

# **Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children and Young People aged 0–25 years**

**2020-22**

## **1 INTRODUCTION - CORPORATE PARENTING**

Looking after and protecting children and young people from harm is one of the most important jobs that a Local Authority can do. Where a child cannot remain safely at home for whatever reason and comes into the care of the Local Authority the council becomes the 'corporate parent' for that child. They are also the corporate parent for any young person who is under 25, who has been looked after for at least 13 weeks after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The term 'corporate parent' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees and partner agencies, in providing the best possible care and safeguarding support for the children and young people who are looked after by the council for the purpose of this strategy document. The associated responsibility and any reference to 'we' refers to all multi-agency partners. A child in the care of the council looks to the whole council to be the best parent it can be to that child. Every elected member and employee have statutory responsibility to act for that child in the same way that a good parent would act for their own child.

This strategy sets out Durham County Councils (DCC) ambition for our Children Looked After and our key priorities for 2020/21.

Our commitment is to all children and young people living in foster care and residential care; placed for adoption; living in supported lodgings or at home under Placement with Parent Regulations as well as those living in secure establishments or in custody, and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

## **2 DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL'S POSITION STATEMENT**

Durham County Council is committed to be the best parent it can for our Children Looked After and Care Leavers and strives to ensure that we deliver support and care that is as good as every good parent.

Durham County Council is committed to ensuring our Children Looked After and Care Leavers have the best opportunities available to them to achieve their full potential and that these are at least as good as the opportunities available for all other children. It is recognised that many children and young people face significantly greater levels of challenging circumstances before reaching adulthood than their peers and that this may mean that they have the need for additional support. Durham County Council are committed to ensuring that services are designed with and for Children Looked After and Care Leavers to meet their needs.

We want all of our Children Looked After to live in loving, stable and safe homes in a place that they can 'call home'. We want the people who are caring for them to be fun, loving, skilled, enthusiastic, ambitious and to fight their corner every step of the way. We want our children to form good, trusting, nurturing relationships with their carers and have positive experiences.

We want our children to live in stable placements, only moving when it is in their best interests or when they have chosen to do so.

Durham County Council is ambitious for our children and wants to encourage them to dream big and fulfil their potential. We are committed to ensuring that they receive the best education in the best schools and get additional support if they need it; that they are well prepared for independence and work through apprenticeships, high quality training, support into higher education and into university for those who aspire to do so.

We want our children to be well, healthy and have good emotional and mental health. We want to celebrate their achievements, no matter what these are, so that they can be proud of themselves and know that we are proud of them too. We want them to have fun and be able to develop their own interests and hobbies so that they can develop in confidence and establish friendships and make memories that they can fondly look back on in later years.

Across Durham County Council, we are committed to listening to our children and young people, hearing what they have to say and acting on it wherever possible. We will develop our services based on this feedback and regularly check with them that we have got it right. We will welcome their feedback and will use this to challenge the way we do things, and to make changes based on their views.

We want our care leavers to be well prepared for adulthood and want to ensure they feel part of an extended family who will be there for them if they are needed. We want our young people to be able to make mistakes and know that they will be supported to pick up the pieces if things don't go to plan. This is part of learning and developing, and an important part of growing up and it is really important that there is someone there to offer help, support and guidance at these times.

We want our young people to be able to move into their own homes when they are ready, and to feel safe and supported. This can be a big a challenge for any young person and we know that young people who leave care, often do so earlier than their peers.

We also want our young people to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to be able to independently manage their own health and wellbeing to ensure they are living the best life they can.

### **3 YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROMISE**

We have a 'promise' that has been developed with children and young people who are in the care of Durham County Council to show our commitment to providing the best care we can. Our 'promise' outlines what young people have said they want from their social workers, foster carers and the other services we provide, to support them, to help them achieve and succeed and to ensure we listen to their views and their voice throughout the time we look after them.

Printed copies were distributed to DCC teams and offices that work with children Looked After, and framed copies are displayed in public view outside the offices of our Chief Executive, Director of Children and Young People's Services and Heads of Service within Children and Young People's Services.

We have asked those who work with our Children Looked After to keep the promise and stick to these principles in all aspects of their work. We promise to:

- Treat you with respect and to remember that everyone is different
- Help find best home we can for you. It will be where you feel safe, cared about and treated well
- Help you stay in touch with family and friends if it is ok to do so
- Listen carefully to you and try to act on what you say
- Make sure that your social worker will get to know you well
- Make sure your social worker will keep in touch with you and listen to what you say
- Really listen to things you would like to change about being looked after
- Be honest and share any information or changes with you
- Involve you in any decisions, plans or changes that affect you or your future
- Give you any help or support that you need
- Help you to be the best that you can at school, college, training and work
- Give you help and support when needed to move from care to adult life
- Work together and support you during every change in your life e.g. moving placement or leaving care.

Young people from the Children in Care Council (CICC) regularly challenge us on any areas where they do not feel we are keeping our promise, and we encourage them to continue to hold us to account.

## 4 ROLE OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

The Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) is made up of 21 elected members including the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services and the Chair of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well as senior officers from within the council. In addition, there are co-opted members on the panel including representatives from local schools and health services as well as young people from the Children in Care Council.

The Corporate Parenting Panel is responsible for the following five functions as set out in the Council's constitution:

**Function One:** Ensure that the Council acts as a good corporate parent to children and young people in care and care leavers including:

- Children and young people in residential care
- Children and young people in foster care
- Children and young people placed for adoption
- Children and young people placed at home under care planning, placement and case review regulations
- Young people who are living in supported lodgings
- Young people in secure services
- Young people in custody.

Responsibilities:

- Take an overview of the Councils and partner agencies responsibilities toward children and young people in care and care leavers
- Monitor performance of services for children for whom we are corporate parents, including care leavers, receipt of information on regulation 44 visit and inspections, referring any systemic issues to Cabinet and or Scrutiny as required
- Maintain a strategic overview of all developments, plans, policies and strategies for children whom the Council is a corporate parent and make appropriate recommendations for action
- Ensure all members of the Council are regularly updated on issues affecting children for whom they are the corporate parent including care leavers through an annual report to Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny
- Receive an overview of Regulation 44 visits and inspections of private children's homes within the County Durham area
- Receive an update on independent residential homes within County Durham and their Ofsted inspection reports outcomes
- Agree an annual work programme based on corporate parenting strategy and priorities.

**Function Two:** Engage and listen to the views of children, young people and their carers for whom the Council is the parent.

Responsibilities:

- Provide a forum for children and young people in care and care leavers to participate and influence policy and have an opportunity to talk about their experiences of the services they have received
- Ensure that positive experiences are maintained, lessons are learnt, and changes made in areas that require improvement
- Meet with children for whom the council is corporate parent and their carers on a regular basis and celebrate their achievements
- Participation in Regulation 44 visits quarterly allows the Panel to improve planning and understanding of care in residential homes
- Ensure that leisure, cultural, further education and employment opportunities are offered and taken up by our Children Looked After and care leavers.

**Function Three:** Work in partnership with other statutory agencies to drive forward improvements in care.

Responsibilities:

- Examine ways that the Council as a whole and partner agencies can improve life chances of children in care and care leavers
- Ensure there is good joined up working with partner agencies
- Develop links with the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership including a picture of Serious Case Reviews of Children Looked After.

**Function Four:** Act as the governing body for the Virtual School for Children Looked After and young people.

Responsibilities:

- Maintain an overview and provide challenge of governance arrangements for the virtual school
- To monitor and bring challenge to ensure Children Looked After's educational attainment and performance is optimised.
- To encourage and support each looked after child to achieve optimum educational outcomes at each stage of their schooling.

**Function Five:** Act as the governing body for Aycliffe Secure Services, monitoring and ensuring the quality of secure accommodation.

Responsibilities:

- Maintain an overview and provide challenge of governance arrangements for Aycliffe Secure Services
- Support and bring challenge to achieve the best outcomes for Children Looked After who are in secure services
- Agree the themes and performance, on an annual basis that enhance corporate parenting of Children Looked After in secure services.

## **5 CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WORK ACT**

Section one of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to have regard to the following seven corporate parenting principles when discharging their functions in relation to Children Looked After and care leavers:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

## **6 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL WORK PROGRAMME**

The Corporate Parenting Panel sets its work programme around key lines of enquiry as outlined in the Local Government Association (LGA) resource packs (Corporate Parenting; Permanence; Support for Care Leavers; Youth Justice), in relation to outcomes for Children Looked After and Care Leavers which require oversight and scrutiny, these include:

- Understanding the characteristics of our cohort of young people including age and length of time in care; where children are placed; numbers of children in different types of provision; those waiting for a permanent placement or match to a prospective adopter, those with additional health or developmental needs
- Understanding the role of key partners in supporting our young people to achieve good outcomes and providing challenge where this is needed
- Exploring how we demonstrate to children in our care that we have high aspirations for them
- Understanding how well we provide stable environments for our children.
- Ensuring that the partnership is looking after the health and wellbeing of our children
- Understanding how many children are placed out of county and the reasons for this, and ensuring there is sufficient placement provision within the local authority
- Ensuring that we support our foster carers well
- Examining the quality of outcomes for our care leavers against a range of measures
- Understanding how well we develop and commission new services to meet the needs of our children
- Ensuring that children and young people have an opportunity to express their views and ensuring that we know that they have been acted upon.

## 7 SOURCES OF INFORMATION TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

There are numerous sources of information provided to the Corporate Parenting Panel, which informs the work of the Panel, and the Work Programme. These include, but are not limited to the following:

- Monthly Corporate Parenting Panel meetings, where members receive regular reports and updates from a range of sources.  
Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, meetings were cancelled from March 2020. In their place, we have developed monthly briefing notes which are circulated to members of the CPP to ensure they receive assurance around the wellbeing of our Children Looked After and Care Leavers during the pandemic and receive regular updates on how young people are being supported in response to the ever changing situation.
- The Children in Care Council (CICC) have a standing item on each Corporate Parenting Panel meeting agenda, where they provide feedback from CICC meetings.  
Due to the CPP meetings being cancelled from March 2020, we have implemented monthly CICC meetings, which are hosted virtually through Microsoft Teams, enabling young people to continue to have regular communications with the chair and vice chair of the CPP and senior leads from within CYPS during the pandemic.
- The CICC usually host two meetings per year, where they set the agenda. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel and senior officers within the service area are invited to attend, and feedback is shared through the Corporate Parenting Panel meetings and actions taken as appropriate. Due to the pandemic, these have been replaced by the monthly CICC meetings, however we hope to re-establish these meetings as soon as we are able to do so as CPP elected members value the direct interaction with children and young people.
- Care Leavers have a separate forum and feed their views into a panel either by attending personally or through their representative
- Feedback from foster carers and adoptive families is shared with the Corporate Parenting Panel
- A number of annual reports are presented to the CPP, including:
  - Independent Reviewing Officer in respect of Children Looked After
  - Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership, including Serious Case Reviews
  - Fostering Service
  - Adoption Service
  - Care Leavers
  - Sufficiency Strategy
  - Virtual School
  - Corporate Parenting Panel



- The Corporate Parenting Panel receives regular updates from the Corporate Parenting Panel subgroups, which has been incorporated into the monthly briefings during the pandemic:
  - Virtual School
  - Aycliffe Secure Centre
- Regular Performance Reports are presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel in respect of the following:
  - Placement stability
  - Health of Children Looked After and timeliness of health and dental assessments
  - Education outcomes
  - Outcomes for care leavers including the proportion in education, employment and training and appropriate accommodation
  - Children placed out of Durham or in external provision
  - Children who are missing from care
  - Unaccompanied asylum seeking children
  - Children awaiting adoption or permanence.

During the pandemic, this information has been captured in the monthly briefing note.

## **8 CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL ANNUAL REPORT**

The Corporate Parenting Panel Terms of Reference which form part of Durham County Council's Constitution, make specific reference that the Corporate Parenting Panel will prepare and provide an Annual Report that will be shared with Cabinet, Council and Overview and Scrutiny.

To ensure the voice of the child is reflected in the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel, it was agreed that young people from the Children in Care Council, supported by officers from Durham County Council Partnerships team, would co-produce the Corporate Parenting Panel's Annual Report.

For the 2017-18 Annual Report, the young people worked on the design, layout, content and language of the Annual Report to ensure it was easy to read and understand. Moving forward, a decision was made to use DCC Design and Print Team to align the Annual Report with other strategic documents. This was implemented for the 2018-19 Annual Report, and young people worked with us to approve a template to be used for future versions, ensuring the corporate design retained enough of the young people's original design to make it appealing to young people and easy for them to read and understand.

The Annual Reports are published on the Durham County Council website, and hosted on the Investing in Children website, and the Children in Care Council website.

We held one meeting with young people in March 2020 to get their comments and ideas on what the 2020-21 Annual Report should include. Approximately 25 young people attended this session, however due to Covid 19 restrictions, which were implemented later that month, the rest of the consultation was undertaken virtually, which has proven to be really successful.

The Annual Report includes information on:

- Message from chair
- Message from Co-opted CICC members
- What a Corporate Parent is
- Why and where young people are in care
- The role and responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Panel
- The Corporate Parenting Panel's Terms of Reference
- Key performance data
- Achievements
- Care Leavers Challenge
- Children in Care Council
- Update against 2019-20 priorities 'You Said – We Did'
- Virtual School subgroup update
- Aycliffe Secure Centre subgroup update
- The Corporate Parenting Panel's priorities for 2020-21.

## **9 ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2019-20 AND PRIORITIES FOR 2020-22**

### **Priority 1**

**Ensure good multi-agency partnership work and integrated governance to meet the needs of our Children Looked After and Care Leavers.**

**We need to work closely with all partner agencies to ensure there is high quality multi-agency working to meet the wide range of needs of our Children Looked After and Care Leavers.**

### **Achievements in 2019-20**

The Looked After Strategic Partnership group continues to meet to ensure that there is a joined up approach to our multi agency work with children and care leavers.

There is a proactive multi agency steering group leading the work on developing services and support for care leavers.

In addition, the Multi-Agency Collaborative Care Meeting was established in March 2019. The membership of the group comprises of a range of organisations who can help to identify children and young people who are at risk of being admitted into hospital due to their mental health needs as well as tracking and monitoring care arrangements for young people once admitted. The group are responsible in ensuring that the appropriate care and treatment can be identified to meet the needs of children and young people post discharge from hospital.

The group are also responsible for the Dynamic Risk Register (DRR). In Durham we have expanded the criteria for the DRR to include all of those Children and Young People at risk of in-patient admission regardless of diagnosis.

The group has recently reviewed its membership and has agreed that the social worker with care/aftercare planning responsibility should attend the meeting virtually to give an overview of progress and next step planning. This will also give the social worker an opportunity to hear and receive advice from the specialist mental health providers and commissioners who are core attendees.

In recent months, during the Covid pandemic, the group has observed a significant rise in the number of children and young people admitted into hospital for specialist treatment who were unknown to services previously. In response to this the group has identified that Care Education and Treatment Review (CETR)'s could and should be considered for children and young people earlier, and that everyone working in children's social care need to understand what a CETR is, why and when they are used to prevent hospital admissions and so children and young people can receive treatment to meet their needs in the community close to where they live.

### What further action will we take and when?

<b>What</b>	<b>When</b>
CETR Awareness Training delivered across children's services	March 2021
Re-launch of the Multi-agency Collaborative Care Group (MACC)	October 2020
Work in partnership with a range of mental health providers and commissioners to create an intensive support crisis offer to young people and their families to prevent admission into specialist mental health provision.	February 2021

## **Priority 2**

**We will develop services which are focused on providing high quality support to enable children and young people to remain at home with their families where it is safe to do so.**

### **Achievements in 2019-20**

We continue to implement the Signs of Safety (SOS) practice framework. The Signs of Safety Framework puts the child(ren) and their naturally connected networks of support at the centre of decision making and planning so that more children can remain safe and well in the care of their families. We have seen examples over the last year where this approach has been used and children have been safely returned to the care of a family member. We currently have a focus on holding family network meetings with families as early as possible in their journey through services. The Supporting Solutions Service have been supporting this work.

The Supporting Solutions Service (SSS) has been in operation for 24 months offering crisis interventions for young people aged between 11 and 17 years, classed as being on the Edge of Care (EOC). The service also manages a crisis bed for young people who need emergency out of hours accommodation for one night.

Supporting Solutions have successfully engaged with 169 young people on the edge of care between April 2019 and March 2020.

The SSS is also responsible for Family Group Conferences (FGC), the aim which is to find extended family and ensure the family are supported to work together to create their own solutions and create sustainable safety plan to the local authority of family support to prevent a child becoming looked after.

Ofsted Feedback – Inspection of Durham’s Children’s Social Care Services - September 2019: “The work of the supporting solutions service (edge of care) is strong and effective. Good use is made of family group conferences to develop networks of support or to identify suitable alternative care arrangements for children who cannot continue to remain at home safely.”

### **Development Activity**

Family Group Conference video for young people – SSS have now been awarded ongoing ‘Investing in Children’ status as an outcome of the project completed with young people. The aim of this was to create a video animation that helped to describe to Children and families the role of a FGC through the eyes of a young person. This has been a huge success and we now have an excellent engagement tool designed and created by young people for young people. This has really helped other professionals to have a better understanding of the FGC process and ethos.

Sessional Support - The service has a number of staff from across Children’s services who offer sessional intervention to young people over weekend periods if this is required as part of a crisis support package.

Consultation Clinics - The Therapeutic Social Worker provides a number of sessions per week for staff to discuss individual young people and their families/carers who require a service from Full Circle. This also includes fast track referrals into CAMHS. The Full Circle Social Worker is also able to work alongside the EOC Worker in some instances to deliver therapeutic interventions where appropriate.

Voluntary and Community Sector – Since January 2020, a member of the VCS has sat within SSS one day per week. This arrangement has strengthened the links between SSS and the VCS, team members have reacted positively to this change and have expressed how beneficial it has been. This has also helped to build stronger links between the families we work with and the resources they have in their local communities to empower families to access more sustainable support moving forward.

**What further action will we take and when?**

<b>What</b>	<b>When</b>
Extend the service criteria to support children from 8yrs old	January 2021
Family Group Conference Workers to be link workers into safeguarding teams to help social workers expand skills in delivering family network meetings	September 2020
Signs of Safety implementation to work towards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family Network Meetings being held with all families within 15 days of a new referral</li> <li>- The identified network will be involved in creating and reviewing the plan for the child / young person</li> <li>- Where there are plans for a child / young person to return home, then the identified family network will be involved in safety planning and the trajectory tool will be used to support this</li> </ul>	January 2021 January 2021 March 2021

### **Priority 3**

**Sufficiency of Placements and Placement Stability is important for our children and young people. We want to ensure there are enough high-quality placements to meet their diverse needs and to ensure that young people have a choice where this is appropriate.**

#### **Placement Sufficiency**

We have reviewed the remit and membership of the Placement and Resource Panel (PRP) to ensure all young people who live in foster care (in-house or with an Independent Fostering Family), residential care (in house or external) and young people who live in supported living arrangements have their package of care or support agreed at panel and reviewed by PRP. This ensures we are reviewing whether their home continues to meet their need and that a tighter and more robust process for agreeing and reviewing the financial arrangements and quality of provision is in place. This has included a review of all young people who are placed out of area or at a distance where we can explore if it is right for them to return to Durham and if so, that this happens in a timely manner in line with their needs. Equally we have reviewed all arrangements where there is a bed block in place, ensuring support is given, progress is made, and financial review of these arrangements is undertaken.

The Sufficiency Strategy was reviewed considering both the current demands on the market due to The Covid pandemic, and in line with the needs of Durham County Council. This strategy will continue to be under review as we move through 2021. A key focus within the strategy is to ensure we have enough bespoke and solo homes in place to meet the needs of the children and young people, who due to the level of trauma and challenges in their lives, need homes who can care for and safeguard their individual needs.

#### **Kinship Carers (friends and family carers)**

We have taken the opportunity over the last year to review and strengthen our information, guidance and assessment tools, learning from feedback from the people who use our service and national best practice. This has helped carers understand the process, what is expected and by when.

We have worked hard in the last year to ensure our support offer to kinship carers has continued to be strengthened. This offer has seen the increased support and offer through Grand Parents Plus, who are an organisation specifically set up to support kinship carers with the challenges they face. Equally we have seen the increased support provided by Full Circle, our therapeutic team, who offer advice, guidance and training. The kinship team have continued to develop their sign posting offer which helps kinship carers know which service to access and how to access them based on their individual needs.

#### **Residential Services**

We have embarked on supporting a change in culture across the homes which has seen several changes come into place across the establishment. These changes have been underpinned by our child centred values. This drive has seen us share more widely the views of children and young people and ensure they are at the

forefront of shaping their home and future homes for other children and young people. This has seen children and young people take a more active role in reviewing and changing the things that matter most to them, for example pocket money and holiday allowances, Wi-Fi access and being an active member of the interview panels for new appointments to the service.

We have worked hard across our residential homes to ensure that we have the right infrastructure to support our ongoing development. This has included a review of our recording system which will see our paper records replaced with electronic files available through Liquidlogic, to bring us in line with the rest of the service. This work also includes the updating of our policies which underpin and guide the teams. Equally we are strengthening the training and development offer, ensuring training and development includes research, access to networks, development of the champion role, involvement in service and partnership activities and a bespoke programme designed and delivered specifically for registered managers on Regulation 45 reports.

We have designed and piloted two quality frameworks across the residential homes. One which looks at the qualitative information which feeds into the Annex A and Regulation 45 process which is outlined in the Children's Home Regulations 2015 and develops a greater understanding of what's happening and where it is recorded. The second tool is a reflective audit tool used to support analysis and case discussion which focuses on the qualitative information which improves thinking and practice as well as the quality of our records.

We have worked hard to ensure the move of one of our existing homes, to a new home, which ensures we continue to have a range of homes that are of high quality and in good repair. Equally we have purchased an additional home which will support three young people who require a higher level of support to ensure their safe care.

It's not withstanding that Covid has presented us with some challenges, however from this we have looked at opportunities to change and review the way we work as well as ensuring we continue to safeguard and care for our young people during these unprecedented times. We used the opportunity the Covid pandemic presented to support people to work across different homes and take advantage of moving on a more permanent basis to a new home by sharing skills and energising teams. We have also undertaken a recruitment campaign which has enabled us to succession plan some of our existing team members, recruit new people into the residential team and develop a pool of relief workers who are trained and supported to provide high quality and consistent care to our children and young people.

Unfortunately, the development of the Residential Edge of Care provision was halted whilst we responded to Covid, and to allow us to ensure we responded to the needs of young people who need to live in a children's home. This was particularly important as the private sector struggled to meet demand, particularly during this period. However, we are back on track with our search for a suitable property and the work already undertaken will not be lost. Equally our relationship with our colleagues in the supporting solutions team has grown from strength to strength, which ensures progress will be expedited throughout 2021.



## **Mainstream Fostering**

We have worked hard in recent months to review the marketing offer ensuring that we look at recruitment and retention in tandem following a slow start to the year. We are steadily improving our understanding of the market position and how we can target campaigns and responses to get the best responses to our campaign. Equally, we have increased our focus on understanding how to maintain and support our current foster carers, particularly when many of us are reflecting on the future. We have seen more active targeted marketing which promotes our unique selling points, this was demonstrated in the Christmas Wonderland event and our radio campaigns.

We reviewed the feedback from children and young people and as a result the care experienced young people reviewed the pre induction training for foster carers which they deliver. The feedback from carers and young people is phenomenal. We have also strengthened the foster carer support group and young people's group, reviewing delivery and attendance. This has been positive and will continue to develop. Care experienced young people and foster carers continue to support recruitment, whether that be recruitment to the team or recruitment of new carers.

In preparation for April 2020 we reviewed the work across the service to ensure the fostering teams can focus on the right areas of work and that they can consolidate their work to get the most out of their roles. This resulted in formation of a designated connected carers team, two mainstream teams, a recruitment and retention team and placement team. We have also ensured that we have improved our recording system within Liquidlogic to ensure the teams have a robust and effect workspace and as we progress throughout the rest of 2020 we will continue to develop the performance dash boards and reports which enable us to better understand ourselves. We have had a huge push on ensuring a timely and effective response to family finding and have put in place more robust measures to support and track progress. Equally the introduction of performance reviews have meant we have been able to strengthen and quicken our response to foster carers when needed, provide more stability and consistency from named fostering social workers and improve the timeliness of the foster carer reviews which supports retention.

## What further actions will we take and when?

What	When
<p><b>Sufficiency Strategy:</b> Working alongside commissioning undertake a needs analysis to inform the range of accommodation options required to meet the needs of children looked after and care leavers</p> <p>Review existing accommodation options to identify gaps in relation to emerging need and develop proposed accommodation solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developing in-house/independent residential capacity</li> <li>- Developing access to a diverse range of appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers</li> <li>- Develop an appropriate community-based accommodation and care solution which meets the needs of children and young people stepping down from tier 4 mental health hospital provision</li> </ul>	December 2021
<p><b>Sufficiency Strategy:</b> Continue to monitor the efficiency of placements through the Placement Resource Panel, ensuring providers continue to meet standards and agreed outcomes for children and young people.</p>	Weekly throughout 2020 - 2021
<p><b>Residential Care:</b> Develop a new edge of care home within the Residential Service to support placement stability and to prevent children and young people from coming into care</p>	October 2021
<p><b>Fostering:</b> Support growth in the number of in-house Foster Carers and review the existing marketing strategy to ensure a focus on recruitment and retention as well as targeted and general campaigns.</p> <p>Increase the number of foster carers joining Durham and reduce the number leaving.</p> <p>Review the support and opportunities to support the skills, knowledge and values of foster carers to understand, respond too and care for our young people.</p>	<p>January 2021</p> <p>March 2021</p> <p>March 2021</p>
<p><b>Recording and Performance:</b> Continue to develop and embed Liquidlogic within the fostering service and develop dashboard and performance reports to track and monitor progress</p> <p>Support the development of a Liquidlogic workspace for the review of kinship assessments and develop dashboard and performance reports to track and monitor progress.</p>	<p>February 2021</p> <p>July 2021</p>

What	When
<p><b>The voice of children, young people and families:</b> Review the learning from feedback and best practice to inform what support is available to kinship carers.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Ensure care experienced children and young people continue to inform and shape practice using collaborate approaches and opportunities such as training, interviewing and joint projects / reviews.</p>	Ongoing
<p>Expand the opportunities whereby care experienced children and young people share their views.</p>	Ongoing

## **Priority 4**

**Promoting Early Permanence is a key priority for us, we want to ensure that children are moved into their permanent placement or adoptive placement as quickly as possible once this has been agreed as the appropriate plan.**

### **Achievements in 2019-20**

Since the implementation of the Early Permanence Strategy in May 2018 which included an improved focus on 'fostering for adoption' whereby prospective adopters are also approved as foster carers to ensure that very young babies have the opportunity to be fostered by the people who want to adopt them, where it is appropriate. To date we have 4 babies (children between 0-4) under foster to adopt arrangements, since 2018 we had a further 7.

During 2019-20, 164 children were permanently matched into foster placements, which is an improvement on the previous year which was 155.

We have continued to increase the number of children and young people subject to a Special Guardianship Order and in receipt of financial support from the local authority, which means we have been able to secure stable long term permanent care arrangements for children within their families.

During 2019-20 the Adoption Team have worked hard to improve practice in all areas of their responsibilities. Processes and practices were reviewed and streamlined to increase efficiencies. A concerted effort to improve the timeliness of assessments of prospective adopters resulted in all assessments allocated from November 2020 being completed in the statutory timescale. This achievement increased the number of available in-house adoptive placements to 25 with a target of 31 for 2020-21.

The availability of in-house adoptive placements has positively impacted on the time for some children to be placed with their forever family, with 55 children adopted in 2019-20.

Work has continued regionally during this period to prepare for the launch of Adopt Coast to Coast, the Regional Adoption Agency, which is a partnership model for Durham, Cumbria and Together for Children/Sunderland. A shadow launch is planned for 1 February 2021.

The Pre-Birth model and ambition is to enable babies to remain with their parents, or at least within the birth family where it is safe to do so, or identify quickly that parents cannot meet their babies needs and ensure children achieve permanence without delay and numerous moves. The current criteria is that either parent has had a previous child permanently removed from their care through care proceedings.

A review of the Pre Birth Intervention Service (PBIS) was undertaken, this highlighted a great deal of positive and effective work being undertaken. However, it also highlighted the complexity of the work, a large proportion the team were working with parents who were resistant to the intensive 20-week pre-birth intervention programme and parents showed very little capacity of change. It was clear that the

intervention had deviated from the original intention and referrals were accepted whether meaningful consent was given by parents or not.

This led to a review of the criteria for the PBIS which focused on the most vulnerable groups of parents who would benefit from the intensive package of support on offer. Consideration has been given to care leavers, parents with a learning disability and parents who have had a previous child removed through care proceedings at least 12 months previous, where there are some noted positive changes of circumstances.

Following a successful regional 18 month pilot of the PAUSE project, Durham have commissioned their own PAUSE project from the licensed provider who would look to support 24 women across the county who have experienced repeat removals of children from their care. The Pause program works with mothers who have had 2 or more children removed permanently from their care, before they become pregnant again. The aim of the service is to help mothers address their own individual issues before they become pregnant, so that they stand a better chance of keeping their babies. This may be supporting them to access services to address their mental health issues, self-esteem, relationship issues, substance misuse issues, housing etc. It is anticipated PAUSE will 'go live' at the end of November 2020.

We monitor children with a plan of permanence with foster carers by understanding which children have a plan of permanence who are in a permanent placement awaiting a match and the number of children with a plan of permanence who are not in a permanent placement and who we are actively family finding for. We have reviewed the way in which we undertake family finding to ensure this is linked directly to the consultant social workers role. Whilst this work is in its early days, we have already seen an improvement.

To help us improve and reduce the time it takes to achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity we have embarked on a review of the performance data which we will then streamline to develop a cross service permanence tracker. This will tighten the focus, maintain grip and increase challenge

There are built in review points between the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service and social work team to monitor the progress of the child/young person's plan. This is in addition to those stated within the IRO Handbook.

All staff across Children Social Care were invited to attend workshops on Early Permanence and Family Time in the spring of 2020. Since then further work to promote the family time service has continued which has been really positively received by children, young people, parents and carers.

## What further action will we take and when?

What	When
Finalise the develop a service wide permanency dashboard and report which provides real time information which demonstrates progress and challenges drift.	February 2021
Continue to recruit prospective adopters and foster carers who can meet the needs of our children, particularly for brothers and sisters, children with complex needs and our older young people.	Ongoing
Review the Post Adoption Support offer, including streamlining the referral process and improving timeliness and consistency of response.	December 2020
Improvement the adoption workflow on LCS to aide service delivery and review.	January 2021
Support the adoption team and wider staff groups for the launch of Adopt Coast to Coast.	Ongoing
Review of the IRO Dispute Resolution Process to have a focus on improving outcomes for the child/young person.	October 2020
Implement the changes to the PBIS criteria	December 2020
PAUSE to go live	November 2020

## **Priority 5**

**Durham County Council and its partners will develop a 'local offer' for our care leavers and provide them with advice and support from a personal advisor until they are 25 years old.**

**Care Leavers need to have a range of appropriate accommodation options to meet their needs.**

### **Achievements in 2019-20**

- The Local Offer has been reviewed and work continues to be ongoing in order to develop services/support for care leavers. A meeting is planned in September 2020 with the Director of Children's Services and senior managers to look at broadening the offer across the council and with local community businesses.

There continues to be excellent working relationships between CYPS, Housing the Improving Progressions team, and human resources, to continuing developing The Local Offer with a range of suitable accommodation options for care leavers and extend the employment/further education opportunities. Work is also being undertaken to look at work experience on a wider scale within the council.

- Unfortunately, the EPIC awards have not taken place this year due to the COVID 19 pandemic, however achievements have been recognised on an individual basis.
- We currently have four Care Leavers in apprenticeship posts within the council, with a further three Care Leavers starting apprenticeships in September 2020.
- Work continues to develop further opportunities for Children Looked After and Care Leavers through the corporate apprenticeship approach and associated Organisational Development (OD)/Work Force Development (WFD) programmes e.g. work experience, traineeships.
- Close joint working continues with the CYPS Progression and Learning Team and the Looked After and Permanence Service to provide support to Children Looked After and Care Leavers to access the council's apprenticeships. All unemployed Children Looked After and Care Leavers have a Progression Advisor through the council's DurhamWorks programme.
- In addition to the support provided through DurhamWorks, Children Looked After and Care Leavers are supported through the recruitment process as follows:
  - guaranteed interview if essential criteria for the post is met;
  - revised qualification levels for apprenticeships, based on the minimum entry requirements for the apprenticeship standard subject to business requirements. This helps to remove qualification barriers for Children

- Looked After and Care Leavers to enable them to meet the essential criteria to be guaranteed an interview;
  - Where Children Looked After and Care Leavers are shortlisted, the Organisational Development (OD)/WFD team contact the Lead Officer prior to the interview to remind them of their corporate parenting responsibilities and to provide the highest level of support/opportunities in-line with these responsibilities.
- The teams are improving the quality of the pathway plans, ensuring a more consistent approach across the three teams, with all teams using the Signs of Safety practice model. Team managers are continuing to quality assure the plans, and this has also been reported back from the IROs. There is still room for further improvement and this work will be monitored closely by managers, IRO's and the Quality Improvement Service.
- Premises have been identified which will provide an opportunity for a drop-in centre to be developed. Refurbishment of the premises is expected to begin in December 2020.
- Joint work is being undertaken with Children and Young People's Services (CYPS), Housing Solutions and Commissioning to increase the supply of accommodation:
  - Housing Solutions and CYPS jointly fund supported accommodation provision for homeless young people, Children in Need and Care Leavers, delivered by Changing Lives for 16-21 year olds as part of Homeless Support Services Contract
  - The Newly formed County Durham Lettings Agency will provide further opportunities to source appropriate tenancy options for young people
  - Working with Housing Providers on New Start model to reduce bed blocking in Supported Accommodation and secure own tenancy.
  - A bid has been submitted by Housing Solutions to secure government funding to introduce a 'Housing First' model in Durham.
- A meeting has taken place with the Department for Education (DFE) to explore the possibility of us being part of a pilot to develop 'Staying Close'. Housing colleagues are looking to identify premises which are in the close locality of the residential home.
- Changing Lives have been successful in supporting young people into independent living from Hedley House, discussions are taking place to see if this can be developed further with outreach support workers supporting young people following the move.
- An accommodation and support framework for young people aged 16-18 with complex needs was commissioned in December 2019 and is now in place offering a range of solo occupancy provision across a range of providers. Market engagement was carried out as part of the commissioning exercise as referenced above. Accommodation options and gaps are evaluated on an ongoing basis and are considered in the sufficiency strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers.



## What further action will we take and when?

What	When
Joint working continuing with Young People's Service (YPS) and housing to offer a wider range of suitable accommodation options for care leavers	Review April 2021
Joint working continuing with YPS Improving progress team, HR and the virtual school to extend opportunities for young people with employment, education and training through work experience, developing Teenagers to work and continuing to offer a wide range of apprenticeship opportunities	Review April 2021
Develop and review the Local Offer for care Leavers and broaden the offer across the council and local partnerships	Review April 2021
Joint working with commissioning to review and develop services to support care leavers	Review April 2021
Work with DFE, housing, residential and YPS to implement Staying Close	Review March 2021
Programme in place for Drop-in centre available for care leavers	April 2021
Continuous improvement of pathway plan assessments, with measurable outcomes	Review April 2021

## Priority 6

**We will work to ensure the right services are in place to meet the health and wellbeing needs of our children and young people**

### **Achievements in 2019-20**

- Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust (HDFT) have strengthened the Vulnerable Parent Pathway, and have introduced a single point of contact
- Within the safeguarding service specifications and Local Quality Requirements there are clear requirements for the Children Looked After nurse team with key outcomes relating to health assessments and health passports, supervision and training being reflected within the local quality requirements. In response, two dashboards have been developed for County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) and Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) to measure activity in regard to Children Looked After service delivery and improve our understanding of the Children Looked After cohort to inform and improve service delivery.
- The number of children seen by a paediatrician within 20 working days, if paperwork is received from the local authority within 7 working days, has shown an improvement. It is to be noted that some factors which may impact the assessments taking place cannot be controlled by either health or the local authority, for example young people leaving care before the assessment has been undertaken, parent/child refusing consent etc. However, these numbers are small and have limited impact on compliance.

Number of children offered IHA appointment within 20 working days of LAC start date, where paperwork was received from LA within 0-7 working days of coming into care.	78 (95%)	69 (100%)	57 (95%)	55 (100%)
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- The Designated Nurses successfully submitted a business case for additional resource into Durham, which includes a Designated Nurse for Children Looked After to give priority to children in care, and this post will commence in November 2020. One young person was an active panel member for this recruitment process. Furthermore, there will be an additional session for the Designated Doctor role which will support the strategic priorities as well as meeting the needs of children in care. As well as the Designated Doctor the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) also commission paediatric sessions to support the adoption medicals, initial health assessments and the panel requirements of both the adoption and fostering panels.
- A template has been developed to improve GP compliance and the quality of information being shared in health reviews for children. This will be embedded and audited during 2021.
- As part of the public health contract, 0-19 staff are commissioned to undertake review health assessments (6 monthly for under 5 and annual for over 5s) for those children in care within the boundaries of County Durham and Darlington, including those still in care at the point of leaving full time

education. The CDDFT Children Looked After nurse team will continue to request the member of staff undertake the assessment 3 months prior to the due date and will forward to the local authority upon completion. The Children Looked After nurses will monitor the quality and timeliness of review health assessments providing performance data to HDFT and CCGs on a quarterly basis. Furthermore, the new public health 0-25 contract that HDFT were successful in securing will consider the needs of care leavers. Further development will be part of the transformation process.

- During 2019/2020 The Looked After Health Needs subgroup continued to meet prior to the Covid 19 pandemic restrictions. This is a joint County Durham and Darlington partnership meeting with membership including health providers (CDDFT, HDFT), commissioners (Clinical Commissioning Group and Public Health), Education and the Local Authority with two Young People as substantive members of the group. The sub-group meets bi – monthly with the aim of improving operational processes and the quality of services for children in care. The group is a subgroup of the Durham Children Looked After Strategic Partnership and Darlington Multi-Agency Children Looked After (MALAC) to which it is accountable. The aim is to support the improvement of health outcomes for Children Looked After and governance arrangements across County Durham & Darlington.
- During Covid all children continued to be offered an initial health assessment (IHA) and review health assessment (RHA). Health agencies responded quickly to a new and uncertain situation ensuring the health needs of our young people were either met or at least followed up post lockdown. The Designated Nurses joined a daily National Network of Designated Health Professionals to understand the emerging picture for children in care during this pandemic, which included understanding the provision for care leavers and unaccompanied asylum seeking children as well as those in pre-adoptive placements. The challenge for health professionals going forward is to understand the impact of the pandemic on our children and their families, to understand what has worked well and what we need to adapt, and this must be completed jointly with children and young people.
- The Health Needs Assessment identified the following four priority areas, and work has taken place to implement the recommendations and actions plan:
  1. Mental health and emotional wellbeing  
Currently half of all children in care meet the criteria for a possible mental health disorder, compared to one in ten children outside the care system. Pathways to access mental health services need to be robust and clear to all agencies. In response to this, a task and finish group was established in October 2019 to produce an outcomes audit to include mental health and the emotional well-being of children in care. Public Health worked closely with key partners to lead a review and improve the current mental health pathway for Children Looked After and Care Leavers. This was progressed via a workshop which reviewed the pathways and resources for addressing mental health and emotional wellbeing for children in care in County Durham including the KOOOTH programme of online support for

young people. Commissioned by TEWV 'KOOOTH' is a free, online counselling and emotional wellbeing platform which is available to young people aged 11-18 years across County Durham and Darlington. Public Health report on data and progression of the review for Children Looked After to the aforementioned children looked after groups in County Durham and Darlington.

2. Risk-taking behaviours, including smoking, substance misuse, sexual health and teenage conceptions

We continue to deliver the updated rolling training programme including introduction to sexual health services, C Card and Sexual Health and the law to Foster Carers and staff within residential homes, however the impact of Covid 19 has caused delays.

Pathways are in place to ensure that Children Looked After and Care Leavers are able to access dedicated, enhanced support through Teen Mother Pathway delivered by County Durham and Darlington's Integrated Sexual Health Service. This service provides effective contraception advice, and a subsequent plan to prevent further unplanned conceptions.

Education Durham continue to offer a comprehensive offer of training and support to staff who are supporting Children Looked After and Care Leavers, this includes the delivery of a number of evidence-based programmes aimed at promoting topics such as confidence and self-esteem and healthy relationships.

3. Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

In respect of Speech and Language we undertook an audit of speech and language therapy (SLT) assessment of children during their initial health assessments. As an outcome from that piece of work we explored utility of the clear cut communication tool and agreed as a strategic partnership to look at embedding this assessment in the early stages of working with children, young people and their families, recognising that communication underpins any support, intervention or plan. This is in the process of being rolled out within Children's Services

4. Wider determinants of health for care leavers: e.g. education, employment and training; accommodation and financial management

All children aged 16-17 years should now receive a summary of their health records in line with 'Promoting the health and wellbeing of Children Looked After: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups and NHS England (2015)'. A working group was established in 2017 to develop and introduce health passports, in line with the pathway plan and 'developmentally appropriate healthcare'. Young people were consulted, and one young person attended the working group deciding when and how they wanted this information to be shared. Those young people not opting in continue to be reviewed within review health assessment processed to ensure they are appropriately signposted for

their health needs. Additionally, 100% of the Review Health Assessments for Care Leavers are quality assured.

### What further action will we take and when?

What	When
Determine if young people age 16+ want digital Health Passports See what Apps are currently on the market/available	Ongoing
Further identify ways to ensure we include the voice of our Children Looked After and young people	Ongoing
To work with GP practices to inform GPs about their responsibilities to care leavers by progressing the Task and Finish Group gap analysis based on Children Looked After commissioning toolkit	August 2021
Increase compliance of Primary Care GP information to inform initial and review health assessments.	May 2021
The GP Template completed however requires further action to embed into primary care	February 2021
Initial Health Assessment Quality assurance audit to be completed	April 2021
Children Looked After outcomes multiagency audit to be completed with the agreed focus to include Care Leavers, access to health assessments, mental health and emotional wellbeing, to include child/Young Person's voice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- did we listen?</li> <li>- were we accessible?</li> </ul>	May 2021
Due to an increase in under 1's in Durham becoming looked after, plan a review of the pre-birth service including birth response plans and Early Help	February 2021
The impact of Covid 19 on Children Looked After and the assessments utilising the national questionnaire March – June identifying the views of children prior to reviews in September to include the voice of the child and influence of further services provision	December 2020
Continue the development of a process for health passports for those young people who are placed out of area and those requesting a passport post 18 years	August 2021
Roll out of ClearCut Communication Tool across Virtual School, Early Help and Looked After service initially	March 2021

## **Priority 7**

**We will continue to work with our children and young people to ensure they have opportunities to access good education, employment and training to achieve their full potential.**

### **Achievements in 2019-20**

- The process for completing Personal Education Plans (PEPs) has been streamlined to ensure we meet the 10-day deadline for initiation, and work is ongoing to improve quality assurance systems. A new IT system has been implemented to help achieve this. This now covers early years and Post 16 PEPs for Year 12 and will support Year 13 from September 2021.
- We have improved opportunities for our children and young people to have their voice heard with regards to education / voice of the child (VOTC). We have attended Children in Care Council meetings and have supported them in producing a leaflet for the Designated Teacher. They are to support a future Network meeting. We are working with them to produce a series of Podcasts for the Virtual School website.
- Work with social care teams has been undertaken to establish a PEP process for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Post 16 and in September 2020 we moved to an electronic system.
- We reviewed the impact of the Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) grant and explored how to use it more effectively to secure additional and timely therapeutic input to support emotional and mental wellbeing and readiness to learn. We have secured a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Full Circle to provide an Early Help helpline for schools and training where the need is identified. We have access to 0.5 Education Psychology and an SLA with Durham Counselling Service. We have promoted the SLA with schools, settings, social workers and IRO with Future Steps (Occupational Therapy).
- We continue to share National Association of Virtual School Headteachers (NAVSH) research. During the Covid period the focus has been on outcomes for children, supporting Carers during lockdown, supporting emotional wellbeing, attachment and trauma. Information was shared with the Head of Children's Social Care on the outcomes of the research on Children in Need and Children Looked After which was carried out by David Berridge (Emeritus Professor of Child and Family Welfare).
- Work is ongoing with teams in Early Years and Post 16 to ensure seamless transition in and out of statutory education and support young people to achieve the best outcomes they can to support transition into Employment, Education and Training (EET). WE have added an Early Years Specialist to the Virtual School team (0.4 Post) to support Early Years children as they move into reception. We have also introduced systems to share information and establish clear communications between Early Years settings and

schools. A seconded post from the Progression and Learning Team has been brought in to support the Post 16 system, work with Young People's Advisors (YPAs), Post 16 providers and Children Looked After PEP Caseworkers to introduce improved systems for transferring information to help the young person succeed in Post 16 settings. This post will also play an active part in supporting young people to avoid them from becoming NEET.

- Care Leavers have continued to receive sustained wrap-a-round support through the DurhamWorks Programme, to enable them to progress into and remain in Education, Employment and Training. Since the Programme commenced, 579 young people who identified themselves as Children Looked After / Care Leaver have been supported by DurhamWorks. Of these, 224 young people have completed the programme, with 190 progressing into Education, Employment or Training – a progression rate of 84.8%.
- Care Leavers have accessed opportunities to increase their confidence and motivation, as part of the DurhamWorks Programme. For example, Care Leavers have had the opportunity to access specialist learning provision (First Point Training - On the Road Programme), which has focused on providing support to young people who have additional needs / barriers.
- Two Care Leavers successful obtained Apprenticeship opportunities with Durham County Council. These posts were ring-fenced specifically for Care Leavers (the original intention was to ring-fence six Apprenticeship positions for Care Leavers but as a result of Covid 19, the overall recruitment of Apprenticeships by Durham County Council was reduced). Additional support was provided to Care Leavers applying for the Apprenticeships through the DurhamWorks Programme, this included support with their application form and interview preparation.
- Care Leavers in Year 11 received information about their Post-16 progression pathways through one-to-one careers interviews from Specialist Progression Advisers during school. There are also annual Post-16 Options Events which are specially tailored for Care Leavers. There has been an increase in the proportion of Care Leavers progressing into post-16 Education, Employment or Training – the 2019 Year 11 Activity Survey shows that 86.9% were participating in learning, compared to 82.1% in 2018.
- The number of Care Leavers into Higher Education is increasing. In 2019-20, 23 Care Leavers were attending a Higher Education institution, compared to one young person in 2010.
- We continue celebrating the success of Care Leavers who progress into Post-16 EET through annual awards, which included the annual EPIC Awards (organised by the Children and Young People's Service). Care Leavers were also nominated for awards at the annual DurhamWorks Achievement Awards.

## What further action will we take and when?

What	When
Undertake consultation on top slice PP+ with DAPH / DASH.	Ongoing
Develop Work Experience, Traineeship and Apprenticeship opportunities for Children Looked After and Care Leavers, by embedding our 'Durham County Council Pathway for Young People'	Ongoing
Develop more opportunities for young people to develop skills for life, to support their transition.	Ongoing
Work with Social Care to identify smoother transitions and improved procedures when a child/young person is placed outside of County and the move is Care led.	December 2020
Provide further training on the ePEP system for Social Workers and IRO's to ensure a high quality PEP is produced for all Children Looked After of Statutory School Age.	December 2020
Embed the new Virtual School structure to support better outcomes for Children Looked After	November 2020
Develop training for Post 16 Providers and YPA's to support the new PEP system.	September 2020
IROs to review all plans as part of the looked after review relating to a child/young person which will include the PEP, EHCP and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).	October 2020
Utilise opportunities through the Government's Plan for Jobs e.g. the Kickstart Scheme, to support unemployed Care Leavers who have been affected by COVID-19, to progress into employment.	October 2020
Provide further pathways into employment within Durham County Council for Care Leavers e.g. paid sessional employment opportunities.	December 2020



## **Priority 8**

**The engagement and influence of children and young people is a key priority across Durham County Council.**

**We will continue to work with Children Looked After to ensure that we have adequate strategies in place to hear their voice. We will work proactively to ensure that opportunities are available to enable more young people to share their views and be involved in developing services and setting priorities.**

### **Achievements in 2019-20**

- Meetings with DCC's Chief Executive Officer and the CICC continue to take place, providing young people an opportunity to have discussions and share ideas, thoughts or concerns directly.
- Children and young people are regularly part of the recruitment process for staff who will be working with Children Looked After and Care Leavers within the council. The views of children and young people are also included in relevant recruitment packs so that candidates know what children want from their practitioners from the outset.
- Children and young people can chair their own looked after reviews where they wish to do so.
- Two young people from the CICC have co-opted positions on the CPP and attend each meeting (supported by IIC) to share feedback from the CICC. The young people attend the full meeting and are involved in decision making within the CPP, which influences service decisions and developments as necessary.

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, CPP meetings were cancelled from March 2020 and replaced by monthly virtual meetings with young people from the CICC, providing an opportunity for young people to maintain regular contact with the chair and vice chair of the panel, along with senior leads from CYPS. These meetings do not pick up CPP work programme items, instead they are led by the young people and are proving to be popular, with young people keen to engage.

- In addition to the formal CPP meetings, children and young people from the CICC (supported by IIC) host a joint meeting with the CPP every 6 months. The young people set the agenda/venue for the meeting and invite members and officers of the CPP to attend to meet with the full CICC. This is a much less formal meeting than the CPP meeting, and provides an opportunity for all of the young people who are part of the CICC to raise issues which are important to them, and have discussions directly with members and officers of the CPP. Feedback from the discussions is collated by IIC and key issues are presented by the young people from the CICC at a formal CPP meeting, for further discussion. Work takes place to address these issues within the service, and feedback is provided to the CICC at the next joint meeting.

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, these meetings have been incorporated into the monthly virtual meetings, with wider CICC members being encouraged to join in.

- During Covid 19, young people from the CICC have developed two newsletters, which have been circulated to members of the CPP and also shared with The Children's Commissioner for England to enable our young people's experiences to be included in a piece of work they are doing about 'life in lockdown'.
- As CPP meetings have been cancelled, a monthly briefing has been developed to ensure that members of the CPP receive assurance around the wellbeing of our Children Looked After and Care Leavers during the pandemic and receive regular updates on how young people are being supported in response to the current situation.
- At the request of our young people, photographs and profiles of Regulation 44 visitor are on display in all residential settings so that the young people know who's who before they come to visit their home. These have also been included in the CPP Annual Report.
- All of Durham County Council's looked after services and their nine residential homes have retained the Investing in Children Membership Award™, and each were able to clearly demonstrate the ways in which children and young people had a voice and evidence the changes that had been made as a result.
- Young people from the CICC have continued to be involved in the co-production of the CPP annual report during the pandemic, with meetings being adapted to virtual communications. This has proved successful, allowing young people to be involved in the process from start to finish.
- Young people from the CICC challenged the CPP to undertake the Care Leavers Challenge to live on £57.90 per week. The young people want members to understand some of the challenges faced by care leavers, and champion for change on the back of this. Following a previous challenge, a letter was sent to the Secretary of State for Education requesting that consideration be given to bring the benefits system in line with the legislative requirements of local authorities to provide care to the age of 25.

From this year's challenge one of the significant issues was transport costs, and as a result this has been identified as a priority area of focus in the CPP Annual Report for 2020-21.

- Young people from the CICC deliver foster carer training to potential foster families and feedback has been that this is invaluable in informing potential foster families to make informed decisions.

- Young people from the CICC deliver training to those on Social Worker courses in the North East, ensuring these students understand what young people in care want from a social worker from the outset.
- Head of Service training was delivered last year by the CICC, to ensure senior leaders are aware of the views of our children and young people, and use this to shape service delivery
- Young people sit on the fostering panel, and supported lodgings panel to provide diverse representation, from a young people's perspective.
- Consideration is being given to the language used across Durham County Council as a result of feedback from children and young people. Further work is scheduled to take place to address this, but some initial changes have been made, including:
  - Using 'children who are looked after' instead of 'LAC'
  - Using 'family, brother/sister' instead of 'siblings'
  - Using the 'family time' instead of 'contact'
- Feedback from the CICC, indicated that the young people thought that the 'risk assessment forms' which were completed before they went into placements made it sound like they were dangerous and should not be placed. Members of the CPP requested work to be undertaken on this to address the young people's concerns and the forms have been amended and agreed by the young people.
- Following our continued commitment to listen to young people and act on what they tell us, we are making changes to the rooms where family time takes place after feedback indicated that these are not particularly nice places to spend time. Young people, supported by staff within the service have identified the changes they wish to make to the rooms, and have sought out items they want to purchase. The money to make these changes have been allocated by members from their own individual neighbourhood budgets. Work will continue, although the Covid 19 pandemic has slowed progress.
- The CPP recognised the importance of informal meetings, and the value this brings in effective communications. With this in mind, elected members donated money from their own budgets to pay for our care leavers to go out for a Xmas meal in 2019. The young people chose the venue and 31 young people, 2 of their own children and 14 staff from the YPS celebrated together. Enough money was secured to repeat this in 2020, although due to the Covid 19 pandemic we are looking to postpone this until 2021.
- Across Children and Young People's Services, 44 teams have worked with young people to achieve Investing In Children Membership Awards, which give national recognition for the good practice and active inclusion of children and young people in dialogue that results in change

- The IRO service has worked in partnership with the CICC to establish a young people forum to hold the IRO service to account, feedback on developments and provide an expert view as care experienced young people on any future changes needed for the service.

**What further action will we take and when?**

<b>What</b>	<b>When</b>
Durham County Council engagement approach to be rolled out across the council, with the development of a youth council with representation from the CICC	October 2020
Exploration into the expansion of the Freedom Cards to establish a discount scheme for care leavers.	Ongoing
Care Experienced Young Inspectors would help us to shape the services we provide in Durham County Council Children's Residential homes. The Inspectors will be developing a framework and toolkit, accessing training and support to allow them to carry out the role of a Young Inspector. The role would involve them visiting homes and sharing their views and observations on the services provided to the young people and their home.	April 2021
Work with young people to improve WIFI in our Children's Homes	April 2021