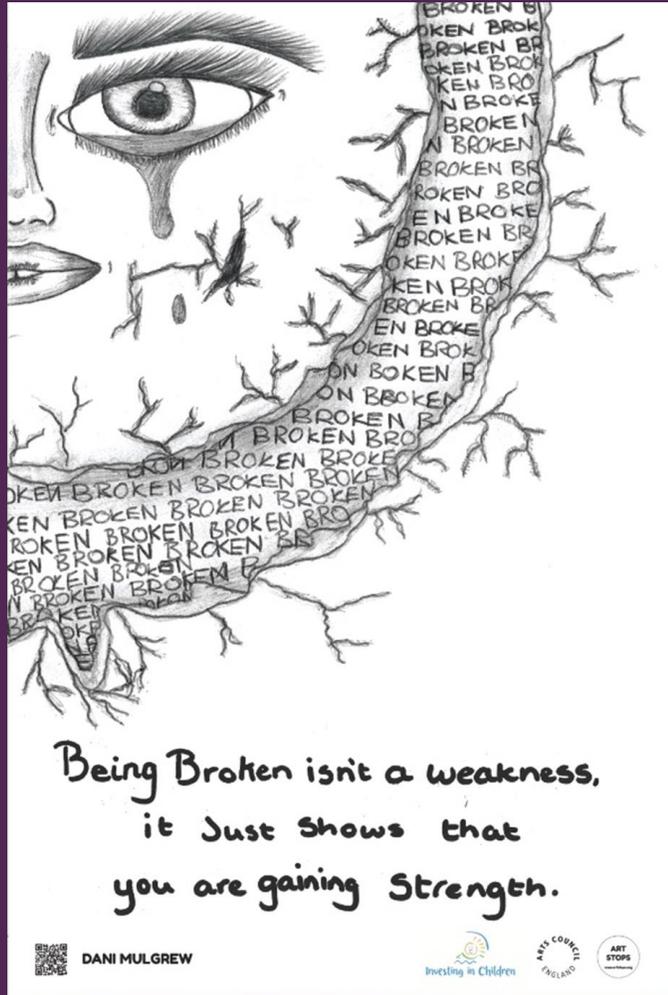
“Durham provides a range of services that offer extra support to both children and their carers when they are under pressure”



“The local authority designated officers are experienced and effective”

“IROs know their children well”

# “Children’s aspirations are being recognised”



“Assessments of connected carers are completed promptly”

“The recruitment, assessment and approval of foster carers and adopters are rigorous”





“Strong practice model ”

“Children are benefiting  
from relationship-based  
practice”

“Skilled social workers and other professionals”

“Creative work to engage with children”



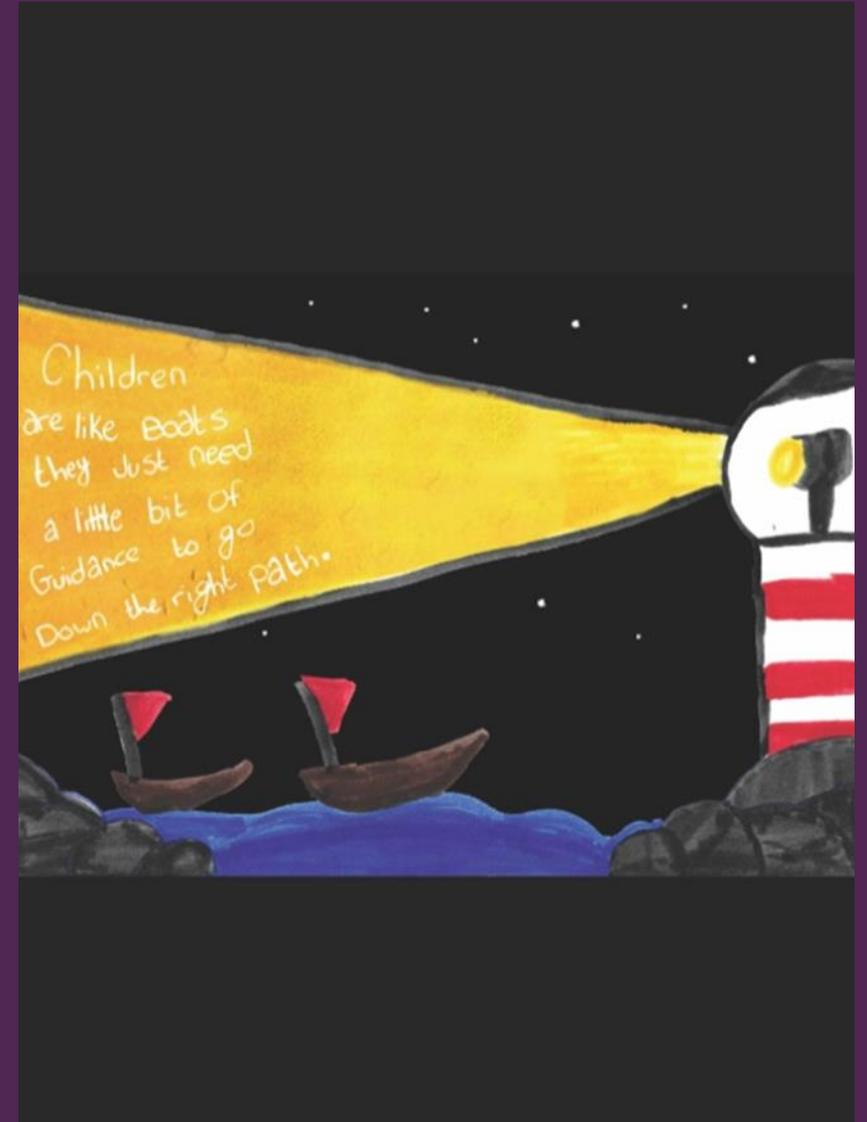


“Children report ‘feeling cared for’”

“Children in care live in caring homes”

“The virtual school is championing educational needs”

“Comprehensive systems in place to ensure parents who elect to home educate are providing an appropriate education”





“Care leavers were exceptionally positive about their YPA”



“YPA has been a long-term consistent figure in their life”



“Care leavers are extremely proud of the hub”

“Widens their horizons and begins to prepare them well for adulthood”





“Very vibrant  
and  
enthusiastic  
Children in  
Care Council”

“A clear commitment to hear from a wide range of children”

“Child protection chairs welcome participation of children”

“Opportunities for children to share their views and opinions in different forums”



“Ensure children’s voice is influencing key strategies”

“Children have a good access to participation activities”





“Social workers fully understand the importance of promoting children’s identity”

“Workforce offer is substantial”

“Wide range of training and development available”

“Structured career development pathways”





“Social workers like working for Durham”

“A positive and open workplace culture”

“Mutual respect between leaders and social workers”



“Newly qualified social workers receive high levels of support”



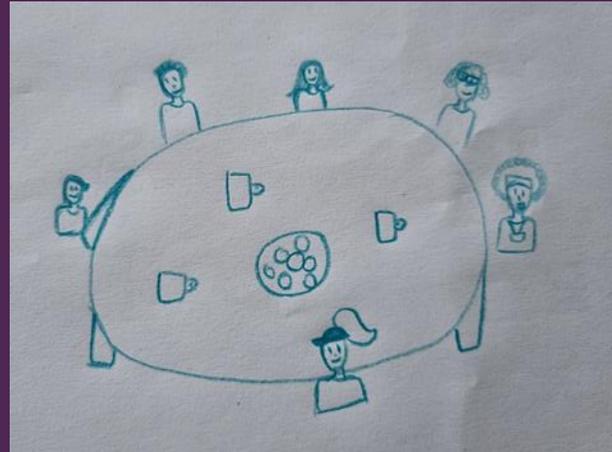
“Impressive leadership academy”



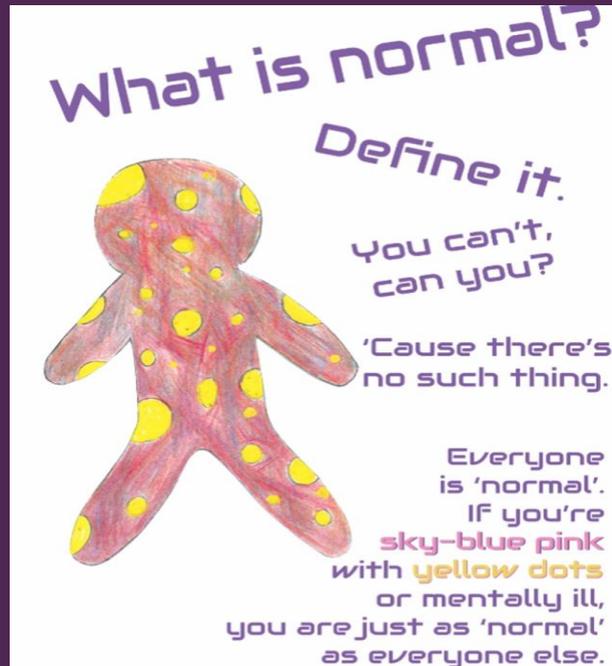
“There is a focused sufficiency plan”



“Quality assurance programme is comprehensive”



“Political leaders are committed and scrupulous”



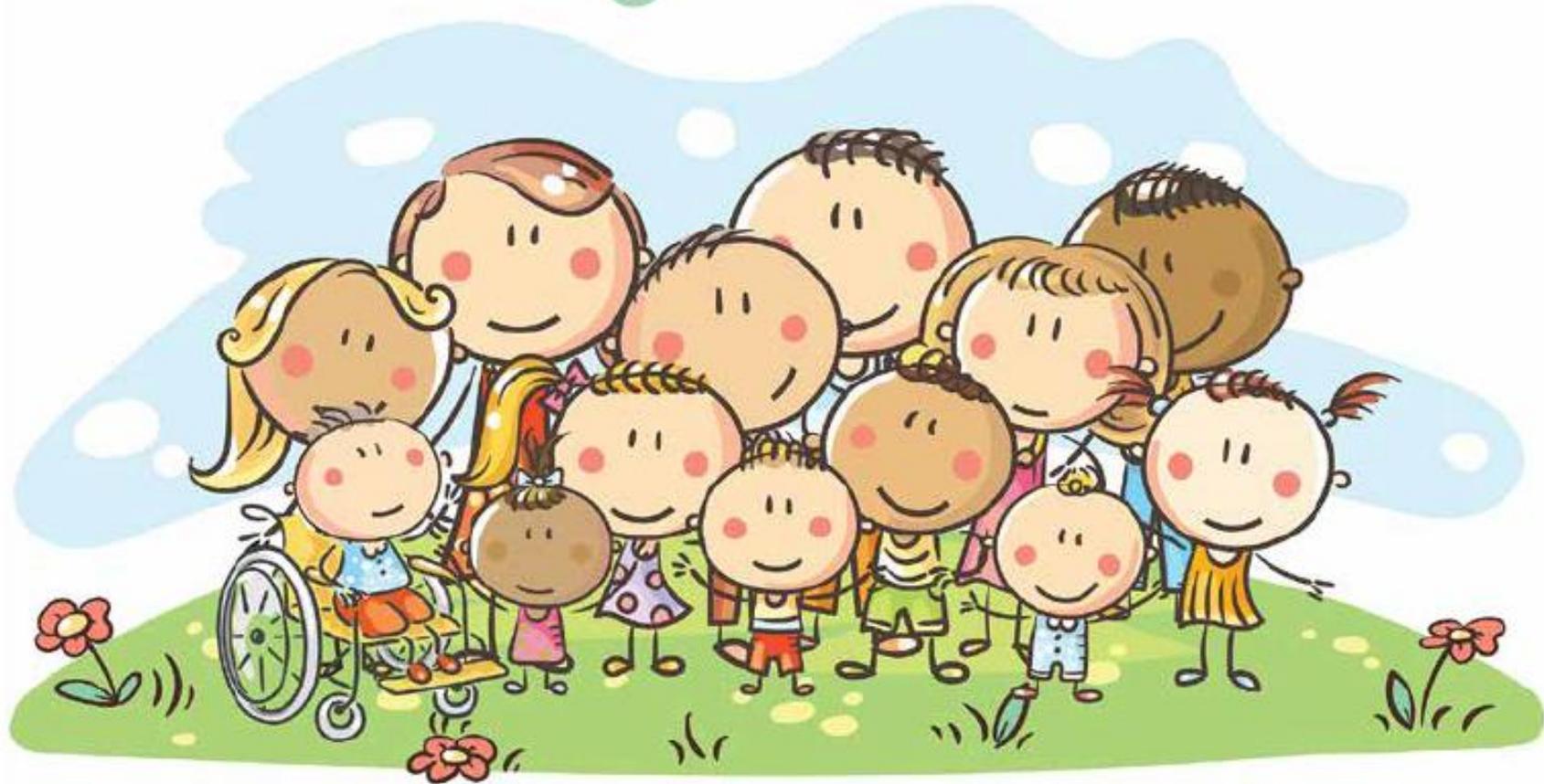
“There is ongoing investment”



“Leaders and managers at all levels continually strive for excellent social work”

“Ambitious aims to make them an employer of choice”

# Thank you



Dear Colleague

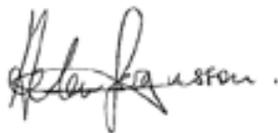
## Thank you for all you have done

and continue to do to support, safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people, their families and carers.

Our recent inspection has shown that your commitment and dedication is impressive. Let's keep working together to support our ambition of achieving the best possible outcomes for all our children and young people in County Durham.



John Pearce



Helen Fergusson



Martyn Stenton



Jim Murray



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The link to the full report on the Ofsted Website is here:

<https://t.co/BhCOBE1nOU>

relationships **children** focussed  
 effective Foster carers **STABLE**  
 outstanding-leadership  
 adopters **PROGRESS**  family  
 young-people trusting   
**DURHAM** **innovative** social workers  
 views **responsive** sustainable **↑ purposeful**   
 prompt proportionate **AMBITION** aspirational participation creative strong  
 vibrant committed  **GOOD** proactive  
 confident **PARTNERSHIP** supportive  
**CHANGE** positive+ trusting **CARING**  
 comprehensive enthusiastic **LEARNING** impact **HELPFUL**

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



## Durham Children in Care Council (CiCC) – June 22 Highlights

- Future Foster Care Training has been reviewed by CiCC members. Three new CiCC members are observing CiCC members undertaking the training in July regarding future foster carers
- Both CiCC groups have connected with the Supportive Family Time Team to discuss a range of issues to develop the service better.
- The older CiCC group have connected with NHS care experienced nurses to review the way they work and will meet as a subgroup to look at raising awareness and training opportunities for health practitioners.
- Another CiCC newsletter has been developed and we also have a care leaver who is interested in developing podcasts later in the year.



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

## Durham Children in Care Council (CiCC) – June 22 Highlights

The younger CiCC group has met to discuss practitioner profiles being developed via their project, All About ME. They think profiles should be used by all practitioners when arranging meetings with care experienced young people for the first time as they think it will improve relationships. They particularly liked the template below, which was created by a CiCC member and they are looking for CPP to support this idea.



**Robert (Rob) Johnson**  
Office: Sjovoll Centre  
Email: robert.johnson@investinginchildren.net  
Phone Number: 07832190995  
Office Phone Number: 01913077030

Favourite Food: Hummus  
Favourite Drink: Black Coffee  
Favourite Emoji: 😊  
Pets: 2  
Fun Fact: I love running

Investing in Children  
Durham County Council

**Corporate Parenting Panel**

**19 July 2022**

**Annual Report on the Adoption Service  
2021/2022**



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

**Electoral division(s) affected:**

None.

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 Annual review of the Adoption Service for 2021/22 including the identification of service priorities for 2022/23.

**Executive summary**

- 2 In 2021/22, the Adoption Service received 217 enquiries, completed 62 initial visits, and 40 prospective adopters were approved.
- 3 At the 31 March 2022, there were 20 prospective adopters in Stage 2 and 22 prospective adopters in Stage 1; this is potentially 42 families who will complete their adoption journey in 2021/22.
- 4 65 children have been matched at Panel. 34 matches were within the RAA, 27 with DCC approved adopters and 7 with our partner spokes. 31 children were placed with adopters approved by voluntary agencies. This is comparable with the previous year’s figure of 35 and maintains the continued improvement from previous years.
- 5 6 children have been placed within this reporting period under Fostering for Adoption regulations.
- 6 22 Adoption Orders have been granted within this period This has been negatively impacted by the Somerset judgement.
- 7 5 new panel members have been successfully recruited in this period. 1 panel member resigned due to personal circumstances and the 2 panel medical advisors remain on to provide medical information but have resigned as full panel members due to work commitments and availability.

- 8 219 birth parents have been supported in writing their post box contact letters. 23 birth parents have requested and received support regarding their children's adoption
- 9 115 children have been supported through successful assessments of need completed by Social Workers within the adoption team. This is a total funding agreed by the ASF of £373000.00
- 10 48 adopted adults have sought support to access their adoption records in this period.
- 11 72 Non -Agency adoption enquiries have been received, a significant increase from the previous year of 42.

### **Recommendation**

- 12 Corporate Parenting Panel is requested to:
  - (a) Note the contents and agree the proposed priorities.

## **Background**

- 13 This annual report sets out the previous performance and the direction of travel for the Adoption Service as a spoke in the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt Coast to Coast.
- 14 The activity of the Adoption Service detailed in this report was in a continued period of Covid lockdown. The service re-evaluated its procedures throughout to ensure guidance was followed, whilst ensuring a safe service was being delivered to provide well assessed permanence for children.

## **Data Accuracy**

- 15 Liquid Logic is almost fully embedded in the Adoption Team for performance reports to be directly produced from the Liquid Logic system. The Adoption Dashboard is being constructed and reporting areas have been requested to support data collection moving forwards.

## **Main Implications**

- 16 Key priority areas for 2022/23:
  - (a) To work collaboratively with our partners in Adopt Coast to Coast to recruit, assess and approve adopters in a timely manner.
  - (b) To ensure children's plans of permanence via adoption are progressed without delay
  - (c) Fostering for adoption placements and matches are to be identified at the earliest possible stage in children's planning to prevent delay and ensure minimal moves for children.
  - (d) To recruit new panel members to the central list. This will ensure quoracy and prevent the possible need to stand a panel down due to lack of available panel members.
  - (e) To continue to embed signs of safety into practice and panel processes in line with the Durham model of social work practice.
  - (f) To increase relationship-based practice with trauma informed service developments, particularly in the development and support of post adoption contact.
  - (g) To identify potential plans of adoption for children as early as possible. This will allow for targeted adopter recruitment at the earliest possible point. Where there is a need for an adopter able to take sibling groups, older children or children with more

complex health or disability needs, thus preventing delay or the need to purchase adopters at a high cost from external providers.

## **Conclusion**

- 17 Please note the contents of the Adoption Service's Annual Report which highlights practice achieved in 2021/22 and sets the direction of travel for the remainder of this financial year.

## **Author**

Barbara Arbon, Adoption Team Manager

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

Section 3 Adoption and Children Act 2002 places a duty on each local authority to maintain within their area an adoption service designed to meet the needs of:

- (a) children who may be adopted, their parents and guardians,
- (b) persons wishing to adopt a child, and
- (c) adopted persons, their adoptive parents and natural parents

By making arrangements for the adoption of children and for the provision of adoption support services.

The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 contain detailed requirements which local authorities must comply with in order to comply with this duty.

### **Finance**

Expenditure on inter agency adoption payments demonstrated a significant decrease in 2020/2021, reversing the trend experienced over the previous three years as the service continues to maximise placements with adopters recruited by the authority directly. While interagency fees are an additional material expense, they are one off payments and cost significantly less than a child in a long-term fostering placement.

### **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



Durham County Council  
Adoption Service Annual Report  
1 April 2021 – 31st March 2022



## Durham County Council Adoption Service

This annual report covers all adoption activity within Durham County Council, a spoke within the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt Coast to Coast. This is a partnership 'hub and spoke' model between Durham, Cumbria, and Together for Children in Sunderland.

The Statement of Purpose for Durham Adoption Service was updated in August 2021 and a copy was provided to OFSTED as per the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003. The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and updated annually.

Adoption National Minimum Standards 25.6 (2011) states that written reports are provided on the management, outcomes, and financial state of the Agency every six months. A report was submitted in Autumn 2021 covering April to September 2021. This report takes into account the full financial year, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2022.

It should be noted that during this 12-month period two significant issues have been raised in respect of adoption nationally, both having a significant impact for children, adopters, and staff.

**Ombudsman finding regarding Wolverhampton** - In June 2021 a complaint was lodged against Wolverhampton Council by a person who in 2019 had their application to adopt turned down. The complaint related to procedures not being followed at the enquiry stage and an initial visit being undertaken before the registration of interest was submitted. Adoption agencies nationally have needed to review practice in this area. Durham reviewed these procedures immediately. This led to an increase in work, due to no longer being able to rule any potential unsuitable applicants out at the initial point of contact. There are only 3 situations for ruling out now at this stage being;

- Applicants must be over 21 years of age
- Applicants must be legally resident in the UK, the Channel Islands, or the Isle of Man, and have been so for at least 12 months.
- Applicants must not have any criminal convictions or cautions for offences against children or for serious sexual offences.

As a result, a greater number of enquiries are now progressed to initial visits and detailed information is requested from the applicant at this stage, before a decision can be made regarding suitability to progress.

**The Somerset Judgement**- On 24 November the High Court handed down a judgement in *Somerset County Council v NHS Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group & Anor* [2021] EWHC 3004(Fam) dealing with the lawfulness of Placement Orders made in ten separate cases. The court found that the Agency Decision Maker

(ADM) had not made the decision that the child should be placed for adoption in accordance with the Adoption Agencies Regulations (AAR) 2005.

In these cases the Medical Adviser had not completed the Child's Permanence Report as required by Regulations 15 & 17 of the AAR 2005. She had not given advice on whether the child needed to have a medical examination and had not written a summary of the state of the child's health. The Court found that the breach of the Regulations was so fundamental that it could render the application for a Placement Order invalid.

It should be noted many other Local Authorities nationally also worked in the same way. Durham Adoption Service had adopted this practice in August 2020.

Resolution of this matter has caused delays for children waiting to be matched with prospective adopters. Family finding continued, however children were not able to have chemistry visits with adopters and other than in exceptional circumstances which needed to be agreed by ADM, could not be placed with their adopters.

Adoption panels in February 2022 where matches were being presented, needed to be stood down. Local Authorities were given permission by Court to place some children with their prospective adopters in exceptional circumstances, which Durham was able to do for 8 children, following agreement and review of medical reports by the Agency Decision Maker.

### **Durham Adoption Team Staffing**

- The Head of Children's Services is Helen Fergusson.
- The Head of Adopt Coast to Coast is Paula Gibbons.
- The Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence and Agency Decision Maker (ADM) is Jodie Henderson. In the absence of Jodie Henderson, Jac Tyler and Bernie Toomey, both DCC Strategic Managers, have undertaken the role of ADM once each over this year.
- Barbara Arbon is the Adoption Team Manager and Adoption Agency Advisor. In the absence of Barbara Arbon, Sarah Fitzpatrick and Wendy Ellis, both Adoption Social Work Consultants, have undertaken the Agency Panel Adviser role.
- 2x Consultant Social Workers.
- 7x full time social workers.
- 4x part time social workers.

- 1x 4 day week social worker.
- 1x Adoption support worker.
- 3 x student social workers have been provided with placements within the team over this period. One of which was a Durham County Council employee on a social work apprenticeship.
- The Adoption Team has recruited to 1 Full time Social Worker post within this period. This post was successfully filled by an experienced social worker who at that time was on a 1-year secondment with the Adoption Team. The worker moved to the permanent post on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021. 1 part time vacant Social Worker post was also recruited in this period and this experienced member of staff joined the team on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2021.
- 2 adoption panel chairs are independently employed. Barbara Brelsford and Sandie Dixon. Mary Greenwood, panel chair retired after many years' service in September 2021. Sandie Dixon was successfully recruited in this vacant post.
- Due to a significant increase in work across all areas of the adoption service it has been necessary to implement a new duty process. Duty is now covered by a main duty worker along with a backup duty worker Monday to Friday 8.30am – 5pm, 4.30pm on Fridays. There is also now an initial visit rolling rota, which allows a fair dissemination of such visits and stage 1 allocations across the team.

## Recruitment

- In this period, DCC have received 217 initial enquires, of which 62 Initial visits were carried out. This is a significant increase from the previous year of 115 initial enquiries resulting in 46 initial visits.
- 30 Information sessions have been held via Teams and facilitated equally across the 3 spokes of the RAA, each undertaking 10 sessions. There has been a flexible approach to the timing of the events, including evenings and Saturdays.

**Below are some quotes from attendees at the information events facilitated by Durham's Adoption Team.**

- *"I came out of the meeting feeling absolutely invigorated about the journey we're about to take. Being able to listen to people with so much knowledge and talk to other people about to do the same thing was very exciting!"*
- *It was all very positive, and information was provided in an easy to understand way*
- *We felt good and encouraged to proceed with our application.*
- *I think the organisation was really well done. There was a clear structure, lots of valuable information presented very clearly and inviting a person to talk about their experiences with the adoption process was really insightful*
- *Clear, mostly. The presenter, gave a coherent step -by-step overview which I found very useful*
- *Hearing from an adopter was great. She was very positive about her experience which was encouraging. They were both lovely. It's so hard to host on Zoom. They did everything they could but people are never going to feel as relaxed as they would in person.*

## **Stage 1**

Information, counselling, and preparation courses (ICP) have been delivered monthly on a shared basis between Durham and TFC adoption teams. The training takes place over 3 full consecutive days. Durham facilitates the training on alternate months. This provides geographical ease for attendees, however, when necessary, Durham & TFC applicants are able to attend Cumbria courses and vice versa.

In this period Durham adoption staff have facilitated the training for 76 applicants. From February 2022 Durham re-commenced face to face ICP training. Prior to this Teams was used due to covid restrictions.

### **Feedback from attendees at the ICP training;**

- *Thank you for the way in which you conducted the training. I did not feel at all uncomfortable to ask questions and really felt at ease.*

- *Eye opening and informative throughout and that can only ever be a good thing to help with everything going forward.*
- *The session went really well. It was nice to meet other people who are going through the same process as us and share our ideas and thoughts with them. xxx, who delivered the training, was lovely and was clearly experienced, which was reassuring. The training was fun and interactive, whilst still providing us with things we needed to know and there was plenty of opportunities to ask questions.*
- *Informative, interactive, believe was a good session. Helpful in understanding certain things which we weren't too sure about. Also covered things which never thought about to. Nice to be part of a group in same position.*
- *Was good and covered wide range of issues which had never considered. Shone a light on why certain things can be important to the child future knowledge and links to their past.*
- *The session was great, very informative but with a relaxed atmosphere, so we didn't feel too overwhelmed with everything. We liked how there were lots of opportunities to ask questions and have discussions.*
- *The videos from the foster carer, adopted young lady and medical advisor were great. It was good to hear their experiences and thoughts on adopting.*

## Stage 2

In this reporting period, 40 adoptive households were approved. At the end of this reporting period, there were 22 prospective adopters in Stage 1 and 20 prospective adopters in Stage 2.

During stage 2 prospective adopters are invited to attend a training session providing information about Fostering for Adoption (FFA). It is acknowledged as a required area for development and growth as this provides the greatest opportunity for children to experience a reduced number of care givers, although it does carry a degree of emotional risk for adopters.

This session allows for more detailed exploration of the process. The session provides clear, well-balanced advice and information on the benefits of FFA for both child and adopter. This training is well received, and adopters are fully aware that attendance at the session does not mean they must undertake FFA. Adopters have felt able to progress with FFA but have not restricted themselves solely to this pathway to being matched with a child.

The therapeutic parenting training, which is mandatory has been delivered during stage 2. Earlier in the year this was held in stage 1, however after feedback from prospective adopters this has been moved to stage 2 to prevent prospective adopters feeling overwhelmed with information.

### **Adoption Panel/Independent Reviewing Mechanism**

Adoption Panel has been held 23 times over this 12-month period. Panel is held fortnightly and additional panels held when necessary to prevent delays for children. 5 of the 23 panels held were additional panels.

At these panels 59 matches for children with adopters and 39 adopter approvals were considered.

Within this cohort only 1 adoption application for approval in April 2021 was not recommended by panel. This was supported by ADM. In November 2021 this was presented at the applicants request to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM). IRM also felt unable to recommend the applicants be approved as adopters. ADM supported the IRM decision.

Panel members and chairs have noted throughout the year that the reports presented to them are of an extremely high quality and very child focussed. This is fed back to social worker, their managers and senior managers. Panel have said that they felt so reassured by the detail within some prospective adopter's reports (PARs) that they have found it a challenge to identify questions to ask adopters during their panel attendance, saying that this is reflective of the quality of the reports.

In respect of training for panel members and chairs, Barbara Arbon, has provided a variety of literature, research, practice updates and information to each member/chair via email throughout the year. Any such information is discussed in AOB at the end of panel.

Panel have also received a face-to-face training day in this period held together with the RAA partners.

Panel Members had their annual appraisals in April 2021.

There has been a continued drive to recruit new panel members. A priority for future recruitment will be to ensure panel has a good range of diversity within the central list.

2 elected members stepped down from their panel elected member status during this year but remained on panel as independent members. To date no new elected members have come into this role.

5 new panel members have been successfully recruited in this period. 1 panel member resigned due to personal circumstances and the 2 panel medical advisors remain on to provide medical information but have resigned as full panel members due to work commitments and availability.

## **Adopters feedback**

Recently 2 approved adoptive families with Durham County Council provided the following feedback (professionals names have been removed)

1. *“Adopt Coast To Coast have been very supportive throughout the whole process of adopting second time around.*

*The social worker has been such a help and support for us as a couple and as a family. She has a very professional, friendly, and caring attitude. Nothing is too much trouble for her, no matter how stupid some of my questions may have been. Knowing she was always a phone call or email away helped a lot. Even if she was unsure of something she always came back to me after checking with one of her colleagues.*

*There have been so many changes in the adoption process since we adopted our first child six years ago. One huge change was the opportunity to have a chemistry meeting with the child and foster carer prior to being approved/matched. This was a great chance to ask the foster carer questions about the child, so much better than relying on just paperwork giving you facts.*

*Having a medical consultation via Teams with the Dr was highly beneficial, giving us the opportunity to ask questions about the child's health.*

*The approval/matching panel via Teams was strange but I felt it made us feel a lot more relaxed and we could enjoy it.*

2. *My experience of the adoption process so far*

*My husband and I has discussed adoption for a number of years but finally found ourselves in a position to proceed in early 2021. After looking at a couple of different agencies we chose to apply through Adopt Coast to Coast.*

*After completing the initial ROI we were invited to training. I loved the training, our trainer was lovely put everyone at ease. We were encouraged to keep in touch with the other prospective adopters on the course, which has been great and we still*

*Speak to quite a lot of them now. The training was delivered virtually, though this was definitely more convenient, I feel face to face experiences are always more beneficial.*

*We met with our social worker on a weekly basis, some through Teams, some face to face and discussed all the stuff you have to discuss. She made us feel so at ease, I feel we got on well and a number of the sessions were actually really enjoyable, which I did not expect after reading different stories online! I think the processes can become quite confusing but she kept us on the right track throughout and always explained honestly where we were up to and what was likely to happen next. We got through everything in time for panel in January.*

*After panel we joined Link Maker which I found pretty difficult, then in March our worker approached us with a little girls profile, we expressed an interest and here we are now waiting for matching panel in approx. 7 weeks!!!*

*Things are definitely moving more quickly now but I feel comfortable enough to ring our worker with even the stupidest questions or worries I have that crop up.*

*So now I have everything crossed and hope things will progress smoothly, but I am definitely letting myself get excited now.*

*Overall I have enjoyed the process, I have learnt things I never knew and definitely feel more prepared.*

*To me it really feels like a big jigsaw, and that everything happens for a reason. Yes of course there have been times I've been worried, stressed, or annoyed that things aren't moving as quickly as I would have liked; but it's not an easy or quick process and everything has got us to exactly where we are now, and soon my daughter will be home and it feels really right.*

*In conclusion, I'm grateful. I'm grateful to Adopt Coast to Coast for all the training, help and support for getting us to the point we are at now. And I'm grateful to our worker, for putting up with all my waffling and finding us a perfect match to complete our family 😊*

### **Reflections of Panel Chair Barbara Brelsford.**

The year from 2021 until 2022 has been a challenging one for the Adoption Service on a number of levels. Restrictions imposed as a result of the global pandemic meant that Adoption panels were held virtually and have only recently opened up to allow panel members, adoption service staff and prospective adopters to attend in person. This development has been welcomed by us all and it is beginning to feel as if some semblance of normality is at last being restored.

Despite not being able to carry out face to face assessments, adoption social workers adapted well to these new circumstances and there appears to have been no significant reduction in the number and regularity of panel meetings.

Quality of reports has not been compromised and it has been clear from their presentation and feedback that prospective adopters have felt supported and valued, despite predominantly not having actually met their assessing social worker other than on a screen.

Adoption service staff should be commended and thanked for their efforts along with agency medical advisers who provide such valuable advice and guidance to both panel members and prospective adopters. And without the technical expertise and patience of the panel administrator, virtual panels would not have operated as smoothly as they did. All these factors have come together to minimise any delay in placing the child with their adoptive family and that remains at the heart of all we do.

In October 2021, our respected friend and colleague, Mary Greenwood, made the decision after fifteen dedicated years as panel chair, to retire and our thanks and good wishes go with her. Mary's successor, Sandie Dixon, has ably taken up the reins as co-chair of the panel as we look forward to a further year of continuously improving practice.

A key feature in pursuing a commitment to adoption as a way of meeting a child's need for permanence, is the establishment of the Coast-to-Coast Regional Adoption Agency which has now been functioning since 1st April 2021 and includes an exciting learning partnership with colleagues from TFC and Cumbria.

And finally, sincere thanks to our panel members who are so conscientious and spend a significant proportion of their own time in both preparing for and contributing to the vital discussions which go towards securing a permanent future for our looked after children.

### **Reflections of panel chair Sandie Dixon.**

I have chaired panels since September 2021 and was immediately taken by the commitment shown by panel members. By their very nature, panel members are busy people through their work commitments, dedication to the children looked after by them through foster care or their voluntary work but they are consistently well prepared for panel and use their knowledge and expertise to scrutinise each case presented to them.

Generally, the quality of reports presented to panel is good, sometimes being so thorough that panel has no questions for the social worker or applicants. When I first started there were some concerns regarding foster carers' reports having so little information, or that information being so superficial, that it was difficult to get a picture of the child(ren); this however has been rectified and the reports have greatly improved.

It has been an honour and a privilege to be part of an adopter's journey and I know that each member of the panel is acutely aware of the importance of their role and the part this plays in safeguarding some of the most vulnerable children."

### **The Child's Journey**

- In this reporting period 73 children had an ADM decision for a plan of adoption, in the previous year this was 40.
- 59 Children have been granted a Placement Order compared to 37 in the previous year.
- In this period 65 children were matched at panel.
- 34 of these children being matched within the RAA, of which 27 matches were with DCC approved adopters, 7 matches were with our partner spokes.
- 31 matches were with voluntary adoption agencies.
- This is a significant increase from the previous year where 35 children were matched at Panel. Of these 15 were placed with external providers.

The budget position at the end of this reporting period is;

- DCC placed children with 26 approved adoptive households from our 2 partner spokes.
- Cumbria, 7 families costing £189,000.
- TFC, 1 family costing £27,000.
- 34 children were placed in voluntary adoption agency placements.

- 22 Adoption Orders have been granted within this period This has been negatively impacted by the Somerset judgement.
- 41 children are placed with prospective adopters but not yet adopted.
- 4 children's plan were changed from adoption to long-term fostering.

In this period a sibling group of 2 children experienced a disruption 3 months after being placed with their adopters in an external agency. The learning from an upcoming disruption meeting will be shared with the staff in Durham and across the RAA for adoption practice development.

### **Family Finding**

Profiling events remained virtual due to covid restrictions. However, face to face activity days and profiling events are planned to take place throughout 2022.

Early permanence via Fostering for Adoption (FFA) is a priority and within this period 6 children have been placed in this arrangement. 1 of these children was placed under FFA regulations due to the Somerset Judgement.

Early permanence meetings are held shortly after a child becomes Looked After when adoption is being considered as a possible plan. The child's plan is then tracked by the Permanency Monitoring group, chaired by Jodie Henderson, and attended by Sara Peterson, Looked After team manager, Barbara Arbon Adoption team manager. Further regular weekly monitoring is undertaken by Sara Peterson, Barbara Arbon and Sarah Fitzpatrick, social work consultant in the Adoption Team.

### **Post Box contact**

Post box contact has significantly improved through the commencement in post of the Adoption Support Worker and named business support worker who have worked to bring the post box up to date on the LCS data base. The next step for improvement in this area is to upload historical post box letters to LCS. This is a very large piece of work and is moving forward.

219 birth parents have been supported in writing their post box letter or understanding the post box process. This also included Indirect contact

agreements that have been put in place on historical post box cases. This work has been undertaken by the adoption support worker.

## **Post Adoption Support Services**

Overall, there has been a significant increase in each area of adoption support services which are a statutory requirement for each Local Authority.

### **Adoption Support Fund assessments/application**

Within this reporting period 115 children have been supported through successful assessments of need completed by Social Workers within the adoption team. This is a total funding agreed by the ASF of £373000.00

This area of work is increasing vastly both within DCC and nationally. This is having an impact on the ASF provider, who have needed to extend their decision-making timeframe from 20 days to 25 days following the receipt of an application. This causes further delay for families waiting for therapeutic service input.

There have been 13 children who have also received services from our colleagues within the Safeguarding teams at either Child in Need or Child Protection levels alongside the support received from the post adoption support services. The allocated adoption social workers have attended various meetings as part of the team around the family in all cases.

### **Feedback from adoptive parents requesting support and advice**

- *From one adopter: xxxxx, that is the best news. Thank you so so much for all your involvement and getting this to fruition.*
- *From another adopter: You have been such a godsend to us*
- *Another adopter has verbally expressed her thanks "for the support she has had".*

### **Full Circle**

Barbara Arbon, Team Manager meets weekly with Michelle Summerbell and the Full Circle team to consider Adoption Support requests in order to work collaboratively with this DCC therapeutic service. The aim is to provide wherever possible swifter more streamlined services for families in need of therapeutic support.

Parents are asked if they wish to have Full Circle work alongside the adoption social worker to complete their assessment of need. If in agreement this takes place and where a service may be provided by Full Circle and should parents

wish to select them as a provider, an ASF application is made to fund the work.

It should be noted that it is parental choice, and the adoption staff have a duty to provide a list of therapeutic providers to parents.

To further support new adoptive parents prior to Adoption Orders being granted where agreement is given an assessment of need is carried out by the DCC adoption social worker in order to see if the criteria has been met to make an ASF application for the adopters to enrol on a nurturing attachment rolling programme with Full Circle. This is intended to ensure ongoing support in the earlier stages of the adoption and build on parent's strengths and abilities, hoping to reduce the need for more intense support as the child grows.

### **The Adoption Service also provides:**

Support, advice, and counselling to birth parents and those who are affected by adoption. This task is undertaken by the Adoption Support Worker. 23 birth parents have requested and received support regarding their children's adoption, by the adoption support worker in this period.

For the previous 12 years ARC Adoption Agency were contracted to undertake access to records for adopted adults wishing to access their adoption records. This contract ended at the start of this reporting period and the task was then undertaken instead by DCC adoption social workers 48 adopted persons have requested this service.

### **Non-Agency Adoption**

**This relates is where the Local Authority does not place the child for adoption, i.e. step-parent/parent's partner/grandparent seeking to adopt a named child.**

The number of referrals and complexities of this area of adoption work are increasing. One part time adoption social worker specialises in this field of adoption and leads on and undertakes the non-agency work.

In this reporting period there have been:

- 72 enquiries, this is a significant increase on the same period last year being 42.

- 17 initial visits were completed, with 9 resulting in an assessment commencing.
- 6 Adoption Orders have been granted.
- 4 completed assessments are waiting to be finalised at court.
- 1 assessment was completed but the couple have not submitted their application to court yet.
- 1 assessment was completed but the family did not apply to court because they required support from colleagues in Children's Services.
- 9 assessments are ongoing although it is unlikely all will result in the families making an application to court.

### **Adoption Support Allowance**

Financial support is payable under Part 3 of the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 to an adoptive parent for the purpose of supporting the placement of the adoptive child or the continuation of adoption arrangements after an adoption order is made. The Adoption Support Allowance is means tested and is reviewed annually. The review process requires Strategic Manager sign off. In this reporting period the agreed annual budget was £895,107.00. The amount of allowance paid to adopters was £781,031.34. This was an underspend of 114,075.66.

### **Signs of Safety/Signs of wellbeing/success**

Adoption team staff have now attended Signs Of Safety training sessions delivered by DCC learning and development team and this model is now being embedded within day-to-day practice. As this model has been devised primarily as a safeguarding tool, it has been necessary to adapt some wording to ensure it is used to its best advantage within the adoption service. This affords us the opportunity to work with the model to make the best fit for service delivery.

### **LCS and Dashboard**

In this reporting period adoption work has moved to use Liquid Logic recording systems for Children's Social care (LCS) in all areas of the service. The LCS team

have worked alongside Barbara Arbon and several adoption social workers to agree the processes, forms and recording methods needed. This has to some degree been via a process of testing with cases, highlighting issues and improvements needed and regular reviews with the LCS team.

There remains one area still to undergo some improvements and this is planned to take place in June 2022. This relates to the performance dashboard however; this is almost at completion point with the data team now having received a list of reporting areas required as authorised.

### **Key priority areas for 2022/23:**

- To work collaboratively with our partners in Adopt Coast to Coast to recruit, assess and approve adopters in a timely manner.
- To ensure children's plans of permanence via adoption are progressed without delay
- Fostering for adoption placements and matches are to be identified at the earliest possible stage in children's planning to prevent delay and ensure minimal moves for children.
- To recruit new panel members to the central list. This will ensure quoracy and prevent the possible need to stand a panel down due to lack of available panel members.
- To continue to embed signs of safety into practice and panel processes in line with the Durham model of social work practice.
- To increase relationship-based practice with trauma informed service developments, particularly in the development and support of post adoption contact.
- To identify potential plans of adoption for children as early as possible. This will allow for targeted adopter recruitment at the earliest possible point. Where there is a need for an adopter able to take sibling groups, older children or children with more complex health or disability needs, thus preventing delay or the need to purchase adopters at a high cost from external providers.

Barbara Arbon

Adoption Team Manager



## Adopt Coast to Coast Summary of progress - 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022

### Marketing Activity

The marketing activity for 2021-2022 for Adopt Coast to Coast was all about brand recognition and getting the name out as far and wide as possible. Whilst events and some more traditional tools couldn't be employed due to the pandemic activity focused on the following actions:

- Public relations – stories about our launch, appeals, events, campaigns and more
- Internal communications – amongst three partners
- Radio campaign – activity during the launch and another campaign in October
- TV advert – to celebrate the launch of Adopt Coast to Coast
- Google advertising – making sure Adopt Coast to Coast appears highly when searched for
- Facebook and Instagram advertising – to raise awareness and promote events
- Display advertising on key websites to raise awareness of Adopt Coast to Coast
- Third party campaigns – joining in with activity such as for National Adoption Week or New Family Social's

#### LGBT+ Adoption and Fostering Week

- Organic social media activity
- Newsletters to adopters and those interested in adoption
- Spoke support from three partner local authorities including emails, internal publications, external publications, intranet
- Regular website updates

### Adopt Coast to Coast and spokes' performance

	Adopt Coast to Coast	Cumbria	Durham	Together for Children
Enquiries (2021/22)	558	186 (*33%)	216 (*39%)	156 (*28%)
Approvals	78	11 (*14%)	40 (*51%)	27 (*35%)

Matches	122	28 (*23%)	65 (*53%)	29 (*24%)
Conversion from enquiry to approval	14%	6%	19%	17%

\*percentage of RAA performance

## Durham County Council's Adoption Performance

It is very positive to note that the transition to Adopt Coast to Coast has not had a detrimental impact on the children who have moved to adoptive families or recruitment of Adopt Coast to Coast prospective adopters assessed by Durham's adoption team.

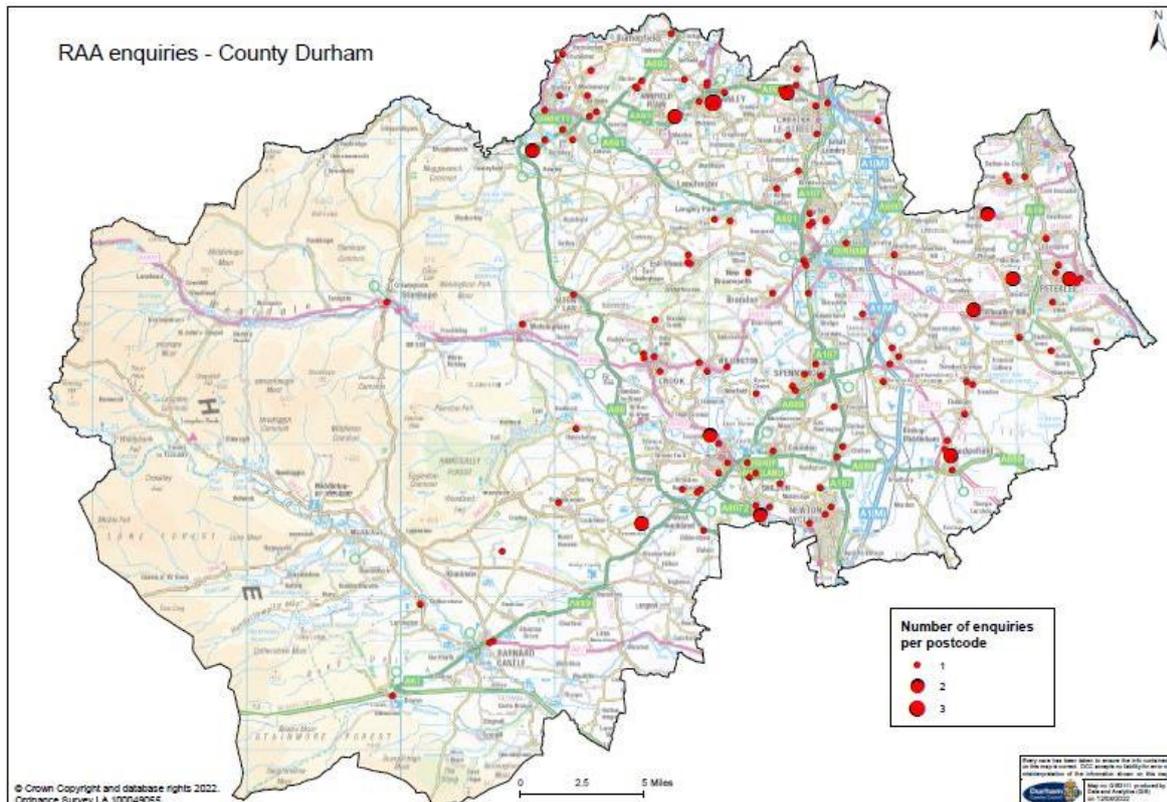
## Children's Journey

	2020/21	2021/22	Analysis
Waiting with PO	14	10	<p>The slight upward trend of children waiting more than 6 months for a match with their adoptive family reflects the national position. Children with additional needs and groups of brothers and sisters are waiting longer. The national campaigns continue to seek to address these challenges.</p> <p>In respect of interagency usage, the responsible Strategic Manager continues to monitor spend and is reassured that interagency spend is only requested after RAA resources have been explored and it is in the child's best interests for an external match to be progressed.</p>
Waited over 6 months	1	4	
Matched	60	65	
Interagency use	18 (30%)	34 (52%)	

## Prospective Adopter's Journey

Durham's adoption team are responding to enquiries promptly. The team cover Durham and all local authority areas south of Durham. The attached maps show the enquiries and stage 1 applications received from within Durham County.

### Enquiries received



	2020/21	2021/22	Analysis
Enquiries	100	217	<p>The increased number of enquiries being converted to applications (stage 1) and approvals has enabled Durham to retain the high number of matches achieved in 2020/21.</p> <p>There are already 25 prospective adoptive families in stage 1 and 2 and with a further 11 in stage 2 pending. Therefore Durham would expect to approve these 36 families in 2021/22, without the new enquiries received since the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. We</p>
Stage 1	13* (0 in stage 2 pending)	17* (further 11 in stage 2 pending)	
Stage 2	9*	*8	
Approvals	41	40	
Number of matches for Durham approved adopters			

			therefore anticipate the 2 <sup>nd</sup> year of Adopt Coast to Coast will build on the excellent performance that the Durham adoption team have achieved in 2021/22.
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\*at 31<sup>st</sup> March

### Prospective adopter journey

Katie and James were one of 6 couples to have started their journey with Adopt Coast to Coast and had a child placed before our 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary.

Katie and James have been a couple since they were teenagers and having married and enjoyed lots of quality time together as a couple, they felt the time was right to start their adoption application in April 2021.

Katie said: “I’ve known since the age of 15 that I wouldn’t be able to conceive naturally so adoption was always on the cards for us. We live in the same local authority as I work as a teacher and because I teach a few looked after children I know a lot of the social workers. I didn’t want to apply with the local authority where we live because I thought it felt too close to home, but I heard about Adopt Coast to Coast and knew they would cover our area.”

“The first part of the process felt long and we were checking our emails all of the time as there’s so many little steps to do that are out of your control. We really enjoyed the training and felt like something was really happening which we were more involved in. The second stage was around 6 weeks and was timed to fit in with the school holidays for me which really helped us.

“Our social worker was brilliant, when you’re first assigned a social worker, you’re worried about whether you’ll get on and how it’ll feel talking to them about such personal things, but our social worker was so down to earth and easy to talk to. What was clear from the start was that you don’t have to be a certain way to adopt, you don’t need lots of money just time and love. I think more people should do it and more young people too – I’m 27 now and I was one of the youngest on our training and although it’s hard and emotionally draining at times it’s worth it.”

Meeting our son for the first time was magical. He sat on my knee immediately and he was so relaxed and I felt an instant connection– it was definitely meant to be.

14<sup>th</sup> April 2021 – enquired with Adopt Coast to Coast

12<sup>th</sup> May 2021 – commenced stage 1 and completed 3-day preparation sessions

15<sup>th</sup> July 2021 – moved into stage 2

5<sup>th</sup> October 2021 – approved as suitable to adopt

Following approval they were considered for children within their matching considerations and waited patiently as their preference was for a baby under 1 year of age who was not presenting with any additional needs.

9<sup>th</sup> February 2022 – match agreed with a 9 month old baby boy.

Speaking just four weeks after their little boy moved in with them Katie said: “We’d had so many years to prepare for adoption and we always knew it would be our route to parenthood so we accepted it and knowing him has been the best four weeks of our lives – he’s just amazing. I was worried before we started all of this that we wouldn’t have a connection but he’s our whole world - he 100% feels like our son already.

### **Marketing activity priorities for 2022/23**

- Marketing activity will include a focus on potential enquirers for groups of brothers and sisters, children with additional health needs and/or developmental uncertainty.
- Alongside the Adopt Coast to Coast activity, there is a pan regional initiative to increase opportunities for children to be adopted by families living in the North East and Cumbria through strategic partnership working across the 3 RAAs and 4 VAAs in our region.
- Continue to review and develop marketing activity and the recruitment practice across the spokes being cognizant of the lived experience of children and their adoptive families and the findings from the national mystery shopper activity.

Paula Gibbons

Head of Service

Adopt Coast to Coast

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**Corporate Parenting Panel**

19 July 2022

**Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2021-22****Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care, Durham County Council****Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

**Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report April 2021 – March 2022, for agreement.
- 2 The Annual Report 2021-22 is attached as Appendix 2 of this report.

**Executive summary**

- 3 Over previous years, a number of changes have been implemented to strengthen political and management oversight of the Corporate Parenting Panel and increase the voice of children and young people in our work. This continues to ensure the best possible outcomes are achieved for our young people.
- 4 The Corporate Parenting Panel's Terms of Reference form part of Durham County Council's constitution and make specific reference that the Corporate Parenting Panel will prepare and provide an annual report that will be shared with Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny.
- 5 This is the fifth Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Panel, following the changes to political oversight.

**Recommendations**

- 6 Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to:
  - (a) Discuss and agree the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report for 2021-22

## **Background**

- 7 The terms of reference make specific reference that the Corporate Parenting Panel will prepare and provide an annual report that will be shared with Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny.
- 8 In September 2019, Durham County Council's Children's Services were inspected by OFSTED. The inspection report stated that 'The Corporate Parenting Panel is effective and is maintaining good political and strategic governance of children in care and care leavers.'
- 9 In July 2021, Durham County Council were subject to a remote focused inspection led by Children's Services and Skills on behalf of Ofsted's work into how England's social care system delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the coronavirus pandemic.
- 10 The inspection identified a range of strengths and recognised that the service knows its children well, with Ofsted commenting that the self-assessment provided an accurate picture of children in care.
- 11 The processes in place to listen to the views of children and young people and to ensure their views positively impact service delivery were acknowledged. Inspectors were extremely complimentary about the Children in Care Council, having had the opportunity to meet representatives, to hear about their experiences and achievements.

## **Development of the Annual Report**

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

- 16 The Annual Report includes information on:
- (a) What a Corporate Parent is
  - (b) The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel
  - (c) The Corporate Parenting Panel's Terms of Reference
  - (d) Key performance data
  - (e) Achievements during 2021/22
  - (f) Priorities for 2022/23
  - (g) Proud moments

### **Next Steps**

- 17 Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to note the following key dates for the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report:
- (a) Children and Young People's Services Management Team: **28 July, final version for information**
  - (b) Corporate Management Team: **17 August 2022, final version for information**
  - (c) Cabinet: **14 September 2022, for endorsement**
  - (d) Council: **21 September, for information**
  - (e) Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee: **23 September 2022, for information**
- 18 The Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report has already been presented to Children's Social Care Management Team, Children and Young People's Services Management Team and Corporate Management Team for comment.

### **Conclusion**

- 19 Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to provide comment and agree the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report which provides oversight of the work undertaken during 2020-21, and the priorities for the year ahead.

### **Author:**

Jayne Watson

Tel: 03000 268371

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

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

### **Finance**

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

### **Consultation**

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

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

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

### **Climate Change**

There are no climate change implications

### **Human Rights**

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

### **Crime and Disorder**

There are no crime and disorder implications.

### **Staffing**

There are no staffing implications.

### **Accommodation**

There are no accommodation implications.

### **Risk**

There are no risk implications.

### **Procurement**

There are no procurement implications.

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**Appendix 2: Draft Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report  
2021-22**

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Attached as a separate document

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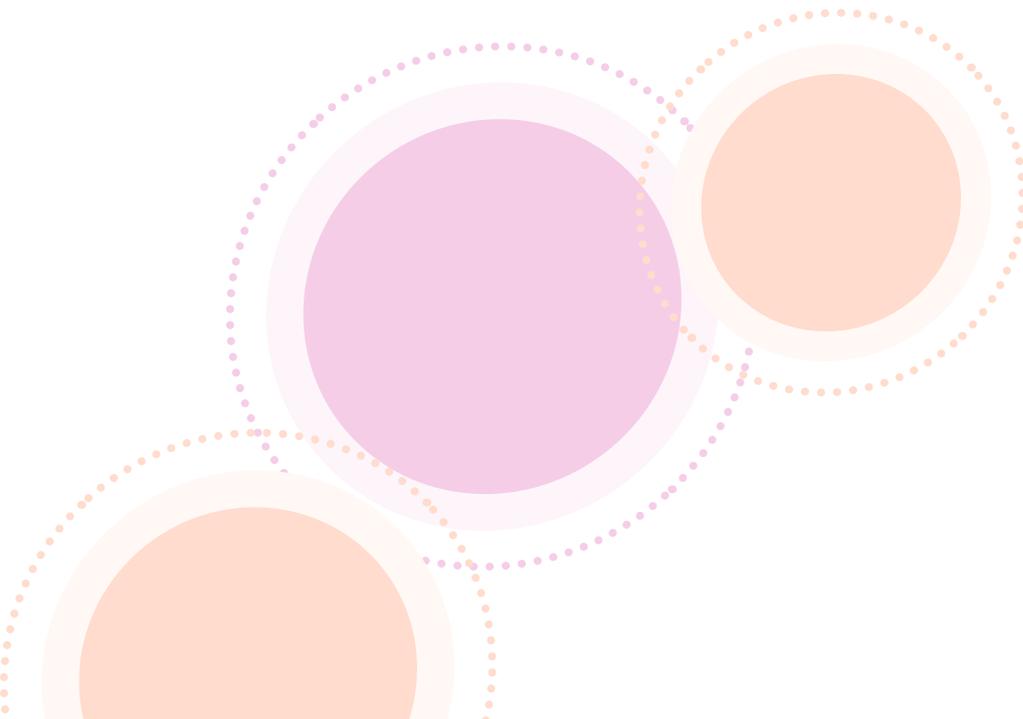
# County Durham Corporate Parenting Panel

**Annual Report**  
April 2021 - March 2022





# Contents



# Message from the Children in Care Council (CICC)

## representatives

“ I have been a part of the Corporate Parenting Panel for just under a year and it's been one of the many highlights I have achieved with Durham's CICC over the years alongside Investing in Children.

Having the opportunity to be on the panel, has allowed me to build up my confidence by speaking to elected members in County Hall by sharing my own and other care experienced children and young people's thoughts and opinions about what we think needs to be done within the care system, and in Durham. ”

**Caitlyn**  
Co-opted member



# Message from the Chair!



Councillor Mamie Simmons  
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

As Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, I would like to thank everyone for their continued commitment during what has been another very challenging year.

The country was at the height of the pandemic as the financial year commenced and the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic continued to impact on the delivery of services, both in County Durham and across the whole of England.

In Durham, staff, partners and volunteers have worked extremely hard and have adapted so well ensuring we were able to respond to the outbreak and to the changing rules and restrictions to ensure that all children, young people and their carers received the best possible help, advice and support.

The young people themselves have demonstrated tremendous resilience and have adapted, and often kept us right as we got used to new ways of communicating.

I am pleased to introduce the Corporate Parenting Panel's fifth annual report, which outlines the work undertaken across the service to help us understand and respond to need, ensuring our young people have the best possible opportunities available to them. **March 2022**



Councillor Michelle Walton  
Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

“ Working with the Corporate Parenting Panel has been an honour, me and Caitlyn being chosen as the young people to represent IIC and giving us the opportunity to talk with all the managers that I aspire to, has been great.

Personally it has helped me massively with building confidence in presenting to others and is a unique and great experience to mention in my CV.

Out of everything I have been able to do with IIC, the CPP has definitely pushed me outside of my comfort zone the most and I'm forever grateful to show my passion for the future of young children to make sure their experience of foster care is the best it can be. ”

**Luke**  
Co-opted member

## What is a corporate parent?

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

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

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



## Why are children in care?

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

## Where are children in care?

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



# Role of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)

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

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



## CPP responsibilities

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

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

More information on the Corporate Parenting Panel can be found in the [constitution of Durham County Council](#)

# Updates against 2021/22 priorities

What we said we would focus on	Where we are now	What young people think
<p>Transport</p>	<p>Discussions have taken place with colleges about bus pass deductions from care experienced young people's bursaries. New College Durham will no longer deduct these, and further conversations are taking place with the remaining college.</p> <p>Durham County Council have awarded all care experienced young people in County Durham who are in years 12 and 13 an 'all time top up bus pass' to use anytime, not just when they're going to college. Additional money is also available to extend this to young people who attend college outside of County Durham.</p> <p>Further discussions around access to public transport are continuing into 2022/23.</p>	<p>Happy</p>  <p>Young people feel that lots has been done but that this is an important area and there's more to progress</p>
<p>Consistent use of child friendly language</p>	<p>Six monthly language updates have been incorporated into the CPP work programme</p> <p>Staff are using language that young people understand, which is familiar to them for example, if a young person refers to their grandmother as 'nanny' then that term is used in their Care Plan.</p> <p>Other changes include 'family time' as an alternative to 'contact' and 'home' instead of 'placement'</p> <p>It was acknowledged that this is an ongoing exercise and young people continue to challenge and encourage us to use 'young-person friendly' language, where it is appropriate, as an alternative to professional terms.</p>	<p>Happy</p>  <p>The feedback from young people is that these small personalised changes mean a great deal to them</p>
<p>Care Experienced Young Inspectors programme</p>	<p>Unfortunately, due to the impact of the Covid pandemic, and the pressures and developments in residential services, work against this action has not been progressed, however this will be picked up for 2022-23.</p> <p>Discussions have recently taken place about also establishing a young people's scrutiny panel where young people would ask questions, review services and make recommendations for improvements. The internal children's homes and fostering teams as well as commissioned providers would be part of this process.</p> <p>The young people's scrutiny panel will be picked up as a priority area for 2022-23</p>	<p>Unhappy</p>  <p>Young people were disappointed that this project hadn't progressed but look forward to getting involved in both the Young Inspectors programme and the scrutiny panel and suggesting areas of focus for these.</p>

What we said we would focus on	Where we are now	What young people think
Sessional employment -paid opportunities with DCC	<p>We offer Care Leavers the opportunity of paid work experience placements in Durham County Council.</p> <p>To support this, a Sessional Employment Co-ordinator was appointed in July 2021 and joint recruitment processes have been developed.</p> <p>Ten young people have placements agreed and further placements are anticipated.</p> <p>In addition, an agreement is also in place for a 'Benefits Calculator' to be completed by Welfare Rights for each Care Leaver.</p> <p>More information is available in the Employment, Education &amp; Training (EET) section in the annual report.</p>	<p>Happy</p> 
Family time	<p>In response to young people's feedback we have reviewed family time spaces, and all family time plans.</p> <p>As a result we have updated some of the venues we use, and have stopped using some of the venues. We have also made requests for new family time venues.</p> <p>We are also working with a group of young people who are helping us to make some of our venues more 'teenager friendly'.</p> <p>We explained Covid rules as best as we could so that young people knew about and understood social distancing and the rules around this when meeting their families.</p> <p>Across the service we have implemented a renewed focus on making sure that everyone understands their family time plan after Covid implications.</p>	<p>Just ok</p> 
Support for Care Leavers post 16	<p>In response to feedback we have reviewed our Local Offer in comparison with national Care Leavers offers, and have made sure that young people know that our Local Offer to Care Leavers is easily available on the internet.</p> <p>We have reminded young people that the DurhamWorks offer is included in the information given to Care Leavers, including the job interview offer. This has been shared at CICC meetings and with the Corporate Parenting Panel.</p> <p>Our transport offer for college students has improved with the majority of colleges now offering bus passes. In addition, all students in years 12 and 13 have been offered an all time top up bus pass, to use for non-college travel.</p> <p>Care leavers are eligible for Freedom Cards, which offers a range of discounts and free activities, including swim and gym use, and in addition our wider financial offer for care leavers is being reviewed.</p> <p>We have a dedicated Care Leavers team, and have recently opened our first Care leavers hub, offering a safe place for young people to gather, socialise, do laundry, bathe, and access free meals.</p>	<p>Happy</p> 

What we said we would focus on	Where we are now	What young people think
<p>Challenging stigma and discrimination for young people in care</p>	<p>The Art Stops project has been hugely successful, and has helped to increase positive images and reduce stigma of Care Experience young people across the region. Opportunities to expand this project are being considered.</p> <p>At each CPP meeting we celebrate the success of our young people and share 'proud moments'</p> <p>The use of language is a regular agenda item at social work team meetings, and six monthly language updates come to CPP meetings giving the young people an opportunity to share their thoughts on how things are going and what could be improved, as it is acknowledged that this is ever changing, and should be based on young people's personal preferences using language that is familiar to them.</p> <p>Films have been produced by young people, showcasing some of the issues that are important to them. These have and will continue to be shared appropriately to increase awareness.</p> <p>Meetings have taken place with community midwives to discuss how care experienced young people who are parents can be supported, and awareness is being raised about the corporate grandparenting role.</p> <p>Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) training has been undertaken by the CICC to raise awareness of care experienced young people within the Police service, and in addition PCSO 'buddies' have been aligned to our children's homes to build positive relationships between the police and young people.</p> <p>A range of foster care training is delivered by care experienced young people to potential foster carers so that they understand things from the young people's perspective from the outset. We also host the Fostering Stars Awards to showcase success.</p> <p>Some young people met with Josh McAlister, chair of the independent review of children's social care to share their views, and a young person's 'care experience story' was shared with him to feed into the review, as well as the story being shared as part of care day 2022.</p> <p>More information on the independent review can be found <a href="#">HERE</a></p>	<p>Just ok</p> 

# Priorities for 2022-23

Each year, young people choose key priority areas that they would like the service and the Corporate Parenting Panel to focus on. It was agreed that the young people would identify key areas and share these with the CPP members at the six monthly joint CICC / CPP meetings.

It was felt that this would be a good balance, in order to keep things achievable and to enable us to focus on these areas and provide regular updates to the young people.



**The following areas were identified by young people for 2022-23:**

- Personalised Care
- Staff in Children's Homes and Foster carers
- Family Time

**As well as these continuing priorities:**

- Broaden and increase attendance at CICC meetings
- Establish a Young Inspectors programme and a Young People's scrutiny panel
- Transport

In order to increase the representative voice of the Children in Care Council all children in care will be given the opportunity to identify from these areas their order of priority and this will direct the plan of work moving forwards.

## Children in Care (CICC)

The CICC is a group for children and young people who are looked after in County Durham and is supported by Investing in Children. The CICC members meet monthly to talk about issues which are important to them, highlight what works and share stories of the support they have received. This forum is well established, and has recently been split into older and younger groups as there were so many attendees, and the two age groups often had different priorities.

Senior managers from within Children and Young People's Services and elected members who are on the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) regularly attend CICC meetings.

More information on the CICC can be found at <https://www.durhamcicc.co.uk/>

## Co-opted positions for CICC members

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

## Joint CICC/ CPP meetings

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

The young people set the agenda for the meeting and invite members and officers of the CPP to attend to meet with the CICC.

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

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



## CICC Newsletters

Young people from the CICC produce newsletters, which are shared with partners across the service, with children, young people and their families and with the CPP.

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

You can find copies of the CICC newsletters at <https://www.durhamcicc.co.uk/cicc-newsletters>

## CICC catch ups

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

Young people found these meetings really valuable and so when the CPP meetings were re-started a decision was taken to continue these meetings virtually on a bi-monthly basis to maintain regular contact with the CICC and the CPP leads.

Some of the things we discussed at these meetings were:

- IRO work
- Use of language
- Social worker profiles
- Understanding PEPs and the PP+ project
- Apprenticeships and job opportunities
- Brothers and sisters and the importance of staying together or maintaining contact
- Independent review of Children's Social Care
- Police work
- Peer mentoring
- Artstops project
- Bus Pass deductions from College Bursaries

# Ofsted inspections

Ofsted's focused inspection of Children's Services, took place remotely on 13 & 14 July 2021, and looked at DCCs arrangements for children in care.

A letter outlining a summary of the findings was received from Ofsted on 23 August, which can be accessed [HERE](#)

The letter contained lots of positive feedback, including the work of the CICC, and the opportunities young people have to share their experiences, and included two areas for priority action and one area for improvement.

One co-opted member was involved in discussions with the inspectors, and the inspector said that the young person explained to them how much young people felt they had been listened to and how DCC responded really well to their feedback e.g. use of language.

The inspectors talked to the Head of Children's Social Care about how empowered the young people were, and shared really positive feedback that the work of the CICC was exceptional. The inspectors were really impressed with all of the young people they met.

## Celebrate Me event

On Thursday 21 October 2021 – a Halloween themed celebration event took place virtually. Young people helped to plan the event, and chose the music and entertainment, and picked the Halloween theme and insisted all attendees dressed up. Although young people appreciate the challenges that covid brings, and enjoyed the virtual event and the diversity it brought, they still like face to face events.



# Care day 2022



We hosted virtual events to celebrate Care Day 2022 with a variety of activities and communications on Friday 18 February and Monday 21 February, including:

- A play about the importance of promoting relationships with brothers and sisters
- Young people sharing their stories, poems, achievement and experiences.
- Virtual quiz: Young People v Staff
- Virtual session about the importance of life story work.

All of the young people has a great day and look forward to next years event.



## Children's Social Care Teams

Children's Social Care Teams won a Mind of My Own award for a children's launch event, when young people designed the poster.



# Independent Visitors

Did you know that any person in care (from primary school age, until you turn 18 years old) is entitled to an independent visitor. An independent visitor is a volunteer who can help with your mental health and wellbeing, help with social anxiety, and you can also plan trips and activities to do together. Ask your social worker for more information.

During 2021-22 the service received 68 referrals, which is a significant increase on the previous year (17 referrals), and 59 young people were matched with an Independent Visitor. Of these, 24 matches ended due to the young people becoming 18, not wanting Independent Visitor any more, or the Independent Visitor leaving the role – leaving 35 active matches.

The main impact of having an Independent Visitor is reported as an increase in confidence and self-esteem amongst young people. Developing independent skills is also reported as a significant impact. Feedback from users of the Independent Visitor service is ...



“Did you know that any person in care (from primary school age, until you turn 18 years old) is entitled to an independent visitor.”

“The work done with ‘A’ has seen him develop so much as in individual and his behaviour has improved so much’ (Social Worker)

‘B’ is a completely different person. Once upon a time he would not even talk to us. His confidence has increased so much’ (Foster carer)

‘I love going out with my Independent Visitor and doing different activities. I also get to choose which is great!’ (Young person)

‘It is like having a relative that cares’ (Young person)

‘The work that ‘C’ has completed with their Independent Visitor has allowed him to transition from foster care to independent living with vital skills to survive when lots of other support has gone’ (Social Worker)

‘The relationship between the Independent Visitor and ‘D’ is very strong. This is helping to support her through some very tough periods in her life and give her someone independent to talk to’ (Foster Carer)

# Children with disabilities

There have been significant changes to services for children and young people with disabilities since 2019 which includes additional investment in front line staff as well as a remodelling of the service to create a 0-18 children's service and a 14-25 navigation service within adult social care services, focused on supporting the transition from children's to adults services.

We also work with partners to ensure that where appropriate, children are signposted to other services and sources of support.

Work has developed with a wide range of partner agencies to support these practice improvements to ensure the needs of our children and young people are met and they are in receipt of high-quality support and services.

A Governance Improvement Board for disabled children has been created which has oversight from a children's and adults services perspective and includes commissioning colleagues who are key to service development and innovation for children and young people with disabilities. The board is jointly chaired by Heads of Service in CYPS and ASC.

We have strengthened the voice of our children so they along with their parent/carers are informing their care plans, reviews. This means they influence the development of the services they receive and can be more confident that they are the right services for the child.

Our procedures and guidance have been updated and will be reviewed annually, and all of our children have up to date assessments which are also reviewed annually, and we see the children who receive our services regularly.

We have managed some of the challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic by reviewing services and working with our commissioning colleagues to think differently about service delivery for families. As a result, improvements in the service can be evidenced by the increase in compliments from families and professionals and a reduction in complaints.



## Young people have told us what they want from us:

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

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

That we know them well, and when we can't help we find someone who can

- Ensure that team culture promotes building good relationships with young people, their families and carers.
- That where possible, young people have the same social worker throughout their childhood.
- When you cannot help or when the criteria is not met, you will endeavor to provide advice, support and guidance to help meet young people's needs.

**'My social worker is very fun' (young person)**

**'The team are kind and caring, giving the right information at the right time, even when the child doesn't meet their eligibility criteria'. (Carers)**

Ensure needs are understood and regularly discussed by people who know the young people best

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



*'it means we get to see the same people and know what is going to happen next' (young person)*

*'The support, that I'm getting my own independence but I'm already independent. When I'm at the Metrocentre the workers let me go and do bus spotting on my own, they are always upstairs [in the Metrocentre]. I would like them to 'Take me out more often and have more quality time' (young person)*

## Supporting Solutions Service

### Supporting Solutions Service offers:

- Edge of care support, offering intensive interventions where there has been a relationship breakdown
- Family Group conferences to support families to put in place a sustainable plan to support the young people
- Missing from home work
- Child Exploitation support and interventions
- Access to an out of hours bed for one night where there is a crisis situation

During 2021-22, 198 young people received support from the SSS service, 138 of these were referred in 2021/22, whilst the other 60 had been referred prior to this.

- 130 young people who received support from Supporting Solutions were able to remain in the care of their family and 6 young people were able to return to the care of their family after a period in care. 10 young people were supported to remain in their long-term placement.

- The crisis bed at The Nest was used on 59 occasions, for a total of 73 nights.
- 231 initial Family Group Conferences were completed in 2021/22; for 197 of these the plan supported the child/young person to remain with or return to the care of their family.
- The Erase child exploitation workers have supported 92 young people who were identified as high risk of criminal or sexual exploitation in 2021/22. When reviewed in April 2022 43 young people remained high risk, but for 49 young people their risks had reduced (26 to medium risk and 23 to low risk).
- 683 young people were reported missing in 2021/22, a total of 1992 missing episodes. This is an increase of over 80% on the previous year. Of the 1910 occasions where a Return Home Interview was offered 1417 were completed, and information shared with partners to inform risk reduction planning.

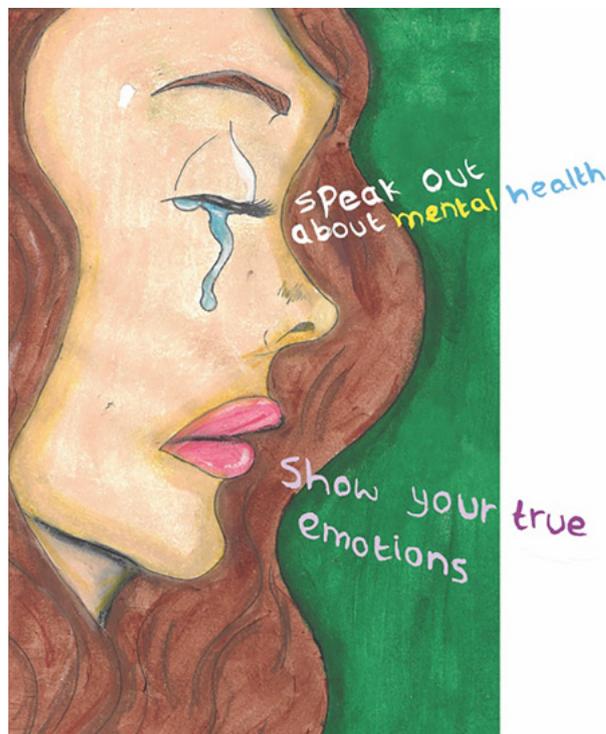
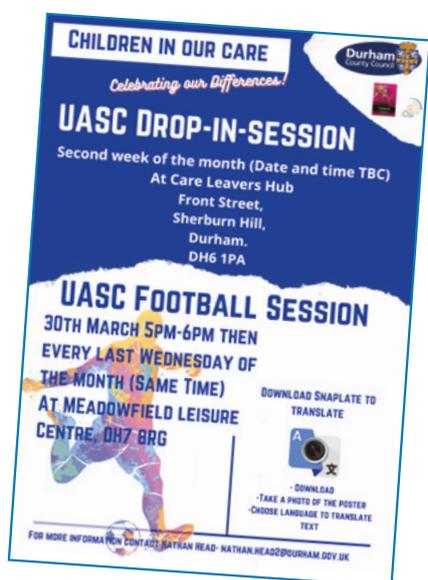
# Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Durham Children's services works with the national scheme for the dispersal of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and has done for some time. The scheme became mandatory around 6 months ago and since that time an increasing number of children who are seeking asylum alone have moved into the care of Durham Children's services.

The children come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, with the majority having been trafficked into the country and have then been detained by border control through the South of England Counties.

The needs of these children are significant, and services are developing and responding to their needs in terms of safe places to live, education physical and emotional health services along with opportunities to enjoy life.

A social work consultant from the children in care teams leads much of the practice in this work and has established a football group with a number of young people that meets and plays weekly. The language of football is assisting the young people to reduce feelings of isolation, build networks and have fun together. It is hoped this can develop into a regional group where young people will be able to meet others from their home communities and build supportive networks for their adult lives.



## Fostering Friendly Award

The Designated Nurse for Children in Care was successful in their application for the Fostering Friendly Award. Fostering Friendly Employer status was gained in April 2021 following review of policies within the CCG to ensure that they provided flexibility for employees who were or were considering being foster carers. The subsequent Fostering Excellence Award was gained in November 2021. This achievement highlighted the support the CCG provided to foster carers / potential foster carers in their role so encouraging the uptake of foster parents for our most vulnerable children across County Durham. The Designated Professionals support and take part in fostering friendly fortnight – led by the local authority, to encourage people to consider the role but also highlight the excellent although often challenging work our foster carers do. County Durham CCG were the first NHS organisation to have received this accolade. The Designated Professionals will continue to champion foster cares both at place and across the ICB and as such will be committed to being able to make a difference for the people and children within our communities.

# Fostering Services



The fostering service in Durham has 252 fostering households offering around 460 fostering beds to children. The service is well recognised, and the work of foster carers is valued throughout the Council and with partners.

The fostering community is under significant pressure to meet the needs of children and the demand for fostering beds significantly outstrips the capacity.

The fostering team is split into 6 teams to organise the work and to support the ability to recruit and train carers, match them to the right carers and to support the carers in their fostering role across the county.

The fostering team also support connected carers with dedicated fostering social work support. Around 15% of children in foster care live with connected person carers. Many of these children leave care under a legal order to these carers if they are not able to safely return home

## Foster Care Review

In early 2022, a Service Manager was appointed to undertake a review of the support and recognition of foster carers and the work that they do. This includes a review of the criteria for foster carer skill levels, as well as reviewing foster carer payments known as 'payment for skills' (PFS) to ensure they have enough money to support and care for their foster children.

Foster carers were asked to share their thoughts around what we do well, or what we could do differently so that we can ensure Durham's core offer to its foster carers is as good as it can be and acknowledges the hard work that they do.

## Mockingbird Family Model

The Service Manager also led on the implementation and roll out of the Mockingbird Model, which is a project committed

to increasing and retaining our foster carers which is critical to stabilising fostering placement. The model also increased the level of support offered to foster carers and children.

## TV Advert

A number of targeted campaigns take place across the year to increase the number of foster carers. We recently launched our first TV advert, watch it [HERE](#)

## Did you know... ? ?

We have a group called 'M8s' that provides support for foster carers own children, if they have them. This gives an opportunity for the young people to meet others whose parents are foster carers, and to have fun whilst sharing their experiences.



## Mind of My Own App

To ensure all we do has children's voices at the centre, we have several ways that we engage and in addition to our direct work, all young people are supported to access the Mind of My Own app. This enables young people to share their views, successes and any challenges with their social workers ahead of their Looked After Reviews or Foster Carer Reviews. The app also allows young people to contact their social worker if they have any worries or queries about anything at any time.

You can find out more about the app in this presentation: [Mind of my own](#)

## 'Fostering Friendly Employer Award'

The County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group have worked with the Fostering Network to achieve the 'Fostering Friendly Employer' Award, which will help staff who are, or who wish to become foster carers.

## Foster care training

Feedback from the training is so good, there have been requests to make the sessions even longer so that more can be discussed.

## Foster Care awards

Because of Covid restrictions, the 2021 awards were postponed as we were not able to have any in person celebrations, so for the 2022 awards we decided to go all out!!

We hosted the Foster Care Star Awards on Wednesday 9 March 2022 at the Gala Theatre, Durham to recognise the outstanding achievements of foster carers, as well as their families who have welcomed children and young people into their homes and lives.

Over 100 carers and their families received awards for long-service, outstanding achievements, sons and daughters of carers and all-round support. As the 2021 event was postponed, even more carers were recognised this year for their efforts to help young people reach their full potential.

A new, publicly nominated award was also given to the foster family seen by local communities as having gone 'above and beyond' in making a child feel comfortable, safe and secure in their new family home. It was an excellent event, and there were lots of very proud staff and elected members.



## Did you know...



Staying Put arrangements means that if a young person and their foster carer agree, the young person can continue to stay with their foster carers when they turn 18, even though they become a care leaver. This may be something a young person wants to do because they want support while they finish their education, or they might just want more time to make the transition to independence. They can stay with their foster carer until they are 21.

The Annual report of the Fostering Service 2021-22 is available on request.

## Children's homes



We currently have nine registered Children's Homes across the County (with a 10th being registered) offering residential care to children and young people. This could be support and care for young people who cannot live at home, or short respite breaks when children and young people with disabilities need to have a little time away from their family or carer. Many developments are taking place within residential services including new systems, new peripatetic staff teams, deputy managers being introduced in all homes and physical works being undertaken on the buildings to ensure they are homely and fit for purpose.

## Sufficiency

A number of new children's homes are being developed to ensure that as many children as possible live within County Durham and are able to maintain links with their schools, friends, families and hobbies. The new homes are different sizes (ranging from 1 to 3 places) so that children and young people with more complex needs can be cared for. An Edge of Care home is also being planned; this will offer short breaks and wider support to young people and their families to help them to remain living at home.

## Staying Close

This is similar to the staying put principles, when young people leave our children's homes they may not feel ready to be fully independent, so we will look for accommodation options that are close to their former children's home so that they are able to pop in for advice and support, or to use laundry facilities, have a meal etc when they need to.



## NYAS

All children in Care have access to independent advocacy services through the National Youth Advocacy Service.

## Regulation 44 / elected members

Some of our elected members attend the Regulation 44 inspection visits alongside the NYAS inspectors on a quarterly basis ([more information on Reg 44 visits can be found here](#)). Posters of the inspectors are on display in the home, so that young people know who is visiting, and can identify them easily:

### Home/Councillor

#### Framwellgate Moor, Durham

Cllr Mamie Simmons



#### New Lea House, Stanley

Cllr Michelle Walton



#### Park House, Sherburn Village

Cllr Stacey Deinali



#### Coxhoe

Cllr Chris Varty



#### West Rainton

Cllr Bev Coult



#### High Etherley

Cllr Samantha Townsend



#### Hickstead, Newton Aycliffe

Cllr Joyce Charlton



#### Orchard House, Sacriston

Cllr Cathy Hunt



#### Moorside, Spennymoor

Cllr Beaty Bainbridge



#### Walworth, Aycliffe Secure Centre

Cllr Ken Robson



#### Barnard and Durham, Aycliffe Secure Centre

Cllr Jake Miller



#### Lumley, Aycliffe Secure Centre

Cllr Chris Hood



# Adoption

Adopt Coast to Coast was established as the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), and the launched virtually on 1 April 2021 as the go to agency for those who are interested in adoption. Adopt Coast to Coast is a partnership RAA, and is made up of the following three partners (spokes):

- Cumbria County Council
- Durham County Council
- Together for Children who deliver children's services on behalf of Sunderland City Council

Adopt Coast to Coast is working with partners to embed models of early permanence in Durham, for example 'Fostering for Adoption', and work across the partnership to develop the post adoption support offer.

Adopt Coast to Coast's marketing activity for 2021-22 was all about brand recognition, and getting the name out as far and wide as possible. This was impacted by the pandemic as we were unable to use some of the traditional methods, so we focused on the following:

- Public relations – stories about our launch, appeals, events, campaigns and more ...
- Internal communications – amongst our three partners
- A radio campaign in April during the launch month, and a further two campaigns in October and March

- A TV advert to celebrate the launch of Adopt Coast to Coast which can be viewed [HERE](#)
- Google advertising, making sure Adopt Coast to Coast appears highly when searched for
- Facebook and Instagram advertising to raise awareness and promote events
- Display advertising on key websites to raise awareness of Adopt Coast to Coast
- Third party campaigns e.g. joining in with activity for National Adoption week

Adopt Coast to Coast's marketing activity for 2022-23 will focus on:

- Potential enquirers for groups of brothers and sisters, children with additional health needs and/or developmental uncertainty.
- An initiative with neighbouring regional adoption agencies and voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) to increase opportunities for children to be adopted by families living in the North East and Cumbria.
- Reviewing and developing marketing activity and recruitment practice across the spokes, being mindful of the lived experience of children and their adoptive families and the findings from the national mystery shopper activity.





Katie and James were one of six couples to have started their journey with Adopt Coast to Coast and had a child placed with them before the services' first anniversary. Katie said:

**“What was clear from the start was that you don’t have to be a certain way to adopt, you don’t need lots of money just time and love. “We’d had so many years to prepare for adoption and we always knew it would be our route to parenthood so we accepted it and knowing him has been the best four weeks of our lives – he’s just amazing. I was worried before we started all of this that we wouldn’t have a connection but he’s our whole world - he 100% feels like our son already.”**

## DCC Adoption/Service

This has been a really busy year for Durham’s Adoption Team in all areas of the service. The post adoption service has helped to secure funding through the Adoption Support Fund to the value of almost £376000.115, and adopted children have benefitted from therapeutic support as a result of this.

The numbers of enquiries from people considering adoption have risen hugely and the team have responded to 216 enquiries, whereas in the previous year 100 enquiries were received.

Across the year, 30 information sharing events have been held for people in the enquiry stage to attend, and feedback from these has been very positive. One attendee said

***‘It was all very positive and information was provided in an easy to understand way.’***

- Information, counselling and preparation courses have been held monthly for those moving along the assessment process. These have been held jointly with our Regional Adoption Agency partners in Together For Children and Cumbria.

- A total of 40 adoptive households were approved in this time frame. This was a combination of single adopters, heterosexual and same sex couples.

- 65 children were matched with their adoptive families, with a further 6 being placed under Fostering for Adoption. Again, these figures are increased on previous years.

- We continue to be proactive in responding to enquiries, and provide a wealth of information and support at all stages on their journey to becoming adopters.

# Care Leavers

The Durham County Council Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers has been developed, covering January 2022 to December 2024. It outlines our vision, and areas for action.

The strategy has a strong focus on learning from those who are care experienced to drive forward practice improvements in County Durham and help our young people to build strong relationships that will endure.

## Local Offer to Care Leavers

The Local Offer has been published on our website and gives details of how DCC will support young people with:

- Options about where they live
- Helping with money, benefits, and financial advice
- Looking after their health (physical, mental, and sexual); drug, alcohol and smoking cessation support; support about relationships.
- Education, Employment & Training

Care experienced young people have undertaken a research project to look at Durham's local offer, which included a trip to York Council to look at their care leavers offer. The research project benchmarked Durham against other regional and national local authorities local offers.

Moving forward, colleagues and young people from ten other Care Leavers services will visit Durham and vice versa. The ten Local Authorities will provide feedback on Durham's services in June 2022. Consideration is being given to hosting a conference to share this feedback, and what it means for us in Durham.

Durham compares well to other areas, however plans have been put in place to make our local offer even better, and the proposals will be presented to the Chief Executive Officer and DCCs Corporate Management Team.

We will include an update in next year's annual report, but some of the key things in the local offer are:

- Improving the quality of pathway plans
- Strengthening our corporate commitment to our care leavers
- Making sure our young people have a variety of suitable accommodation options
- Improving the health outcome of care leavers, following the impact of Covid
- Helping prepare our young people for adulthood, which does not mean 'independence' as we recognise that everyone needs support throughout their lives
- Improved coproduction

An action plan has also been developed for 2022/23 which outlines how we will do what we say we are going to do, and by when.



## Midwifery offer to care experienced young people

We have a group called 'M8s' that provides support for foster carers own children, if they have them. This gives an opportunity for the young people to meet others whose parents are foster carers, and to have fun whilst sharing their experiences.

## Supported lodgings

Supported lodgings provides a safe, supportive and friendly home environment for young people, aged between 16 and 25 years old, who are leaving care and do not want to live independently. Supported lodgings providers give young people a key to their home, their own room, access to a bathroom, kitchen and laundry facilities.

Each young person is different, but many need practical support and help with things like learning to cook, doing laundry, budgeting, attending appointments, or even to help them find a job, or access education and training.

Supported lodgings can be short term, or for up to two years, and in Durham we have several supported lodgings providers and always seek to recruit more.

## Care Leavers hub

The care leavers hub was officially launched on 28 February 2022, by our care leavers. The hub is a safe space to engage with services and each other, and just a welcoming place to hang out, get warm, clean and fed. A programme of events has been developed for the hub for the year ahead, and some further ideas for the hub include a monthly Sunday dinner club with a yorkshire pudding making competition.



## Drive project



The project supports young people by providing driving lessons, up to the value of £500. The project pays for one lesson, the young person pays for the next lesson, and so on then the project pays for the first theory test and one practical test. This is available for looked after young people aged 17+ and care leavers up to the age of 21 (25 if in full time education).

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic restrictions the project was on hold during 2020-21 and we are still seeing the impact of this as the pandemic has impacted on the availability of driving lessons nationally.

We are working with the DCC procurement team to consider options, ensuring that lessons are secured with reputable instructors.

# Health

It is the responsibility of Durham County Council, County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and commissioned health services to identify and address the unmet health needs of children who become looked after.

## Physical health

The CCG commission County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) to:

- Provide medical services
- Undertake initial health assessments (IHAs)
- Undertake review health assessments (RHAs) for those living out of the Local Authority boundary but within a 20-mile radius.
- Complete health passports for those children aged 15½ years old and above.

Public Health commission Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust (HDFT) to undertake RHAs for young people living within the Local Authority boundary.

These health assessments result in individual health plans being developed which form, part of the young person's overall care plan.

The CGG has recruited a Designated Nurse for children in care, and 'children in care' is now a key focus within training offered by primary care professionals.

Year on year there have been increasing numbers of young people entering care, which has posed some challenges to the CCG in responding to the increasing numbers, especially on the back of the existing Covid pressures.

Moving forward, the increasing number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and potentially children from Ukraine will also bring challenges, especially as these young people will come to us with no or limited medical and / or mental health history or differing systems of health care.

## Mental Health

At present the CCG commission Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) to provide Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to support young people with mental health difficulties (Tier 1-3).

NHS England provide in patient mental health services (Tier 4).

Durham County Council commissioning additional mental health support from Full Circle which is a therapeutic service dedicated to working with care experienced young people. The Full Circle have an important role in responding to mental health needs of children in care and adopted children. Full Circle is a social work led team, made up of Therapeutic Social Workers employed by the Local Authority, including a Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Nurse Specialist, who are employed via and have links with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) service within Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust.

Full Circle utilise a trauma informed approach to assist placement stability by supporting the children's foster carers and adopters, social workers, residential staff, educational staff and the child's care team to support the child's recovery from complex trauma and abuse.

The availability of suitable in-patient services is also a challenge for the service.



# Self-Care & Mental Health for Kids



Share your own feelings to encourage self-awareness.



Set aside time for low-stress or solo activities.



Find social groups that help them feel like they belong.



Practice self-care for yourself to set the standard.



Focus on articulating feelings.  
"I am angry."  
"I am sad."

Encourage journaling and diaries.

Encourage your child to focus on the moment.




Establish a self-care routine.

Recognize toxic stress events.

BlessingManifesting

Cultivate interests and hobbies.

## Priorities for health moving forward include:

- Continued support for the recruitment of foster carers
- Improved data collection
- Working with local authorities to augment information sharing processes
- Improving mental health outcomes for young people - the number of Children in Care accessing CAMHS services and their needs are fully understood

## Joint work continues with Local Authority partners to:

- Facilitate the date of the first Looked After Review being communicated to the Foundation Trust to expedite a timely IHA appointment – this is a longstanding challenge for the LA to meet the statutory 5 day timeframe.
- Augment the information sharing pathways following a child entering care and relevant documentation is distributed to the Foundation Trust in a contemporaneous manner.

## Health outcomes for children in care and those care experienced continue to improve:

- Health Needs Analysis to be complete to inform future service delivery
- Continue to liaise with NHS England colleagues to ensure children in care are prioritised by dental practices across the region
- Immunisation campaign to be promoted
- Recognising the needs of Children in Care who are reported missing.
- Improving terminology used for Children in Care health assessments by working with the Children in Care Council.

As of July 2021, there were 573 Durham looked after children of statutory school age:

- 48% primary / 52% secondary.
- 46% female / 54% male.
- 81% County Durham schools / 19% out of County schools, which is an increase of 3.6% from the previous year.
- School attendance for the whole looked after cohort was 89.3%
- Fixed term exclusions remain low at 5.6% (22 children)
- 49% had an identified special educational need (SEN), which is an increase of 6% from the previous year.
  - 21% are supported by an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
  - 28% had a school SEN Support Plan, an increase of 4% from the previous year
  - Social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) were the primary need for 39% of primary aged children and 51% of secondary aged children.

The Virtual School are proactive with SEN to ensure young people are known, and that interventions are available for schools to access as early as possible. If a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is moved out of the Local Authority area to have their care needs met, it is important that Durham retain the plan for that child until an appropriate setting has been found. In Durham, every child who is looked after who has an EHCP now has an identified SEND Caseworker as well as their PEP Caseworker.

## Language

Following on from discussions with young people about the language we use, the Virtual School has raised this at network meetings, so schools are aware that this is a priority for CLA. We have also developed the use of the Clear Cut Communication Tool at the entry into care and at the personal education plan (PEP) meeting to support young people by understanding their communication needs. This helps everyone involved in the child's life to provide the right support which should then lead to better outcomes.

- For 2020/21 centre assessed grades were used as there were no formal examinations due to Covid. Our young people performed well with some young people achieving strong sets of results.
- For 2021/22 children will sit their Key Stage 2 SAT's and formal exams for GCSE will take place for young people in Year 11. This will bring additional challenges for our CLA

## Virtual School Sub group

Agreement was made by the Corporate Parenting Panel to bring two new reps onto the Virtual School sub groups to ensure representation from maintained nurseries and post 16 education.

## Education fun fund

Given that schools were not operating in the usual way during 2021-22 due to Covid, there was an underspend in the Pupil Premium Plus money, which is allocated from Government. The Virtual School transferred £3,000 PP+ money to the CICC for an Education Fun Fund project.

Within schools, PP+ money must be spent on educational resources whereas this project could be more flexible around purchasing non education equipment.

Young people from the CICC set up the project, and developed an application process whereby young people can apply for up to £150 for non-educational items, which would not typically be funded in this way for example, sport and exercise equipment, boxing lessons, art and craft supplies, instruments and music lessons etc.

Post 16 young people attending further education colleges have been involved in a government pilot where they have received PP+ funding for one financial year. This has supported them to access the wider college life and has encouraged good attendance. A Mentor was employed to provide additional pastoral support.

# Education/Employment & Training

A range of support continues to be available for care leavers to enable and support them to progress into education, employment and training (EET).

## DurhamWorks programme for schools

This programme provides support for young people aged 15 and 16 to help them to make a successful progression from Year 11 into to post 16 learning.

During the 2021-22 academic year, a total of 800 young people who were identified as being at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) were supported, including 34 Looked After Children. Of these, 28 Looked After Children (82.4%) progressed into a positive post-16 learning destination.

## DurhamWorks

DurhamWorks provides care leavers with wrap around support to enable them to progress into and remain in Education, Employment and Training.

Since its inception in 2016, 665 young people supported by DurhamWorks have identified themselves as being Looked After or a Care Leaver. Of these, 599 young people have completed the programme, with 417 (69.9%) young people progressing into a positive Education, Employment or Training destination.

## DurhamEnable

This is a new supported employment service available for our Care Leavers, aged 18 plus who have learning, physical and/or mental health barriers to employment. Overall, DurhamEnable aims to support over 900 County Durham residents between now and December 2023.

## Durham County Council Pathway for Young People

The pathway continues to be embedded to provide more opportunities for care leavers within Durham County Council 'The Family Business'. As part of this, a sessional employment programme offers care leavers opportunities to undertake paid work experience which align to their talents, interests and aspirations.

A sessional employment Coordinator was appointed in July 2021 to facilitate the programme and they are actively engaging with Care Leavers, Young People's Advisers, Durham County Council Human Resources staff, as well as Service Managers. Joint recruitment processes have been developed in conjunction with Durham County Council

Human Resources staff, a programme has been designed and delivered to support Care Leavers and staff, and an agreement is in place for a "Benefits Calculator" to be completed by Welfare Rights for each Care Leaver.

At present, ten Care Leavers are currently undertaking Sessional Employment and placements have been agreed in the following areas: Construction, Farming and Protective Landscapes, Motor Vehicle, Human Resources, DurhamWorks and Catering. Further placements are anticipated in Quantity Surveying as well as with CYPS Young People's Service.

## Apprenticeships

Further action was undertaken to support more Care Leavers into Durham County Council Apprenticeships. This included the ring-fencing of Apprenticeship opportunities specifically for Care Leavers, as well as delivery of bespoke training to support Care Leavers with their applications and to prepare them for the interview stage. There are currently seven Care Leavers undertaking Apprenticeships within Durham County Council.



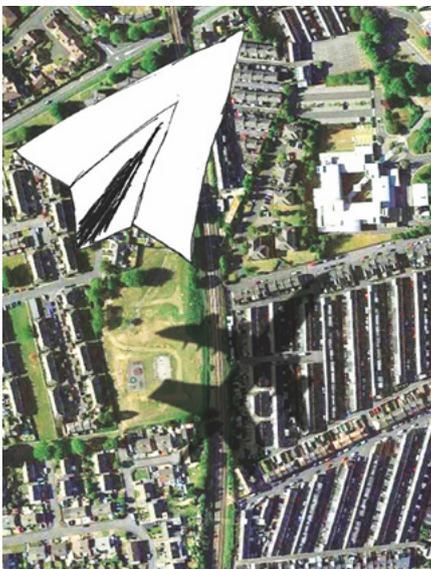
## Youth Hubs

DurhamWorks has liaised with the Department for Work and Pensions to set up 'Youth Hubs' across County Durham. These are spaces where unemployed young people can access a range of intensive support and provision to enable them to find a job. Youth Hubs are operating in Stanley and Peterlee, and an exciting new Youth Hub opened in Bishop Auckland in March 2022.

## PP+ Pilot

A 'Keep In College' incentive payment of £20 per week is in place for care leavers who achieve over 80% authorised attendance. There are currently 52 Young People attending 14 different Further Education Colleges, who are receiving this.

All information is available on the [DurhamWorks website](#)



## Key performance data

- There were 982 children in care at the end of March 2022. This is higher than last year, however our rate of children in care per 10,000 children in County Durham remains lower than in the North East and our Statistical Neighbours.
- Our number of children in care has fluctuated during the year following an increase in children leaving care once Family Courts reopened, but also a reduction in children coming into care in through most of 2021. Children becoming looked after has returned to similar pre-COVID levels but we have experienced another recent reduction in children leaving care. This is a direct impact of the Somerset Judgment, with 30 children who are currently placed for adoption experiencing a delay. If these delays had not occurred, we would be at a similar number of CLA to last year (949).
- The National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children has also started in year and the first young people have started to arrive in Durham. This will also lead to an increase in children who come into our care throughout the year.
- 62 children were adopted in 2021/22. This equates to 18% of all children leaving care which is higher than in England and the North East in 2019/20.
- A higher proportion of children in care in Durham are in a foster placement than in our comparators (74% compared to 71% in England and 72% in our statistical neighbours in 2020-21).
- Around a quarter of our children in care are placed outside of County Durham, but the vast majority are within neighbouring local authority areas. Often closer to their home than if placed in other areas of the county. This continues to be consistently lower than in our comparators.
- We have experienced significant placement pressures during, and following, COVID which has led to an increase in children having 3 or more placement moves and long-term stability for some of our children aged under 16 who have been in care for more than 2 1.2 years.
- We have seen an increase in the number of children in care reported as missing alongside the number of missing episodes, with some children regularly reported as 'missing'. This is a potential impact from lockdowns during COVID. Multi-agency work is ongoing with Police and other partner agencies to monitor, understand and address this.
- Performance in relation to our care leavers remains positive in relation to accommodation suitability and education, employment and training remains above or at benchmarks
- Educational attainment data is included in Virtual School and EET sections.

# Aycliffe Secure Centre

In April 2021  
ASC had its full  
unannounced  
Inspection and  
was judged as  
Outstanding  
Overall.

In November 2021  
ASC had an  
interim inspection  
and was awarded  
Sustained  
Effectiveness.



“ Our mission statement: **“Through developing and investing in our staff and infrastructure, Aycliffe secure centre will continue to provide each young person with a safe, secure, caring home and school. Encouraging and motivating each young person to be the best they can be in an environment they can enjoy.”** ”

Aycliffe Secure Centre provides secure homes and onsite school for up to 38 young people, eight of whom are sentenced or remanded by the Youth Custody Service. In addition, there are places for 30 young people who are looked after for their own safety, under section 25 of the Children’s Act 1989, commission by Local Authorities. Over the last year, we reduced our occupancy levels due to the impact of Covid19, so we only had 4 out of the 5 houses in use.

The philosophy of the centre is that of Exceptional Parenting underpinned by Trauma informed care. We have been an active part of the National SECURE STAIRS framework and received an annual review last Autumn which highlighted the exceptional work and support offered to young people and staff alike. Through this trauma informed care young people understand their journey and

work to build confidence, positive self-esteem, and resilience. Young people have enhanced multi-agency care and support and have been encouraged to have a significant voice and have been part of the mantra “no decision about me without me.”

Over this last year, living with the impact of the Covid19 pandemic we have continued to follow the centres recovery road map, and followed both national and local guidance in order to keep everyone as safe and well as possible. Ensuring the use of PPE, effective testing and effective measure of Infection control are in place has taken a whole centre approach which has been challenging, particularly in ensuring staffing levels are kept conducive to individuals and groups of young people and helping everyone’s mental health and wellbeing was at the forefront of our minds.

## Highlights over the year include:

- School has remained open throughout the pandemic.
- The horticultural and park area is being actively used in both the curriculum and for leisure.
- Health and Social Care is now part of the curriculum.
- Several of our young people have been entered and achieved success in the national Koestler Awards
- Our first young person to achieve their CSCS card (Construction Skills Certification Scheme)
- Young people have been able to keep contact and connected to those who are important to them through technology in particular Teams.
- Since the roll out ,135 multi-agency staff have participated in the 5x day Trauma informed care

- Psychological formulation and reformulations are undertaken with and for all of our young people.
- Reflective practice is embedded into the whole centre
- We have developed and Enhanced Practitioner role to up skill workers and help with succession planning
- We have launched the new radio system which will also reduce air wave noise pollution
- Stage one of the electronic case management systems ClearCare roll out has been achieved
- Refurbishments of the catering and music classrooms
- Significant improvements have been made to the infrastructure
- Hybrid working has been implemented within the support services.
- Face to face meeting with Investing in Children have recommenced

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



Involving the young people in their care is vital to their success and one young person's Social Worker said:

**“We have just completed the formulation/ transition meeting. (Young person) did a presentation to at least 16 people (professionals) including the new service provider about what she has gained from therapy and general interventions from the multi-agency team at Aycliffe and how she can carry this on into independence. It was outstanding and testimony to the work that has been undertaken with her in the nine months she has been at Aycliffe. I was blown away by it. The care and intervention they have received at Aycliffe is second to none and now she has a fighting chance of success in the community with good, continued support.”**

## Young people said:

**“G is the kindest interventions worker I have ever had.”**

**“K is a good little umperlumper. He is a great negotiator he is also a role model to other staff and should be entitled to a pay rise.”**

**“I can see the difference in myself since I first came here. It has helped me being here and I will stay in touch with H and C.”**

We continue to promote engagement, leisure and hobbies including,

- Celebrating events including, birthday, religious and faith days and leaving meals and mobility
- Animal care, having regular pets and small animal care visiting
- BBQ's and pool parties
- Centre wide quizzes and competitions
- Pampering sessions
- Sporting activities and pastimes, including football, trampolining, the gym, and dancing and mindfulness
- Gaming, Lego, board games and crafting

Future developments at Aycliffe includes the building and registering of the Transitions Home, which will offer up to four young people a steppingstone from living in secure accommodation to moving into the community in a safe and sequential way. The building work commenced in February 2022 and is set to be completed by October 2022. We are beginning the registering process and have recruited the Homes Manager who will be with us soon.

## Proud moments

In response to young people telling us that they sometimes faced stigma and discrimination, agreement was made by the Corporate Parenting Panel that proud moments would be shared at each meeting to highlight young people's achievements and successes - no matter how big or small.

### Some of our proud moments include:

- A young person who won a competition with posters and leaflets they had created. The young person had been grateful for the opportunity to showcase their talent and the praise they received had increased their confidence, improved their schooling and relationships and had also led them to decide to pursue art as a future career.
- A young person who lives in one of our children's homes volunteers with a local community allotment project, and worked hard to support the project's activities and raise awareness of environmental issues. This led to a commendation from the volunteer lead and the project is now supporting the young person to achieve the John Muir award for raising awareness of the natural environment.
- A young person who had been finding life particularly difficult, received help and support from specialist services to overcome their difficulties and as a result, developed such empathy for other young people in similar positions, that they are now leading activities and providing help and support to others. The young person is helping others to live their lives to the full and realise that they are valued and can make positive contributions.
- One young person had suffered numerous traumas which had a long-lasting impact, resulting in them missing much of their education. With support, the young person had grown stronger and secured a trial day for a job. On their first day at work, the employers were so impressed, they offered them the job at the end of the day. This was a well-deserved achievement for the young person, who had shown great strength and determination to succeed.
- A young person whose past experiences had led to them finding it difficult to form relationships and to share thoughts, feelings and fears with others, discovered their talent for baking. The young person enjoyed making and decorating cupcakes, and one day, decided to make a special cupcake as a 'thank you' for a teacher who had provided support through some particularly difficult times. This gesture was a very brave step for the young person who was acknowledging the trust and attachment that had been formed.
- A young person living in shared care arrangements had experienced difficulties and disruption in their life, however they are now making remarkable progress, attending school regularly and achieving new goals both at school and in their personal life. Staff and their family had noted the changes and said how proud they were to see their progress and the kindness shown when caring for their younger sibling who has additional needs.
- One young person who has disabilities completed a sponsored walk for the Dogs Trust and raised over £100. Everyone was really proud of their achievements.
- Young people living at one of our children's homes became aware of a 'toilet-twinning' project and set about fundraising for this to help make a difference to children who are living in difficult circumstances. They raised £100 of donations to provide a toilet for a family in Afghanistan, and their positive proactive work was recognised and praised.

- A young person who was preparing to move into supported living arrangements had been reflecting on the past whilst preparing for the future. They explained that they felt loved and prepared for the next phase of life, knowing that their family will continue to support them, just as they had done throughout the years. Their carers spoke of how proud they are and how they were pleased to see such a positive outcome for this young person.
- Young people living at one of our children's homes were so happy with their new bathroom facilities that they arranged an official opening event to celebrate. The event included a ceremonial ribbon-cutting, handing over of the ceremonial 'toilet roll' and a tea party. Staff were proud at the effort the young people had made and were pleased to see how much they value their home, which emphasised just how important it is that young people are provided with high quality facilities.
- A year 11 student with an Education Health and Care Plan moved out of Durham to access specialist provision. They 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, and encouraging them to continue writing.

- The Head of the Virtual School had supported a young person during their transition into year 7, and they met again several years later at a Children in Care Council meeting. The young person had done well through school and acknowledge how valuable the support from the Virtual School had been to them at the time.
- One of our older young people stood as an independent candidate in their local election in May 2021. Although they were not elected, we were very proud that they had the confidence to do this and to take the next steps in their lives, knowing they have the support they need around them.
- Finally, the young people are proud of the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, who donates 'corporate grandparent' gifts of hand-knitted baby clothes, to be given to our care leavers who have children of their own. The young people are appreciative of the kind gesture.



# Achievements

## PCSO training

In late 2020, the Children's Commissioner for England asked for the CICC to get involved in some focus groups to inform the National Police Chiefs Council's work in updating their strategy in relation to police and children. The aim of this was to influence how police interact with children, and they specifically wanted to include voices of children, particularly those with care experience.

Following completion of this work with the NPCC, the CICC approached Durham Constabulary to discuss their thoughts on the interventions they have received from police regarding care interventions or in relation to crime.

As a result, the CICC have delivered training sessions to highlight the importance of child focused, and child sensitive work, and this is being shared to a broader group of officers in Durham Constabulary to ensure that better relations are established with the police.

In addition, police will form links with our children's homes with 'police buddies', so that they are visiting the young people in a positive capacity – not just when there are problems or concerns.

## Government's Independent Review of Children's Social Care

In March 2021, Government commissioned an independent review of Children's Social Care, chaired by Josh McAllister - a link to the review can be found [HERE](#)



A report was commissioned by the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ACDS) in the North East on Children's Social Care, which will feed into the review to highlight the picture in Durham to influence national policy, and to share sector led improvements.

In addition, one of our young people attended a national event hosted by Josh McAllister, to discuss their views on children's social care, and another young person wrote about their thoughts on the review, which have also been shared. This young person's story was also shared in a variety of ways, including a film and podcast as part of the Care Day celebrations.



## IIC Membership Award

The membership award gives organisations national recognition for the good practice and active inclusion of children and young people in dialogue that results in change.

At present, 18 Durham County Council Services have an active IIC Membership Award, which recognises and celebrates examples of imaginative and inclusive practice across Children's Services.

## Artstops - creative images in public spaces

#artstops #durhamartstops

Twelve care experienced young people connected with this project to produce and designed a range of images which have been put on display in bus stops across the Durham and Chester-Le-Street area. Use this [interactive map](#) to see exactly where they are.

Following the success of this project, further discussions are taking place to see how this project can be implemented in other areas of County Durham.

The young people's artwork, poems etc can be viewed here: [HERE](#).

## Peer mentoring

Seven young people have undertaken the training to become peer mentors. IIC and the CICC are working with DCC staff to ensure that the young people taking part in the programme have the support that they need to make sure they feel safe and know what to do with any information that is shared or disclosed during these sessions.

The peer mentor programme is being developed and implemented slowly to ensure all plans and support are in place.

## Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) work

An IRO document has been developed with young people from the CICC. This will be sent out with the invites for the review meeting so that young people know what will happen and who they will meet.

They young people have also developed this animation which explains the role of an IRO <https://www.youtube.com/embed/GEM-w-x7xtc>

## Social worker profiles

It was suggested by young people that social workers (and Full Circle/CAMHS workers) provide profiles of themselves so that young people know a little bit about them e.g. if they have children, favourite foods, movies they like etc as well as their work contacts and a picture of themselves.



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