

Corporate Parenting Panel

22 March 2023

Children Looked After with a Disability Annual Update



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's 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 also seeks to update the panel on the outcome of the ILACS Ofsted inspection in May 2022 and to highlight some excellent practice examples collaborating with our children and families.
- 5 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

- 6 We know that a comprehensive programme of improvement work within the children with disabilities team is continuing to have an impact on practice and this was reflected back in our ILACS Ofsted inspection May 2022:

- 7 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.
- 8 Whilst there are clear criteria for the children and young people receiving support from these services, the team collaborates with partners to ensure that children are signposted to other appropriate services and sources of support where appropriate. This means families are held to receive the support that is right for their children.
- 9 Ofsted told us during the May 2022 ILACS inspection that the Children with Disabilities team complete "*Comprehensive assessments in the disabled children service which led to clear recommendations for services. There is evidence of creative direct work with non-verbal children and good evidence of sensitive partnership work with parents.*"
- 10 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.
- 11 We have strengthened the voice of our children so they along with their parent/carers are informing their care plans and 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.
- 12 All our children have up to date assessments which are reviewed yearly. The CWD team see our children regularly.
- 13 The CWD team procedures and guidance has been updated and is reviewed annually.
- 14 Improvements in the service can be evidenced by the increase in compliments from families and professionals and a reduction in complaints.
- 15 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.
- 16 We have responded to this feedback from Ofsted in relation to the capacity of our short breaks service and there is a comprehensive action plan in place (as you will see in our commissioning partners who work with the CWD team section of this report).

- 17 We can provide assurance that our assessments of children with disability continue to be of high quality and that where necessary they inform commissioning activity, particularly in relation to the need for short breaks.

Recommendation

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

Background

- 19 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 and the Young Persons Act 2008.
- 20 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 our children in care.
- 21 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).
- 22 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.
- 23 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.
- 24 Criteria of the CWD service is to offer support to the following children and young people who identify as having:
 - (a) Substantial physical disabilities that significantly impact on the child's wellbeing.
 - (b) Substantial learning disabilities.
 - (c) A diagnosis of Autism with a substantial learning disability.
 - (d) Multiple or substantial disability.
 - (e) Substantial sensory impairment in conjunction with a substantial learning disability.
 - (f) Complex physical disability and health needs, this would usually involve support from the continuing health care team (health

services). There might be an assessment from the Continuing Children's Care service if required (health needs).

- 25 There are a total of 262 (As at the end of March 2023) children open to the Children with Disabilities Team.
- 26 Twenty-eight of these children are Children in Our Care.
- 27 The remaining children receive social work support and services under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (two children are presently on a child protection plan). 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.
- 28 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 and further evidenced in the ILACS Ofsted inspection 2022.
- 29 The Navigation team do not case hold children 0 -18 as they previously did. The Navigation Team work with Care Leavers. The CWD team and the Navigation Team ensures effective joint working between Children and Adults Services and support the children's teams to support transition to independence in a planned way for our children and young people.

Staffing in the CWD Team

- 30 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.
- 31 We have an established team, and this means our children in care with a disability have stability and get to know their social worker really well. (You will see a clip from one of our social workers in the team on the day of corporate parenting panel)

Support that the Children with Disabilities Team offer

- 32 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).
- (d) Our children 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 is 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 immense 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 did not 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 Navigation team and by looking at what the needs of the children are into adulthood.

Partners We Work With

- 33 There is close joint working between the CWD team and the Families First Safeguarding Teams, Navigation team, Countywide services, and our front door colleagues. 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.
- 34 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. They 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, they are part of discussions when a child's care arrangements change, and a school placement is required. The Post 16

CLA Personal Education Plan caseworker supports the young person into Post 16 and is part of the initial conversations with Durham Works in supporting the young person into adulthood.

- 35 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 who work with the Children with Disabilities team

- 36 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.
- 37 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.
- 38 Our commissioning colleagues have developed a Short Breaks Sufficiency Strategy and action plan including new governance and monitoring arrangements.
- 39 They have reviewed and revised the short breaks statement with an emphasis on a graduated response and made this clearer for families including introduction of visual short break offer and an animation clip.
- 40 They have created a single point of contact 'SEND Empowering Inclusive Communities - SENDEIC which consists of two new posts who work directly with families, professionals, and providers to grow capacity and increase access to universal community activities, expand the offer and remove any barriers to access.
- 41 They have developed promotional material for SENDEIC and visited a number of teams, settings and events across County Durham focused on providing information too hard to reach families on the offer.
- 42 They have set up new systems and processes to support the graduated approach and capture needs and unmet needs of families which feeds in to needs lead commissioning of services to fill gaps.
- 43 They have commenced mapping of all existing community provision for SEND in order to help grow capacity, promote, and fill any gaps as required.

- 44 Set up a regular weekend session for a cohort of children and young people with challenging behaviours and communication difficulties in the Seaham of the county to be able to take part in a regular positive activity with the right support to allow carers a break.
- 45 An exercise to analyse all usage of specialist short breaks packages and further understand the true need by separating these out into positive activities, short breaks for carers, and intensive support/ crisis intervention.
- 46 A regional group has been set up to develop future commissioning arrangements for over-night short breaks and specialist hospice care.
- 47 A re-commissioning exercise has been initiated working with the market to include all support services for children and young people's social care including positive activities, short breaks for parent carers, and intensive support/ crisis intervention.
- 48 Our commissioners have secured additional resource to assist with re-commissioning, growing the market and supporting providers to be able to respond to the needs of children and young people and fill gaps in meeting needs for those with complex and challenging behaviours (not yet in post).
- 49 Professionals and social work teams report that they feel more knowledgeable about short breaks and able to support families to get the right support to prevent escalation of needs
- 50 Providers report the impact is that they have been supported to recover from the pandemic to improve their service delivery and capacity.
- 51 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.
- 52 We appointed a short breaks solutions officer – who is working to research what is already on offer for families and help signpost to these. Collaborating with Voluntary Community Sector and providers to develop this offer. Work with families to understand what the barriers are to accessing community activities
- 53 We have worked jointly with Adult Commissioners to re-commission an all-age Domiciliary Care Support Framework.

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

- 54 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.

- 55 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.
- 56 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.
- 57 Park House currently has thirty-three children accessing the service with another five young people currently being considered, the age range is from 5 to 17 with young people leaving us the day before their 18th birthday. They have one emergency bed.
- 58 We maintain close working relationships with our health professionals who help to provide the specialist individual training that our children often require.

14-25 Navigation Team (Adult Services)

- 59 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.
- 60 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.
- 61 Where there is no formal diagnosis of a learning disability the 14-25 Navigation Team can support with arranging an initial screening assessment.
- 62 The Navigation team structure is an integrated team with expertise in social work, learning disabilities and mental health.

63 The ethos of the team is to:

- (a) Avoid unnecessary delays and duplication
- (b) Deliver appropriate care and support plans
- (c) Develop a sustainable pathway into adulthood.
- (d) Embed shared understanding between Children and Adults Services
- (e) Provide continuity between Children and Adults Services
- (f) Provide appropriate and cost-effective services for the long-term future.
- (g) 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.
- (h) 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
- (i) Consider the needs of Parent carers and Young Carers.
- (j) 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

64 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.

- (a) Their needs arise from or are related to a physical or mental impairment or illness
- (b) As a result of the adult's needs, they are unable to achieve two or more specified outcomes
- (c) Therefore, there is or is likely to be a significant impact on a person's wellbeing.
- (d) 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

65 We continue to improve practice/quality in Children with Disabilities team by the implementation of an improvement action plan alongside a team plan. A thematic audit of children's cases is completed yearly

alongside collaborative audits these are showing a consistent improvement in practice.

- 66 We continue to implement the Signs of Safety practice model. All current members of the Disabilities Team have completed their 2-day SOS training and are able to complete 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.
- 67 The CWD team has its own audit programme where we can identify themes of practice improvement and celebrate good practice within the team.
- 68 Our partners and parents report improved relationships, and the team were nominated for a national social work team of the year award (2022) and were also nominated for the Durham Inspiring People Awards.

Conclusion

- 69 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.
- 70 The CWD team will continue to collaborate with our partners to create the best services with and for our children and families.
- 71 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.
- 72 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.
- 73 The CWD team will ensure the voice of the child will continue to grow and influence the practice improvements within the team.
- 74 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.
- 75 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.