

Corporate Parenting Panel

18 February 2022

Children Looked After with a Disability Annual Update



Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children' Social Care, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel will receive a summary of the work of the Children with Disabilities Team with Children and Young people who are Children in our Care (CIC) and Care Leavers, for information.
- 2 To inform members of the Corporate Parenting Panel of the remit and the number of children currently open to the Children with Disabilities Service (CWD) who are in our care.
- 3 The report outlines the progress made since the ILACS Ofsted inspection (September 2019) when Ofsted told us the Quality and performance of social work practice was too variable.
- 4 The report provides an update of the Transition's arrangements for 14 - 25 years and their preparation for life as a young adult, which are provided by the 14-25 Navigation Team (Adult Services) alongside the CWD team.

Executive Summary

- 5 There have been significant changes to services for Children and young people with disabilities since 2019 which includes additional investment in front line staff as well as a remodelling of the service to create a 0-18 children's service and a 14-25 navigation service within adult social care services, focused on supporting the transition for these young people from children's to adults services. Whilst there are clear criteria for the children and young people receiving support from this services, the team works hard with partners to ensure that children are signposted to other appropriate services and sources of support where appropriate.

- 6 Work has developed with a wide range of partner agencies to support these practice improvements to ensure the needs of our children and young people are met and they are in receipt of high-quality support and services.
- 7 A Governance Improvement Board for Disabled Children has been created which has supports oversight from a children's and adults services perspective and includes commissioning colleagues who are key to service development and innovation for children and young people with disabilities. The board is jointly chaired by Heads of Service in CYPS and ASC.
- 8 We have strengthened the voice of our children so they along with their parent/carers are informing their care plans, reviews. This means they influence the development of the services they receive and can be more confident that they are the right services for the child.
- 9 All our children have up to date assessments which are reviewed yearly. The CWD team see our children regularly.
- 10 The CWD team procedures and guidance has been updated and is reviewed annually.
- 11 We have managed some of the challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic by reviewing services and working with our commissioning colleagues to think differently about service delivery for families.
- 12 Improvements in the service can be evidenced by the increase in compliments from families and professionals and a reduction in complaints.

Recommendation

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

Background

- 14 The functions (including powers and duties) of the local authority to children who are looked after by us are set out in the 1989 Children's Act as principally amended by the children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, the Adoption, Children Act 2002, Young Persons Act 2008.
- 15 The associated Regulations and guidance in relation to those functions. Section 22 (3) of the 1989 Act sets out the general duty of the local authority looking after a child to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. This duty underpins all activity by the local authority in relation to looked after children.
- 16 A child is looked after by us either by reason of a Care Order or is being provided care by us under Section 20 of the 1989 Act for more than 24 hours with the agreement of their parents or carers with parental responsibility, or if the child is over 16 years old or over (section 22 (1) and (2) of the 1989 Act).
- 17 The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (**DoLS**) are part of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. This piece of legislation aims to make sure that young people in care homes and hospitals are looked after and safeguarded in a way that does not inappropriately restrict their freedom. A consideration of this legislation is key in planning for the safe care of our children and young people.
- 18 We undertake Parent/Carer assessments using Children Act 1989 section 17ZD (10). The Parent carers assessments are to support and understand the well-being of the parent / carer, and the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the disabled child who is cared for and any other child for whom the parent carer has parental responsibility. This parent/carer assessment can lead to the provision of services which support families, including short breaks.
- 19 Criteria of the CWD service is to offer support to the following children and young people who identify as having:
 - Substantial physical disabilities that significantly impact on the child's wellbeing.
 - Substantial learning disabilities.
 - A diagnosis of Autism with a substantial learning disability.
 - Multiple or substantial disability.
 - Substantial sensory impairment in conjunction with a substantial learning disability.
 - Complex physical disability and health needs, this would usually involve support from the continuing health care team (health

services). (There will be an assessment from the continuing health care service if required).

- 20 There are a total of 227 children open to the Children with Disabilities Team.
- 21 28 children are Children in Care.
- 22 The remaining children receive social work support and services under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Many receive packages of respite support to enable them to meet and socialise with other young people in the community and to enable their parents/carers to have a break from their caring responsibilities.
- 23 There have been clear and sustained improvements both in performance and quality of practice within this service since the Ofsted ILACS inspection of children's social care services in 2019. All the children currently open to the service have had an assessment in the last 12 months. This means our children have an up-to-date assessment and that the services are the right ones for them as their needs are understood.
- 24 As of 24 January 2022, all children in care within the CWD Team were visited within statutory timescales.

Staffing in the CWD Team

- 25 The Team structure has expanded as the service has been reviewed and strengthened within the last twelve months and received additional investment to increase social work capacity.

Support that the Children with Disabilities Team offer

- 26 We aspire to support families to care for their own children, and we do this by promoting the local offer www.durham.gov.uk/localoffer
 - (a) All our children who are children in care, have regular meetings with annual health and dental checks and regular multi-agency care team meetings;
 - (b) Each child has an independent review officer. Children with a disability or who have a special educational need will receive support from the IRO to help ensure these needs are identified, assessed, and met. They will read the Education Health Care Plan and the Personal Education plan and use this to influence the care plan alongside the CWD team;
 - (c) Our children express their views through observations, one to one work and play. They have access to an advocate from NYAS, an opportunity to have a Young Carers assessment and to use **Mind**

of My Own (you will hear more about this on the day of the corporate Parenting panel from some of our children);

- (d) Our CWD can be some of the most vulnerable children therefore strong multi-agency working is critical to ensuring children are safe and there is good evidence of this in the work of the service, both within child protection strategy meetings, child protection conferences and care planning;
- (e) The CWD team ensure our children's voices are heard using direct work. One of the ways we have done this is by investing in digital technology this is call Mind of My Own and referred to by our children as MOMO;
- (f) We believe that young people should always be able to participate fully in their lives and it should be easy for them to speak up anytime they want. The Mind of My Own app was designed with young people for young people;
- (g) Our children in the team use MOMO Express. Momo Express helps them share their views, wishes and feelings in a fun way that's easy for workers to understand and evidence. Express is for very young children or those with additional needs. Express helps children express their views, wishes and feelings;
- (h) The design and function of MOMO enables children's participation in to create one-page profiles for placement matching, before health checks, assessments to build rapport and gather crucial information, our statutory visits, foster care reviews, Looked after reviews, Education, health and care plans, Transition planning, CIN reviews, short break services and Communication passports. The CWD team have all now completed their MOMO training and moving forward we will see our children's voices strongly represented within all conversations;
- (i) An example of this is a young girl who used Express with her residential worker she took great pleasure in filling out a statement, which was lovely to see. 'All about me' starts off with basic questions that workers sometimes stop asking, such as 'What do you like to eat' and this young person gave so much detail it was lovely for the worker to see. She gave loads of details about what she liked and what she didn't and then what makes her happy and what makes her sad and how workers should communicate with her. She took a long time to complete this profile of her but what was also interesting is that Express asks 'What you would like for tea', she talked about a worker, Michael, who cooks Sunday breakfast and how that was her favourite food. What was evident is that the young girl was so appreciative of the

care her home was providing and that these are the things she will remember;

- (j) Our children have access to services – In addition, the Local Authority delivers a short break respite service for children, young people, and their families. The work in these services is delivered in partnership with the wide range of agencies who support children with disabilities and complex needs;
- (k) Community support services are available to them;
- (l) Our children looked after are monitored through children in care procedures. Statutory visits take place and children are regularly seen by school and health professionals;
- (m) All aspects of safeguarding are completed by the social workers on the team;
- (n) Our children have a pathway plan to ensure a smooth transition to adulthood, this is done with the 14-25 years transitions team and by looking at what the needs of the children are into adulthood.

Partners We Work With

- 27 There is close joint working between the CWD team and the Families First Safeguarding Teams, we have open dialogue with our partners in Education – special schools, Health i.e., Occupational Health services, Continuing Care Services, Police, Local Authority Commissioning Teams, Health Commissioners, Early Help colleagues and the voluntary services, Advocacy service and the Carers centre.
- 28 We work closely with the Durham Virtual School Head, and she describes that her team works closely with the CWD team to support CIC into the best provision to meet the child's needs. We provide advice to social workers and attend meetings to ensure the education provision the child attends are the right one. In consultation with the SEND caseworker, we are part of discussions when a child's care arrangements change, and a school placement is required. The CIC Personal Education Plan caseworker continues to support the young person into Post 16 and is part of the initial conversations with Durham Works in supporting the young person into adulthood.
- 29 We work together with all our partners to identify the needs of families and listen to family's aspirations for the care of their family members and the children's voice for their wishes and feelings to determine demand and gaps in provision and consider what provision can best meet needs and achieve the best outcomes for children and young people.

Our Commissioning partners

- 30 We have a commissioner who is dedicated to working with Children's Services to understand the needs of children with disabilities and their families to ensure there are services that can be accessed to allow 'short breaks' from caring when needed to improve outcomes and prevent family breakdown.
- 31 We are working in partnership with providers of services to help them recover from Covid. This includes working together to help attract staff who want to work with disabled children and young people and ensure they are trained to provide specialist care and support to meet the needs of our most complex children.
- 32 We have worked jointly with Family Centres to develop a number of local 'inclusive community hubs' across the county. These hubs will aim to support families when they need the break these tend to be after school and weekends, delivering safe services to children and young people with complex needs from the hub into their local community. The specialist hubs have mobilised within Chester le Street, Aycliffe, Bishop Auckland, Fishburn and Horden so far.
- 33 Commissioning also supports the team's statutory assessment of family need for specialist services and direct payments Outreach services, community hubs, home care, overnight respite care. We have worked across the region to develop a framework of providers who can provide over-night short break care for children and young people within residential settings to enable over-night short breaks for parent/carers.
- 34 We will shortly be recruiting - Enabling Inclusive Communities Officer who will be working with any families who identify they would like to access something but there is a barrier. This person will work with the family and the providers to remove the barrier, extra training etc.
- 35 We appointed a short breaks solutions officer – who is working to research what is already on offer for families and help signpost to these. Working with Voluntary Community Sector and providers to develop this offer. Work with families to understand what the barriers are to accessing community activities
- 36 For parent/ carers who need a break from caring, but their disabled child is unable to access activities due to their disability in the community/ mainstream provision we have a commissioned – short break offer (without an assessment). We have a range of activities targeted with additional training. These include.
 - Physical activity sessions on weekends
 - Youth groups
 - Community projects

- Sports clubs
 - Family activities
 - Buddy scheme
 - We have a commissioning group with early help for Children with Disabilities and parent/ carers who decide on the menu of services.
- 37 We have worked jointly with Adult Commissioners to re-commission an all-age Domiciliary Care Support Framework.
- 38 Where there have not been the appropriate solutions in place, we have worked together to develop bespoke off-framework arrangements, including for example making appropriate changes to a family home to enable children to remain living there.

Respite provision for our Disabled Children in Durham who live with Parent Carers

- 39 Park House is a short break provision based in Sherburn Village, in Co Durham. Park House offers Durham's young disabled people, between 5 years & 18-years short breaks. A short break is defined under Section 20 Children Act 1989, where the short breaks exceed a total of 17 days per placement/75 days per 12-month period and/or take place in more than one setting.
- 40 Park House provides short break care for young people who have a learning disability, but may also have complex physical or health needs, who may require specialist equipment, specific communication needs and a sensory impairment. In emergency situations Park house is registered and can support children in the longer term whilst alternate placements are identified.
- 41 Park House currently has 30 children accessing the service with another 9 young people currently being introduced, our age range is from 5 to 17 with young people leaving us the day before their 18th birthday.
- 42 We maintain close working relationships with our health professionals who help to provide the specialist individual training that our children often require.
- 43 Park House provide overnight short break to children and their families, giving children the opportunity to have a "sleep over" make new friends and hopefully gain new experience and independent skills in an enjoyable, safe, and caring environment. This allows parents and carers to spend time with their other children or just have time to sleep and recharge their batteries which is often needed to support them in their caring role.

14-25 Navigation Team (Adult Services)

- 44 The Navigation Team is an adult services team which responds to the needs of disabled children and young persons aged between 14 – 25 years during their transition from children to adulthood. The team reflects the requirements of the 2014 Care Act, 2014 Children’s and Families Act, Special Educational Needs (SEN) 2014 reforms and Mental Capacity Act (2005) so that young people and their families receive appropriate support to plan for adulthood with the care, health, and education services they need. There are 8 children Looked After in the Navigation Team. The Navigation Team also work with Care Leavers.
- 45 The teamwork with children (from the age of 14 years) and young adults with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, sensory needs, mental health, autism and acquired brain injury and will require a statutory intervention in adulthood i.e., commissioned service.
- 46 Where there is no formal diagnosis of a learning disability the 14-25 Navigation Team can support with arranging an initial screening assessment.
- 47 The 14-25 Navigation team have 17 young people open to the Navigation Team all of whom are aged 17 or over. This includes one child in care and 3 care leavers. The remaining 14 young people are child in need. The Navigation Team ensures effective joint working between Children and Adults Services. Team Structure
- 48 The Navigation team structure is an integrated team with expertise in social work, learning disabilities and mental health.
- 49 The ethos of the team is to:
- Avoid unnecessary delays and duplication
 - Deliver appropriate care and support plans
 - Develop a sustainable pathway into adulthood.
 - Embed shared understanding between Children and Adults Services
 - Provide continuity between Children and Adults Services
 - Provide appropriate and cost-effective services for the long-term future.
 - They will support and lead on Education, Health and Care Planning for young people with special educational needs, promoting the use of personal budgets so that young people have more control over the type of support and services they need and want.

- Undertake core legal work e.g., Care Act, Mental Health Act, Mental Capacity Act and consider the need for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and applications to the Court of Protection
- Consider the needs of Parent carers and Young Carers.
- They assist children's services in both health and social care to navigate complex adult provision and establish whether the young people will require an adult provision in the future.

Over 18 years

- 50 Individuals prior to their 18th birthday will be assessed in accordance with the national eligibility criteria set out in the Care Act 2014. This states that an adult meets the eligibility criteria if.
- Their needs arise from or are related to a physical or mental impairment or illness
 - As a result of the adult's needs, they are unable to achieve two or more specified outcomes
 - Therefore, there is or is likely to be a significant impact on a person's wellbeing.
 - Pathway plans are in place for all children looked after with the Navigation team which support them into adulthood. The Navigation team work jointly with the Young Peoples service where they are care leavers. Children's services would be responsible for completing documentation related to this but with input from the 14-25 Navigation Team

Practice Improvements

- 51 We continue to improve practice/quality in Children with Disabilities team by the implementation of the CWD Governance Group which has been established to focus on service improvement this is jointly chaired by Helen Fergusson Head of Children's Services and Lee Alexander Head of Adult's Services the membership is health, commissioning, children's services, and adult services where the focus is practice improvement and service development.
- 52 We continue to implement the Signs of Safety practice model. All current members of the Disabilities Team have completed their 2-day SOS training. 6 members of the Disabilities Team have completed their Advanced training. This has meant that we have been able to focus on practice developments to improve the quality of service and outcomes for our children and families within the team using this practice model.

- 53 The CWD team has its own audit programme where we can identify themes of practice improvement and celebrate good practice within the team.

Conclusion

- 54 The CWD team will continue to embed the service improvement plan within the team and develop and identify themes of practice improvements to do this we will continue to use direct feedback, audits, thematic audits, complaint outcomes, and the child's voice to direct this work.
- 55 The CWD team will continue to work with our partners to create the best services with and for our children and families.
- 56 The CWD team will continue to work with commissioning regarding the recovery from the pandemic and this will be a focus for us and our families so that our families have the support they tell us they need. This will also bring new opportunities to how we work with families and deliver service i.e., community hubs.
- 57 In the next year the CWD team priorities are to continue to develop the work identified in this report and to develop co-production with our children and families.
- 58 The CWD team will ensure the voice of the child will continue to grow and influence the practice improvements within the team.
- 59 We will champion the use of all our direct work tools including Mind of My Own, so we see our children influencing all the information and decisions made with them.
- 60 The CWD team will continue to complete yearly assessments for all the children in the team so that they know the children well. When we cannot offer a service, we will support the family to find someone or a service who can. The CWD team will ensure the children's needs are understood and regularly discussed by people who know them best.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

There are legal duties on the Local Authority to implement the disability and special educational needs reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. As Corporate Parents, there is a legal duty to care for our Children in care under the Children Act 1989.

Also, The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) are part of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. The safeguards aim to make sure that people in care homes and hospitals are looked after in a way that does not inappropriately restrict their freedom.

Finance

No direct financial implications.

Consultation

None.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The Local Authority under Equalities Legislation and the Children's Act have a duty to provide access to services for Children and Young People with SEND. The needs of all young people are considered on an individual basis

Climate Change

Wherever possible we seek to provide services and support close to where families live, and this seeks to reduce travelling.

Human Rights

Children and young people with disabilities have the same right to a family life (HRA S8) as any other young person whom CYPS deliver services and support.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

CWD service is suitably staffed, to ensure that the service offers appropriate staffing levels based on current need.

Accommodation N/A

Risk N/A

Procurement

We work with Commissioning Services and follow the agreed procurement procedure if specific service is required.