



# Growing Up in County Durham Strategy 2023-25



## **Introduction**

We have a vision for all children, young people and their families, that creates a view of what we want to achieve in County Durham. Our vision is:

**County Durham supports all children, young people and their families to achieve their goals in life, in an environment that is safe, happy and healthy.**

This strategy is our high-level plan that explains what we are going to do to achieve our vision. It will tell you what our seven priority areas are for the next three years, how we have decided these priorities, the high-level actions we will focus on to achieve these priorities, which support the aims of the Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board, and how we will know if we have been successful.

It is designed to be easy for children and young people to understand. We have asked young people from County Durham Youth Council to tell us why this strategy is important, this is what they said:

‘The children, young people and families’ strategy is vitally important for us as a youth council, and as young people, because it gives us a chance to be informed about what is being done to ensure children, young people and families can grow up in a safe environment, and feel they are involved in the decision-making process that will affect them. The strategy’s aims, being developed using consultation and the opinion of the people the strategy focuses on, reflect how important the strategy is, as it targets the areas that children, young people and families feel are the most important areas to improve in County Durham. Everyone in County Durham deserves to have a say in the development of their local area, and the county, to improve safety, opportunities and health, and this strategy is vitally important to deliver that to children, young people and families.’

With any strategy it’s important to show the guiding principles we have used when developing it, and to be clear about what is included in it, and what isn’t:

- It is written in a way that makes it easy for a young teenager to understand, and in a format that is accessible to everyone.
- It is based on evidence gathered from consultation with children, young people, their families, carers and professionals.
- It is also based on what the data tells us are the issues children, young people and their families face in County Durham, for example – physical health, mental health, emotional wellbeing, child poverty levels or educational attainment.
- It gives a brief, but clear, overview of what we will be focusing on over the next three years.

- It focuses on adding to what is already being done. It doesn't duplicate the work being carried out by others, but it provides links to their strategies and plans, or the work that people are doing, so you can see what is happening.
- It is designed for all children, young people and their families, irrespective of their personal characteristics or family make up, including for example, those in care, with a disability or from the LGBTQ+ community.
- It covers the three years from the beginning of 2023 to the end of 2025.
- It doesn't include technical detail or jargon.

We developed the strategy during 2022. We took time to involve people, who will be affected by the strategy, in its development, carrying out engagement activities with lots of children, young people, families, carers and professionals. We worked with a number of community groups and children's groups across the County on the strategy development, with them often carrying out the engagement activities on our behalf. Their responses guided our ambitions and we worked with them to identify the seven priority areas outlined in the strategy.

### **Where are we now?**

Working in partnership is very important to us and we think that, if we are to be successful, we have to work together to make changes; this includes working with children, young people and adults, in their own communities, to help them to find solutions to their issues.

The Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board are the people who have agreed this strategy, and who are responsible for delivering the high-level actions identified. These high-level actions will support the Board's four strategic aims:

1. Making sure every child has the best start in life – even before they are born.
2. Making sure that all children are supported to be happy, healthy and safe to achieve their potential, and provide additional help when it is needed.
3. Making sure that children and young people with additional needs are supported throughout their childhood, teenage years and as they move into adulthood.
4. Making sure the services we provide are joined up, with children, young people and families/carers at the centre.

These strategic aims provided a starting point to develop the strategy. We then looked at what the data told us about children and young people living in County Durham, and the issues that they face. Examples include:

- There are 115,000 children and young people (aged 0-19) in County Durham
  - 7 out of 10 children achieve a good level of development at the end of reception year in school
  - Childhood vaccination take up is better than the national average
  - 10,400 school age children have special educational needs
  - 91% of 16-17 year olds are in education or training
  - The county's care leavers are more likely to be in education, employment and training than in other areas both regionally and nationally
- Poverty: 1 in 4 children live in a household which cannot afford all the basics they need such as their food and fuel bills
- Impact of Covid-19:
  - A 20% increase in demand for children and young people's mental health services is projected over next 5 years
  - 1 in 6 children, aged 5-16 years, identified as having a probable mental health disorder (an increase from 1 in 9 in 2017)
- Healthy start to life:
  - There are almost 4,800 live births annually
  - 1 in 6 women smoke at time of baby's delivery
  - 1 in 3 are breastfeeding 6-8 weeks after birth
  - 1 in 4 of reception and more than 1 in 3 year 6 pupils are overweight
  - 1 in 4 5 year-olds have tooth decay
  - The number of babies, toddlers and school age children vaccinated is significantly better than the England average

You can see the data in more detail and other data that we have used by visiting the [Children and Young People in County Durham Summary Infogram](#).

Based on data, and what people told us, we have identified seven priority areas that we are going to focus on:

### **1. Family, friends and community**

- You told us that where you live, both your home and your community is very important. Family relationships in a safe, loving and supportive home environment are key.
- Having friends and living in a community with good support networks and infrastructure, which you can easily be part of is what you want. Where there are things for children and young people to do, green spaces to play and good access to services and transport links.

- You want us to make sure that all mums, dads and carers have opportunities to access community support and services as family networks continue to change.
- You said that we need to make the most of the community support groups and facilities available for children and young people, to improve access to local services and activities.
- We are facing some challenges, for example the number of children and young people coming into council care continues to rise and support services, including accommodation, are experiencing high demand.

## **2. Being safe**

- You told us that being and feeling safe at home, at school or college and when you are out and about is important; and that having safe spaces to meet and play, both in the real world and online, whether that's websites, gaming or social media sites is part of this.
- Making our communities clean and free from anti-social behaviour, where criminal activity is low and where there is mutual trust and respect is what we should be striving for.

## **3. Fairer opportunities**

- You said that providing fairer opportunities to access community support and services, by targeting support to those most in need, will help improve prospects for all our children and young people.
- Having good access to healthy food is important to children and young people; helping them to grow up in good health, protected from infectious disease, be a healthy weight, be physically active and enjoying play and social activities.
- You highlighted the importance of how we deal with the many impacts of long-term financial hardship and poverty. These include poorer physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing and more limited access to learning and leisure opportunities. County Durham has some of the worst physical and mental health inequalities in the country and the proportion of children who live in poverty in the County is significantly higher than many other areas of the country.
- Many more families are struggling to pay their household bills (food, heating, water, rent/mortgage, council tax), due to the current cost of living crisis, and there is increasing demand for money advice services, foodbanks and other community support. Children and young people have told us they are worried about the current crisis and how it will affect them as they grow up.

#### **4. Development, learning and skills**

- From birth through to adulthood, childhood development, learning and skills is essential. Developing early childhood skills before the age of 2, such as play and socialising with other children, being ready for school at 5, then secondary school and further education or work are all key to accessing a happy and prosperous future.
- You have told us that parent and toddler groups and parenting skills programmes are critical at the start of life. As children get older, you have told us that developing emotional and life skills, such as confidence, citizenship, budgeting and cooking, are important alongside education and careers advice ensuring young people grow up to be resilient and responsible adults able to cope with what life brings them.

#### **5. Tackling the Impacts of Covid-19**

- The impact of Covid-19 on children and young people has been huge. Children and young people have missed out on so much in the two years of the pandemic. National lockdowns removed opportunities to socialise and develop and it has had a significant impact on your learning and mental health, which requires additional support from professionals.
- It has been reported in various studies that children's physical activity levels have also declined as a result of the pandemic. National data has indicated that more children are overweight than before the pandemic. Again, support is needed to help children back to pre-pandemic activity levels, both inside and outside school.
- Covid-19 has also impacted on support services such as mental health support. The reasons are twofold - services were put on hold, or diverted during the pandemic, which has caused a backlog and there has also been an increase in demand for these services as an impact of the pandemic. The scale and type of support needed to help those children and young people with Long Covid is still to emerge.

#### **6. Physical Health, Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing**

- The need for children and young people's emotional wellbeing support services continues to increase. According to a recent parliamentary report, 1 in 6 young people are now likely to experience poor mental health, compared to 1 in 9 pre-pandemic.
- Children and young people have told us that the challenges of lockdown, school studies, exam stress, peer pressure, social media, loneliness, worries about the environment, climate change, cost of living

and the war in Ukraine are reasons for their anxiety and stress. There was a feeling that education settings may be able to more support children and young people to be resilient and to promote emotional wellbeing.

- Parental mental health, including pregnant women, new mothers and their babies, was also cited as an important issue by parents and carers.
- Our recent 2022 Student Voice survey also highlighted high numbers of primary and secondary school children getting less than 8 hours sleep per night. Sleeping well helps children to thrive and promotes learning and good emotional wellbeing.
- We need to meet the challenge of the increasing need for support at all levels, whether that's the availability of advice and guidance in schools and colleges, and other settings such as youth clubs, through to more focused support for those who need it, from services such as our Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

## **7. Access to community support and services**

- You told us that providing children, young people and families including new parents and babies, with access to good quality local services which are shaped round their needs, will support the best outcomes for them, and we need to ensure that we involve you in shaping the services we deliver.
- We also know that providing early enough support to children and young people, who need it, will reduce the need for crisis interventions and improve outcomes for all involved.
- You have told us that being able to navigate often complex systems, delivered by more than one agency, can be confusing, so providing clear information about how to access support and clear information about how that support will be delivered, is important to ensure you can make informed decisions, no matter the circumstances.
- You have also told us about issues where you have had to deal with different people, from different agencies, so providing a consistent source of support is important.
- You mentioned that travel to access opportunities and services is sometimes an issue, due to the large and rural nature of the County, and that services are not always available at a time to suit you, or within your budget.
- You said that we need to make the most of our community support networks to improve access to local services and activities.

## What is already happening?

1. You said safety is important. You can find out more about what we are doing to keep you safe and the support you can get by going to:
  - Keeping children safe - [Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)
  - Community safety, anti-social behaviour etc. - [Safe Durham Partnership](#) and Anti-social Behaviour Strategy (currently being developed – added when strategy is launched)
  - Support for domestic abuse - [Domestic Abuse](#)
2. You said the environment you live in is important. You can find out more about what we are doing to protect and improve the environment by going to:
  - Environment and climate - [Environment and Climate Change Partnership](#) and [Climate County Durham](#)
3. You said supporting people who need some extra help is important. You can find out more about what we are doing to support people by going to:
  - Supporting children in care – [Corporate Parenting Strategy](#) and [Investing in Children](#)
  - Supporting young carers - [The Bridge Young Carers Service](#)
  - Supporting adult carers - [Durham County Carers Support](#)
  - Supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) - [SEND Strategy](#)
  - Children and families affected by poverty - [Poverty Action Plan](#)
4. You said learning, employment and life skills are important. You can find out more about what we are doing by going to:
  - Schools and education - [Durham Schools and Education](#)
  - Employment and skills – Inclusive Economic Strategy (currently being developed – added when strategy is launched)
5. You said supporting people’s physical health, mental health and emotional wellbeing is important. You can find out more about what we are doing to support people by going to:
  - Health and wellbeing - [Health and Wellbeing Board](#) and [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#)
  - Mental Health - [Looking After Your Mental Health](#)
  - Physical activity – Physical Activity Strategy for County Durham (currently being developed – added when strategy is launched)
  - Oral Health Strategy - (currently being developed – added when strategy is launched)

6. You said having easy access to information about community support and services is important. You can find out more about what is available by going to:
  - Community support - [Advice in County Durham](#) and [Onepoint Family Centres and Hubs](#)
  - Community information - [County Durham Families Information Service](#)

### **What are we going to do?**

We have identified eight high level actions, based on what the Children Young People and Families Partnership Board can do, to add to the work that is already being done by other people:

1. Working with the strengths and opportunities in local communities to develop a network of family hubs which can support the delivery of a range of local community support and services to children, young people and families.
2. Ensure every young person, who has health, education and/or care needs, and their family, has access to the right support on their move from children's to adult's services, when they are old enough to do so.
3. Work with children, young people and their families to address the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the development, emotional wellbeing and physical health of children and young people.
4. Monitor and evaluate the Bus Service Improvement Plan in relation to benefits brought to young people through concessionary fares and other favourable benefits, allowing young people to have wider access to health, education, leisure, volunteering and other services, and for young people aged 16 and over, work and apprenticeships.
5. Build community support and services as a clear offer which is communicated in a way that is easy for children, young people and families to understand.
6. Ensure children, young people and families have an equal role in the development and redesign of the support and services they use.
7. Develop seamless services that support children, young people and families across health, education and social care.

8. Use data and intelligence across health, education and social care and other services, to build stronger communities and a fairer county for children, young people and families.

### **How will we measure our success?**

We will know we have been successful if we have:

1. Improved the network of family hubs across the County to provide better community-based support and services.
2. Reduced the number of babies going into care to help families stay together.
3. Increased the number of babies who are breastfed during the first months of their life.
4. Increased the number of children who achieve a healthy development during the first years of their life.
5. Reduced the number of times children and young people have to go to hospital with unintentional injuries.
6. Improved children and young people's experience of the move from children to adult's services.
7. Shown how children, young people and families are more involved in developing the support and services they use.

We are going to work together to deliver this plan by the end of 2025 when we, working with children, young people and families, will review it in detail to see how we have done.