



Corporate Parenting Panel

Date **Friday 11 April 2025**
Time **9.30 am**
Venue **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham**

Business Part A

Items which are open to the public and press

- 1 Apologies for Absence
- 2 Substitute Members
- 3 Minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2025 (Pages 3 - 12)
- 4 Declarations of Interest
- 5 Number of Children in Our Care and Care Leavers - Verbal update from Head of Children's Social Care / Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children
- 6 Ofsted Updates - Verbal update from Head of Children's Social Care / Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children
- 7 Proud Moments - Verbal update from Strategic Managers
- 8 Update from CICC: Care Day 2025 - Verbal update from young people from the Children in Care Council
- 9 Children with Disabilities Annual Update - Report and presentation of Head of Children's Social Care (Pages 13 - 30)
- 10 Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration
- 11 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)

- 12 Regulation 44 Visits - External Children's Homes - Report of Head of Integrated Commissioning Service (Pages 31 - 38)

- 13 Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration.

Helen Bradley
Director of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
3 April 2025

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

Councillor M Walton (Vice-Chair)

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, C Bell, J Clark, S Deinali, J Griffiths, T Henderson, B Kellett, L Mavin, D Oliver, S Quinn, A Reed, K Robson, K Rooney, A Savory, P Sexton, C Varty, J Watson and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

J Bell, C Brown, M Johnson, J McCarthy, E Reed, W Taylor, F Tweddle and Children in Care Council representatives

Contact: Jill Hogg

Tel: 03000 269 711

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2 County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 21 February 2025** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Walton in the Chair

Members of the Panel:

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, S Deinali, J Griffiths, B Kellett, L Mavin, D Oliver, S Quinn, A Reed, K Robson, K Rooney and C Varty.

Co-opted Members:

Cory, J Bell, Luke, J McCarthy and Mason

Also Present:

Laura Armstrong – Professional Practice Manager
Rachel Farnham – Head of Children’s Social Care
Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager
Paula Jemson – Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence
Rob Johnson – Project Manager, Investing in Children
Helen McAloon – Strategy Officer
Lee Peacock – Participation and Engagement Officer
Paul Rudd – Strategic Manager for Children’s Homes
Martyn Stenton – Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children
Melanie Stubbs – Head of the Virtual School
Jayne Watson – Senior Policy and Partnerships Officer

Prior to the formal business, the Chair announced that Councillor Hunt had stepped down from the Panel and she placed on record the Committee’s thanks to Councillor Hunt for her valuable contribution to the Panel.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Clark, A Savory, M Simmons and M Wilson; from Co-opted Members Michael Johnson and Wendy Taylor and from officer Bernadette Toomey.

2 Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3 Minutes

With an amendment to minute number 9 to clarify that the comment made by Mason related to his concerns for care leavers who find themselves stuck in the benefit trap, when they would prefer to be in education, employment or training and the impact that can have on their health and wellbeing, the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 17 January 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair recalled that, at the previous meeting, the Strategic Manager for Progression and Learning asked members to consider what more could be done to increase the number of ringfenced apprenticeships for care leavers. Members were reminded to provide suggestions to the Senior Policy and Partnerships Officer.

The Chair referred to the question posed by Mason at the previous meeting regarding the number of care leavers receiving benefits. Martyn Stenton, Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children explained that the most up to date information from the Department for Work and Pensions was from 2023 when approximately 40% of care leavers aged 19-21 were claiming Universal Credit and this figure did not include other young people who may have been claiming other types of benefit. This highlighted that a significant number of young people transitioning from care accessed financial support. Statistics relating to care leavers over the age of 21 claiming Universal Credit were not readily available.

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Number of Children In Our Care and Care Leavers

The Head of Children's Social Care, Rachel Farnham, informed the Panel that the total number of children in our care was 1,192, which included 34 young people awaiting adoption and 55 young people in the care population who were unaccompanied asylum seeking young people. 89 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people were care leavers and the total number of care leavers was 435.

6 Ofsted Updates

The Head of Children's Social Care updated the Panel that recent Ofsted Inspections rated Elderhirst Children's Home as 'good' and Hudson House Children's Home as 'outstanding'. The Head of Children's Social Care and the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children thanked the Strategic Manager for Children's Homes, the Registered Managers of the homes and all the staff, who had worked hard to achieve these good outcomes.

Inspections had taken place at Park House, Hickstead Rise and Aycliffe Secure Centre and the outcomes would be reported in due course.

7 Proud Moments

The Professional Practice Manager, Laura Armstrong, shared her proud moment at the Celebrating Practice Week event which was held on 10 February 2025. Young people helped to host various stalls including the care leavers' hub cake stall. One of the young people concluded the day with their inspiring closing remarks. Over £900 was raised in total for care leavers which Care Leaders offered to match.

8 Supply Packs

The Panel received an update and presentation on the Supply Packs project presented by Luke (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

Delivering the presentation, Luke explained that the packs, which were originally named 'Coming into Care Packs', were born from an idea suggested by the young people of the Children in Care Council (CiCC). The young people subsequently decided to change the name to 'Supply Packs'. The purpose of the packs was to provide personal items to comfort children and young people who were placed into care, in emergency circumstances.

The CiCC was granted initial funding to create the packs in August 2024 when 60 packs were put together by young people, with help from practitioners. The packs were given to the Families First and Emergency Duty teams to be distributed to young people entering care. Feedback from the young people who had received the packs included that the packs had helped them to settle into their new homes and the fact that young people with care experience were responsible for the project, made the gesture even more meaningful.

Luke informed the Panel that further meetings were held in January and February with the CiCC, to share ideas for items to be included in future packs.

An event was being held on 28 February 2025 at 12 noon at the Sjovell Centre in Framwellgate Moor and members were invited to join the young people to assemble the next batch of packs.

Rob Johnson, Project Manager for Investing in Children thanked staff from the Administration team for their support with the project.

The Chair remarked that it was pleasing to see that the young people were suggesting items to take to school, to be included in the packs.

Resolved:

That the content of the report be noted.

9 Experts Through Experience

The Panel viewed a presentation and video which provided details as to how young people scrutinise various parts of the service and make recommendations for improvements (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

Cory explained how the young people discuss subjects that they would like to investigate, with managers and critical friends and the coproduction aspect of the investigations relied on gaining a consensus. The Panel heard that the next enquiry would investigate hearing the voices of young people living in our children's homes, in order to learn more about their lived experiences.

Luke recited a poem entitled 'Celebrating Every Journey' which reflected the importance of recognising that all young people have different perceptions of their experiences. He explained the work of the Experts group sought to gather as much of that lived experience as possible, to inform services of the future. Luke spoke of the value in young people discussing their feelings, informally, with other young people who have had similar experiences.

Cory referred to the mutual respect that was shown during the discussions, with questions being asked sensitively to ensure that the young people felt comfortable sharing their views. Rachel Harris, Service Improvement Manager, commented that she was one of the supporting officers present at the discussions and she observed how well the young people understood each other, having shared similar experiences. She added that even experienced practitioners could benefit from observing the discussions between the young people.

The Chair asked how the Experts dealt with situations when there were differences of opinion.

Cory responded that the young people had learnt to empathise and respect each other. He highlighted that they consider alternative viewpoints to be opportunities to look deeper into why a person feels a particular way and they work to develop solutions, to reach agreement on the way forward.

Laura Armstrong, Professional Practice Manager, commended the young people and she spoke of how the practitioners ensure the investigations are coproduced safely. She also thanked the Lee Peacock, Participation and Engagement Officer and Darryl Samuels, Workforce Development Lead, who helped to train the young people. Cory, on behalf of the Experts, paid tribute to the practitioners and critical friends who had empowered the young people and provided the platform to enable the young people to share their voices.

Mason commented that he would like to see an investigation into how to better support young people's emotional and physical health and more opportunities for young people to explore as many activities as possible to help them identify what makes them happy. He added that he would be interested in joining the Experts Through Experience group, to investigate the support systems currently in place.

The Service Improvement Manager referred to work carried out by Children's Social Care and a Community Interest Company on research into the benefits gained from creative arts for care experienced young people and the service had linked with Cultural Services, with a view to developing a creative arts project in the future.

10 Protected Characteristics Update

The Head of Children's Social Care provided a verbal update on the Council meeting held on 22 January 2025 at which the Council considered a report of the Corporate Parenting Panel which sought agreement for care experience to be adopted as a local protected characteristic in County Durham.

The Head of Children's Social Care spoke of how proud she was of all the young people who had progressed this piece of work and she thanked the Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel for presenting the report, which received support from across the Council.

The next steps included young people attending the Chief Executive's Extended Management Team (EMT) meeting on 5 March 2025 to discuss with the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Heads of Service, the development of an Implementation Board and a subsequent implementation plan.

The Panel agreed to receive regular progress updates on the work.

11 North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board Overview of Children in Care and Care Experience Week

The Panel received a presentation from Jo McCarthy, Deputy Designated Nurse for Safeguarding and Children in Care and Care Experience and Coopted Member of the Corporate Parenting Panel, which provided feedback from the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (NENC ICB) 'Lunch and Learn' sessions, which took place between 21-25 October, as part of Care Week (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

The Deputy Designated Nurse explained that Durham's Clinical Commissioning Group had integrated into the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board and an agreement was made that children in care and care experienced, will be a priority for the Integrated Care Board.

This was an opportunity to ensure that all Durham's young people, including those living outside the county, will have access to the same health offer. A Children in Care and Care Experience workstream was set up comprising 14 local authorities and, as part of Care Week in October, the NENC ICB hosted the 'Lunch and Learn' sessions. Over 500 people attended the sessions which reached wider than the north east and north Cumbria footprint. The sessions included the participation of young people, including Durham young people, who shared their experiences and their thoughts with regard to the future development of services. The Deputy Designated Nurse thanked the young people for giving up their time to attend the sessions adding that their contributions were of great value to the health perspective, particularly in relation to health assessments and the changes that occur at the age of 18. Some of the young people allowed their videos and poetry to be shared during the sessions which made a real impact.

During the sessions, information was provided on practice areas in Durham including the Peer Mentoring Programme, the support for unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and the Durham Works programme.

The Deputy Designated Nurse provided an overview of the next steps which included the introduction of a GP Pathway for Care Leavers across the ICB region and the development of a digital health information app, to link with the NHS app. The work will also focus on improving the engagement of young people, with lived experience, in coproduction. There will also be involvement in the work relating to Durham County Council's implementation of care experience as a local protected characteristic. Luke commented that he would like to see links being strengthened between health practitioners and the CiCC and the Deputy Designated Nurse agreed to discuss with Luke, opportunities to attend future CiCC meetings and she was aware that Karen Watson, Designated Nurse, had requested to attend a future regional CiCC meeting.

The Head of Children's Social Care suggested that it would be beneficial to have health representation on the implementation board for care experience as a local protected characteristic. She added that many young people, on reaching the age of 18, struggle with the transition to adult services and she would like to have more information on the ICB's plans in relation to support for trauma as she was aware that some areas provided specialist trauma services for children with care experience, as they transition. The Deputy Designated Nurse responded that she was aware that this was a focus area within the workstream and she would make enquiries to gain more details, for a future update to the Panel.

12 Performance Update

The Panel received the quarterly update report presented by Helen McAloon, Strategy Officer (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

Summarising key areas of performance, the Strategy Officer highlighted that the north east continued to have the highest number of children in care. The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people in care had reduced from 74 in December with 19 of those young people reaching the age of 18 and becoming care leavers. The number of children coming into and exiting care continued to align more closely than in previous months. During 2024, there had been a slight increase in children under the age of 9 coming into care and numbers in the 10-17 age cohort had reduced.

The number of young people in foster placement had reduced however the figure remained in line with benchmarks and the number of children in a family setting had increased.

With regard to missing from home, there was a slight increase in missing episodes for December however the number of children going missing had not changed which indicated an increase in the number of missing incidents per child. The percentage of return home interviews completed within 72 hours had increased to approximately 96%.

Referring to care leavers, the Strategy Officer explained that an increasing proportion of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people required care leaver support. 95% of young people aged 17-21 were in suitable accommodation. The proportion of care leavers in education, employment or training aged 17-18 was at 65% which was in line with the north east average, however, this was below the England average. For those aged 19 to 21, the percentage was 49% which was below benchmarks. The number of initial and review health assessments completed within timescales stood at 69% and 85% respectively.

Cory asked for clarification on the definition of unsuitable accommodation. Officers explained that custody and temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfast accommodation were classed as unsuitable accommodation. Secure accommodation was also classed as 'unsuitable' and whilst secure accommodation was of a very high standard, it was not the Council's preferred choice of accommodation for children in our care.

Cory observed that the percentage of 19-21 year olds in education, employment or training continued to fall and he asked what action was being taken to support young people. The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children informed Cory that a detailed presentation was given by the Head of Progression and Learning at the previous meeting and he offered to link Cory with the Head of Progression and Learning, for further information.

Councillor Deinali asked whether there was a set criterion for the standard of suitable accommodation. Officers clarified that suitability was based on a range of factors and the Staying Close team worked with young people who had tenancy agreements. Young people were offered wrap-around support when moving into supported accommodation and care leavers were entitled to a Setting Up Home allowance. Young People's Advisors also provided assistance to young people when setting-up their homes.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

13 Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report

The Panel received the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2023-24 report, for information (for copy see file of minutes).

14 Such other business

The Chair announced that a request had been received from young people to reconsider the timings of Corporate Parenting Panel meetings as the current timings conflicted with educational commitments. Members were asked to inform the Senior Partnerships and Policy Officer of any suggestions that they may have and the suggestions would then be included in the corporate process for meeting dates for the forthcoming municipal year. Councillor Quinn requested that it would be helpful if meeting times could avoid school drop-off and pick-up times. Councillor Reed referred to the possibility of holding hybrid meetings and the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children pointed out that the government had recently carried out a consultation on enabling hybrid attendance at local authority meetings and the outcome of the consultation was awaited.

15 Exclusion of the Public

Resolved:

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

16 Regulation 44 Visits – Internal Children’s Homes

Paul Rudd, Strategic Manager for Children’s Homes presented an update report and answered questions from the Panel on Regulation 44 visits relating to internal Children’s Homes (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes).

The Senior Policy and Partnerships Officer presented the Regulation 44 Alignment showing current vacancies. The Panel agreed that it would be appropriate for the memberships to be refreshed following the forthcoming elections.

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Corporate Parenting Panel

11 April 2025

Children with Disabilities Annual Update



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, CYPS, DCC

Electoral divisions affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides an update on the progress of the Children with Disabilities Team within the last 12 months and the vision of how to continue moving forward.

Executive summary

- 2 Any child or young person with additional need is entitled to an assessment of need as set out under S17 of the Children Act 1989. The children's parents and carers are also considered as part of the assessment. The child or young person's level of need will determine which team is responsible for completing this assessment.
- 3 The Children with Disabilities Team (CwD) undertake assessments with the purpose of meeting the needs of children and young people, who have a permanent or severe disability. The team are a specialist service targeted at those children and young people who are aged 0 to 18.
- 4 Durham aspires to support families to care for their own children, and we do this by promoting the local offer, www.durham.gov.uk/localoffer.
- 5 The local offer is designed to help families find the very best support for children and young person, from 0 to 25 years with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). It provides information, advice and guidance about the types of services and support available.
- 6 Our children are some of the most vulnerable children therefore strong multi-agency working is critical ensuring children are safe and there is good evidence of this in the work of the service.
- 7 We believe that young people should always be able to participate fully in their lives and to share their views when decisions about them are

being made. The Children with Disabilities team strive to ensure our children's voices are heard using a range of direct work tools.

Recommendations

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

Background

- 9 The Children with Disabilities Team has an eligibility criterion that means they support the most complex of children and young people whose needs are so specialist they cannot access the targeted provision within the Local Offer.
- 10 There are children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) with social workers within the Families First Teams, whereby their assessed need does not require input from the CwD Team however there are established links between teams should additional advice and support be required. There has been work completed across the service to raise awareness of the Local Offer and the need to ensure parents/carers are supported to navigate this, accessing support services within their locality.
- 11 As of 13 January 2025, there are a total of 306 children open to the CwD Team (an increase of 13 of the number of 293 that was shared with Corporate Parenting Panel in 2024) of which 28 are children in our care. There are two other children in care due to move to the CwD team in the coming weeks, which will mean we will be supporting 30 children in our care (an increase of 3 young people from last year's panel). There are 2 children subject to a child protection plan (1 less than last year) and the remaining children receive social work support and services under Section 17 (Children Act 1989). Many children receive packages of short breaks support to enable them to meet and socialise with other young people in the community and to enable their parents/carers to have a break from their caring responsibilities.
- 12 The Navigation Team continue to support as co-workers for children and young people from the age of 14 and take full case responsibility from the age of 18. The Children with Disabilities Team and the Navigation Team work closely together to ensure effective joint working to support young people to transition into independence in a planned way for our children and young people.
- 13 Last year we shared with Corporate Parenting Panel that a new forum had been established to ensure that the Navigation Team are made aware of children and young people at an earlier stage, this has now been established over a year and all children and young people who are open to the CwD team and are aged 14 or over have been presented at this forum and accepted and will be allocated a navigation worker when this is needed in the preparation for adulthood. Those children and young people who receive support outside of the CwD team who are aged 14 and over, are also discussed within this forum.

What we told you was our next steps in the Corporate Parenting Panel 2024

- 14 Preparation for Adulthood to be a focus on every child and family assessment for 14 plus and focused, in all plans for disabled children;
- 15 We are pleased to update Corporate Parenting Panel that of the 306, over 100 of these young people are 14 years and over and all these young people have a 'transitions implications' aspect of their child and family assessment completed, this incorporates all the preparation for adults' headings that are required in a Care Act adults' assessment. All these children and young people have been presented at the navigation forum and are open to the Navigation Team. All children have an annual reassessment in line with their birthday month and as such there is a referral made in line with the 14th birthday to the navigation team. This is featuring in Care Planning and Social Care Advice for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) completed by the CwD team.
- 16 Social Care advice to be completed alongside every annual reassessment and shared with education provisions;
- 17 We are pleased to inform that this is in place for every child open to the service and is being completed in line with annual reassessments. We are confident that social care advice is completed for all children who are open to the Children with Disability Team with an active plan, whether this be a child in need, child protection or child in care plan.
- 18 The quality of Social Care Advice provided by the CwD Team are, within audits recognised to be of good quality, accurately reflecting their social care needs. There continues to be a focus upon this area following the SEND inspection, and work is ongoing across the Partnership to ensure such consistency is evident across all agencies.
- 19 Continue to develop new and creative ways of communicating and getting the voice of our most vulnerable disabled children who do not have words to communicate;
- 20 This will continue to be an action as we support children and young people with the most complex of needs. We use a variety of tools including Picture Exchange Communication System, symbols, some signs, Mind of My Own Express where this is accessible, pictures and social stories for the children and young people we work with, and some lovely examples are shared in the accompanying presentation.

- 21 Continue to develop opportunities for disabled children for short breaks through our commissioned services and personalised pots of funding to support specialist creative packages;
- 22 In the last 12 months our colleagues in Commissioning have worked hard to develop a flexible framework and supported with provider engagement sessions that has led to us having a much broader framework that we hope will allow much more choice around short breaks for disabled children. We have continued to use a personalisation pot that is accessible to all teams to make applications up to £200 for children not accessing a service from CwD and up to £100 for those accessing a service, this needs to be specific in a creative solution to provide a meaningful activity for a disabled child and allowing their carer a break. We have seen lots of creative applications that have included specialist swim lessons, sports classes that require a 1-1, sensory activities and equipment. This will continue to be used in this way, the smaller pots mean that a larger number of children and young people with additional needs are benefiting from this in County Durham.
- 23 Continue to work closely with our home finder team around identifying specialist homes for our disabled children close to home.
- 24 In the last 12 months we have of course needed to identify specialist provisions for our complex young people, but we have been able to, on the whole, identify these much closer to home than we have historically. We have linked in with new provisions and we have had two young people come into specialist residential provisions that we have been able to identify in the local area and they have remained close to their family home. This will continue to be a work in progress because we continue to support some children and young people at a distance from County Durham but we continue to look for ways for them to be closer to their family links.

What our SEND Inspection of Durham Local Area Partnership told us

- 25 Durham County Council had an area SEND inspection take place in 2024. As always, we are guided with areas for learning and development. The CwD Team were a real focus within this inspection and the feedback highlighted the positive work that has taken place in the recent months and years.
- 26 Highlighted what the area partnership is doing that is effective as follows:

- *The CwD social care team conducts thorough assessments of disabled children's needs. Children have their needs quickly and accurately identified. For example, social workers identify any needs arising from disability or environmental issues, and when needs are identified, social workers make prompt referrals to services and ensure support is quickly put in place. Specialist services are brought into holistic planning as needed.*
- *Early Help workers and CwD social workers are knowledgeable about the support available to children and young people and their families. Navigation workers ensure that support features in young people's future planning and continues into adulthood. For example, planning to support children with SEND as they approach adulthood starts when they become 14 years old. Navigation workers complete Care Act assessments and capacity assessments as needed. This ensures that young people who need continuing care and support from adult services post-18 have their care packages agreed in advance.*

A Child's Story

- 27 Last year we told you about a young person called Emily who until 2023 had spent some time living in a specialist children's home in London, we shared that we had found her a home in the North East and the social story that we had completed to support her with this transition. We wanted to update Corporate Parenting Panel that Emily is now 16 and continues to live in the North East in the same home. She has started college and is really enjoying her time there. Emily likes that she is able to see her family more often and they love that they can pop and see her without this needing to be a lengthy trip to London.
- 28 As part of our Investing in Children annual membership award Emily was visited for the annual report and her feedback was incorporated:
- *Emily explained: "I wanted to see my mam and my family more", which is happening more often now. It was really encouraging to learn about how much of a positive relationship Emily has with her social worker: "I can ring her; I really like her and she is nice and helped me see my mam more".*
 - *Emily has had her Social Worker for the last 4 years, and this relationship was clearly very important to Emily who had faced some difficult times in the last few years. Emily was given a piece of wedding cake from her Social Worker's recent wedding, which Emily was really happy about and really felt like she was always there for her.*



Education Health and Care Plans

- 29 All children open to the CwD Team have EHCPs, the improvements that we told Corporate Parenting Panel have been fully embedded and there is evidence of social care advice on every child's file that has been contributed to the EHCP review.

Short Breaks for Disabled Children

- 30 Short Breaks for children and young people with disabilities can be sometimes the only social opportunity for children to engage with their peers. This not only provides the children to have social opportunities but allows parents and carers to have a much-needed break. Having short breaks regularly means that children can remain to be cared for at home by their parents, carers, or foster carers.
- 31 As noted above, Commissioning colleagues have undertaken a huge piece of work in developing a flexible framework of providers who can support in identifying short breaks for disabled children. This has been a piece of engagement work across providers and has generated a larger pool of providers that we can approach for short breaks.
- 32 The waiting list for commissioned short breaks has significantly reduced with children and young people being matched to a provider within 8 weeks and usually sooner from the agreement to search for a commissioned provider.
- 33 The SEND Empowering Inclusive Communities (SENDEIC) has continued to grow capacity and increase access to universal community activities, expand the offer and remove any barriers to access. This is Durham's local offer around providing better access for disabled children to mainstream services. If a disabled child would like to access a community group, our Empowering Inclusive Community's Coordinator will support to overcome these barriers. There are more providers being commissioned through this offer and we are seeing a more proportionate intervention for children who may not necessarily need a social worker.

- 34 The CwD Team continue to believe that children and families are the expert in their care and strive to support in providing person centred care and where there are assessed needs that can be met through a direct payment, we will support this. Where a child lives with parents, meets our eligibility criteria and has assessed needs for short breaks, a direct payment can be offered for them to recruit a support worker on their own behalf, this allows families to be more creative in how their support needs can be met and also provides more flexibility. This is our preferred way to support families where possible. It can mean a wait when parents can't identify someone, and in those circumstances, we will support families to consider other support options.

Multi Agency working

- 35 Many children with disabilities, have complex health needs and their care packages are often co-ordinated jointly between Children's Social Care and Children's Continuing Care. The packages of support can be jointly funded and supported by a social worker alongside a continuing care nurse. This can include a specialist trained professional coming into the home for overnight stays and specialist hospice care. Like short breaks, this provides the same opportunities with specialist trained staff on hand to keep our children and young people safe.
- 36 There continues to be close working relationships with other colleagues across Children's Social Care, Navigation Team for young people 14 and over, Children in Care Teams. The CwD Team work closely alongside the SEN casework team and our virtual school. The team also offers a monthly step up and advice clinic to other teams.
- 37 We have established good and effective working relationships with our partners in Education, Health i.e., Occupational Therapy services, Continuing Care Services, Police, Local Authority Commissioning Teams, Health Commissioners, Early Help colleagues and the voluntary services, Advocacy service and with Durham Carers.
- 38 The Local Authority commission Durham Carers to complete parent/carer needs assessments for carers of children with additional needs.

What others think

- 39 As a team we encourage feedback from other's experiences. This enables us to assess the quality of our working relationships between children, families and practitioners. It also enables the team to celebrate good practice, build on strengths and take steps to make improvements where needed.

- 40 Durham County Council's Participation and Engagement officer has completed visits independently to get feedback from children and families about their experiences
- 41 One child fed back that they knew their worker well and felt that they could easily talk to their worker.
- 42 One child fed back that the support he got from Park House (our in-house short breaks unit) was a positive one for him.
- 43 One child fed back that they trusted their worker and she gave time to him.
- 44 One young person asked that the care team meeting was clearer with her which we have listened to, and her worker will continue to explore this with her.
- 45 Collaborative file audits have consistently found children and young people's case files within the CwD Service to be of a high quality with all scores out of 4 being 3 or 4 in the last 12 months.

Next Steps

- 46 The new flexible framework has just been established, in the next 12 months we would like to see that this is fully embedded and allows for better choice around short breaks for disabled children.
- 47 A new process is being developed to streamline the process from assessment of needs to implementing a care package that is to be embedded.
- 48 New work is taking place around the Local Offer and increasing the accessibility for parents and carers of disabled children.
- 49 Continue to work on identifying places for disabled children to live that are close to their networks and families.
- 50 Continue to upskill the workforce around creative ways to record children's wishes and feelings.

Conclusion

- 51 The report reflects a great deal of positive and effective working. The CwD team are passionate and committed about achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people in our care with disabilities.
- 52 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel will have oversight of the work of the CwD team during the previous year, and will understand the plans for the team as we move forward.

Authors

Caley Banks

Tel: 03000 265971

Mairi Pratt-White

Tel: 03000 267305

Claire Kenny

Tel: 03000 265295

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.

The Children Act 2004, requires that all higher education institutions do not discriminate against disabled students and prospective students. The Act establishes clear standards for promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people and for providing high quality services that meet their needs.

The Equality Act 2010 for disabled children covers disabled children and young people whether or not they have SEN. For the purpose of avoiding discrimination, anticipating and making reasonable adjustments, and meeting wider responsibilities, schools need to know who their disabled pupils are

The Children and family Act 2014, Part 3, sets out how local authorities work with children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

Finance

No implications.

Consultation and Engagement

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.

Children with Disabilities Annual Report

11 April 2025

What We Told You Last Year.....

- ❖ We told you all about how we are capturing the voice of disabled children and young people who we work with.
- ❖ We talked to you about how we ensure that children's needs are understood by the people who know them best and our vision to provide consistency to all children and young people open to the service by the social workers and Family Support workers in the team.
- ❖ We told you about our non-assessed short breaks and the local offer
- ❖ We talked to you about how we are ensuring that we provide EHCP social care advice.
- ❖ We shared some feedback from a young person.

This year we would like to share the stories of 3 of our Children with Disabilities in Residential Children's homes:

Ann, Emily and Hendrix

Ann

Ann has enjoyed lots of exciting activities this year. In the spring she went on her first holiday with placement to a caravan park near Scarborough. She had so much fun that she asked for staff to take her again which they did in the summer.



Ann went to a school friend's birthday party and asked if she could have one too. Ann's carers arranged a lovely party with a Peppa Pig cake, entertainment and mascots. Ann's Mam, Sister and Social Worker all came as well as her friends from school. Ann loved singing karaoke!

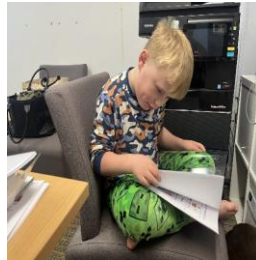
Ann has also had her bedroom redecorated to make it more grown up in accordance with her wishes.

Ann really enjoys the time she spends monthly with her Mam and sister. For Christmas Ann, with the help of staff, made a photo calendar for her Mam Jodie with pictures of all of the things she had been up to.

Hendrix

Hendrix has moved into a new specialist home this year and has settled in really well. He enjoys the swimming pool which is on site and also loves social activities like the Halloween Disco.

Hendrix has made a short film for us to watch.



Emily

Emily has had a busy year returning to education after a long gap. Emily loves college and speaks positively about her friends there. Emily also loves cars and staff have been taking her to the local BMW garage where she is a regular and enjoys sitting in the cars!

❖ Focus on Specialist Children's Homes

Sometimes we need to look for the right support for some of our disabled young people where they can have all of their needs met.

One of our big worries in the past has been that children have lived a long way from their local area at times, and we have had some real success for the 3 young people who we have just shared being able to have a specialist provision in their local area and maintain important links with their family while being supported with the level of care and support they need.

We will continue to strive to identify the right home for children, when this is needed and where we can as close to their home.

❖ Feedback to the CwD team from the SEND partnership inspection

- The Children with Disabilities social care team conducts thorough assessments of disabled children's needs. Children have their needs quickly and accurately identified. For example, social workers identify any needs arising from disability or environmental issues, and when needs are identified, social workers make prompt referrals to services and ensure support is quickly put in place. Specialist services are brought into holistic planning as needed.

- Early help workers and Children with Disabilities social workers are knowledgeable about the support available to children and young people and their families. Navigation workers ensure that support features in young people's future planning and continues into adulthood. For example, planning to support children with SEND as they approach adulthood starts when they become 14 years old. Navigation workers complete Care Act assessments and capacity assessments as needed. This ensures that young people who need continuing care and support from adult services post-18 have their care packages agreed in advance.

Thank you for listening – we look forward to sharing all our new news in 2026 in how we continue to support disabled children and young people.

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