

Durham County Council Induction for Councillors

Being a Corporate Parent

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Children in Care

What brings children into care?

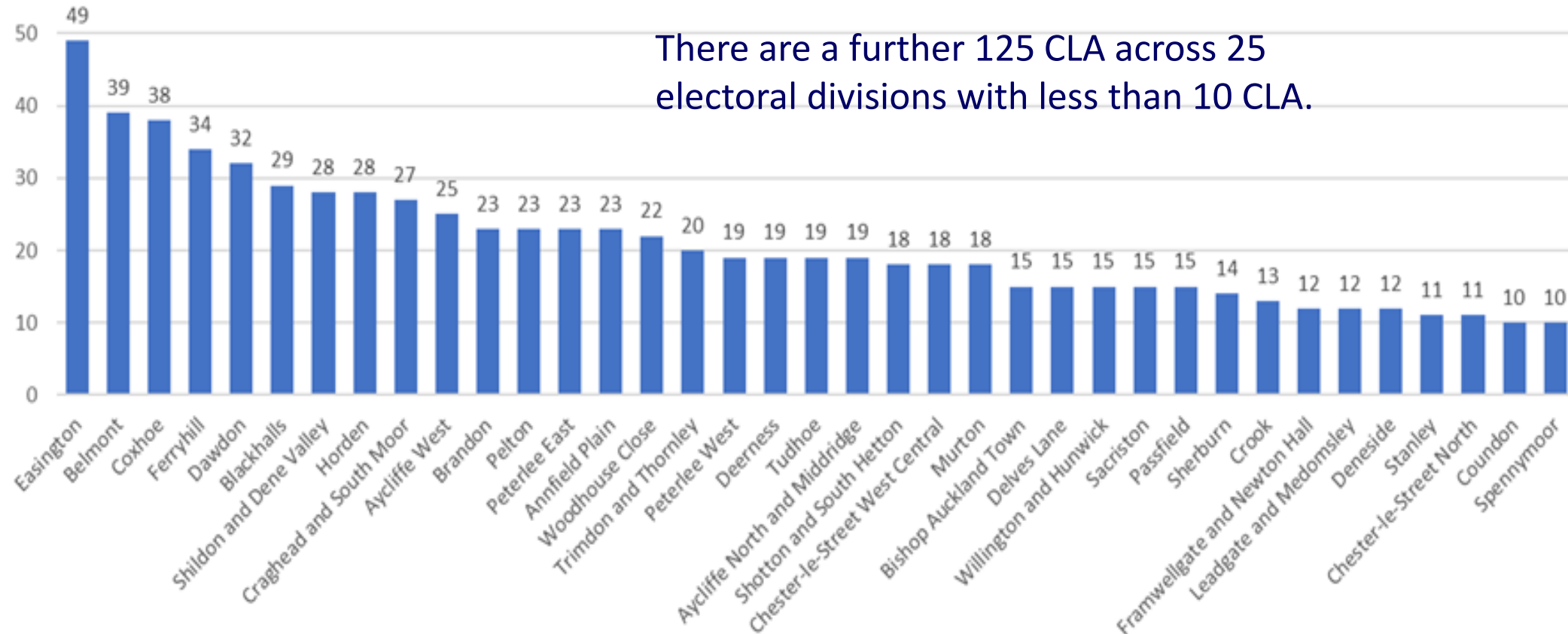
- Most commonly, it is neglect as a result of parents' alcohol and drug use, mental ill health, domestic violence or learning difficulties.
- There are currently around 945 Children in Care. This has increased significantly from 2016, when there were around 600. The number has further increased during Covid-19.
- These increases are happening all over the country

Why are these children vulnerable and need special attention?

- Education, Health, Crime, Employment

Children in Care – County Profile

CLA by Electoral Division of home postcode



Putting Corporate Parenting into practice

1. **Universal responsibility** – All Councillors
2. **Targeted responsibility** – Corporate Parenting Panel
3. **Specialist responsibility** – Lead Member and Portfolio team

What does Corporate Parenting mean?

Universal responsibility - Level 1

- When a young person comes into care, the Council becomes their 'Corporate Parent'.
- We have a statutory responsibility to act for and care for that child in the same way that a good parent would for their child.
- We care about these young people, and it is our responsibility to ensure they get the best experiences in life.

Every Councillor is a Corporate Parent

Councillors are expected to undertake ***Corporate Parenting training*** as part of the induction programme to enable the Corporate Parenting role to be carried out adequately.

- You recognise the prevalence of young people from your ward
- You ensure that children are treated with respect
- You have an interest in their general welfare
- You raise any concerns about children more generally

Corporate Parenting Panel

Targeted responsibility - Level 2

The Corporate Parenting Panel is a forum made up of 21 Councillors plus officers who are responsible for corporate parenting. The Corporate Parenting Panel has a targeted responsibility to ensure Durham County Council undertakes its duties as corporate parents:

- Ensuring the Council acts as a good corporate parent to children and young people in care and care leavers – we check out their progress in education, that their health needs are being met, that they are making the transition to adulthood through work, housing and independence, that they have a range of opportunities
- Engaging and listening to the views of children, young people and their carers for whom the Council is the corporate parent
- Working in partnership with other statutory agencies to drive forward improvements in care
- Acting as the governing group for the Virtual School for looked after children and young people
- Acting as the governing group for Aycliffe Secure Services, monitoring and ensuring quality of secure accommodation for looked after children across the county

Role of Lead Member

Specialist responsibility – Level 3

- Ensure the local authority demonstrates high standards of corporate parenting and fulfils its responsibilities to the children for which it is the corporate parent
- Holds equivalent responsibilities as the Director of Children and Young People's Services at a local political level, as required by the Children's Act (2004)
- Make links with other Executive Members to ensure issues affecting looked after children and care leavers are taken into account and prioritised in all council decision making
- Ensure the views of looked after children and care leavers are sought and used to influence service development and delivery
- Accountable for the actions, decisions and delivery of services for looked after children and care leavers

Being a good parent - 3 questions:

- If this were my child, would it be good enough for them?
- If I were this child, would it be good enough for me?
- How could I make it even better?

Things to consider as a Corporate Parent

- Young People's **health**, for example vaccinations, healthy weight, mental health
- **Educational attainment** of young people through the virtual school head, including apprenticeships and further education opportunities
- Ensure there are a **range of opportunities** available to young people, and that they are taken up to develop their skills and talents
- Make sure they have an **enjoyable childhood** progressing onto a **successful adult life**
- **Preparation for adulthood**

Corporate Parents

Corporate Parents have to understand, accept and carry out the functions outlined in the DfES guidance 'if this were my child', specifically:

- **Accept responsibility** for children in the care of Durham County Council, and make their needs a priority
- Seek for them the **same outcomes** any good parent would want for their own children and seek reassurances about their **safety and wellbeing** raising concerns with appropriate officers and/or Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel
- **Question** how well DCC looks after these children through membership of formal systems such as Fostering and Adoption Panels, Corporate Parenting Panel, and Governing Bodies of schools

Durham County Council Fostering Service Web Page



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We are still looking for foster carers to join our fostering family. All contact with you will be online or in a Covid safe way.

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Corporate Parenting Panel Achievements

- 2019/20 *priorities and action plan* were agreed with Member involvement
- Participation and raising awareness of the *Care Leavers Challenge*
- *Children in Care Council (CICC)* work and involvement in CICC meetings
- *Co-opted places on CPP* for two young people who are CICC members
- Members committed in providing *increased opportunities* for looked after children and care leavers to access education, employment and training - Ringfenced apprenticeship posts in DCC 'the family firm'
- Corporate Parent *training* for all new members, some of which is delivered by young people
- Elected Members are *Adoption and Fostering Panel Members*
- Involvement in all *Regulation 44* visits to children's homes and Aycliffe Secure Services
- *Awards ceremonies* to celebrate young people's and their carers achievements
- *Changes to the language* we use based on feedback from young people
- Free access to *DCC leisure centres* for young people to swim or use the gym
- *Council Tax* exemptions or concessions, and winter fuel allowance payments
- *Christmas meal 2019 & Christmas hampers 2020* funded by money from members budgets
- CPP were shortlisted for *LGC Awards 2020*

What is the Children in Care Council (CiCC)

- All children and young people who are looked after by Durham County Council are automatically members of the CiCC and have a right to attend meetings.
- The CiCC meets once a month to talk about what is good about being in care and what needs to change, due to the pandemic these have been virtual meetings.
- The children and young people bring their ideas and suggestions and work with professionals to improve services – this was done monthly via virtual meetings.
- CiCC attend the Corporate Parenting Panel meetings to provide an update on the work of the CiCC and to hear the updates coming into the CPP, and give feedback as necessary.

What does the Children in Care Council Do?

The Children in Care Council has:

- Worked on developing 'Young People' guides that will be available to anyone in care
- Delivered training to social workers (and social work students in universities), Independent Reviewing Officers, foster carers, potential adopters and corporate parents
- Been involved in the Epic Awards
- Consulting other young people and then sharing views on key issues. For example CiCC provided views on the benefits of having pets in children's homes and in fostering families
- Produced newsletters throughout lockdown. DCC provided a link with the wider council Marketing Team to support young people to understand the editorial role and become a 'young editor' for the newsletter
- Been involved in work for the Children's Commissioner around young people's views of the police
- Been involved in the Digital Voice project creating animations to allow young people's voices to be heard
- Bid for money to develop summer packs to be distributed to young people during lockdown
- Asked the CPP to challenge stigma and at each meeting we now share 'proud moments'
- Hosted an easter egg competition during lockdown

Children in Care Council – You Said, We did



Money and allowances

What Young People wanted.....

Lots of children and young people were saying that it all depended on where you live to how much pocket money or allowances you get.

They all agreed this wasn't right and that everyone should be treated the same, and that some young people shouldn't be rewarded for being good when others are good all of the time.

What has changed.....

A piece of work has been undertaken with the CICC looking at all of the money and allowances young people get across residential care and foster care

- The Service increased the pocket money allowances, toiletries and birthday / Christmas money.

Risk Assessments (Foster care)

What Young People said.....

Young people said that they did not like the term 'risk assessment' as it felt like they were a risk to the foster family.



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What changed.....

- Young people worked with us and we met regularly to review the language and criteria used to describe a young person's individual circumstances. These were re-written and re-named Safety Plans.
- The service is now working to ensure that these are in place for every young person.

Review of Freedom Cards

What Young People asked for.....

- Young people said that they wanted a review of the Freedom cards to see if additional offers and discounts could be included which would meet the needs of older young people as well as those younger.

What has changed.....

- From January 2020 the cards have included access to Leisure Centres at the request of young people.
- Exploration has taken place to try and expand the Freedom Cards to include discounts in shops, cinema etc. This was stalled due to the pandemic response but work recently resumed.



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School Settings

What Young People said...

Work with school settings so that they better understand the needs of children who are looked after.

What changed for the Young People...

Training event delivered to over 60 designated teachers across County Durham by young people to help them to understand what it is like to be a child in care.

Progress has been made with the virtual head to better promote young people's individual voices about pupil premium funds and personal education plans.



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Young Inspectors

What Young People said...

They would like to use their knowledge to shape the services we provide in Durham County Council Children's Residential homes.



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What changed for the Young People...

The CPP is developing a framework, training and support to allow them to carry out the role of a Young Inspector. The role will involve them visiting homes and sharing views on services provided to the young people and their home.

This work is on hold due to Covid-19. In the mean time we have supported our care experienced young people with opportunities to take part in interviews across a range of jobs - asking questions, leading discussions, rating presentations. These skills are transferrable to the young inspector role.



Pets

What Young People said...

That it is really important for some young people to have their own pet, or to have family pets

What changed for the Young People...

Animals that young people would like to keep in contact with are now included in safety plans as they are important to the young people. This is now part of social work training.

A number of children's homes have introduced pet hamsters.

Some of the children's homes are hosting 'dog-fostering days' when staff bring their dogs in – this enables the young people to walk, groom and feed the dogs.

One home has an allotment with chickens and one young person is helping a horse owner to care for their horse.

Work around animals and pets will be replicated in the fostering service.



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WiFi

What Young People said...

That the WiFi wasn't very good in the children's homes

What changed for the Young People...

New WiFi has been put into all of the homes, and any new homes will have WiFi included in the service specifications to ensure it meets the needs of the young people



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Any questions?



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