

# Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020/2021



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# Introduction

As the three statutory partners of the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership, we present our report covering the period 2020/21. In it we aim to demonstrate how we function and provide assurance that our safeguarding arrangements are effective in keeping children safe.

We are now two years into the new partnership arrangements and although at times challenging, there is clear evidence this new way of working enables leaders at service delivery and quality assurance levels to maintain ownership of the safeguarding agenda.

Throughout this entire reporting period we have all lived with the COVID-19 Coronavirus and the significant impact it has had both personally and professionally in terms of how we all deliver our services. All partner agencies responded with a positive 'can do' attitude to the challenges faced and were determined to keep vulnerable children at the forefront of their thinking. We embraced new ways of working which we continue to embed into practice.

We detail in this report some key areas of success where we have made a real difference for children and families, but also highlight areas where we need added focus to continually improve services across the DSCP and our individual agencies.

In consideration of this, key work carried out has led us to rationalise a large number of actions from different inspections, audit and learning to theme them into four broad Practice Improvement Areas (detailed in report), that are the basis of our Strategic Plan and focus for activity over the coming year.

John Pearce  
*Director of Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council*

David Ashton  
*Detective Superintendent Safeguarding Lead, Durham Constabulary*

Anne Greenley  
*Interim Director of Nursing and Quality, NHS County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group*



# About Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership

The Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) has a statutory duty to prepare and publish an Annual Report every 12 months which describes how our partners safeguard vulnerable children and young people. Our primary responsibility is to provide a way for the local agencies that have a responsibility for child welfare, to agree how they will work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and to ensure that they do so effectively. We changed from the old Board structure into a Partnership in April 2019 and are governed by our Partnership Arrangements.

The Annual Report 2020/21 aims to demonstrate the extent to which the functions of the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership, as set out in the national statutory guidance, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)', have been fulfilled and to provide assurance that the multi-agency safeguarding system is effective.

The work of the partners throughout the entire reporting period has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with changes in working practices and activity necessary, but this seems if anything to have strengthened connectivity across the Partnership.

The Vision and Values of the DSCP remain consistent being the driver over the last year with continued emphasis on Child Exploitation and Neglect as well as our focus on the following Practice Improvement themes:

- Domestic Abuse – Coercive Controlling Behaviour
- Cumulative Harm and Risk Assessment

The Partnership is supported by three strategic sub-groups; Embedding Learning; Performance, Challenge and Impact; and the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP). Assurance reporting also feeds into these groups, notably from the Child Exploitation Group, Neglect Group, and other task and finish groups.





## Our Vision and Values

Our Vision is simple, it's about 'Keeping Children Safe' on the premise that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. It acts as an umbrella covering all that we do and underpinned through our three Core Values – Tenacity; Curiosity; Openness.



### Prevention through early intervention

We will work together to prevent harm at the earliest opportunity.



### Joined-up response

We will respond promptly drawing on appropriate expertise of others.



### Listening

We will listen to and observe children to ensure their voice is heard even when they don't or can't speak out.



### Identifying

We will identify those most likely to be harmed by sharing information and data effectively.



### Challenging

We will challenge, learn and continuously improve.

## Our Partners

Each local area is required by law to have a Safeguarding Children Partnership. The DSCP is a statutory body established in legislation (Children Act 2017) and works according to national guidance, 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018', and in accordance with the local Partnership Arrangements. The statutory guidance provides children's safeguarding with a legal framework, setting out the responsibilities of local authorities and their partners.

The statutory bodies are supported by a number of other Relevant Agencies coming from the areas of Criminal Justice; Health; Education and the Voluntary sector.



## DSCP Budget 2020-21

The financial contributions from the strategic partners are as follows, with monies from the 4 NHS Trusts being part of the CCG overall total:

Partner	Contribution 2020/21 (£)
Durham County Council	181,604
Clinical Commissioning Groups	113,135
Durham Constabulary	39,285
CDDFT – Admin costs for CDOP	6,036
Training fees	5,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>345,524</b>

# Children and Young People in County Durham

19% total population are children and young people

4% of pupils in the January 2021 school census are Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME)

101,468 children and young people under 18 living in County Durham (Aug 2020/00)

Age 0-4	26,347	Age 15	5,318
Age 5-9	30,272	Age 16	5,291
Age 10-14	29,209	Age 17	5,031

20,316 (20%) pupils are eligible for free school meals

82 children are missing from education

667 children and young people are electively home educated

1,494 pupils attend special schools in County Durham

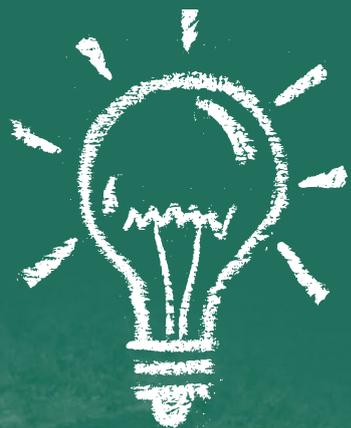
3% of pupils in the January 2021 school census have a first language other than English.

9,782 with Special Educational Needs (SEN) support in Durham schools

73,802 pupils attend state-funded schools (Jan 2021)

2,383 children and young people have Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) including those maintained by other Local Authorities

## Schools in County Durham



**196** primary schools  
including  
**8** infant only schools  
**8** junior only schools

**31** secondary  
schools

**1** Pupil  
referral  
unit

**10** special  
schools  
(1 academy)

**11** nursery  
schools

## The effect of COVID-19

As soon as lockdown commenced a decision was made to suspend all multi-agency DSCP meetings and face to face training. A Safeguarding Assurance Group was formed which initially met every week. Their primary responsibility was to establish what the core functions were of the partner agencies and working together to address any potential gaps in service delivery in terms of both restriction and capacity, in order to maintain an effective Partnership service during the pandemic. The group was able to coordinate and maximise the capacity of frontline practitioners across the Partnership to ensure that the most vulnerable children were seen.

Business Continuity Plans developed by individual agencies were considered to understand their effect, with Partnership activity altering to ensure essential service delivery for children and families remained in place. This has enabled those with the ability to make decisions to problem solve issues as they arise in a coordinated way. We were able to compare data and discuss emerging risks to understand the impact of lockdown and its relaxation on our children and families.

The group also took responsibility for the communication of key Partnership messages that needed promulgating out during various points during lockdown. Two main social media campaigns were implemented aimed at awareness raising in communities, so families were well informed that services remained in place despite lockdown and signposting them to relevant services. Over time the sub-groups of the DSCP returned, albeit over a digital platform.





# Achievements against Priorities

## Domestic Abuse – Coercive Controlling Behaviour

This has been one of the key Practice Improvement themes over the last year in raising awareness and understanding, to ensure children are considered as a part of domestic abuse situations and appropriate action taken to protect them.

Partner agencies have come together to develop a range of tools, interventions, and workforce development opportunities to support practitioners in identifying and responding to families where coercion and control is a feature.

Available on the DSCP website is the enhanced Children and Families Practice Toolkit at: <https://durham-scp.org.uk/professionals/early-help-and-neglect/toolkits-and-guidance-for-practitioners-single-assessments-and-early-help/> which was launched during September 2020 through virtual events. These events were attended by representatives across the multi-agency Partnership; feedback from the event and from those using the toolkit has been positive. The toolkit was developed in line with Signs of Safety and includes practical guidance and resources for practitioners to support victims, children and young people and perpetrators. From an impact perspective, managers' report they can see the difference it is making in improving practice across their teams.

Looking at coercion and control as a part of domestic abuse, the Partnership has worked closely with the Open Clasp theatre company to further develop their production of Rattlesnake and accompanying workshops. The sessions explore how coercion and control can manifest in relationships and the impact this has on families, particularly children. The response from staff across all agencies has been overwhelmingly positive with staff describing this as "the most thought provoking session I have ever taken part in" and "this is so hard hitting and emotional, its really made me think about the families I work with". Further work is ongoing on how we can build on the success of Rattlesnake moving forward.

Impact - DASH Risk Assessment training linked with the Signs of Safety Harm Matrix has been developed, and managers' report seeing an increase in the use of these tools to better understand risk and potential harm within families.

### Case Study - Impact On Practice

"I would say that the training has brought the issues of coercion and control to the forefront of my mind. It is an issue that is not always visible or obvious and one that is often hard to evidence. Since the training I am more conscious of the issue, am able to identify 'tell-tale' signs at a much earlier stage, and support my team to start and ask the 'right questions'. Since the training we have been able to evidence and step up a family to the most appropriate services. This family had been in and out of Early Help and the focus had always been on neglect issues. Looking at it from a coercion and control perspective, we were able to see a pattern of subtleties that suggested coercion and control leading to more empathetic but direct questions. This enabled us to unpick and identify years of abuse and although the individual in this instance did not initially fully accept or even understand the abuse they are living with, the dialogue is now open which means that the coercive behaviour can be challenged and positive changes made going forward".

## Cumulative Harm

The DSCP had earlier recognised that more work was required around the assessment of risk in line with our Signs of Safety Practice framework, and most notably in our judgement on the effect of cumulative harm on children and families. Initial focus was around improving the usage across the Partnership of the Harm Matrix as a tool when developing the risk assessment, in effect asking key questions to illicit quality information to best inform the assessment.

A launch event around the Harm Matrix took place across the Partnership in September 2020 and was followed up with a further awareness raising session during Safeguarding Week in November. An additional briefing session in December 2020 was recorded and is available through the Me Learning platform as well as a narrated Powerpoint presentation on the DSCP website. Feedback and scrutiny would show a greater understanding of the Harm Matrix and improved use as part of the main risk assessment.

It was however recognised that this tool was only one part of the broader need to fully understand and assess risk based on the cumulative harm being experienced by children and its significant effect. With a clear need identified this area is one of our Practice Improvement Themes for 2021/22.





## Safeguarding Children Sub-Groups

The DSCP has three principal sub-groups – Embedding Learning; Performance, Challenge & Impact; and the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP). Two other groups worthy of note that feed into the partnership are the Child Exploitation and Neglect groups.

### ● Performance, Challenge and Impact Group

The purpose of the Performance, Challenge & Impact group is to monitor the impact and outcomes of partner activity on behalf of the DSCP, as required by Chapter 3 of Working Together to Safeguard Children, 2018.

The group considers the performance of all agencies involved in safeguarding children using the Vision of the DSCP as a basis from which to assess good practice and concerns, reporting such to the Safeguarding Executive Group, by using data and intelligence.

Key work for the group has been the improvement in the analysis and understanding of the data so key questions can assist the partners in problem solving and developing options for tackling the issues.

### Impact - Return To Home Interviews

Following on from a multi-agency audit in early 2020, improvements were necessary in the way in which we dealt with Return to Home Interviews after children had gone missing. The attrition rate for completion was too high with inconsistent quality.

Two Missing Coordinators were appointed who complete all Return to Home Interviews, and administration sits across both Police and Children's Services in a collaborative multi-agency setting. Assessment is made whether the risk matrix needs completing and feeding into the Vulnerability Tracker. Completion rates on Return to Home Interviews are now high, quality is good, with robust assessment now in place around vulnerability, and fed into the multi-agency processes for intervention.

### ● Embedding Learning Group

The purpose of the Embedding Learning Group is to improve the quality of multi-agency safeguarding frontline practice through the implementation of a joint, co-ordinated approach which will ensure good outcomes for children which will be evidenced through multi-agency audit; peer review and inspection.

Their work will respond to the recommendations and actions from inspection; audit; serious case reviews/child safeguarding practice reviews; local learning lessons reviews; complaints; performance information; and feedback from children and families. This is to ensure multi-agency safeguarding practice is high quality; makes a difference to children; and enhances learning about what works for children and families.

Work of significance progressed through this group over the last 12 months has been a change in ethos and decision making with the development of Practice Improvement Themes to provide in-depth analysis and work in key areas where we need to improve. Extensive work examining the actions and recommendations from Serious Case Reviews and other inspection, and audit activity has led to their rationalisation into the four themed areas the DSCP are focused on for 2021/22. The introduction of a Workforce Learning and Development Group ensures there is a continuous cycle of improvement, so learning from all sources influences training and impacts on professional practice.

### ● Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP)

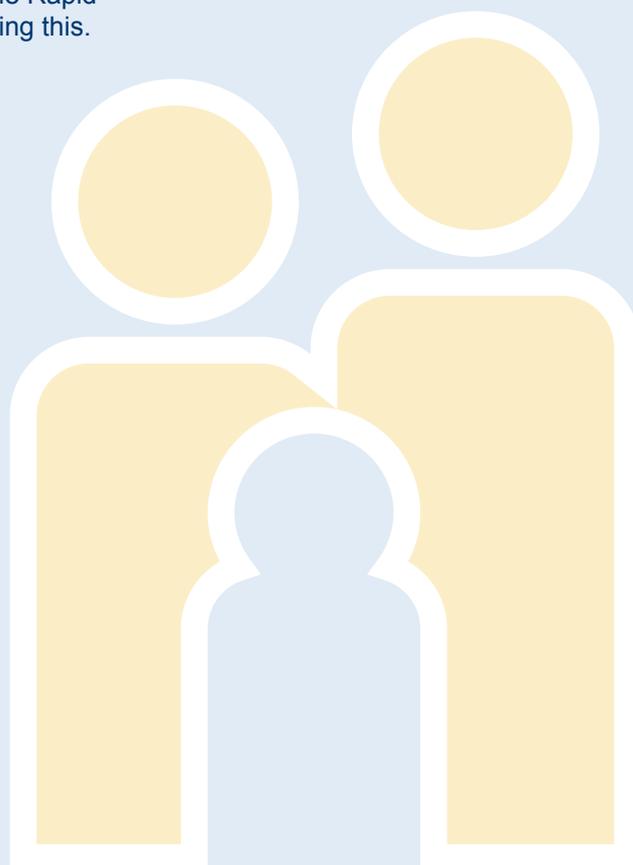
Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 specifies, *'When a child dies, in any circumstances, it is important for parents and families to understand what has happened and whether there are any lessons to be learned'*.

The CDOP oversees all deaths of children under 18 regardless of cause, of which there have been 28 in the reporting period. All of these are subject to a Child Death Review (CDR). The CDOP works closely with the Safeguarding Executive Group to highlight any emerging themes, issues and learning from child death reviews that require further consideration. The CDOP also completes its own Annual Report which is available on <https://durham-scp.org.uk/professionals/serious-case-reviewchild-death-reviews/>

Significant work has taken place to harness the recommendations and learning from all reviews and other areas of both internal and external scrutiny. The Partnership, in an evolving way now determines Practice Improvement Themes which require sustained multi-agency focus going forward, with the governance for progression sitting both with the Embedding Learning Group and CDOP which has its own Thematic Review process. It is within these themed areas that the learning from both Child Death Reviews (CDR) and CSCR's sit. For the coming year there are four themes which are detailed later in this report.

### ● Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (formerly Serious Case Review Panel)

Over the last 2-3 years the DSCP had an unusually high caseload of Serious Case Reviews (SCR) and through the transition across to Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSCR) had these to finalise. During the reporting period six serious case reviews were concluded and published. (link to website). Cases have been referred under the CSCR process, but none have progressed to full review. There have been 3 Local Rapid Reviews and one case which was progressed to a Learning Review. With one other case it was agreed that the criteria for a local CSCR had been met, however all the learning had already been identified at the Rapid Review stage meaning there was no added value in undertaking this.





## ● Child Exploitation Group

Multi-agency work around all forms of child exploitation is coordinated by this group which is a joint group between the two local authorities of Durham and Darlington, thus covering the entire Police Force area. It has both a strategic and connected delivery plan framed around the DSCP Vision.

The primary purpose of the Child Exploitation Group is to monitor, improve and evaluate the strategic response of partner agencies in tackling children missing from home, care and education and the reduction of all forms of child exploitation.

A notable achievement around child exploitation is the way in which the use of the Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker (CEVT) has been embedded into multi-agency practice influencing decision making on a day-to-day basis around our most vulnerable children. It feeds into the strategic CEG and offers a richer data picture on which to base analysis and has vastly improved the focus of both Partnerships around our most vulnerable children and young people. There is clear connectivity and information sharing between the multi-agency processes that feed the CEVT and operational risk/vulnerability areas such as County Lines and radicalisation.

### Impact - Child Exploitation Team (CET)

The Child Exploitation Team (CET) is a specialist multi-agency team identifying, engaging and working with young people who have been identified as the most vulnerable to exploitation. Police and Children's Services staff are co-located and work together linking in with representatives from, for example, Health and Education, to ensure those most at risk have a joined-up service. The Child Exploitation Vulnerability Tracker (CEVT) is a multi-agency process with relevant partners coming together to complete a holistic assessment of the young person and their needs. The CEVT has become a highly effective tool in the assessment of risk/vulnerability and the prioritisation of the necessary interventions which are subsequently agreed through a multi-agency operational meeting. There is tangible evidence this work is making a real difference in identifying and acting to protect our most vulnerable young people at an early stage.

## Case Study

A thirteen-year-old female after triage through the multi-agency CEVT process was graded as high risk of child sexual exploitation. She was deemed to be at risk of being incited to engage in sexual activity by older persons whilst missing and under the influence of drugs or alcohol. The child was frequently missing from home. She was living within a single parent household and the child's relationship with her mother was difficult.

She was allocated an exploitation worker in order to complete a piece of work with her to improve her knowledge around exploitation. The CET conducted disruption work around her associates, including the issuing of child abduction warning notices. One male received a prison sentence for child abduction following this intervention. Also during this period she was made subject of a Child Protection Plan which was de-escalated as the perceived level of risk reduced.

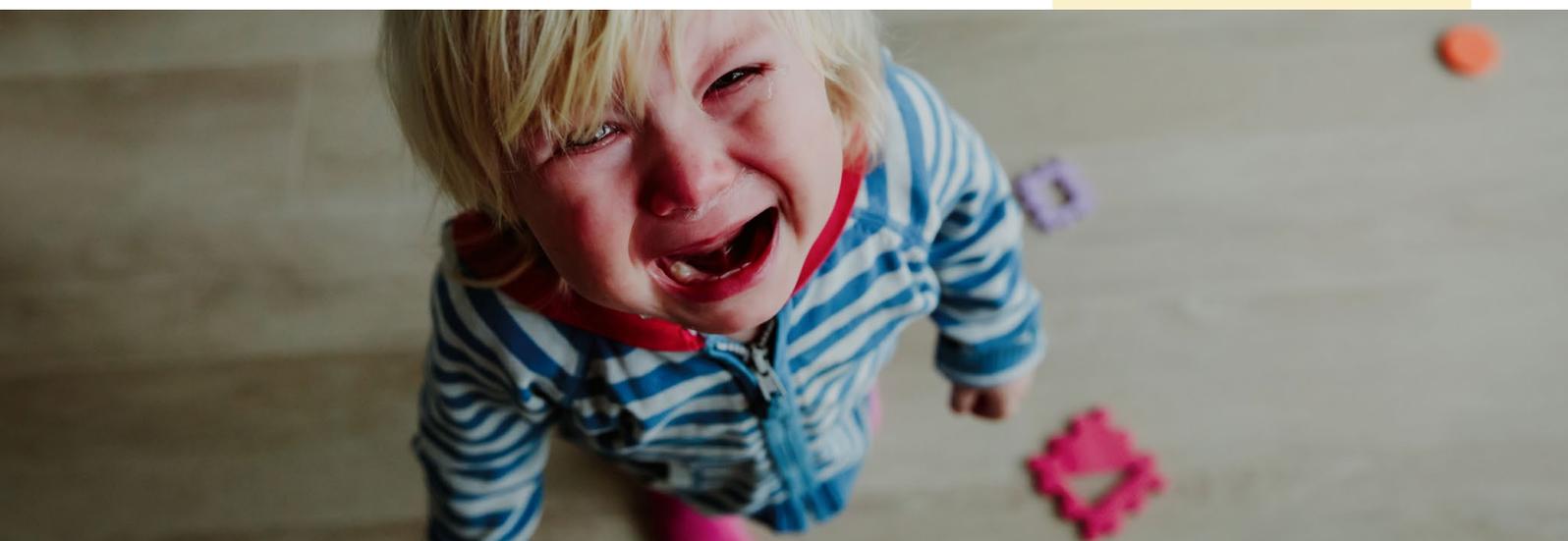
Her missing episodes reduced markedly as the multi-agency work continued, she became more settled and engaged with professionals. Her case was closed to the CET in February 2021 due to there being no ongoing exploitation risks identified.

## ● Neglect Group

The plan for the group sets out the vision and key priorities for identifying and tackling neglect, through promoting early help and delivering effective interventions. Our agreed vision is 'to reduce neglect, by providing effective help and support at the earliest opportunity' through three key objectives: -

- (a) Understand Neglect: to understand the prevalence of neglect across County Durham in order to effectively target resources in order to help prevent and mitigate the negative impact this has on children and young people;
- (b) Early Identification: to improve the recognition and assessment of neglect
- (c) Effective Interventions: practitioners across County Durham deliver effective evidence-based interventions that reduce neglect before the need for statutory interventions.

A key achievement over the last 12 months has been the design of a new Neglect Practice Guidance section as part of the Children and Families Practice Toolkit to assist practitioners in better recognising the signs of neglect to support effective intervention at the earliest opportunity.



## Impact - Accessing Early Help

The County Durham Stronger Families Programme has been committed to implement a Place Based Approach (PBA) and associated Locality Early Help Conversations to all seven localities across County Durham with there being a major shift with this approach.

The requirement has been that areas embed better ways of collaborative working to mainstream the 'whole family' approach and embed the Family Outcome Framework (FOF) across the Partnership. Partners must demonstrate the difference they are making in supporting families to achieve positive, significant and sustained outcomes.

Feedback shows that through the Locality Early Help Conversations, key professionals come together to provide a broad range of expertise and offers of support that are agreed in a timely manner. This prevents delay in families receiving early help and avoids duplication as all professionals agree the support package being offered to families and is better coordinated.

Durham has far exceeded expectation and to date has 'turned around' 1,054 families against a target of 761. Since 2015, 5,245 families have achieved significant and sustained outcomes with 638 achieving continuous employment, the best in the country.

## Case Study

A family were referred into the One Point Service via an anonymous referral into First Contact. The anonymous refer reported concerns in relation to having different men in the home every evening and that she was using drugs and alcohol. The referrer reported the child looked under nourished and sad and the home conditions were described as 'appalling'. The child was reportedly always late for school.

A Whole Family assessment was undertaken with a coordinated multi-agency response being required. The mother had suffered for many years with a physical health condition. It was however established the family had a good network of support in place, including grandparents and other friends. The Key Worker convened a Family Network meeting with the mother and her support network and they developed a support plan for her and the child. The plan brought simple things into play including school transport for the 6 year old and other household requirements. Housing needs were addressed as was support on managing finances. A Safety Plan was introduced that reduced the burden on the family providing support in a number of key areas.

A Housing Association also supported the mother to apply for a debt relief order, therefore, reducing the need to continually borrow from family members to cover the monthly deficit. This extra income enabled her to buy a greater range of healthy food for the family and left some for some monthly "treats", such as a takeaways and movies, thus developing quality time for mother and daughter. Another Housing Association assessed the family home and authorised adaptations to the home to enable mum to be more independent. The impact of her having greater freedom to get about the home reduced the caring role the young girl had carried out previously and gave her more freedom to be a child.

Feedback from the head teacher has been extremely positive as previous offers of support had not been accepted. *"I now have a different child, who skips into school each day with a smile that lights up the room. Worries such as 'will I be late?' and 'what work have I missed?' along with 'will Mum be on time to pick me up tonight?' have completely disappeared.*



## Other areas of Key Activity

### Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)

The MASH is a co-located multi-agency team of social workers, police and safeguarding nurses and other professionals. They triage referrals to determine the appropriate course of action. In December 2020 a structured multi-agency assurance visit took place at the MASH.

Good evidence was found that the voice of the child and lived experience were being sought from children; robust multi-agency discussions and decisions around risk were taking place and were well recorded; all partners have a voice in the process; and strong evidence a Signs of Safety (SOS) approach was being used. There was highly effective Partnership working at all levels with effective communication and clear evidence of effective learning processes that feed into the relevant agencies and the wider Partnership.

### Looked After Children And Care Leavers

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic children and young people in Durham have been supported with both virtual, and where required, face to face visits by their allocated social workers and young people's advisors with all statutory meetings having taken place.

As Corporate Parents in Durham, we want to focus on the successes of our young people. Our children and young people continue to play an active lead role in our Corporate Parenting arrangements and we benefit from the support and challenge they present to us. We are aware of the skills and talents of our children and young people and are mindful that in measuring this we celebrate not only the successes of their childhoods but that we measure the success of our parenting on the young people that we support.

Care Experienced Young People aged 17-18 in Durham are engaged in education, employment and training at a rate of 74%; this rate has been sustained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic with young people being supported to access digital and other remote solutions where required. The same cohort are managing to retain suitable accommodation at a rate of almost 90%. These indicators of engagement in planning for adult life with productivity and community engagement are hopeful indicators of successful parenting we will continue to progress. Clearly these successes are built upon the actions and interventions with children at a younger age where through our multi-agency care planning we retain an ambitious focus on each child's future, supporting them to feel able to stretch themselves to try new things and to feel hopeful for their futures.



## Elective Home Education

Elective Home Education (EHE) is the term used to describe parents' decision to deregister their child from school and provide education for them at home. Local authorities have no formal powers or duty to monitor the provision of education at home. However, they do have duties to make arrangements to identify children not receiving a suitable education, and to intervene if it appears that they are not. Although the trend for EHE is upwards, the numbers remain relatively low at 0.6% of the total in education (472). Over 70 young people have returned to school from this cohort during the reporting period.

In Durham, information is shared openly between partners including Education, Housing, Health, Gypsy Roma and Traveller Education services, Children's Services and the Police to establish when children were last seen. This informs a wider risk assessment process which considers suitable education and safeguarding.

The profile of EHE work has been raised, resulting in increased liaison with families and consequently a notable numbers of pupils returning to school, where this is agreed to be in their best interests. Proportionate support is offered to those pupils and families identified as potentially most vulnerable to promote their welfare. A recent review of local arrangements by the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee provided assurance that clear policies and procedures are in place to ensure children are receiving a suitable, efficient and full-time education, and that safeguarding arrangements are as robust as they can be and ensure that children are seen by Durham County Council officers or partner agencies.



## Use of Restraint

In conjunction with Durham County Council, the DSCP monitors the use of restraint at Aycliffe Secure Services Centre. The Centre houses a changing population of young people (aged 11-17) with complex needs. The home regularly reports information regarding the use of restraint to the Youth Justice Board and Ofsted, who has judged it as being outstanding in all areas (April 2021).

Injuries due to restraint are graded 1-3, with 3 being the most serious involving serious cuts, fractures or loss of consciousness. Of the 134 incidents of restraint recorded for the year, 23 resulted in injury, but only 1 in the highest level 3 category.

Scrutiny involves a regular review of the home's CCTV where randomly selected incidents are reviewed with a manager from the home about the use of restraint, the circumstances leading up to the incident, and what happened afterwards. This scrutiny provides assurance to the Partnership that the use of restraint is being monitored in terms of legality and proportionality in cooperation with the centre. The Aycliffe Centre has been judged as outstanding across all areas in its most recent Ofsted inspection.



# OUTSTANDING





## Training

With all face-to-face training suspended in March 2020, the Partnership took the opportunity to review its entire training provision and developed a new offer based around e-learning and the online delivery of essential training courses as determined by the Safeguarding Assurance Group. This style of training has been delivered throughout the reporting period and has been effective and well received.

One of the challenges for the DSCP has been the ability to measure the impact of training on service delivery across all partners, something that has proved difficult in any meaningful way. A Workforce Learning & Development Group (WLD) has been established that reports directly into the Embedding Learning Group (ELG). The purpose of WLD is to ensure that safeguarding children training needs are identified, training is delivered to a consistently high standard, and that there is a process in place for the DSCP to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of training.

Primary Aims:

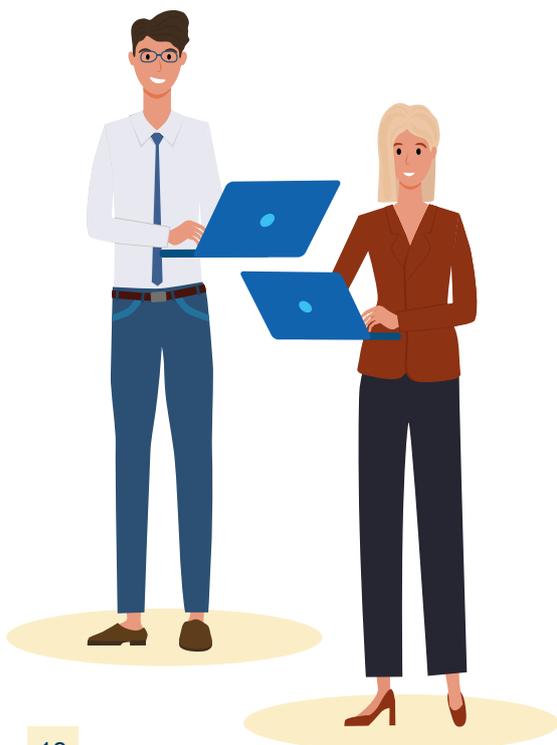
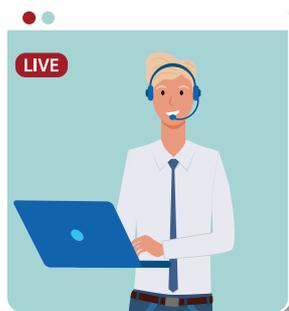
- Develop and coordinate the DSCP programme of safeguarding children training through the formulation of a training strategy.
- To integrate the learning from local and national serious case reviews into the training programme.
- To ensure that all DSCP training reflects the rights of children and encourages participants to consider the experiences of children as central to their work.

Method of Evaluation:

- Measure the impact of multi-agency agency training and ensure single agencies have a process to measure the effectiveness of their training.
- Evaluate all training and incorporate feedback into future training.
- Ensure that training is delivered to a consistently high standard by quality assuring all courses.

A core pillar of the newly developed Training Strategy and Workplan is that we ensure that DSCP training is making a real contribution to improving outcomes for children and families.

In October 2020 we ran a live webinar event focusing on trauma informed practice and led by an eminent expert in this area, Zoe Lodrick. The event was attended by over 700 practitioners and managers from across the Partnership. It was followed up with an additional focused developmental workshop around a specific case. Key learning and areas for improvement were taken from this work and is what is now weaved into the Practice Improvement Themes being progressed by the DSCP for 2021/22.



# What's Next for 2021/22

## Focus on Practice Improvement Themes:

- Management Understanding and Decision Making
- Voice and Lived Experience of the Child
- Risk Assessment and Cumulative Harm
- Child Sexual Abuse



## Introduction of a new website for the DSCP



## Continue to embed the Signs of Safety Practice Framework across partner agencies



## Improve effectiveness of Partnership scrutiny and the assessment of impact



## Continue to embed new Training Strategy with hybrid offer.



Dave Pickard  
*Independent Chair & Scrutineer.*

## Overview by the Independent Chair/Scrutineer of the progress made by the DSCP 2020/21

I was appointed by the DSCP Executive in September 2020 with the remit to not only chair certain meetings, but to act as a critical friend to the DSCP in scrutinising their effectiveness.

The annual report indicates what has been achieved by the partnership in 2020/21 against the significant impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The partnership, agencies and particularly staff are to be congratulated as to how they responded to the pandemic by working together to maintain effective safeguarding arrangements for children and young people throughout the year, despite these challenges.

My first task on appointment was to undertake an independent review of how the partnership was operating and the outcomes and associated impact that it was achieving.

The review made seven recommendations for further improvement. These recommendations and subsequent action by the partnership are detailed below.

### **Reasonable time is committed by the statutory safeguarding partners to lead the DSCP including clarity on priorities and expectations of the subgroups and Business Unit.**

The DSCP Executive have committed the required time to drive this area forward. They have agreed a consistent membership and meet monthly alternating between a 'business' meeting and a 'developmental' meeting. This appears to be working well and as progress is made the frequency of the meetings will be reviewed.

Four improvement areas for focus have been identified, utilising learning from local and national reviews, for delivery by the Partnership:

1. Risk assessment and Cumulative Harm,
2. Voice and Lived Experience of the Child,
3. Management Understanding and Decision Making,
4. Child Sexual Abuse.

This has given the DCSP a clearer focus, and work is ongoing to examine the required structures and method of delivery including a greater focus on impact.

The DSCP is moving towards an assurance model in ensuring all agencies are effectively safeguarding children and understanding how they can add value to this process. This will include assurance from other partnerships, for example managing the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people.

Single agency statutory inspections will add to this assurance, such as ones recently completed in Durham Constabulary and Durham County Council Children and Young People's Service but are limited in informing across the whole Partnership.

### **Understand and agree how best the Independent Chair/Scrutineer can be utilised in achieving the above.**

This relationship is evolving whilst maintaining the distinct boundary that the Partnership is led by the statutory partners and not the Chair. An example of this is that the bi-monthly Executive development meeting is chaired by a partner allowing the Independent chair/scrutineer to act more effectively as a critical friend.

**Review the functioning of the Performance, Challenge and Impact group to allow a greater focus on outcome and impact.**

The group is moving towards a thematic approach to data analysis. This needs improved alignment to the agreed priorities and a more co-ordinated approach in complimenting the work of the Embedding Learning Group. The chairs of both groups are meeting to address this, and the outcomes will be monitored by the Executive group.

**Review the functioning of the Embedding Learning Group to allow a greater focus on outcome and impact.**

Substantial progress has been made on this recommendation in that the over 300 actions from various SCR's and other reviews/inspections have been rationalised into the four priorities. The ELG has created four task and finish groups, one for each priority, to deliver against the associated action plans. This will be further informed once the Executive have agreed the wider scope of structure for delivery discussed in the first recommendation.

**Whatever the outcome of the review into where the Business Unit sit the Executive to take greater ownership in directing and managing the unit as a DSCP resource.**

There is a far greater understanding by the Executive of the work, pressure and demands on the Business Unit and improving understanding from the unit on what the Executive would like them to deliver. There is a two weekly catch-up meeting with members of the Executive and the Business Manager, who is also now line managed by one member of the Executive.

**The DSCP revisit the purpose and operation of the four sector groups to ensure they are meeting the needs of all parties.**

This is the one recommendation, where to date, the least progress has been made. There are four sector groups incorporating:

- Health
- Criminal Justice
- Education
- Voluntary Sector

There is a need to improve the dialogue, expectations, and relationship between these groups and the DSCP. This has been discussed at the Executive Group and work is to commence to align to existing structures to fulfil the intended purpose of the groups.

**The DSCP Executive identify a suitable key line of enquiry for the Scrutiny Panel to complete and also consider closer alignment for the Panel with the Business Unit.**

The Scrutiny Panel recently completed their first piece of work looking at how the Voice of the Child/Child lived experience was delivered in three agencies:

- Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust
- Durham Constabulary
- Durham County Council Children and Young People's Service

They found excellent commitment in each agency and some innovative practice. It was less clear how this was shared across the Partnership or indeed the impact of this. A report was produced for the Executive which will inform the work of the Child Lived Experience Priority task and finish group but it also stimulated good debate about the role of the DSCP in engaging with children and young people.

In conclusion, I am of the opinion that the DSCP is meeting its statutory obligations and is continuing to improve how it achieves this.