



Corporate Parenting Panel

Date **Friday 10 November 2023**

Time **9.30 am**

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

Business

Part A

Items which are open to the press and public

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Substitute Members
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2023
(Pages 3 - 12)
4. Declarations of Interest
5. Number of Children in our Care and Care Leavers
- Verbal update from the Deputy Corporate Director of Children's Services
6. Ofsted Updates - Verbal update from the Deputy Corporate Director of Children's Services / Strategic Manager, Residential Children's Homes
7. Proud Moments - Verbal update from the Service Leads
8. Children in Care Council Update
 - a) Presentation by young people from the Children in Care Council (Pages 13 - 14)
 - b) Update on the themes identified at the joint CICC/ CPP meeting held on 27 April 2023 - Verbal update from the Head of Children's Social Care
9. Protected Characteristics Update - Verbal update from the Head of Children's Social Care
10. Pre-birth Intervention Update - Report and presentation of the Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 15 - 30)

11. Supporting Solutions and Family Group Conferencing Annual Report - Report and presentation of the Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 31 - 50)
12. Contextualised Safeguarding Update - Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 51 - 62)
13. Review of the Independent Visitor Service for Children in Care - Report of the Independent Visitor Coordinator (Pages 63 - 76)
14. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.
15. 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)

16. Regulation 44 Visits
 - a) DCC Residential Children's Homes - Presentation by the Strategic Manager, Residential Children's Homes (Pages 77 - 82)
 - b) New Lea House - Presentation by the Strategic Manager, Residential Children's Homes (Pages 83 - 88)
17. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

Helen Bradley

Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
2 November 2023

To: **The Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel**
Councillor M Simmons (Chair)
Councillor M Walton (Vice-Chair)
Councillors R Adcock-Forster, J Charlton, S Deinali, J Griffiths, T Henderson, C Hunt, B Kellett, M McGaun, L Mavin, S Quinn, A Reed, I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, A Savory, P Sexton, S Townsend, C Varty and M Wilson

Co-opted Members

J Bell, C Brown, J Gamble, E Reed, W Taylor, F Tweddle and R Woods
Young persons representative of the Children in Care Council

Contact: Jill Hogg

Tel: 03000 269 711

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 29 September 2023** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)

Members of the Panel:

Councillors M Walton (Vice-Chair), R Adcock-Forster, S Deinali, J Griffiths, M McGaun, S Quinn, A Reed, I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, A Savory, S Townsend, C Varty and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

J Bell, Billie-Leigh, J Gamble, Luke, W Taylor and F Tweddle

Also Present:

Laura Armstrong – Professional Practice Manager
Jasmine Crammond – Lawyer, Children and Adult Services
Sharon Davey – Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence
Rachel Farnham – Head of Children’s Social Care
Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager
Anne Haigh – Aycliffe Secure Services Centre Manager
Rob Johnson – Project Manager, Investing in Children
Deb Loraine – Service Manager, Children & Young Peoples Services
Helen McAloon – Strategy Team Leader
Lee Peacock – Participation and Engagement Officer
Melanie Stubbs – Head of the Virtual School
Bernadette Toomey - Practice Lead, Children & Young Peoples Services

Prior to the commencement of business the Chair welcomed young people from the Children in Care Council (CiCC).

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, T Henderson, C Hunt and L Mavin and from co-opted member Craig Brown. Apologies were also received from J Watson, Senior Partnerships Officer.

2 Substitute Members

Councillors B Coult and J Nicholson attended for Councillors L Mavin and J Charlton respectively.

3 Minutes

With an amendment to include apologies from Councillor A Savory, the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported:

- The presentation slides from the Corporate Parenting refresher training session held in September would be circulated.
- The video that the young people from the Children in Care Council presented at the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) conference would be shown later in the meeting.
- The Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report is now available online.
- Members will be invited to attend the Fostering Service's fancy dress event on 30 October, to celebrate Halloween. Further details will be emailed to Members in due course.
- Members who had made changes to their sub-group membership recently, were asked to inform Jayne Watson, Senior Partnerships Officer.

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Number of Children in our Care and Care Leavers

The Deputy Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services updated the Panel that number of children looked after stood at 1,179, including 30 young people placed for adoption, 293 care leavers and 73 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).

6 Ofsted Updates

The Deputy Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services updated the Panel on Ofsted inspections carried out over the summer. A full inspection had taken place at Aycliffe Secure Centre in July which gained a 'good' overall rating, with an 'outstanding' in respect of children's health. The Manse and Moorside homes had undergone monitoring visits which found the homes to be 'good'. Full inspections had taken place at Hickstead Rise and High Etherley which were 'good', Framwellgate Moor was found to be 'requiring improvement' and an inspection of New Lea judged the home to be 'outstanding'.

7 Proud Moments

The proud moments this month were reported by the Head of the Virtual School who spoke of the achievements of the young people who sat GCSE exams over this summer. One young person in particular had made a great deal of progress despite having to contend with placement change in the months prior to his exams. Not only did he continue to attend school, he also volunteered with the school's recycling programme and committed himself to extra tuition and after-school revision sessions and activities. This resulted in him achieving higher grades than he expected and he is currently studying at college, on the course that he had set his sights on.

The Panel congratulated all the young people who had sat exams during the summer and wished them continued success for the future.

8 Children in Care Council (CiCC) Update

Billie-Leigh and Luke delivered the presentation on CiCC highlighted activity over the summer (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

Information included that feedback is being gathered to develop the 'Know, What, When' lifemap guide which, it is hoped, will be finalised soon. During the summer, CiCC roadshows were facilitated to reach out to as many young people as possible. The young people have now produced their 10th newsletter and plans are in place for the production of a 2023 annual newsletter, to celebrate achievements over the year. A total of 97 Education Fun Fund applications have been approved and the young people were pleased to report that case studies show the fund is making a real difference to young people. The life skills / savings survey remains active and is being publicised through social workers and support staff and a progress update will be brought to the Panel later in the year.

It was reported that as a result of the success of the Artstops Initiative, the CiCC have been given access to Bishop Auckland art gallery from September to December next year to showcase their art in the #ArtsCarers24 exhibition.

Work is continuing with Newcastle University Street Law project to help children and young people of all ages to better understand care proceedings and work has begun on an animation.

The young people have worked with the Full Circle Team on an open event and they have produced artwork to decorate the team's refurbished building.

The Panel heard that discussions have been held with the Supportive Family Time team to develop family time rooms, with the young people's ultimate aim being a 'family time house', which they feel would provide a more natural and dynamic family time experience. A discussion took place as to how the Panel could assist. Officers explained that work is ongoing to ensure dedicated family time facilities are available throughout the county and the views of the young people will be considered, within the wider context and the Panel will be kept informed of progress. The Panel suggested that local Community Centres may have rooms available which could be used for family time activities.

The Panel congratulated the young people on their work and they were pleased to see their ideas coming to fruition, including the upcoming art exhibition and the success of the Education Fun Fund.

9 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Update

The Panel considered the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children update report presented by Sharon Davey, Strategic Manager for Children and Young People's Services (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager informed the Panel that Durham continues to take a high percentage of UASC compared with regional neighbours and a dedicated UASC team is in place. The team has developed social inclusion opportunities and community links, details of which were provided in the report. In addition, the UASC multi agency group meets regularly to share information on issues including health, education and the voluntary sector, in a partnership approach to support UASC to integrate into the community and promote their physical and mental health.

Members spoke of the assistance provided by the voluntary and community sector and the legal barriers that may be encountered when providing assistance. The Strategic Manager agreed to make enquiries regarding the possibility of providing sign-posting and information on the Local Safeguarding Children's Board website.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

10 Performance Report

The Strategy Team Leader, Helen McAloon, delivered performance information against the key performance indicators, for the first quarter of 2023-24 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that whilst the number of children and young people in care continued to increase, Durham was in line with regional and statistical neighbours. In particular, there had been an increase in the number of babies aged under 1 and the number of 10-15 year olds entering care. During the quarter, there had been an increase in the number of social workers with fewer than 25 cases. The number of initial health assessments and review health assessments completed within timescales had reduced and data was being reviewed to identify any underlying issues. In terms of placement stability, it was reported that the number of children undergoing three or more placement moves in any one year had reduced, however longer term placement stability was slightly below the benchmark. The number of missing incidents had increased, however the completion rate for return to home interviews had improved. More detailed information on missing incidents will be brought to a future Panel meeting.

There was a positive picture with regard to the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation and whilst the number of care leavers in education, employment and training was in line with benchmarks, there was room for improvement.

In response to a request from the Panel that data on the number of children placed with friends and family be included in future reports, the Strategy Team Leader agreed to include the data in the next performance update. The Panel noted that the number of children placed within family / friends networks continues to increase.

The Panel queried whether the number of social workers was sufficient to meet the increasing demand. The Deputy Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services acknowledged that the recruitment and retention of social workers is a local and national challenge, therefore work to support staff recruitment and retention is ongoing.

The Panel commented on the number of missing incidents and the impact on the wider community, in particular police resources. Officers assured the Panel that multi-agency work is undertaken and in some cases, the community may play a part in the solution.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

11 Progress Report on Children Looked After in the Virtual School: Update for the Academic Year 2022 / 2023

The Head of the Virtual School presented an update on the work carried out by the Virtual School from September 2022 to July 2023 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

As at 21 July 2023, there were 766 Durham children looked after, of statutory school age and of these 42% were female and 58% were male. 22% were supported by an EHCP and 31% were identified as requiring SEND support. Attendance is improving following the disruption caused by the pandemic and whilst primary attendance is good, secondary attendance requires attention. As a result, PEP caseworkers are focusing on attendance in order to identify barriers. The report included detailed information on GCSE results.

Responding to a question from the Panel as to the number of suspensions, the Head of the Virtual School clarified that all schools have a behavior for learning policy and pupils may be suspended for several reasons including breaking school rules, disruptive behavior and refusing to engage. Alternative provision is considered as an alternative to exclusion.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

12 Annual Health Update

The Designated Nurse for Children in Care, Jo Gamble, presented the annual health update (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Introducing the presentation, the Designated Nurse outlined the new commissioning arrangements for health provision across County Durham.

With regard to health assessment data, the Panel heard of the work taking place to improve connectivity between health and the local authority and whilst there had been a reduction in the number of children coming into care, seeing a paediatrician within 20 days, processes are in place for improvements and there are times when it is not appropriate to conduct a health assessment within the specified timeframe.

The Designated Nurse detailed the priorities for 2023-24 which are aligned to the work of corporate parenting and the children looked after strategic partnership.

The Panel noted the improvements with regard to access to dental care for children, with 95% of young people in care having had an appropriate dental check.

The Panel also noted that every care experienced child is given the opportunity to have a health passport to understand their medical history and the Designated Nurse explained that health passports had been reviewed which found that a summary of the information would be more effective and the passports had been renamed and were now known as 'Health Summaries'.

The young people questioned why the name had been changed and the Designated Nurse explained the name change was considered necessary as the new format was a more condensed version of the former health passport, however a review will be undertaken of the new format to ensure that it provides all the information required and this could include reconsideration of the name.

Members were pleased to note that access to dental care had returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

13 Annual Performance Report 2022/2023: The Full Circle

The Panel received the Annual Performance Report of the Full Circle covering the period from April 2022-March 2023 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Deb Loraine, Service Manager, delivered the presentation, giving an overview of the annual activity and development of the Full Circle service. Information was provided on this specialised children's mental health service for children and young people who have experienced complex trauma through neglect and abuse. The Panel noted the service benefits from good partnership arrangements with the Virtual School and agencies including CAMHS and the NSPCC. The Full Circle also provides consultation and training for parents, carers and professionals where children have not met the criteria for direct therapeutic support.

The significant amount of development activity during the year was detailed, including the implementation of new operating practices and the increased offer to residential homes and the Virtual School. Outcome measures identified that, just over 95% of children who had received support from the Full Circle service had improved outcomes. Information was also provided on developments for the year ahead.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

14 Such other business

Members were invited to the Fostering Service's Halloween fancy dress party on Monday 30 October from 1-3pm at Nettlesworth Community Centre, Chester le Street. An invitation would be circulated, with responses to be emailed to fostering@durham.gov.uk by 10 October.

The Head of Children's Social Care then welcomed the young people and introduced their video 'We are People not Problems' which the young people presented to the Association of Directors of Children's Services which took place in Manchester in July. The video received a standing ovation at the conference and it was equally well received by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Officers who had accompanied the young people to Manchester commented that the young people had made Durham proud and it had been a joy to be in their company on the trip.

The young people then gave a short presentation on the making of the video. They explained that the script was designed to illustrate that care experience should not be regarded as a problem. They explained how the making of the video had been a very positive experience as it brought them together and the friendships they made have blossomed. They spoke of how for some, this had been a new experience and they had been enlightened as to the extent of the difference their voices can make. The experience had provided them with the opportunity to network and those that presented the video at the conference spoke of how much they enjoyed talking to an audience and how they were overwhelmed by the support they received. They highlighted that only a short time ago, when some of the young people were just newcomers to the Children in Care Council, they would not have believed that they would present a video at the Association of Directors of Children's Services. The young people concluded by saying they were honoured to have been chosen to participate in the event and they hope to participate in similar events in the future.

The Panel recognised the powerful impact of the video which they described as humbling, emotional and inspirational and officers commented that the video remains a talking point.

The Panel thanked the young people for bringing their experiences to life, which is helping to challenge negative perceptions of the care experience and they highlighted that the young people's voices will influence the care experience in the future.

The Head of the Virtual School commented on how far the young people had come since their first video 'We are no different' and she requested to show the 'We are People not Problems' video at the spring Designated Teachers meeting.

The Panel requested that enquiries be made with a view to showing the video at a future meeting of the County Council.

15 Exclusion of the public

Resolved:

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

16 Regulation 44 visits (May-August 2023) and Regulatory Body Ratings of Aycliffe Secure Centre - Summary Report

The Manager of Aycliffe Secure Centre, Anne Haigh, presented a summary of the Regulation 44 visits to Aycliffe Secure Centre for May-August 2023. Members also received a presentation on the pathways into secure accommodation, information which had been requested following discussions at a previous meeting (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

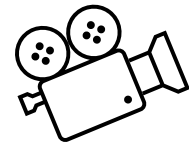
That the report and presentation be noted.

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Presentation by Billie-Leigh and Luke CiCC CPP reps, and Robert Johnson, Investing in Children

Durham Children in Care Council- Update Autumn Update

- Bishop Auckland Art Exhibition September-November 2024
- Care Day 2024
- Life Skills Passport Work
- Family Time Room work continues
- Media Student Video and Shorts Project



Promoting the Rights of Children and Young People



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Corporate Parenting Panel**10 November 2023****Pre-Birth Intervention Update**
Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council
Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides an update on the progress for the Pre-birth Intervention Service (PBIS)

Executive summary

- 2 The Pre-birth Intervention Service (PBIS) was re-established in Durham's Families First (FF) Service in May 2018. The model and ambition are to enable babies to remain with their parents, or at least within the birth family where it is safe to do so. This is achieved by completing as much work as possible before the baby is born and by ensuring that the parents receive intensive support to help them to achieve sustainable change. Where this is not in the best interests of the child, then the ambition is to ensure that the baby is permanently placed with alternative carers as soon as is possible after birth and to reduce the number of carers the child experiences.
- 3 Office for National Statistics data identifies that approximately 1% of the County Durham population are aged under 1. More than 8% of the total children open to Durham Children Social Care (DCSC) are under one. 20% of all children that come into our care are under 1, the next largest group is 16-year-olds at 9%.
- 4 Of contacts into First Contact between the period of June 2022 and June 2023, it is noted that 42% of unborn born babies and 36% of under ones go straight to a statutory referral. This is in comparison to 21% of the overall contacts of other age groups. A higher proportion of unborn and under one contacts are also triaged in the MASH than for other age groups.
- 5 A higher proportion of children who are and become children in our care (CiC) in Durham are aged under one than in comparators. In 2020/21, Durham had the 5th highest under one CiC starts in the country with 29% of all CiC starts in Durham. In 2021/22, Durham dropped to 23rd

highest CiC under ones in the country, which was 24% of all CiC starts in Durham. This has reduced again to 50th highest in the country, which is 21% of all CiC starts in Durham.

Recommendations

- 6 Members of the Corporate Parenting panel are requested to note the context of this report.

Background

- 7 A review of the PBIS criteria was undertaken in 2020, it became clear that it was difficult to implement the intervention due to the level of complexities of parents' needs and circumstances. A high proportion of the cases resulted in care proceedings and babies being placed permanently outside of parental care. The review demonstrated the need to amend the criteria, which enabled the team to have a renewed focus and to target their intervention towards those parents who would benefit from intensive support and intervention.
- 8 The criteria is as follows:
- i. Teenage mothers under 16 who are still in full time education.
 - ii. All active care leavers up to the age of 25, who are currently permanently resident in Durham, and where the unborn meets the requirement for a statutory pre-birth assessment.
 - iii. Parents who have had a previous child removed through care proceedings, where there is evidence of some positive change of circumstances.
 - iv. Parents with a diagnosed learning disability.
- 9 For a referral to be accepted into the team, the referral must be made prior to 21 weeks gestation, and meaningful consent must have been given by the parents.
- 10 Social Workers work alongside Early Help practitioners from the One Point Service. Together they deliver intensive assessment and support, with the aim of enabling parents to safely care for their children or gather evidence to make timely decisions in relation to permanence plans. Where children remain in the care of their parents, they have established relationships with professionals based within local Children's Centres to ensure that support can be sustained and readily accessible to parents.

Outcomes for Children

- 11 In the 12 months leading up to May 2023 the PBIS have worked with 85 children. These can be broken down into 12 children where one or both parents were care experienced, 41 children whose parents had previously been involved in proceedings where there is some sign of positive change, 9 children whose parents were under 16 and remained in full time education and 22 children that did not meet the current criteria but were accepted due to capacity issues across the service/service need. 2 children had parents who were both care experienced and had previously had children removed.

- 12 Of those 85 children, 24 were subject to care proceedings that had concluded. There were 10 adoption orders (including 2 foster to adopt), 5 special guardianship Orders (SGOs), 3 supervision orders and five care orders including two which needed longer term support in a mother and baby placement, and one with no order. In May 2023 there were fourteen sets of Care proceedings that were ongoing, with it being expected that at least 4 more will be issued shortly.
- 13 20 specialist learning disability assessments of one or both parents were completed within the team, 3 were outsourced due to the need for expert assessment as a result of other needs i.e. parents with an additional disability. Of the parents with Learning disabilities, two of the parents were care experienced, two were care leavers with previous experience of proceedings, two were young parents, twelve had previous experience of care proceedings and the other five were parents who did not meet the usual criteria.
- 14 Of the children with care experienced parents who had no previous children removed (8) children 87.5% were supported to have a longterm plan of remaining with one or both parents. Of the children with young parents, 50% were supported to remain in the care of parents, 2 are currently subject to care proceedings so have no determined current plan and the 2 more (siblings) are likely to be issued shortly.

Two children's story

- 15 Below describes the events of two children's journeys through the PBIS. This demonstrates the commitment and dedication of the practitioners within the team. It also demonstrates the inter-face with other parts of children's services.

Baby S

- 16 Baby S was born unexpectedly early to teenage parents. His gestation was such that survival at times did not appear likely and significant support was provided to the parents by the social work team to ensure they could spend as much time as possible with Baby S. Support was also provided by a Families First team to mother who was a child in her own right. Thankfully despite numerous complications, Baby S survived and was discharged into the care of his mother in a mother and baby foster placement.
- 17 The placement was difficult for the mother as due to Baby S's medical needs the most suitable placement was out of area. Care was taken to adapt the placement as much as possible so that mother still spent time with her own family – who provided emotional support - and had the chance to complete her GCSEs. Despite this, the placement

unfortunately could not be maintained as the distance was too great. However, the social worker did not give up and using some extremely skilled Early Help Practitioners, work was undertaken to build Mother's skills away from the placement.

- 18 Through careful negotiation with family members and the assistance of professionals, the outcome of court was positive in that Baby S was made subject to a Care Order with a plan that he would return home to his mother.

Baby H

- 19 Baby H's parents did not meet any of the criteria for the prebirth team when the referral was made. However, it was recognised upon receipt of referral that the parents needs were complex and that the needs of the parents would best be met by the Pre Birth team.
- 20 Both of baby H's parents had diagnosed disabilities impacting on communication as well as numerous mental health conditions. Both had previously spent time in mental health wards and there was a history of violence. There was also concern around a potential learning disability for both parents.
- 21 Given the particular disabilities of the parents, it was not felt an assessment could be completed in house and so the team worked to identify an independent social worker and other experts who were qualified to meet the parents' needs. A high level of liaison was also needed between the social worker and other professionals in mental health and adult disability teams to ensure that the needs of the parents and baby were being met during the pregnancy and afterwards. The level of detail was recognised by the allocated barrister for the case who commented that the Local Authority had "been unusually proactive in giving thought to how the parents needs would be met both pre and post birth".
- 22 Initial connected carers assessments had been completed pre birth of both sets of grandparents but due to the level of risk, full assessments were needed before Baby H could be placed into their care. Additionally, there were concerns around how Baby H's health had been impacted by his mother's medication and other substance use during pregnancy.
- 23 The parents accepted within the proceedings that they were unable to care for Baby H but following close liaison and work with the Connected Carers Team, Baby H eventually moved from foster care into the care of one of his grandmothers. Given the level of risk posed by the parents, this is initially supported by a Care Order however this is intended to be short term with a plan to discharge within a 12-month period.

Hope Boxes

- 24 Hope Boxes are provided to mothers when the plan is removal at birth to start early life story work and to provide the mothers with some comfort/hope during the early stages of separation.
- 25 The boxes are provided to both the mother and child. It has two comforters within it so the smell of the mother and baby can be added to the smell of one comforter each and then exchanged. A handprint kit and wooden milestones to record birth weight, time etc are also included to allow early milestones to be recorded and memories to be created at an early stage. Life story worksheets designed by the life story coordinator are also included to allow this to start at the earliest opportunity. There has been positive feedback from mothers.

Real Care babies

- 26 It is recognised that one of the difficulties of completing pre-birth assessments, is that it is challenging to assess the ability of a parent to meet a child's need when the child is not born. It is also hard to demonstrate to parents, particularly first-time and young parents, the needs of such young children in a way that gives them a realistic expectation of the challenges.
- 27 We introduced 'real care' babies some time ago and these have been used to assist in completing assessments looking at parents' ability to meet the needs of their baby. The recordings tell us about parents' timeliness of responses, the ability of the parent to meet the needs, if any abusive behaviour such as shaking occurred and also if the doll was left for too long without stimulation or in inappropriate temperatures.

Skills and partnership working

- 28 The Nuffield Foundation has launched a number of recent research documents which outlined a number of recommendations and guidance for social work practice when working with expecting mothers and parents with learning disabilities. The team have used the guidance developed by the Nuffield alongside the Good Practice Guidance to develop new assessment pathways which will be submitted for approval soon and hopefully implemented across all the Families First social work teams.
- 29 There are 5 workers in the PBIS who are trained in PAMS or/ and ParentAssess which are tools to take into account parents who have some level of learning difficulties or a learning disability, which mean that they can be assessed and supported by using practical demonstrations and visual aids. There have been 17 PAMS/

ParentAssess assessments completed within the team, which if commissioned would have been a cost to the council in excess of £42,500. There are plans in place to ensure that all staff within the PBIS all have the skills to assess our most vulnerable parents.

- 30 There continues to be a dedicated worker from the Family Group Conference (FGC) service aligned to the PBIS. This helps to increase the parent's sense of control and ensures that family networks are central to the safety plan from an early stage. The FGC also identify alternative carers to be identified and assessed when it is not safe for a child be in parents' care following birth.
- 31 The PBIS works closely with Durham Pause who work with women which have had a child permanently removed from their care.
- 32 The PBIS are a key agency within the Pre-Birth and Under One Delivery group. The purpose of the group is to provide strategic and operational oversight of integrated pathways of support across universal, targeted safeguarding and specialist services to ensure their safety and wellbeing. The vision is for vulnerable unborn babies and babies under 1 year old to be identified at the earliest opportunity and their parents/carers provided with the best possible coordinated help and support to care for their babies safely. Where they are unable to, a timely and robust safeguarding response is in place.
- 33 The PBIS have a lead role in the regional pre-birth group. This provides an opportunity to share good practice and consistency across the service.

What others think

Parents views:

- 34 *I just wanted to say thank you! Thank you for not giving up on me and guiding me towards a better path for me and my beautiful amazing little girl. I know I haven't exactly been easy to work with, but I do appreciate the help you have given me and A. Thank you*

- 35 Some professionals

Judge: *'This is a case which reflects extremely well on all those involved with care planning, professionals and the lay parties. My thanks to all those involved in the outcome.....This Local Authority have shown a refreshing willingness to deal with things appropriately....'*

Judge: *'I would like to give particular thanks to the Social Worker who provided an exceptionally high quality of social work evidence which*

was provided to the court. It was exceptional and made preparation for this hearing much easier. It should be used as a model going forward'.

Foster Carer: 'I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved, of their guidance and support during a very difficult few weeks.... I feel very privileged to have all of your support'.

Foster Carer: 'It was lovely to see N (social worker) on Friday, she found the right words when talking to me and it helped. It was appreciated, as was your support - thank you'.

- 36 Barrister: *'Can I just say that the social work completed in this case was of a very high standard. We were able to bring matters to a sensitive and appropriate conclusion due to the hard work of DCC and the allocated social worker. I think that H (the social worker) will have a bright future ahead of her'.*

What's next

- 37 It is recognised that there is a great deal of diversity in terms of the parents' needs following the change in the referral criteria. A review has identified the need for 3 pathway and intervention programmes. The PBIS are working with Early Help to develop and implement the new pathways across the service.
- 38 The PBIS are pulling together a pre-birth tool kit, this will provide assessment guidance, worksheets and tools for practitioners across families first.
- 39 The PBIS are supporting the role of pre-birth training across families first team, this will have a particular focus on the Nuffield recommendations and Good Practice Guidance.

Conclusion

- 40 The report reflects a great deal of positive and effective working. The team are passionate and committed about achieving good outcomes for children.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

Authors

Jac Tyler

Tel: 03000 262155

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The Children Act 1989 sets out the legal requirement on the local authority to support children in need and to carry out safeguarding investigations and where necessary, issue care proceedings to ensure that children are protected from harm.

Finance

No implications.

Consultation

No implications.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

No implications.

Climate Change

No implications.

Human Rights

No implications.

Crime and Disorder

No implications.

Staffing

No implications.

Accommodation

No implications.

Risk

No implications.

Procurement

No implications.

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Pre-birth intervention & Pause in Durham

Pre-birth intervention service – criteria

Criteria for pre-birth intervention service;

- Teenage mother under 16 who are still in fulltime education
- All care leavers up to the age of 25, who are currently permanently resident in Durham, and where the unborn meets the requirement for a statutory pre-birth assessment
- Parents who have had a previous child removed through care proceedings, where there is evidence of some positive change of circumstances
- Parents with a diagnosed learning disability

To accept a referral, the following additional criteria must apply;

- The referral must be made prior to 21 weeks gestation
- Meaningful consent must have been given by the parents

Pre-birth intervention service

Parents needs;

- 9 mothers who are school age,
- 12 parent/s who are care experienced – 2 babies were both parents were care experienced
- 41 families where a parent has had a previous child removed
- 22 families outside of the criteria due to capacity in families first
- 20 specialist assessments of parents with learning disabilities/ difficulties

Children's plans following care proceedings;

- 9 babies are in the care of their parents following
- 10 babies have plans of adoption (2 early permanence foster placement)
- 5 plan of Special Guardianship
- 14 sets of care proceedings ongoing

Pre-birth intervention service

Baby S

- Both parents were teenagers
- Baby S was born extremely early, and his chances of survival was low
- Families First and Pre-birth team worked together to supported parents visit their baby as much as possible
- Mum and baby went to live in a foster home. Mum struggled adapting to being a Mum, being separated from her family and undertaking her exams.
- Social worker was persistent and not want to give up the possibility of Mum caring for baby S
- Work to build Mum's parenting skills and confidence, led to Mum and baby being reunited in a foster home

Pre-birth intervention service

Good stuff

- All families have the an intensive pre and post birth intervention, delivering proactive, practical and emotional support building on strengths and addressing gaps in knowledge
- Hope boxes
- Real care babies

What others think

Judge:

'This is a case which reflects extremely well on all those involved with care planning, professionals and the lay parties. My thanks to all those involved in the outcome,.... This Local Authority have shown a refreshing willingness to deal with things appropriately....'

Foster Carer:

'I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved, of their guidance and support during a very difficult few weeks.... I feel very privileged to have all of your support'

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Corporate Parenting Panel

10 November 2023

Supporting Solutions & Family Group Conferencing Annual Report



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide an update on activity and developments within the Supporting Solutions, Edge of Care and Family Group Conferencing (FGC) Service from April 2022 to March 2023.

Executive summary

- 2 The offer of support from Supporting Solutions includes:
 - (a) Edge of care (EoC) support – intensive interventions to young people, parents and carers where there has been a relationship breakdown and without this support it is likely that the young person may need to become looked after or experience a placement move. Following a pilot of interventions available to younger children, this offer of support is now available to young people aged 7 plus;
 - (b) Family Group Conference (FGC) – support to families to identify and establish a sustainable plan to meet the needs of children and young people within their family unit;
 - (c) Out of Hours support – Provided by Supporting Solutions Service alongside Emergency Duty Team (EDT).
- 3 Supporting Solutions has successfully supported 83% (of children open to their service) to remain at home, either with family or long-term placements.
- 4 The outcome measures for those children open to Supporting Solutions shows interventions create improvements of all areas measured using the Team Star model: Drug & Alcohol, Well-being, Safety & Security, Structure & Education, Behaviour & Citizenship and Family/Adults.

- 5 The team have supported an additional 56 children aged 7-11, this year, following the age criteria being reduced. 77% of those aged 7-11 remained with family, a further 20% remained with their long-term carers. Only 3% needed to come into our care or move to a new placement.
- 6 The team have facilitated 191 Family Group Conferences (FGC) and 84 Review FGCs.
- 7 The outcomes for children open to Supporting Solutions is good, children benefit from targeted edge of care support. The plan now is to build on the existing Edge of Care service, creating a multi-agency team that provides a range of accommodation options and outreach support to children, young people and their families.

Recommendations

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

Background

- 9 Supporting Solutions provides an edge of care service to children aged 7+. The team's initial criteria was for those children aged between 11-17, however the age range was broadened based on increasing numbers of younger children coming into our care.
- 10 A child on the 'edge of care' is someone who will need to enter care within days or weeks if support is not provided, due to family relationships or family breakdown. The team also work with children and young people accommodated in an emergency with a plan for a quick reunification, and those children in care where there is a risk of a placement breaking down.
- 11 There are 5 stages to Supporting Solutions involvement:
 - (a) Stage 1 Crisis Intervention (initial 24 hours);
 - (b) Stage 2 Rapid response (7-days);
 - (c) Stage 3 Engagement and Identification (4-weeks);
 - (d) Stage 4 Interventions Programme;
 - (e) Stage 5 De-escalation.
- 12 The Supporting Solutions Team also independently facilitate Family Group Conferences (FGC) within Durham. FGCs provide structured opportunity for a family-led meeting in which the family and friend network comes together to make, and review, a plan for a child.
- 13 Supporting Solutions work closely with a range of highly innovative services designed to support adolescents within County Wide Specialist Services. This includes ERASE (Missing and exploitation service), ASET, Social Work Team that support children at risk of extra familial harm, Rapid Response, for children who have been, or at risk of being admitted under Mental Health Act and Full Circle, a therapeutic Social Work team supporting the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children in our care.
- 14 The next steps for Edge of Care Service is to build a multi-agency service that brings together a range of accommodation options, services and outreach to support young people. It's our ambition to develop multi-agency input such as Speech and Language therapy and clinical psychology.

Supporting Solutions 2022/23

Staffing

- 15 The team is split into three; Mini's (7-11) Edge of Care (12-17) and FGC.
- 16 There are 4 full time equivalent staff in the Mini's Team. 12 Full Time employees working with young people 12-17. The FGC Team is made up of a Team Leader and 7.5 full time equivalent FGC coordinators. All three teams are overseen by a Team Manager. The teams also have access to a Therapeutic Social Worker from the Full Circle service who offers clinical supervision.

Outcomes Supporting Solutions

- 17 During 2022/23 Supporting Solutions supported 182 YP on the edge of care.

Outcome	Number of young people
Young people received support	182 YP including 126 new referrals for YP
Number of young people who are in the care of their parents or family/friend at time of closure / writing report plus those rehabilitated home from the care of the LA	135 10 YP rehabilitated from care of LA
Number of young people who were in a long-term placement and remained there	6
Number of young people who have become looked after children during SS interventions	20 (10 YP with foster carers, 8 in Children's Residential Homes and 2 in Secure Accommodation)
Number of young people who are now living in supported accommodation as a CLA	7
Number of young people who are now living in Supported Accommodation not as a CLA	3
Number of young people who were already looked after but moved to a new placement	1

83% of young people who accessed support in 2022/23 are either at home / with extended family or have remained in their long term placement. This is an increase of 9% compared to the previous year.

11% of young people who accessed support in 2022/23 have become Children Looked After (foster care / children's home) during SSS interventions. On reviewing these young people it is clear that they became CLA either because of safeguarding reasons or because home life became so untenable it was not safe for the young person to remain at home. It is also the role of SS to ensure that all avenues of support have been explored and provide evidence to our social work colleagues where the best outcome for a YP would be to come into the care of the LA.

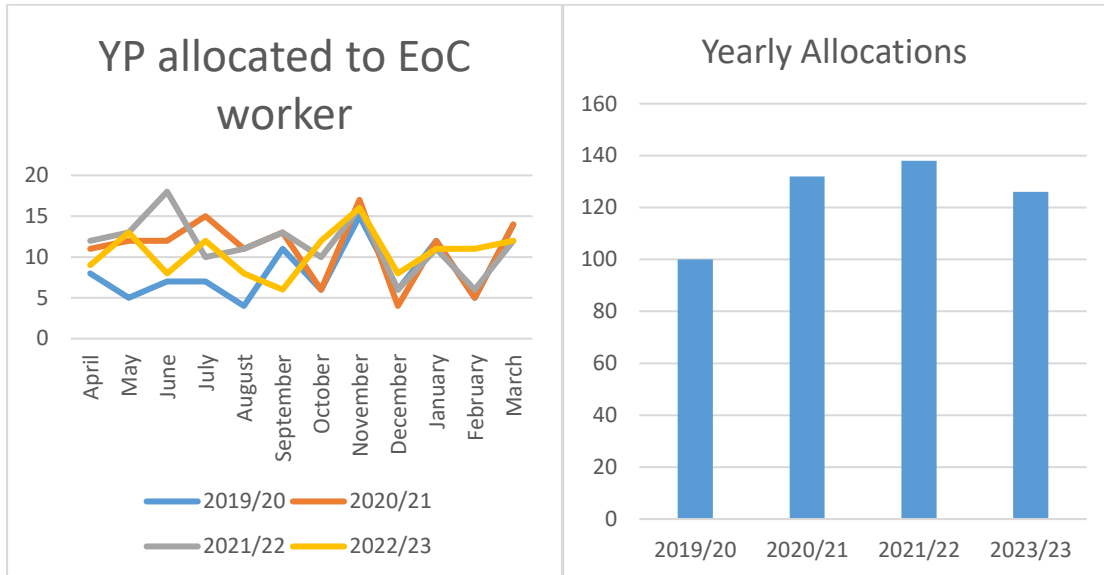
For the 10 16/17 year olds (5.5%) who moved into Supported Accommodated as CLA / not CLA the majority of these young people were supported to remain in the care of their family for as long as possible before the move to supported accommodation was made.

1 young person (0.5%) moved to a new placement as relationship with carers had completely broken down.

During 2022/23 intervention ended with 127 young people, at the point of closure 77% of young people were either at home / with extended family or have remained in their long-term placement. This is an increase of 9% from the previous year. There will be further exploration into sustained outcomes for these young people 1-2 years post closure.

- 18 The tables below show number of young people allocated to 11 plus edge of care workers, with a breakdown of allocated per month. One clear trend is that young people in need of intensive support spikes after the start of the school year but drops on the run up to Christmas. Allocations over all were down slightly in 2022/23, this is likely due to staff sickness within the team over Q3 and Q4, as we would have allocated some young people who we would have assessed as edging towards care, when resources allow. All young people in crisis have been allocated a worker, however, this has meant we have not allocated workers to some young people needing more preventative interventions.

	Allocations 2019/20	Allocations 2020/21	Allocations 2021/22	Allocations 2022/23
Totals	100	132	138	126



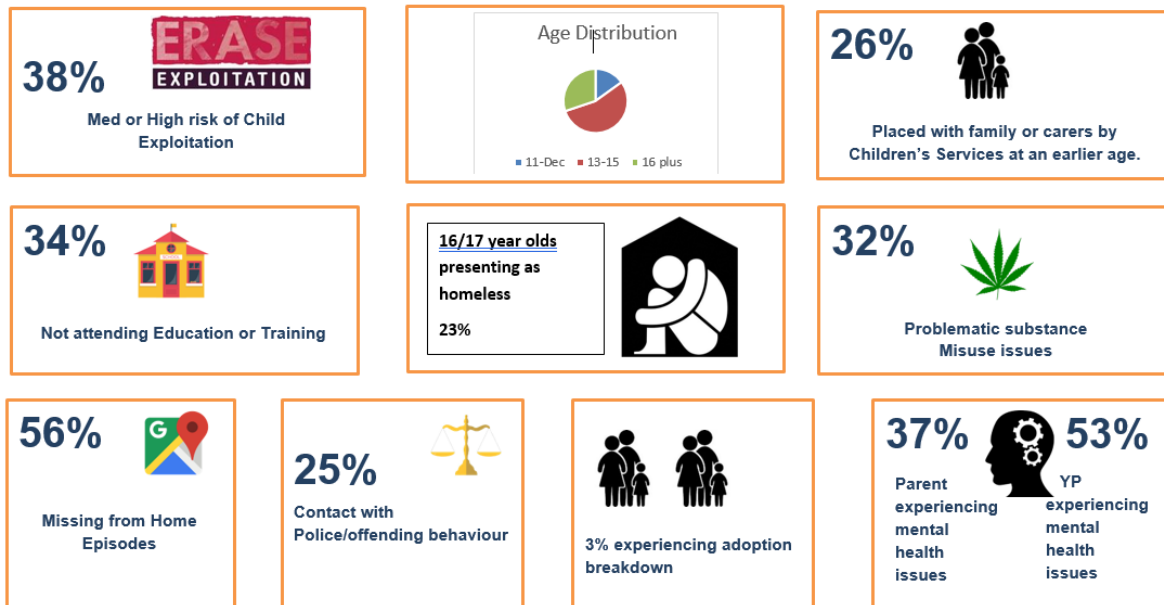
Duty Visits and Consultations

- 19 During 2022/23 SS duty workers spent 228.5 hours completing home visits to young people and families exploring if there was a role for Supporting Solutions or supporting young people already accessing support who were experiencing a crisis.

- 20 SS also completed 124 consultations / duty visits with SWs where the outcome was not to allocate an edge of care worker. Consultations were arranged either because of a request from a SW or because of EDT involvement with a family. Where the outcome was that there was no role for an edge of care worker at that time other avenues of support were suggested, for example, FGC, family worker interventions, independent visitor, CAMHS, Full Circle, Harbour, Humankind and the VCS. Following these consultations, further referrals were made for 14 of these young people, at this point edge of care workers were allocated due to more imminent risk that young person may need to come into the care of the LA / experience a placement breakdown. Out of those young people 79% remain in the care of their family / long term carer.

Profiling

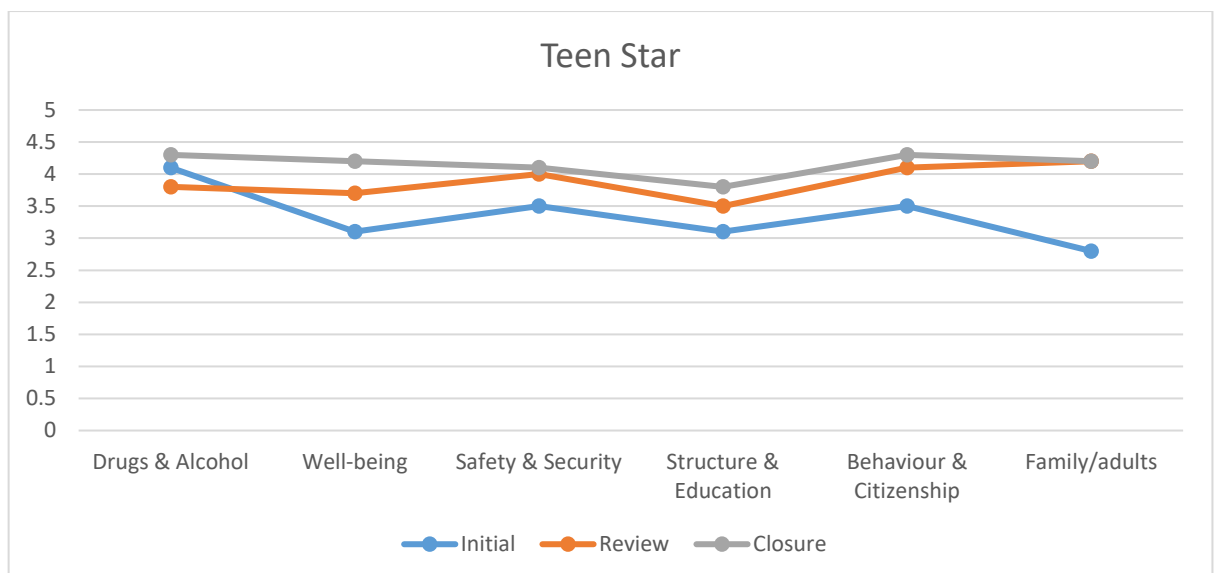
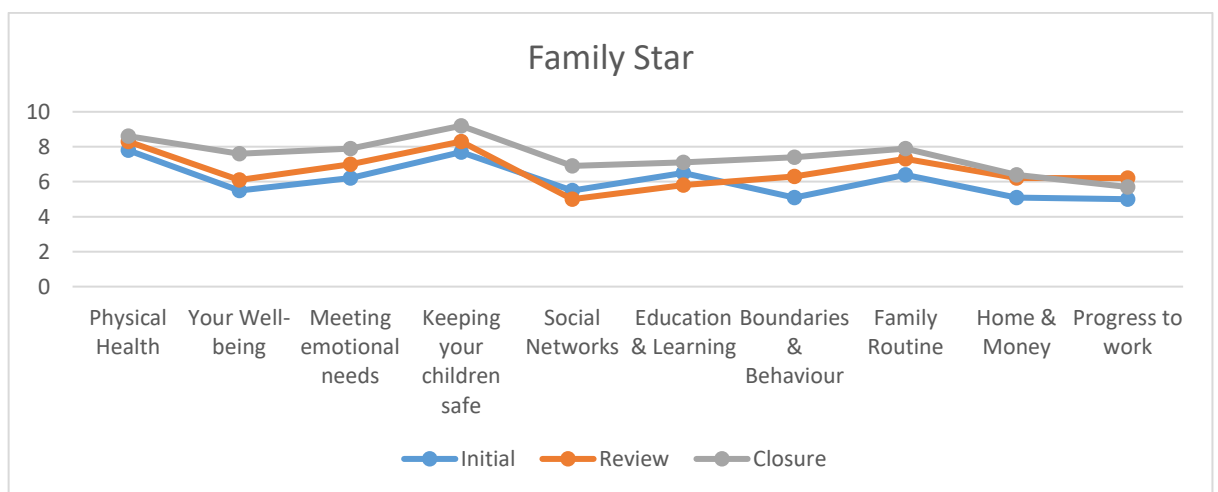
- 21 For the YP who started to access support in 2022/23, the following factors were present and had an impact on YP being on the edge of care. The information below shows these in % figures for 2022/23



- 22 There continues to be a significant cross over in the number of young people on the edge of care who are also subject to or at risk of Child Exploitation and have also had Missing from Home Episodes. Many young people on the Edge of Care are also experiencing issues in education, whether this be exclusion, refusal to attend or out of education altogether. This means that young people spend more time at home, which has an additional pressure on parent/carer where they are already experiencing difficulties in their relationship with their child.
- 23 In addition to this there continues to be an increase in young people who are experiencing worries with their mental health needs. For all the young people where their parent /carer had difficulties with their mental health this was also a factor for the young person.
- 24 Supporting Solutions edge of care workers continue to support more 16/17-year-olds at risk of homelessness helping to ensure that all options to return to the care of parents or alternative people in their network are explored before alternative accommodation is considered. This year the team worked with 29 YP, who presented as Homeless, 20 open to ASET and 9 FF. this is an area of development for the service in terms of performance monitoring.

Individual Young People Journey Mapping (soft outcomes)

- 25 All young people as part of their engagement with Supporting Solutions are asked to complete the Teen Outcomes Star and parents / carers are asked to complete the Family Star Plus. This helps to identify distance travelled in terms of young people, parents and carers achieving the best possible outcomes. Outcome stars are also used as motivational tools and assist workers in being able to offer targeted support to young people and families.
- 26 The tables demonstrate that in all areas of the Teen Star and Family Star Plus young people, parents / carers felt they had made improvements after accessing Supporting Solutions interventions.



Performance Supporting Solutions, Edge of Care 7 plus

- 27 During 2022-223, 56 young people received support from the SSS minis service, 48 of these were referred in 2022/23, whilst the other 8 had been referred prior to this.

Outcome	Number of young people
Young people received support.	56 (48 new referrals)
Young people who remained in the care of their family	43 (77%)
Young people who remained with their long term foster carers	11 (20%)
Young people who became CLA or had to move to a new placement	2 (3%)

Closures

- 28 Interventions ended with 34 young people during 2022/23, 94% of these young people at the point of closure were at home with parents / family members or living with their long term foster carer.

Performance – Family Group Conferencing

FGC - Performance Activity	Target for Year	Achieved
Referrals Received		234
Initial FGC's completed	360	191

- 29 The overall target for FGCs is 360 per year (4 per month x 7.5 FGC workers). The number of referrals received did not reach this target. Work will be done to raise awareness and promote use of the FGC Team in the coming year.
- 30 The table below shows the outcomes following a Family Group Conference, where families devised their own plan which has then been agreed by the social worker at the time of the conference. Overall, 72%

of FGCs resulted in the child/young person being in the care of their parents or extended family

Initial FGC – Outcomes for children	Number of FGCs
Awaiting Outcomes from Assessments and court	45
Rehabilitation plan from care of LA to parents	7
Rehabilitation plan from care of LA to extended family / friends	5
Rehabilitation plan from the care of extended family / friends to the care of parents.	3
Remain with Extended Family / private fostering arrangement	16
Remain looked after by Local Authority	5
Remained with parents with support / safety plan from identified network	107
Alternative Carers Identified	0
Support / safety plan for young person who is in/or moving to – independent living / residential / foster care	3
Grand Total	191

- 31 NFAs – 43 FGC referrals did not progress to an initial conference either because family withdrew consent at a later stage, family did not engage in the process or family circumstances changed and FGC was no longer required.

Review FGC

- 32 Every family who completes an initial FGC is offered a review FGC. In 2022/23 FGC reviews were completed for 84 families. Overall, 89% of FGC reviews resulted in the child/young person being in the care of their parents or extended family.

Review FGC – Outcomes for FGCs	
Remained with parent	74
Remained with extended family	1
Remained looked after by Local Authority	8
Other:	1
Grand Total	84

Development

- 33 The service have identified a series of development aims for 2023/2024, which are listed below:
- (a) Continue to develop the minis service and evidence the ongoing need for more intensive interventions for younger children;
 - (b) Age range of the minis to be changed to 7-11 to ensure that all transition support for children moving from primary to secondary school is captured by the same team;
 - (c) Develop a multi-agency edge of care service that brings together a range of accommodation options, services, and outreach support for young people on the edge of care;
 - (d) Supporting Solutions Edge of Care management team continue to recognise the need for intervention to be available in the team for young people and families where Domestic Abuse had been a factor in family life. SS are working with Harbour to co-deliver the Respect Young People's Programme (RYPP), all EoC workers have already completed this training or will do so in the near future;
 - (e) Extension of FGC service to be explored in relation to Community Conferences and Lifelong Links to help ensure that meaningful support from networks is explored to help ensure that children and young people are safely cared for at home, moving onto independent living and feel safe in their communities;
 - (f) Re-establish regional network for FGCs, use these links to better understand targets for other LAs and how impact is monitored.

Conclusion

- 34 The Supporting Solutions Service has successfully supported 83% children (12+) and 97% (7-11) on the edge of care to remain within their home, whether this is with family or long-term placement in our care.
- 35 The Family Group Conferencing Team have carried out 191 conferences and 84 reviews, however, there now needs to be further work to raise awareness and increase uptake of the service.
- 36 The next steps are to increase the number of children supported to remain at home, and also build on the existing Edge of Care Service that offers a range of accommodation options, services and outreach support to young people. The ambition is to be a multi-agency service, bringing in speech and language therapy and clinical psychology.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

Authors

Lucy Armstrong 03000 262344

Siobhan Davies 03000 263514

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Report includes number of young people detailed under the Mental Health Act

Duties under Children & SW Act / Children's Act to act in the best interests of CYP etc

Finance

No implications.

Consultation

Children and young people are involved in consultation where necessary

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

No implications.

Climate Change

No implications.

Human Rights

All CYP are supported to identify suitable alternative care arrangements where they cannot continue to remain at home safely.

CYP have access to the DCC complaints process

Crime and Disorder

No implications.

Staffing

No implications.

Accommodation

Should CYP come into the care of the LA, there is a need to ensure there is sufficient suitable placements

Risk

The risk of not supporting CYP and their families and carers meant that we are increasing the risk of the young people becoming looked after, or needing to change placements which could cause disruption to the young people.

Procurement

No implications.

Corporate Parenting Panel

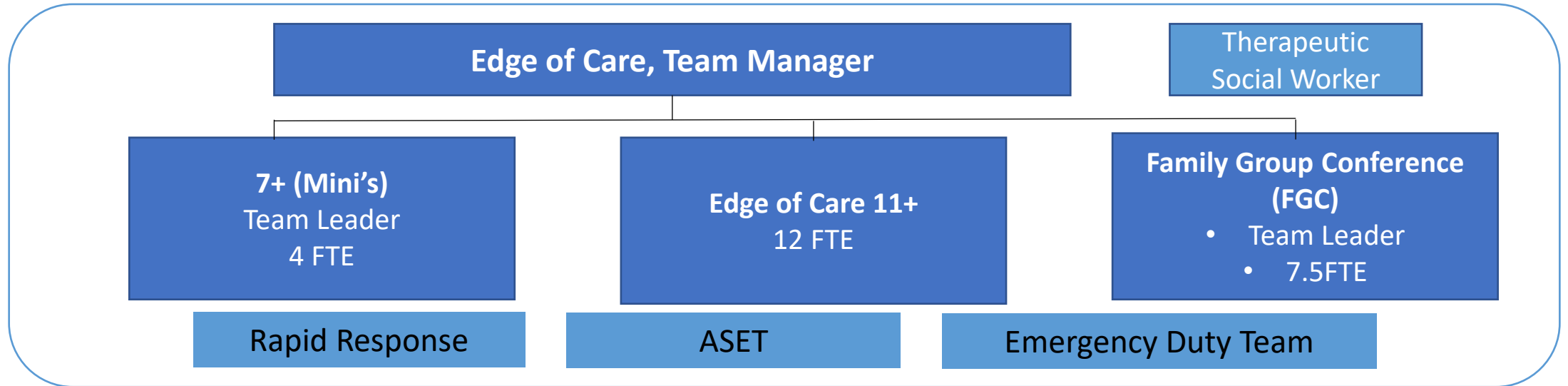
Supporting Solutions & Family Group Conferencing Annual Report

10/11/2023

Siobhan Davies – Strategic Manager, County Wide specialist Services

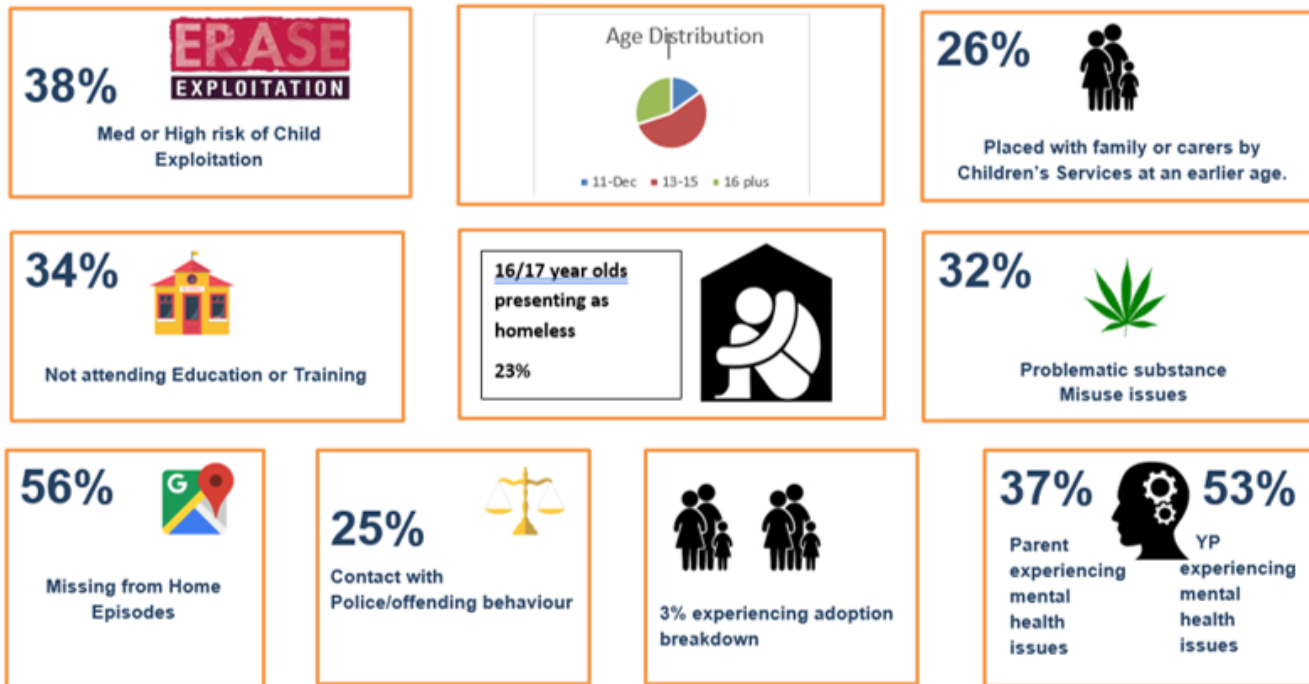


Supporting Solutions



- **Edge of care (EoC) support** – intensive interventions
- **Family Group Conference (FGC)** – support to families to identify and establish a sustainable plan to meet the needs of children and young people within their family unit.
- **Out of Hours support**

Factors which led to Young People being on the Edge of Care



There is a significant cross over in the number of Young People on the edge of care and;

- who are also at risk of exploitation and are missing from home
- Experiencing instability in education
- Experiencing issues with their mental health
- At risk of/or homeless

Rapid Response

Been admitted, or at risk of admission under the Mental Health Act.

ASET

Age14-17

extra-familial issues,

Complex mental health issues Homeless 16/17-year-olds

ERASE

exploitation and missing

Outcomes of children and young people supported 2022/23

7-11 Mini's

97%

Were supported
To stay at home
Or in their long term
placement

3%

Had to move to
A new placement
Or came into our care

12 - 17

83%

Were supported
To stay at home
Or in their long term
placement

11%

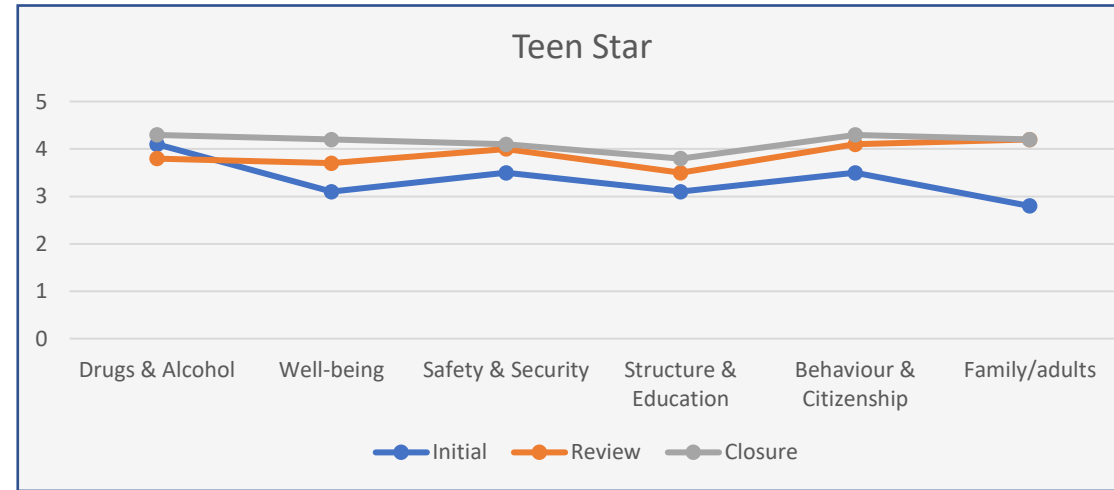
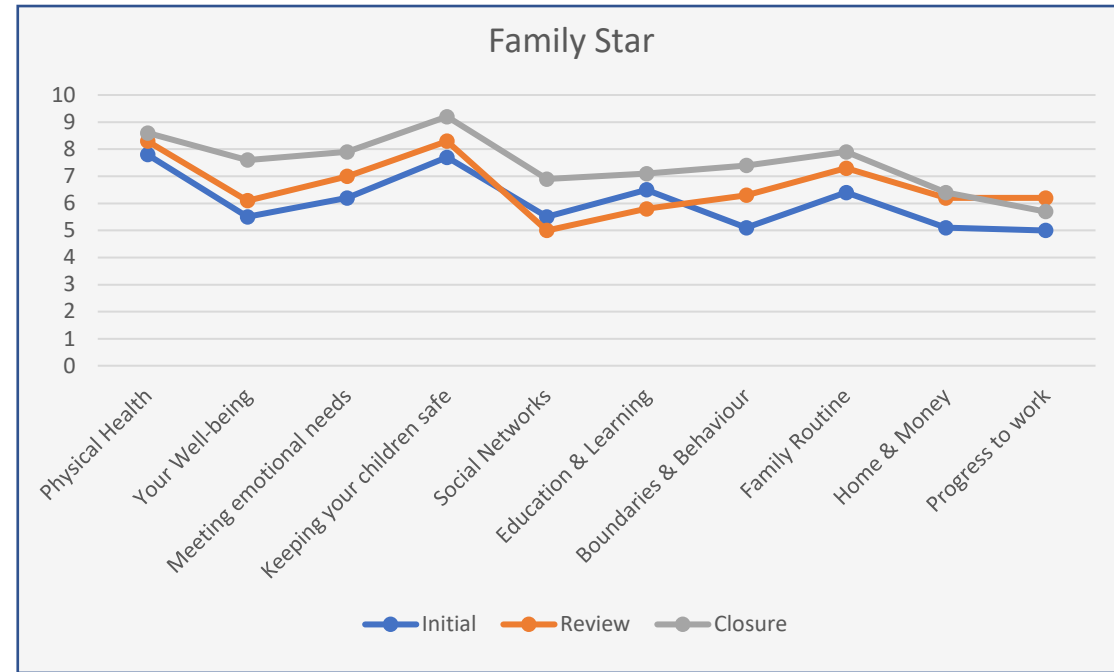
Came into our care
Or needed to move to
A new, long-term
placement

5.5%

Were supported To stay
in Supported To stay
with family As long as
possible Before
Supported
Accommodation

0.5%

Had to move to
A new placement
Due to relationship
breakdown



The Vision

The aim of the service is to work in a multi-agency context to prevent children on the edge of care coming into care

The Edge of Care service will bring together a range of accommodation options, services and outreach to support young people. It is our ambition to develop multi-agency input such as SALT and clinical psychology

The support will be for young people who are looked after or on the edge of care, at risk of family or placement breakdown, stepping down from residential care to family-based care or transitioning to independent living.

The Edge of Care Service will provide short-term interventions.

We are developing a bespoke Practice Model for the Edge of Care service. This will align with Signs of Safety and meet the Care Home regulations.

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Corporate Parenting Panel**10 November 2023****Contextualised Safeguarding Update**
Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children’s Social Care, Children and Young People’s Services, Durham County Council
Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report will demonstrate the work carried out by the Erase team and how it contributed to its overall mission during the reporting period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Executive summary

- 2 In Durham we have two specialist teams who work with children who are at risk due to contextual safeguarding: the Adolescent Safeguarding and Exploitation Team (ASET) and ERASE Teams.
- 3 The ASET vision is a future where young people feel safe beyond their own homes because their communities and our safeguarding system can, and will, protect them from harm. ASET provides assessment and care-planning in line with statutory safeguarding procedures and deliver interventions to young people who are victims or at risk of extra-familial harm or experiencing complex issues and comorbidities.
- 4 ASET will also provide specialist advice and guidance to workers where a young person and/or their siblings are already open to services. This will reduce the need to change workers while ensuring young people receive a specialist service. ASET are a specialist knowledge hub who will provide advice and guidance and support the delivery of evidence-based practice while upskilling of the wider workforce.
- 5 All work with families will be based on a solution focused, strengths based, and relation-based approach using the Signs of Safety framework for assessment and intervention.
- 6 The Erase Team’s mission is:
 - to help and support young people in reducing the risk of exploitation and missing from home;

- to provide young people with a safe space to share their views and wishes, while working holistically with other professionals to disrupt, safety plan and help increase safety and happiness for our young people;
- to support young people in building their understanding of exploitation, building their resilience, and empowering them to identify signs of grooming and exploitation;
- to support parents and carers to spot warning signs of exploitation, implement rules and boundaries, safety planning and understand how to respond to their young people to support in the aim of reducing the risk of exploitation and keep them safe”.

- 7 There are two functions of the Erase Team:
- (a) to fulfil the statutory responsibility for Return Home Interviews when children go missing from home/care; and,
 - (b) to provide interventions to those at high risk due to exploitation.
- 8 The Erase Team are considered the leads in contextual safeguarding in Children’s Services and therefore they provide advice and guidance to the workforce, particularly when children are assessed as medium and low risk.
- 9 In 2022/23, 386 children were assessed using the Child Exploitation Matrix; of those 65 were assessed as high, 223 as medium and 98 as low risk. When the Erase team have been involved for those assessed as high risk, the risk has reduced. Most children’s risk was reduced; however a small number are receiving ongoing interventions.
- 10 The team are now holding multi-agency mapping meetings which is a collaborative response to exploitation to ensure joint up working. There have been five mapping meetings in the past year, these will increase throughout 2023/24.
- 11 The team’s performance in relation to children who are missing is improving, but not yet meeting targets. The number of children missing reduced to 356 in 2022/23, but the number of missing episodes increased to 1,535. We aim to offer every child a return home interview and complete it within 72 hours.
- 12 Feedback that the team receive is very positive, one young person has written a testimonial to demonstrate the work that we do to support our young people.

Recommendations

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

Background

Staffing

- 14 The ERASE team is made up of one Team Manager, four Child Exploitation Workers and three Missing Coordinators. There have been some changes to the staffing team throughout 2022/23, however recruitment has been successful, and all vacancies have been filled.
- 15 The ASET Team consists of a Team Manager, Social Work Consultant and six Social Workers.
- 16 The team has access to a Therapeutic Social Worker from Full Circle. Their role is to offer a therapeutic lens when supervising plans for our young people, this happens through Supervision of Child Exploitation workers. The Therapeutic Social Worker is also available to offer clinical supervision to staff, providing a safe space to reflect on the complex and highly emotive work being carried out with some of our most complex young people in Durham. This helps to ensure staff have the resilience and skills they need to carry out this complex work.

Performance of Child Exploitation Service

- 17 The ASET Team is a social work team carrying out the statutory social work responsibilities. Referrals to the team come via the front door or transfer from Families First Teams.
- 18 Referrals can be made into the Erase Team by any professional working with a child. The referrer will complete an Exploitation Matrix, which is a specialist tool designed to understand more about each young person's vulnerabilities to exploitation. This is then submitted to a multi-agency Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker (CEVT) meeting where a team of professionals with expertise in exploitation will review the matrix and assess the level of risk (Low, Medium, or High).
- 19 When risk is assessed as Low/Medium the CEVT meeting will offer advice and guidance to the child or young person's social worker or lead professional, the child/young person will not directly receive any ongoing support or interventions through Erase. It is the responsibility of their allocated worker to assess and respond to risk of exploitation within their existing assessments, plans and reviews. However, the Erase team can offer advice and guidance to all professionals on an ongoing basis.
- 20 When children are assessed as High Risk at CEVT meeting, they will be allocated a Child Exploitation Worker (CE Worker) and be referred to Child Exploitation Group (CEG). These children will often be open to ASET Team, however not all children meet the team's criteria, therefore

it is important we share expertise of both teams across the whole service.

- 21 CE Workers build understanding of exploitation, building resilience and empower young people and their families. They do this by building relationships with young people and their families, provide intervention, education, and support; and by working collaboratively with all agencies to intervene and create safety for a child. They will gather and submit intelligence to police to build a bigger picture of exploitation in Durham. They will educate and upskill families on safety planning, grooming, healthy relationships, staying safe online and in the community, risk and risk awareness, sexual health, perpetrator strategies, self-esteem, and confidence building.
- 22 The purpose of CEG is to provide strategic oversight of those children who are at most risk of exploitation in Durham.
- 23 In 2022/23 the CEVT reviewed 386 referrals, of which 65 were assessed as High Risk, 223 were medium risk and 98 were low risk. More children were referred due to sexual exploitation than criminal exploitation. Only four children referred were perceived to be at risk of both criminal and sexual exploitation. These young people were assessed as medium risk.
- 24 The outcomes for young people reviewed as high risk between April 2022 and March 2023 then allocated an Erase CE Worker and the outcomes for where they are now in relation to their risk of CE:
 - 59% of those young people who were identified as being at high risk of CSE had risk reduced to low;
 - 17% have a reduced risk level of medium;
 - 24% remain high risk.

It must be considered that those young people reviewed as high risk of CE in Q4 have had a limited amount of intervention since the point of being allocated a CE Interventions Worker, therefore there is still opportunity for this risk to reduce.

- 25 For young people who are identified as at high and moderate risk of sexual exploitation at CEVT and are in the process of transitioning to adulthood, referral advice to Changing Lives is provided to professionals currently supporting the young person. Changing Lives work with young people post 18 years old and can support with a multitude of issues. The CE team have a good working relationship with Changing Lives and support one another. Changing Lives professionals are invited to attend CEVT and CEG. If our CE workers don't feel that

the risk of exploitation has reduced enough by a young person's 18th birthday, they will make a referral to Changing Lives and to support the transition, as we know that exploitation does not end when children reach adulthood. Unfortunately, we are still in the process of identifying support for those at risk of criminal exploitation, especially specialised support for male victims.

- 26 41 referrals were re-referrals, which is 12% (2018-present day).
- 27 The CE Interventions Workers are now using the Teen Star tool with the young people they are working with. This has helped to illustrate the wider outcomes for the young people who are receiving support from the ERASE CE Team. They are mapped against different aspects of their life: drug and alcohol use, wellbeing, safety, structure and education, behaviour, and family using a scale where 0 is poor and 5 represents the best possible outcome. Analysis of the tool tells us that the areas young people have particularly noted an improvement are drug & alcohol and wellbeing, although there is a slight improvement in all areas, which is positive.

Mapping Meetings

- 28 In Durham we hold regular partnership mapping meetings, that allows professionals to see both risks and safety within peer networks and social circles, as well as in spaces and places outside of their home. These currently take place once every 2/3 months however, we look to improve this and are now starting to hold mapping meetings once a month.
- 29 Through carrying out peer mapping exercises, practitioners can identify and understand the nature and extent of the harm outside of the young person home, The aim is to bring together those tasked with safeguarding and those responsible for disruption and enforcement to ensure a joined-up response.
- 30 Five mapping meetings took place in 2022/23. Though only five larger scale mapping meetings have taken place so far, we are increasing these in frequency. Our child exploitation intervention workers also conduct peer mapping sessions with all young people they work with.

Performance of the Missing From Home (MFH) Team comparisons 2021/22 vs 2022/23.

- 31 The total number of missing children (CIN, CP and CiC) reduced from 402 in 2021/22 to 356 in 2022/23. However, the number of episodes increased from 1,488 to 1,535. The average number of hours children were missing increased from 19 to 23. The most common age of children missing is 15, which has come down from 16. The number of

return home interviews offered increased from 97% to 99% this year, offering young people with a safe space to share their views and wishes. However, the number accepted reduced from 71% to 69% and the number completed reduced from 71% to 68%. The number of return home interviews completed within 72 hours jumped from 24% to 49%.

- 32 For children in care we saw an increase in the number of children going missing from 125 to 142 in 2022/23. The number of missing episodes increased from 868 to 992. The average number of hours our children in care were missing increased from 20 to 23 in the past year. The average age reduced from 17 to 15. We offered 2% more return home interviews (99%) but the number accepted dipped from 71% to 68%, which was the same for percentage completed. However, when they were completed, there was a significant jump from 28% completed in 72 hours to 58%.
- 33 For the 69.6% of young people who accepted a return to home interview (RTHI), 99.1% of these took place. This means nine out of 1,045 young people did not receive the RTHI. When further investigated, the following reasons were identified:
 - 34 Three children - RTHI did take place however the form was created on a consecutive missing episode. One form was used to cover multiple missing episodes.
 - 35 Five children - RTHI is recorded on LCS – Data is incorrect.
 - 36 Multiple attempts made to make contact were unsuccessful – Recorded incorrectly by worker on LCS.
 - 37 The data tells us that an overall of 21 young people (-6 CIC) were not offered a RTHI, further investigation shows that in some of these cases, RTHI were completed but completed as part of a cluster of missing episodes where LCS is not able to distinguish this. Other reasons mirror those as listed above.

Summary of data for Children missing from our Care, comparison from 2021/22 to 2022/23

- 38 The data tells us that children in our care receive the same service, in terms of timeliness and response to return home interviews than those who live at home with family.
- 39 Compared to the same period last year, there has been an increase in the amount of young people who are looked after being reported missing, and a decrease for those who remain living with family. We recognise that push and pull factors are more prominent for young people who are looked after and in temporary placements. We

acknowledge that identifying suitable long-term accommodation for young people has been a challenge, resulting in changes in placement and care staff. We know that this increases the risk of young people going missing until their forever home is sourced. While those young people who are supported by family members are likely to have a stronger sense of belonging and networks of support to further disrupt and minimise worries around missing episodes.

- 40 Young people receiving a RTHI within 72 hours has improved quite significantly, over doubling the amount being completed this year in comparison to last year. This area has been a strong focus for the team throughout the last year and changes that have been made can be evidenced in the outcomes. This will continue to be an area of development.

April 2022 – March 2023 – Declined RTHI

- 41 The data shows that in the last year 358 children had a total of 1537 missing episodes; it also shows that 460 RTHI were declined by 138 children.
- 42 In terms of Children Looked After, there were 142 children with a total of 992 missing episodes. RTHI were not completed on 310 missing episodes which equates to 62 children.

Frequently Missing

- 43 The most frequent missing (top 11) Children Looked After make-up a total of 335 missing episodes. The table below outlines the number of missing episodes, the number in which were declined and %.

Young Person	Number of missing episodes	Declined	%
1	107	67	62
2	56	18	32
3	49	13	26
4	44	10	23
5	39	23	60
6	38	16	42
7	22	7	32
8	17	5	29
9	15	4	27
10	14	7	50
11	14	8	57

- 44 As you can see, the young person with the most missing episodes is significantly high and the declined from this young person missing periods, makes up 22% of all CLA declined RTHI's. It must be noted that this particular young person often returns then goes missing within hours. This pattern of missing impacts on the RTHI being able to be completed.
- 45 Current practice means one RTHI would be completed capturing several missing episodes; currently LCS does not capture this. Feedback from the Police Child Exploitation Team is there has been a significant improvement in quality of information captured by the RTHI workers. The analysis of information has improved, which has allowed better insight into risks YP are exposed to when missing, highlight hot spots and making correlations between YP missing at the same time or with the same people, where before with different workers completing the RTHIs it would not be possible to make these links.
- 46 There is a weekly CE Team discussion with the Police re: who we are most worried about that week, this ensures there is effective sharing of concerns and identified next steps. We are now recording post codes of where the young person went missing from and where they were found. We are also recording info re. school to ensure there is a more holistic understanding of the current worries and strengths for the young person.

Development Activity

- 47 **Governance:** ongoing work with the DSCP and Strategic CEG to align the practice within the Erase team to the strategic vision. Partnership developments of Harm outside the Home, awareness of the Government Response to the Care review and recommendations expected in the autumn. Work within children services to ensure the expertise of the Erase team supports the wider service. Informing the development of the practice guide and procedures for Harm Outside the Home for Children Services.
- 48 **Resources / Staffing:** work is ongoing to monitor demand and resources within both exploitation and missing. The work of the Missing Project has evidence demand required an increase in staffing to achieve the 72hr turn around and work on recruitment is progressing. Although there have been vacancies throughout the year, they have been successfully filled.
- 49 **Child Exploitation:** currently caseloads are high with some workers holding 20+ cases, it is recognised that such high caseloads do not provide the opportunity to build effective working relationship with young people at risk of being exploited and does not allow the intensive relational practice model to be embedded. We are in the process of

looking at increasing the resource within the child exploitation element team with a view that caseloads will reduce to less than ten.

- 50 **Missing Project:** Action Plan, this is an ongoing piece of work that involves the partnership, the action plan sets out clear development for the team in respect of quality of RTHI information, effective information sharing and disruption that reduces and disrupts the frequency and length of missing episodes. This work cuts across children services and into Early Help.
- 51 **Performance and Quality Assurance:** the missing power BI dashboard has been developed and it allows for the interrogation of performance in respect of missing as is evidenced in the detail of the report above. Further work is ongoing with the systems team to look at how we capture the impact of the work undertaken in missing on the child. This involves looking at case notes / forms that will inform further reporting. The same work is happening in respect of Child Exploitation. Performance data will be reported to monthly Quality and Performance Clinics where the team will be measured against targets set, with Head of Service oversight.
- 52 **Service Development:** a service specification is being developed with the team looking at their vision to delivering outstanding services to children who go missing and / or are being exploited in Durham. This will include developing the procedures for the team and performance measures.
- 53 **Collaboration and Co Production:** work with the Children in care Council and the Youth Council to look at how we improve the service to meet the needs of children and young people.

Main implications

- 54 No implications of note.

Conclusion

- 55 Children and young people in Durham who are at risk of extra-familial harm continue to be supported through innovative specialist services. These children benefit from multi-agency ownership of risk through the child exploitation group (CEG) and where risk is identified as high, review of children's outcomes tells us that risk reduces over time with specialist intervention. This work needs to further develop, to improve performance for children who are missing. To broaden the offer of support to those at low/medium risk of extra-familial harm to prevent further escalation. There is a multi-agency owned plan to support these improvements, which is regularly reviewed.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

Authors

Siobhan Davies

Tel: 03000 263514

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

No implications.

Finance

No implications.

Consultation

Children and young people are involved in consultation wherever necessary. Young People are being asked to consult on development of RTHI paperwork. They will also be consulted in future on 'what good practice looks like'.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

No implications.

Climate Change

No implications.

Human Rights

No implications.

Crime and Disorder

No implications.

Staffing

No implications.

Accommodation

No implications.

Risk

Effective support for children who are missing or at risk outside of the home is essential to reducing risk to children and young people in Durham. The developments identified within the report will support practice to go further in keeping children safe in the community.

Procurement

No implications

Corporate Parenting Panel

10 November 2023

**Review of the Independent Visitor Service
for Children in Care**



Report of County Durham Youth Justice Service

Mark den Hollander, Independent Visitor Coordinator

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report introduces the role of the Independent Visitor (IV) Service managed by the Independent Visitor Coordinator, based with County Durham Youth Justice Service.
- 2 To summarise the current position of the IV service and highlight developments that have taken place over the past 12 months. This includes recruitment of volunteers, referrals of young people to the service and ensuring effective matching of young people with Independent Visitors.
- 3 To examine the impact of the matches upon young people and volunteers and evidence the development of the service in response to need and request. (Case Study – Appendix A)
- 4 To examine the future development of the service including challenges and how these can be effectively resolved.

Executive summary

- 5 The Independent Visitor Service is a statutory obligation of every local authority highlighted in the Children's Act 1989 to provide to a young person an Independent Visitor when requested and in conjunction with the advice of a social worker, key worker or family member.
- 6 Since September 2020, the service began face-to-face work with young people and the recruitment of volunteers to be Independent Visitors. The service is funded to meet a target of 50 referrals and 30 matches in each year and has exceeded this every year.

- 7 Being an Independent Visitor is considered a long-term commitment with a young person and after three years of service, the service has begun to examine the impact of the involvements on volunteers, young people and with social workers.
- 8 With three years of active service in place, the IV service can now effectively look at patterns, challenges and issues that may affect the continued development in the future, such as ongoing recruitment of volunteers or budget implications.

Recommendation(s)

- 9 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to:
 - (a) Note the content of this report.
 - (b) Note the challenges to the service as it develops in the future.
 - (c) To further update the Corporate Parenting Panel in 12 months on progress and development.

Background

- 10 The role of Independent Visitor was first introduced as a statutory service for '*looked after children*' in the Children's Act of 1989. The Act outlined the statutory responsibility of local authorities to offer an Independent Visitor to any child that they are looking after, a volunteer to visit, befriend and advise the child as part of their care plan.
- 11 The Independent Visitor Service sits with Durham County Council within the Youth Justice Service. The Youth Justice service has appropriate links to services that link with Independent Visitors – Children and Young Peoples Services, speech and language services, criminal justice services and other relevant partnerships.

Current position

- 12 Since October 2022, 43 Independent Visitors have been recruited. By the end of October 2023, there were 75 active volunteers and 18 inactive due to personal circumstances (130 volunteers since September 2020, 37 leaving for personal reasons). Periods of recruitment can be busy or quiet, a recent campaign generating 18 new volunteers included in the totals.
- 13 Since October 2022, there have been 73 referrals to the service and 60 matches (145 referrals and 130 matches since September 2020). 27 matches have concluded this year (70 matches in total). Such conclusions are mainly due to changes in the circumstances of young people and occasionally with volunteers. The service will rematch young people where an IV leaves the service.
- 14 By the end of October 2023, there are 59 matches occurring. There are currently 15 young people waiting, 11 of these in the process of being matched. The remaining 4 are waiting for permanent accommodation and will be matched once this has been secured.

Service Impact

- 15 Service impact is important for a person-centred service but is also challenging to collect. The impact is based on qualitative rather than quantitative responses. The service examines the responses from young people, volunteers and social workers taken from face-to-face contact with the young people by the Independent Visitor Coordinator, from volunteers during supervisions and group events and social workers at Care Review meetings.
- 16 After a young person has been matched for over one year, the Independent Visitor Coordinator arranges a visit with that young person to talk about the service. During these conversations, the young person

is asked their thoughts about the service and their independent visitor. Having had 12 visits with young people, 98% have been very satisfied with the person they have been matched with and feel they have benefited from having an IV.

- 17 Independent Visitors and the Coordinator attend Care Review meetings for young people approximately every 6 months to talk about the matches. This is also an opportunity to review objectives and receive feedback from social workers and other professionals. Since October 2022, 106 Care Review meetings have been attended (246 since Sept 2020), there has been 100% positive feedback from social workers and professionals about the impact of the IV service for the young person.
- 18 Independent Visitor receive supervision every 12 weeks with the Independent Visitor Coordinator. During this supervision, IVs are asked about the impact they feel they are having with the young person (92% could identify positive impact) and if they are enjoying the experience of being an IV (96% gave a positive response).

Future Development and challenges

- 19 As the IV service moves forward, the specific target is to meet the Durham County Council target of ensuring 50 referrals of children in care, of which 30 are matched annually. There is an aspiration to meet the National Independent Visitor Network (NIVN) target of matching 10% of children in care, currently 120 for County Durham.
- 20 To meet the Councils annual target, requires the recruitment of additional volunteers. Discussions are occurring with the Commissioner to examine a feasible level of recruitment as current levels are being exceeded annually and this puts pressure on the service.
- 21 Original budgets estimated that the budget would cover 50 active matches, under review, the current budget will cover approximately 60 active matches. The cost of current activities averages at £30 per visit with an additional 50-mile round trip travel expenses (£24). As the cost of living rises, the cost of activities increases. This clearly places an increasing pressure on the budget and discussions are occurring with the Commissioner about the finances.

Conclusion

- 22 The appointment of a specific IV Coordinator based in County Durham Youth Justice Service and the development of the service over the last three years has been a positive move for the service, ensuring a significant increase in the number of referrals (2020/21 – 17, 2021/22 - 68, 2022/23 – 70) matches (2020/21 – 15, 2021/22 – 41, 2022/23 – 74)

and volunteers (2020/21 – 14, 2021/22 – 44, 2022/23 - 68) to the service.

- 23 After three years of active delivery, we can evidence the positive impact the service has on a qualitative basis, talking with volunteers, young people and professionals, the service is reported as having a positive impact upon the young people it works with.
- 24 Discussions have been taking place with Commissioning about the implications of increasing volunteer numbers and the impact to the budget of increasing referrals.

Author

Mark den Hollander

Tel: 07584345947

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

It is a statutory duty of the Local Authority to ensure that all children and young people who are looked after, can access an independent visitor if they request one and it is in their best interests.

Finance

NONE.

Consultation

NONE.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

NONE

Climate Change

NONE.

Human Rights

NONE.

Crime and Disorder

NONE.

Staffing

NONE.

Accommodation

NONE.

Risk

NONE

Procurement

NONE.

Appendix 2: Case Study

Susan (name changed) has been with the Independent Visitor (IV) Service the longest of all current young people in the service. Having first been matched at 14, Susan was given a taste of what the service can offer, having trips out with the IV and an opportunity to discuss and receive support in challenging areas of her life.

In December 2021, Susan was matched with two IVs as a couple, the first time the service has tried this. This was an instant hit, and they began a productive and fun relationship, allowing time to build trust and rapport. As the relationship developed, the IVs began to develop skills with the young person, budgeting, shopping, bills, public transport and looking at future opportunities for training or work. Mostly, however, a real friendship was building.

Leaving care in July 2023, the service received permission from Commissioning to continue IV service into the journey into independence and Susan moved into a flat. The IVs were very supportive during this transition, supporting the practical elements of the move whilst having trips out to explore the transition from being in care to independence and the emotion behind this.

There was further move in September 2023 into a house. Once again, the IVs supported this move whilst supporting Susan to cope with the complex welfare state, organising training and offering emotional support.

In a settled place, the IV Coordinator explored the possibility of stopping the match and the IVs and Susan becoming friends. This must be a decision that the young person must come to. It was decided that the freedom that friendship offered outweighed the boundaries of the IV service at this stage of her life.

The match concluded in October 2023, and they are now friends, for life! They are all spending Christmas day together.

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Independent Visitor Service

Mark den Hollander
Independent Visitor Coordinator
County Durham Youth Justice Service



Role of the Independent Visitor

Improved social skills, friendships and mental health

- Developing relationship with a trusted adult/peer
- Making positive friendships
- Developing social skills
- Improved self esteem
- Improving confidence and feeling accepted

Raising Aspirations and improving practical life skills

- Increased opportunity to a variety of cultural, leisure and sporting activities
- Exploring education and training
- Becoming more independent
- Making choices
- Using different transports
- Budgeting and planning

Current Position (to August 2022)

Volunteers

- Since October 2022, 43 new IVs recruited (currently 75 active)
- An increase 26 since last year (130 recruited since Sept 2020)

Matches

- 73 referrals since October 2022, 60 matches occurring
- Since September 2020, 145 referrals, 130 matches.
- 27 matches have concluded this year, (70 matches in total)
- Currently, 59 active matches, 15 young people on the waiting list

Service Impact

- A qualitative response – care review meetings, meetings with young people and volunteer feedback.
- Care Review Meetings – meetings with social workers, foster carers, key workers and other professionals (100% positive feedback).
- Young person meetings – after one year of matching, 12 this year (98% positive feedback about the IV and the match impact)
- Volunteer Supervisions – every 12 weeks to discuss the matches, (92% see positive impact with their young person, 96% enjoy the volunteering experience).

Future Development

- To reach the National Independent Visitor Service (NIVN) target of matching 10% of children in care (120) with an Independent Visitor
- Exceeding the Durham County Council target of 50 referrals and 30 matches annually.
- Acknowledge that each activity visit averages at £30 with transport costs of £24 and that increased living costs impact the cost of transport and activities
- Acknowledge that a further 50 Independent Visitors would be needed to reach 120, 10% of the children in care, pressure on current resource.
- Discussions occurring with Commissioning and a report to go to Senior Managers in November 2023.

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