



County Durham Corporate Parenting Panel

Annual Report
April 2022 – March 2023



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Working with the Corporate Parenting Panel continues to be a great experience. Every time I attend, the panel meetings it is amazing to see that the members who are all amazing and doing a great job, are really listening to young people - and more importantly taking action.

Seeing the steady progress being made across the council every month is amazing and I am so proud to represent the CICC along with Billie-Leigh. ”

Luke



Message from chair and CICC representatives



Councillor Mamie Simmons
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

As Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, I would like to thank everyone for their support and dedication during 2022-23.

Last year we were dealing with the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of services, both in County Durham and across the whole of England. Whilst we now live with Covid, there are many other pressures facing the service, including the cost of living crisis, the impact of the war in Ukraine on both goods and services as well as our commitment to help Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people.

In Durham, colleagues and volunteers across our services have worked extremely hard to provide support to ensure that all children, young people and their carers received the best possible help, advice and guidance.

Our young people continue to demonstrate tremendous resilience, adapting to the world around them, and making us, as corporate parents extremely proud.

I am pleased to introduce the Corporate Parenting Panel’s sixth annual report, which outlines the work undertaken across the service to help us understand and respond to need, ensuring our young people have the best possible opportunities available to them.

March 2023



Councillor Michelle Walton
Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

“

As a representative of the Children in Care Council on the Corporate Parent Panel, it has been empowering to have a place where I can bring my passion for bettering the lives of other young people. I feel like we are actually being heard in a society where mainly adults speak on behalf of you.

The council members and the managers are great at making the meeting feel like a safe space to talk about our ideas and have allowed us to push the boundaries a little of the traditional ways of feeding back to the members. In almost every meeting I am not only allowed, but lightly encouraged to be creative and present our ideas and what we have worked on in an unorthodox manner. All the members make me feel welcomed and despite it being a professional manner, the nature of what we talk about makes it a little personal, the boundary is never crossed.



However, I do feel that the Corporate Parents truly care about myself and the other Children in Care Council representative and want the very best for not only for us but all of Durham’s looked after children. The environment created makes me feel seen and that the councillors truly want to see me succeed in everything that I do whether that be in what we raise in the meeting or in my studies.

Our voices are valued here, and this is where young people can really make a difference for future children that may enter Durham’s care system. ”

Billie-Leigh

What is a corporate parent?

When a child is unable to safely live at home and they come into the care of the local authority it is important that they are properly cared for, supported and loved. The term corporate parent means that everyone in the Local Authority has a responsibility to think about the children in our care in everything they do.

Being a corporate parent isn't just up to the Corporate Parenting Panel, everyone should be looking out for our children and young people, and every councillor and council employee has a role to play as the eyes and ears of the community.

Being a corporate parent means doing whatever we can to support young people in our care and our care leavers, to help them achieve their full potential and have the best possible outcomes. This sometimes means being a corporate grandparent too.



Why are children in care?

Young people are looked after for a variety of reasons including neglect and abuse. They could also be in care if their parents are unable to look after them because of their own complex health needs or behaviours. Some young people have no parents to care for them, or they could be unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Where are children in care?

Children and young people can be in care in a range of settings, including foster care, children's homes, supported lodgings, and secure accommodation – the council is corporate parent to all of them.

Did you know?



Durham are leading discussions to establish a regional CPP Chair/Vice Chairs network

Role of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)

The CPP is a group that is part of the council, which is called a committee. It has 21 councillors as well as council officers. There are also 10 other members, including school representatives and young people's representatives to make sure there's a broad range of experience and knowledge and that children and young people are heard, and actively responded to.

Corporate parents have responsibility to act for the children and young people in our care as a parent would for their own child, and should ask three key questions:






CPP responsibilities




There are a number of things which the CPP must do:

1. Make sure the Council acts as a good corporate parent to children and young people in care and care leavers, including:
 - Young people in children's homes, foster care and supported living situations
 - Young people placed for adoption or placed at home under care planning regulations
 - Young people in secure homes or in custody
2. Engage and listen to the views of children, young people and their carers.
3. Work in partnership with other agencies to make improvements for our children and young people in care.
4. Oversee the virtual school for looked after children and young people. For more information visit www.durham.gov.uk/durhamvirtualschool. A sub-group has been established to lead on this work.
5. Oversee Aycliffe Secure Services. Sub-groups have been established to lead on this work.

More information on the Corporate Parenting Panel can be found in the [constitution of Durham County Council](#)

Updates against 2022-23 priorities

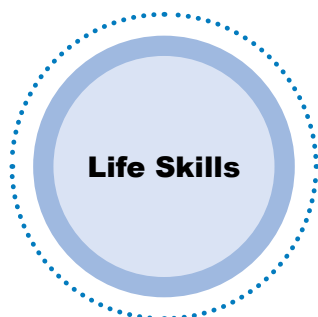
What we said we would focus on	Where we are now	What young people think
Personalised Care	Every child has a care plan which explains how they need to be looked after and supported to get the best from their lives. This includes children and young people in all living situations and for older young people these plans are developed with them directly.	<p>Just OK</p>  <p>CiCC thought it was good that all young people had a care plan. They expressed each young person should have one. They thought care plans could be personalised to each young person so a plan is age appropriate and understandable so they are empowered to participate further allowing their direct voices to come through.</p>
Staff in Children's Homes and Foster carers	<p>All interviews for children's homes or foster carers now has a young person's panel.</p> <p>Staff training is supported by children's groups and voices (using videos etc)</p> <p>The progress of how this feels for young people and if it is making a difference is measured through the CiCC feedback.</p>	<p>Just OK</p>  <p>CiCC members living in children's homes commented on being involved in staff interviews and that additional staff have been recruited to their homes. Support was also valued.</p> <p>CiCC members thought the Mockingbird model was a positive step for foster families. They also thought financial support for foster carers was important and should be considered particularly in school holidays.</p>
Family time	<p>Family time rooms for children whose circumstances are still in an assessment phase have been reviewed and some have been revamped. They remain unpopular with older children in particular and we are looking to develop a 'house' where more natural time as a family can take place.</p> <p>Children with plans of permanence have family time in a variety of community settings. We have reviewed the supervision of this family time and have removed as much as young people have said they are comfortable with. We are looking to progress this further with as many carers as possible supporting family time in a natural way as part of the household. (i.e. meeting a parent for a coffee while shopping, or going swimming, school events).</p>	<p>Happy</p>  <p>CiCC members really liked the idea of making Family Time more natural and some CiCC members explained this was happening.</p> <p>They thought a house for families to use would be a great approach to develop more natural family time for young people who needed support to see their families.</p>

What we said we would focus on	Where we are now	What young people think
Broaden and increase attendance at CICC meetings	<p>Work in this area has been difficult to progress and has been led by Investors in Children staff. The CICC continues to be a small group that does not represent the demographics of the CLA population.</p> <p>The care leavers scrutiny committee may choose to consider this as an action to explore.</p>	<p>Happy</p>  <p>CiCC members like the developments of CiCC road shows, care day 2023, attending foster care events and Artstops as approaches to widen participation.</p> <p>CiCC members would like to produce more surveys to widen participation and continue to look at ways to promote CiCC</p>
Care Experienced Young Inspectors programme	<p>The care leavers scrutiny committee is established and will determine the priority of this type of work as they have a wider remit to explore services to young people across the council.</p>	<p>Happy</p>  <p>CiCC members thought this was a good idea and older CiCC members have started to connect with it, however, they think it could involve more young people outside of CiCC.</p>
Transport	<p>All young people who attend college now receive free bus travel passes.</p> <p>Work progresses with the care leavers and COE group to look at ways that travel accessibility could be improved for young people in Durham.</p>	<p>Happy</p>  <p>Transport for young people at college was viewed really positively, but thought transport for care leavers could be developed further in line with personal circumstances.</p>

Priorities for 2023-24

Each year, young people choose key priority areas that they would like the service and the Corporate Parenting Panel to focus on. It was agreed that the young people would identify key areas and share these with the CPP members at the joint CICC/ CPP meetings.

The following areas were identified by young people as initial ideas for 2023-24:



To increase the representative voice of the children in our care, the Children in Care Council will consider how children who don't attend CICC meetings will be given the opportunity to comment on these priority areas and say if they agree that they are the right ones for the services and the CPP to focus on for the year ahead.

Children in Care Council (CICC)

The CICC is a group for children and young people who are care experienced in County Durham and is supported by Investing in Children. The CICC members meet monthly to talk about issues which are important to them, highlight what works and share stories of the support they have received. This forum is well established, and has recently been split into older and younger groups as the two age groups often had different priorities.

Senior managers from within Children and Young People's Services and elected members who are on the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) attend CICC meetings by invitation only as the young people wanted to determine their own agendas for these meetings.

More information on the CICC can be found at www.durhamcicc.co.uk

Joint CICC/CPP meetings

In addition to the formal CPP meetings, children and young people from the CICC (supported by Investing in Children) host a joint meeting with the CPP every six months. The young people set the agenda for the meeting and invite members and officers of the CPP to attend to meet with the CICC.

These meetings are less formal than the CPP meeting and provide an opportunity for all of the young people who are part of the CICC to raise issues which are important to them and have discussions directly with members and officers of the CPP and have their ideas, suggestions and comments heard.

Feedback from the discussions is collated and key issues are presented at a formal CPP meeting, for further discussion. Work takes place to address these issues within the service, and feedback is provided to the CICC at the next joint meeting.

Co-opted positions for CICC members

Two young people from the CICC have co-opted positions on the CPP providing panel representation from the CICC. They attend each meeting (supported by Investing in Children, and the DCC Participation Worker) to share feedback from the CICC.

In addition, the CICC have a standing item on each CPP agenda, where they provide feedback from CICC meetings, ensuring members of the CPP hear real views and feedback directly from the young people. The young people are involved in decision making within the CPP, and this feedback is shared with relevant leads to influence service decisions and developments as necessary.

CICC Newsletters

Young people from the CICC produce newsletters, which are shared with partners across the service, with children, young people and their families and with the CPP.

You can find copies of the CICC newsletters at www.durhamcicc.co.uk/cicc-newsletters



Care day 2023

A range of activities took place to support Care Day 2023

- **The Children in Care Council hosted an event on 18 February.** Sky Hawkins 'The Word Bird' attended to provide the key note speech. Sky is an award-winning dyslexic poet and performer. Sky was raised in the UK's care system, and began writing poetry in her teens. All of the young people had a great day and look forward to next year's event.
- **Care Day Event in The Durham Room, County Hall, 22 February 2022.** The Children and Young People's Service held an event at County Hall for care day, inviting any young person aged 16+, their workers and all of our care leavers to come along. At the event artwork that has been put together by our young people was on display, demonstrating what young people feel the words "care experienced" means to them! The journey of the care leavers HUB from when it first opened was also showcased. Young people who are moving over to the care leavers service were encouraged to attend to meet Leaders, Managers, YPA's and other young people.
- **Care Leavers challenge.** Twelve people undertook the challenge, including Durham County Council Leadership team. Here are some of their quotes:

I just did one week and what an eye opener it was. I spent way too much money on the first day without really meaning to and had to be extra vigilant for the rest of the week but was extremely lucky to get some dog walking money in the challenge. I suddenly became very aware of how expensive everything is and how much you take for granted - the coffees from cafes on the go, a bag of crisps here, a bar of chocolate there etc and you just can't be frivolous at all. I spent a lot of time trying to squeeze an extra few pennies every time I went to the shops and it was quite soul destroying to be honest at what every day things just couldn't afford.

I sat under a blanket on an evening quite uncomfortable as heating was an unaffordable luxury (did let the kids have a plug in radiator in their bedrooms). I would say though the biggest hardship wasn't the food or heating (which is bad enough) it was not having any money to do anything at all. Couldn't afford the petrol to go anywhere (except work), didn't watch any of the usual TV packages (Amazon, Netflix etc). No going to the cinema, out for a bite to eat, a few drinks after work or a takeaway at home not even spending a couple of pounds having a coffee at the park. I felt quite isolated and if that was my life, long term I can imagine would feel very despondent and even depressed.

Not a challenge I would like to repeat but certainly glad I did it to get insight into how young people leaving care who are already at a disadvantage have to live.

Personal Assistant NHS

Didn't feel right having extra when my colleagues doing the challenge had not been so lucky and some had received a sanction. The experience has given me increased understanding and narrative when considering the needs of care experienced young people. On the afternoon I went to a meeting and everyone was interested in the challenge and how tough it had been. Raising awareness is important but more action is definitely required. Thank you for letting me take part.

Designated Nurse – Children in Care



Independent Visitors

Did you know that any person in care (from primary school age, until you turn 18 years old) is entitled to an independent visitor. An independent visitor is a volunteer who can help with your mental health and wellbeing, help with social anxiety, and you can also plan trips and activities to do together. Ask your social worker for more information.

During 2022-23, the service received 70 referrals for an Independent Visitor, a small increase on the previous year but excellent evidence of the consistent need for support for young people in care. 50 young people were matched with Independent Visitors, and 33 matches concluded during the period. Matches conclude where a young person has left care, although the offer of support for those young people remains, some young people no longer want an Independent Visitor, or the Independent Visitor leaves the role. The service currently has 44 active matches.

The main impact of having an Independent Visitor is reported as an increase in confidence and self-esteem amongst young people. Developing independent skills is also reported as a significant outcome. Feedback from users of the Independent Visitor service is...

“ My Independent Visitor is my best friend. I don't know what I would do without them. I am leaving care soon and they have been a big support to me and will support me through my move.- **Young person** ”

“ The Independent Visitor sticks with me whether I have good days or bad days. I can have very difficult moments when I feel down but they listen to my concerns and frustrations, and this helps to make me feel better. - **Young Person** ”

“ The support and kindness shown by the Independent Visitors to both young children have been amazing during a difficult period. Both young people love going out with them'. - **Foster carer** ”

“ It is so positive to have a service like this in CYPS, that supports the work that social workers do but independent from core responsibilities that we have. Independent visitors can spend more time doing activities with the young person that supports the positive work that the team around the young person aims to achieve'. - **Social Worker** ”

“ The relationship with the young person is very intense, but also real fun. I am led by what they want to do but also try to ensure that they have the opportunity to talk about their issues whilst engaging in useful and fun activities. Such a positive experience!! - **Independent Visitor** ”

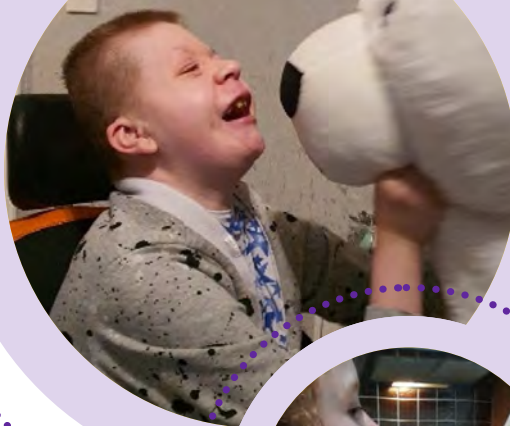
“ There is so much care and empathy shown to 'C' in their relationship with their Independent Visitor. We have also seen a positive change in the way 'C' manages their emotions and the way they build friendships with others. Great positive steps. - **Social Worker** ”

Children with disabilities

There have been significant changes to services for CWD since 2019 and we now can see the great practice improvements for our children.

Which includes:

- Remodelling of the service to create a 0-18 CWD team
- The creation of the 14-25 Navigation team, which is based within the adults' social care service
- The CWD team has had additional investment in staff
- We now have clear processes, guidance and procedures for practitioners which includes a robust eligibility criteria
- A robust short break offer supported by our commissioning colleagues in the process of being created
- And a priority to champion the voice of the child in all our work with our families



Durham County Council Children with disabilities team - All about us

Durham County Council's Children's Social Care are committed to delivering the very highest quality services to children and young people who have disabilities and their families. The Children with Disabilities Team is a specialist service for children and young people who are aged 0-18 years old.

Children and young people that meet the eligibility criteria for an assessment from the Children with Disabilities team will usually have their needs assessed under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

The Team is responsible for ensuring that all children and young people are safe, happy and thrive and become as independent as they possibly can be. In all our work with children and young people we want to provide the right service at the right time and ensure that wherever possible children are supported and kept safe primarily by their family and their network.

We have a statutory responsibility to provide and/or co-ordinate the provision of services to meet the assessed needs of children and young people with disabilities. We endeavour to put children and young people's needs at the heart of all we do. The provision of services to children and young people under the age of 18 with disabilities is delivered by the Children with Disabilities team, which is managed by Durham County Council's Children's Social Care.



What our children with a disability and their families tell us we need to do more of and what we have done!

Ensure we have a voice

- Improve our voice, hear our wishes and feelings, know, and understand our day-to-day experiences.
- Access to advocacy via NYAS - we are passionate about encouraging parents to work with NYAS to ensure children's views are advocated.
- Use Mind of My Own Express and One App.
- We are using more creative ways to gather wishes and feelings including photos, social stories, picture exchange communication, signed supported English, Makaton and commissioned specialist signs when needed.
- Access to Young carers support for brothers and sisters. Alongside Parent Carers assessments.
- That our Independent Reviewing officer asks us what our wishes are and check everyone is doing their best for us.

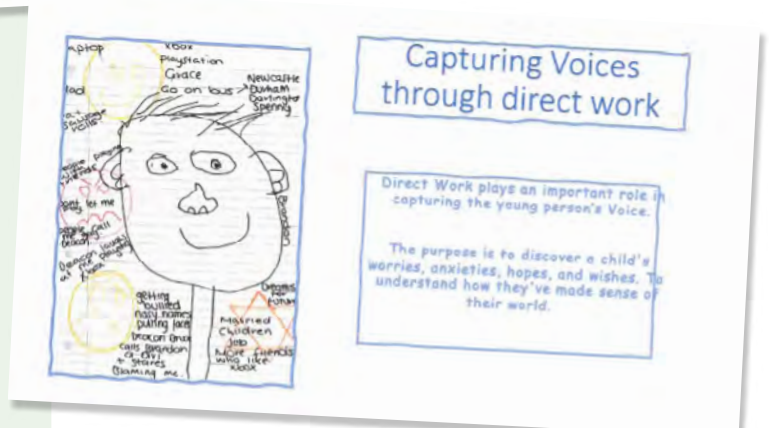
That you know us well. When you can't help you help us to find someone who can

- Ensure that team culture promotes building good relationships with us, our families, and our carers.
- That we will where possible have the same social worker throughout our childhood.
- When you cannot help us as we do not meet the criteria you will endeavour to provide advice, support, and guidance to help to meet our needs.



Ensure our needs are understood and regularly discussed by people who know us best

- We are visited regularly by our named social worker.
- Annual assessments focusing on what's working well for us and our families/carers, what we are worried about and what needs to happen to meet our needs.
- Ensuring we have a robust plan to meet our needs and/or keep us safe. That these are reviewed and updated regularly by us, our families, and our carers.
- Our parents/carers have access to carer's assessments.
- When we are ready to think about preparing for adulthood, we work closely with the Navigation team, they are colleagues in adults' services who can work when is most appropriate to support with the transition to adulthood. We recognise for all young people the transition from children to adults' services is a worrying time, and we work hard to ensure this is done in a planned way.



Achievements

The CWD team achieved an Investing in children gold award as the award gives national recognition for actively including children and young people in dialogue that results in change for our children and their families. The team who shared lots of the lovely work our children and young people have done, and they have designed a new leaflet for the children with disabilities team. It involves hearing directly from children and young people how they have a voice and contribute to changes in the work of the CWD team.



Aimee is one of our social workers in our CWD team and she recently was filmed for the department for education to explain her role and to illustrate that our social workers play a vital role and help make key positive changes in our children's lives. – Here is the link so you can experience the passion the team have for their children and young people.

View Aimee's film here:

<https://twitter.com/educationgovuk/status/1637725774521171968?s=20>

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Within Durham we have a growing population of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. These young people have experienced human trafficking and exploitation during their travel to Durham and we need to support them to recover and to thrive in our communities. We have established a dedicated team to help them do so and for many we have been able to aid them through sport to build confidence and communication with each other and with staff. They meet regularly to play football and to cook and share food. These young people are some of the most vulnerable we have in our child looked after population.



Fostering Services

Fostering services in Durham continue to provide family-based care of a high quality to children who cannot safely live at home. In Durham we have 368 fostering homes. 133 of these are with connected person foster carers and the remainder with carers who do not know the children but are available to offer a loving home for as long as required.

To recognise the work our foster carers do we have changed the way that we pay fostering fees with the introduction of a skills to foster model. This resulted in every carer receiving and increase in payments. We continue to look at ways in which we can improve our support to foster carers in Durham.

They are the engine of children's social care and the care they provide supports children to recover from harms suffered and aids them to return to live with their families or move into their adults lives when they are ready to do so.

We have a staying put scheme that makes sure that young people move from their fostering homes when they are ready to do so and that this isn't because of their age alone.

Mockingbird Family Model

We have successfully launched our first mocking bird fostering constellations. This means that we have an experienced foster carer working with a group of other foster carers to make and extended fostering family. This helps the children and the adults when things are hard. They have the support of each other, and they have the ability to have sleep overs to give each other space if that's what is needed. They share fun events and build the relationships of an extended family.

We have a second hub due to be launched in the coming

months and will progress with this model of fostering to support foster carers to care for children who might otherwise not be able to manage in a family-based care setting.

Fostering recruitment

We need lots more foster carers to make sure that when a child or young person needs a foster carer, we can choose the right one to meet their needs. To help us do this we have had a number of targeted campaigns take place across the year to increase the number of foster carers. Last year we launched our first TV advert. [Here's the most recent TV advert.](#)

Did you know? ? ?

We have a group called 'M8s' that provides support for foster carers own children, if they have them. This gives an opportunity for the young people to meet others whose parents are foster carers, and to have fun whilst sharing their experiences.

Mind of My Own App

To ensure children's voices are at the centre of what we do, we have several ways that we engage with them and in addition to our direct work, all young people are supported to access the Mind of My Own app. This enables young people to share their views, successes and any challenges with their social workers ahead of their reviews. The app also allows young people to contact their social worker if they have any worries or queries about anything at any time. Young people, for whom English is not their first language, can use the app in their own language, which are translated and sent to their workers.

Foster Care Training

Young people support our foster carer training both for new foster carers and for those who have fostered for a while and are refreshing their training. This allows the training to be 'real' and for the young people to help foster carers understand how it feels from their perspective to be cared for in a fostering home.

Foster Care awards

These awards recognise the outstanding achievements of foster carers, as well as their families who have welcomed children and young people into their homes and lives.

Last year we hosted the Foster Care awards at the Gala Theatre, Durham which was really successful but could only have limited numbers in actual attendance. This year we are planning an event to include as many foster carers as we can.

Did you know? ? ?

Staying Put arrangements means that if a young person and their foster carer agree, the young person can continue to stay with their foster carers when they turn 18, even though they become a care leaver. This may be something a young person wants to do because they want support while they finish their education, or they might just want more time to make the transition to independence. They can stay with their foster carer until they are 21.



Ofsted inspections in our residential children's homes

Children's home	The effectiveness of leaders and managers	How well children and young people are helped and protected	Overall experiences and progress of children and young people
Park House	Good	Good	Good
New Lea house	Good	Good	Good
Orchard house	Outstanding	Good	Good
33 Newton drive	Good	Good	Good
54 Blackgate East	Good	Good	Good
Moorside	Good	Good	Good
West Rainton	Good	Good	Good
High Etherley	Good	Good	Good
The Manse	Good	Good	Good
Hickstead	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Hudson house	Not Inspected	Not Inspected	Not Inspected

Information about Aycliffe Secure Centre is included in the ASC section.

We currently have eleven registered Children's Homes across the County offering residential care to children and young people. This could be support and care for young people who cannot live at home, or short respite breaks when children and young people with disabilities need to have a little time away from their family or carer. There have been many developments across the service, including strengthening the existing management teams, with Deputy managers in post and also a "grow your own" approach to recruit new workers with no experience of residential care. Furthermore, the homes are currently being revamped to ensure that they are homely and fit for purpose.

Sufficiency

A number of new children's homes are being developed to ensure that as many children as possible live within County Durham and are able to maintain links with their schools, friends, families and hobbies. The new homes are different sizes (ranging from 1 to 3 places) so that children and young people with more complex needs can be cared for. An Edge of Care home is also being planned; this will offer short breaks and wider support to young people and their families to help them to remain living at home.

Staying Close

This is similar to the staying put principles, when young people leave our children's homes they may still need the support of familiar people to help them settle and feel safe in their adult living arrangements, so we will look for accommodation options that are close to their former children's home so that they are able to pop in for advice and support, or to use laundry facilities, have a meal etc when they need to.



NYAS

All children in care have access to independent advocacy services through the National Youth Advocacy Service.



Regulation 44/elected members

Some of our elected members attend the Regulation 44 inspection visits alongside the NYAS inspectors on a quarterly basis ([more information on Reg 44 visits can be found here](#)). Posters of the inspectors are on display in the home, so that young people know who is visiting, and can identify them easily:

Home/Councillor	
Framwellgate Moor, Durham Cllr Mamie Simmons	
Elderhirst, Meadowfield Cllr Ken Robson	
Maple House, ASC Cllr Stacey Deinali	
Coxhoe Hudson House, Cllr Chris Varty	
West Rainton Cllr Bev Coult	
High Etherley Cllr Samantha Townsend	
New Lea House, Stanley Cllr Joyce Charlton	
Orchard House, Sacriston Cllr Cathy Hunt	
Moorside, Spennymoor Cllr Angela Sterling	
Hickstead, Newton Aycliffe Cllr Ken Robson	
Park House, Sherburn Cllr Jake Miller	

Supporting Solutions Service

Supporting Solutions Service offers:

- Edge of care support, offering intensive interventions where there has been a relationship breakdown (age 11 plus support and minis support which is age 7 plus)
- Family Group conferences to support families to put in place a sustainable plan to support the young people.
- Support for young people who have been missing from home.
- Child Exploitation support and interventions.
- During 2022-23, 182 young people received support from the SSS 11 plus service, 126 of these were referred in 2022/23, whilst the other 56 had been referred prior to this.
- 135 young people who received support from SSS 11 plus service were able to remain in the care of their family and 10 young people were able to return to the care of their family after a period in care. 6 young people were supported to remain in their long-term placement.
- During 2022-223, 56 young people received support from the SSS minis service, 48 of these were referred in 2022/23, whilst the other 8 had been referred prior to this.
- 43 young people who received support from SSS minis service were able to remain in the care of their family. 11 young people were supported to remain in their long-term placement.
- Access to an out of hours bed for one night where there is a crisis situation. The crisis bed at The Nest was used on 55 occasions, for a total of 64 nights.
- 231 initial Family Group Conferences were completed in 2021/22; for 197 of these the plan supported the child/young person to remain with or return to the care of their family.
- The Erase child exploitation workers have supported 92 young people who were identified as high risk of criminal or sexual exploitation in 2021/22. When reviewed in April 2022 43 young people remained high risk, but for 49 young people their risks had reduced (26 to medium risk and 23 to low risk).
- 683 young people were reported missing in 2021/22, a total of 1992 missing episodes. This is an increase of over 80% on the previous year. Of the 1910 occasions where a Return Home Interview was offered 1417 were completed, and information shared with partners to inform risk reduction planning.

Missing from home work

During 2022-23, 624 young people were reported missing, a total of 1965 missing episodes. This is a reduction of 7.5% of young people going missing and a reduction of 3% of the number of missing episodes to the previous year. 141 of these young people are looked after, totalling a number of 992 missing episodes. 356 of those are young people to have a Child in Need (CIN) or Child protection (CP) plan and are supported by social workers; a total of 1535 missing episodes. Of the 1508 occasions where a Return Home Interview (RHI) was offered, 1049 were accepted, completed, and information shared with partners to inform risk reduction planning. In comparison to the previous year, the multiagency work and support has helped decrease the number of missing episodes and young people going missing.

Child Exploitation support and interventions

During 2022-23, the Erase child exploitation workers supported 54 young people who were identified as high risk of child criminal exploitation (CCE) or child sexual exploitation (CSE). When reviewed in April 2023 findings were that

- Initially 20 young people were identified as high risk of CSE. Four of these young people have now reduced to medium risk of CSE and 16 have reduced to low/no risk of CSE.
- Initially 33 young people were identified as high risk of CCE. Seven of these young people have now reduced to medium risk and 14 have reduced to low/no risk of CCE.
- Initially 1 young person was identified as high risk of CCE and CSE, they have now reduced to medium risk.

Adoption

Adopt Coast to Coast was established as the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), and the launched virtually on 1 April 2021, with successfully established branding, as the go to agency for those interested in adoption, across the North East and Cumbria.

Adopt Coast to Coast is a partnership RAA, and is made up of the following two partners (spokes):

- Durham County Council
- Together for Children who deliver children's services on behalf of Sunderland City Council

*Until 31 March 2023, this also included Cumbria County Council.

Adopt Coast to Coast continues to work with partners to embed models of early permanence in Durham, for example 'Fostering for Adoption', and work across the partnership to develop the adoption support offer.

Adopt Coast to Coast's learning from marketing activity in 2022-23 highlighted the following:

- Real stories resonate with people
- Videos are engaged with the most
- Profiles of real children increases engagement
- Social media activity about post-order adoption support such as events significantly helps engagement with adopters and target audience
- Social media and digital activity support awareness raising
- Sponsored content with local publications is successful
- The website continues to be the biggest recruitment tool
- Targeted campaigns e.g. sibling adoption throughout the year works well
- Adopter 'type' specific recruitment activity is well received e.g. LGBTQ+ and single parent adopters

DCC Adoption Service

This has been another very busy year for the adoption team in all areas.

Enquiries from people considering adoption have risen again with 267 being made this year compared to 216 in the previous year.

Twelve information sessions have been held via Teams and facilitated equally by Durham County

Council and Together For Children social workers, each undertaking six sessions. These sessions help to give people a better understanding of adoption in the early stages of their adoption journeys and helps to inform their decision making as to whether it is right for them. These sessions are not mandatory, however the three day information, counselling and preparation course and one day therapeutic parenting course are. These days are delivered after an application to be assessed has been accepted.

By the end of the last year 41 adoptive households were approved and 19 were in the application, assessment or on hold process.

43 Adoption Orders have been granted for DCC children within this period.

Adoption Panel has been held 27 times over this 12-month period. Panel is held fortnightly, and additional panels held when necessary to prevent delays for children. Three of the 27 panels held were additional panels. 58 matches for children/sibling groups with adopters and 42 adopter approvals were considered at these panels. The total number of DCC children matched was 65.

Early Permanence continues to be a key priority, as it allows children to experience a reduced number of care givers and moves allowing for stronger attachments to be formed much sooner.

94 children have been supported through successful 'assessments of need' completed by Social Workers within the Adoption team. Overall, 116 claims were made to the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) on behalf of children in need of therapeutic support relating to adoption issues. This is a total funding approved by the ASF of £398,320.20. Here's what one adopter had to say about their adoption experience.

We found the adoption process so easy. Great introduction meeting and training. Great initial call from yourself around process and next steps as well as ongoing meetings to get the information needed together for panel.

You were a great help and provided guidance along each step.

I have told lots of friends who are considering adoption that the County Durham team are excellent, and it is nowhere near as scary as you believe. Even panel was fine.

Care Leavers

The care leavers service in Durham works with young people from the age of 16 when a young persons advisor is appointed to establish a relationship with a young person and assist the social worker in the development of the pathway plan into adult life.

The Durham County Council Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers has been developed, covering January 2022 to December 2024. It outlines our vision, and areas for action.

The strategy has a strong focus on learning from those who are care experienced to drive forward practice improvements in County Durham and help our young people to build strong relationships that will endure.

Local Offer to Care Leavers

The Local Offer has been published on our website and gives details of how DCC will support young people with:

- Options about where they live
- Helping with money, benefits, and financial advice
- Looking after their health (physical, mental, and sexual); drug, alcohol and smoking cessation support; support about relationships.
- Education, Employment & Training

Care experienced young people have undertaken a research project to look at Durham's local offer, which included a trip to York Council to look at their care leavers offer. The research project benchmarked Durham against other regional and national local authorities local offers.

Moving forward, colleagues and young people from ten other Care Leavers services will visit Durham and vice versa. The ten Local Authorities will provide feedback on Durham's services in June 2022. Consideration is being given to hosting a conference to share this feedback, and what it means for us in Durham.

Durham compares well to other areas, however plans have been put in place to make our local offer even better, and the proposals will be presented to the Chief Executive Officer and DCCs Corporate Management Team.

We will include an update in next year's annual report, but some of the key things in the local offer are:

- Improving the quality of pathway plans
- Strengthening our corporate commitment to our care leavers
- Making sure our young people have a variety of suitable accommodation options
- Improving the health outcome of care leavers, following the impact of Covid
- Helping prepare our young people for adulthood, which does not mean 'independence' as we recognise that everyone needs support throughout their lives
- Improved coproduction

An action plan has also been developed for 2022/23 which outlines how we will do what we say we are going to do, and by when.



Midwifery offer to care experienced young people

A meeting with community midwives has taken place to initiate conversations regarding the support on offer to care experienced young people who are parents, and what can be done to make this offer better. This has progressed to the development of sessions in the care leavers hub for care experienced parents and health professionals jointly. This helps to build relationships and trust.

Supported lodgings

The supported lodgings team now sits within the fostering service. This helps the supported lodging carers receive support and training.

Supported lodgings provides a safe, supportive and friendly home environment for young people, aged between 16 and 25 years old, who are leaving care and do not want to live on their own. Supported lodgings providers give young people a key to their home, their own room, access to a bathroom, kitchen, and laundry facilities.

Each young person is different, but many need practical support and help with things like learning to cook, doing laundry, budgeting, attending appointments, or even to help them find a job, or access education and training.

Supported lodgings can be short term, or for up to two years, and in Durham we have several supported lodgings providers and always seek to recruit more.

Care Leavers Hub

The care leavers hub was officially launched on 28 February 2022, by our care leavers. The hub is a safe space to engage with services and each other, and just a welcoming place to hang out, get warm, clean and fed. A programme of events has been developed for the hub for the year ahead by young people, including a job club, young parents group and session with arts and crafts and wellbeing groups.

There are plans to develop 2 more hubs in the next year and work to progress this has begun. It is hoped that the care leaver service will operate entirely from hubs allowing office space as well as drop-in rooms and activity rooms for planned groups to take place. Young people are working to develop this model and it is hoped these will be managed by the care leaver group.



Drive project



The project supports young people by providing driving lessons, up to the value of £500. The project pays for one lesson, the young person pays for the next lesson, and so on then the project pays for the first theory test and one practical test. This is available for care experienced young people aged 17+ and care leavers up to the age of 21 (25 if in full time education).

- From April 2022 to March 2023:
- 6 young people passed their driving test
- 2 young people passed their driving test whilst on the waiting list
- 3 young people passed their theory test

Please note Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) were dissolved in June 2022, and from **1 July 2022** the NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) took over the responsibility for NHS functions and budgets across County Durham.

It is the responsibility of Durham County Council, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) and commissioned health services to identify and address the unmet health needs of children who are in our care.

Physical health

The ICB commission County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) to:care.

- Provide medical services
- Undertake initial health assessments (IHAs)
- Undertake review health assessments (RHAs) for those living out of the Local Authority boundary but within a 20-mile radius and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children placed in Durham.
- Complete health passports for those children aged 15 ½ years old and above.

Public Health commission Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust (HDFT) to undertake RHAs for young people living within the Local Authority boundary.

Despite the increasing numbers of young people entering care IHAs and RHAs statutory compliance figures are commendable. Issues with IHA time breaches are generally due to external administration processes.

These health assessments result in individual health plans being developed which form, part of the young person's overall care plan.



Table 1

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS IHAs: Excludes unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

	Q1 Apr- June 22	Q2 July-Sept 22	Q3 Oct-Dec 22	Q4 Jan-Mar 23
LA Indicator: Coram BAAF paperwork and consent received from LA within 0-5 working days of child coming into care	45 (50%)	54 (57%)	41 (44%)	54 (59%)
Statutory Indicator: Of the number of Durham children coming into care in the quarter; number of children seen by a Paediatrician within 20 working days of coming into care	66 (72%)	60 (64%)	64 (67%)	53 (58%)
CDDFT Indicator: Number of children offered an IHA appointment by CDDFT within 15 working days of health receiving correctly completed paperwork and consent from Local Authority	78 (93%)	68 (80%)	84 (91%)	70 (78%)

Table 2

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN IHAs – Data is presented separately as timeframes for receiving the correct paperwork within 5 working days from commencement of care is challenging, due to the external processes.

	Q1 Apr- June 22	Q2 July-Sept 22	Q3 Oct-Dec 22	Q4 Jan-Mar 23
Number of UASC coming into care in County Durham	9	10	12	21
Number of UASC requiring IHA by CDDFT	3	6	12	14
B.1: Paperwork received within 5 working days from commencement of care (LA indicator) (% of 14)	0 (0%)	1 (17%)	2 (17%)	1 (7%)
B.2: IHA completed within 20 working days of commencement of care (statutory indicator) (% of 14)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (25%)	3 (21%)

Table 2 continued...

	Q1 Apr- June 22	Q2 July-Sept 22	Q3 Oct-Dec 22	Q4 Jan-Mar 23
B.3: First appointment offered within 20 working days of coming into care. (% of 14)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (25%)	2 (14%)
B.4: First appointment offered within 15 working days of receiving correct and complete paperwork (CDDFT Indicator) (% of 14)	2 (67%)	1 (20%)	8 (67%)	10 (71%)
Number of UASC requiring IHA by OOA Health Provider	1	2	7	5
C.1: Paperwork received within 5 working days from commencement of care (LA indicator) (% of 7)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	3 (43%)	0 (0%)
C.2: IHA completed within 20 working days of commencement of care (statutory indicator) (% of 5)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	1 (20%)
Number of UASC with IHA completed by Kent	3	2	4	2
Number of UASC awaiting confirmation of IHA completed by Kent	2	0	2	0

Table 3

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS RHAs:

	Q1 Apr- June 22	Q2 July-Sept 22	Q3 Oct-Dec 22	Q4 Jan-Mar 23
Number Due	272	210	236	278
Number Returned within timescales	238	187	221	241
Number Remaining outstanding	7	5	1	9
Compliance within timescales	88%	89%	94%	87%

Increasing numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children has led to the adaptation of IHA documentation to ensure a full and comprehensive assessment is completed that reflects their health needs. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children typically require TB screening, screening for blood borne viruses and completion of the vaccination programme as a minimum. Due to no or minimal health information assessing health needs can be more complex. Further developments in the way services are delivered for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are to be explored in 2023/24.

The ICB has recruited two Designated Nurses for Children in Care 1.5 whole time equivalent, strengthening the commitment from the ICB for developing health services for Children in Care.

HDFT have developed and enhanced their care leavers offer with 2 of their Specialist Nurses Children in Care, attending the care leavers hub on a regular basis. Relationships have developed and the young people are approaching them for health support and information. In addition, they are developing links with the care leavers team and supporting care leavers via their YPAs.

Historically, requests for health passports from care leavers have been consistently low. To address this, there is a collaborative approach with local authority colleagues to promote health passports to young people to improve the uptake. CDDFT Children Looked After team have also started to proactively complete health passports for all care leavers; this is shared with the GP and stored in the primary care records so the young person can request access to it at any point in the future.

CDDFT have met with the Children in Care Council to update the language in RHA documentation which is being updated to reflect their views.

Health colleagues across the region (North East and Yorkshire) attended and contributed to the NHSE Care Experienced Virtual Conference

on 20th March 2023. The event saw over a 100 professional in attendance. Over this period primary care has received training on Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, transitional care and the learning from the Leiland-James Corkill Safeguarding Practice Review.

The Designated Nurse for Children in Care has completed an audit with support from the LA Children in Care Operations Manager, looking at health outcomes following IHAs and RHAs. Key findings from the audit showed that the health assessments and health care plans are of a high quality with the majority of health assessments available for the Looked After Review meetings. Areas for improvements include IHAs and RHAs information and care plans are not routinely considered in looked after review meetings and health needs identified in the IHAs/RHAs are not reflected in the principle care plan. The IHAs/RHAs primary focus is the child's/young person physical health needs with little mention of emotional and mental health needs. Work has already commenced with IROs to discuss these findings and an action plan is being developed which will be over seen by the Children in Care Health Meeting.

The Children in Care Health Meeting has developed this year seeing good multiagency commitment to improving the health needs of our children in care. The group has developed a health improvement plan which is aligned to the Children in Care strategic plan.

Moving forward as an ICB Children in Care is one of the 4 priority areas in the Joint Forward Plan, (the ICB and its partner trusts have a duty to prepare a joint forward plan, to set out how they will arrange and/or provide NHS services to meet their populations physical and mental health needs). This is in the initial stages however it will be exciting to see the developments and opportunities of a system wide approach to health services for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People.

Mental health

At present the ICB commission Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV) to provide Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to support young people with mental health difficulties (Tier 1-3).

NHS England provide in patient mental health services (Tier 4).



Priorities for health moving forward include:

- Contribute to the development of the NHS Joint Forward Plan
- Continued support for the recruitment of foster carers
- Working with local authorities to augment information sharing processes
- Improving mental health outcomes for young people
- Work with the LA to ensure that the IHAs and RHAs are considered at the Looked After Review meeting and the Health Care Plan is added to the principle care plan.

Joint work continues with Local Authority partners to:

- Facilitate the date of the first Looked After Review being communicated to the Foundation Trust to expedite a timely IHA appointment – this is a longstanding challenge for the LA to meet the statutory 5-day timeframe.
- Augment the information sharing pathways following a child entering care and relevant documentation is distributed to the Foundation Trust in a contemporaneous manner.
- Ensure all Children in Care have access to the clear-cut assessment and the outcomes are shared with the relevant professionals.
- To strengthen the links with the Designated Nurses and the LA Children's Homes.

Health outcomes for children in care and those care experienced continue to improve:

- Continue to liaise with NHS England colleagues to ensure children in care are prioritised by dental practices across the region
- Ensure the health needs of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children are met.
- Recognising the needs of care experienced patients in primary care.
- Recognising the needs of Children in Care who are reported missing.
- Increase compliance of Primary Care GP information to inform initial and review health assessments.
- Continuing to develop links with NHSE and Aycliffe Secure unit to support the needs of children who are compulsory accommodated.

Full Circle Therapeutic Services

Full Circle is an established specialist, integrated therapeutic service for children who are dedicated to working with care experienced young people. They are part of Durham County Council and provide support to children and young people (and their families and carers), where the children have complex backgrounds and negative childhood experiences which are impacting in the here and now.

Full Circle is a social work team made up of therapeutically trained social workers employed by the Local Authority. They also have a Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Nurse Specialist, who are employed via and have links with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) service within Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust.

Full Circle utilise a trauma and attachment informed approach to promote healing and assist placement stability by supporting the children's foster carers and adopters, social workers, residential staff, education staff and the child's care team to support the child's healing from complex trauma and abuse.

Although primarily an in-house provision for Durham County Council, therapeutic support from the Full Circle can be commissioned by other local authorities who have children placed in our area, to extend the offer to children living in Durham. The income from this goes back into children's services to with support service provision.



Virtual School

As of July 2022, there were 676 Durham looked after children of statutory school age:

- 47.5% primary/52.5% secondary.
- 80.5% County Durham schools/19.5% out of County schools, which is an increase of 0.5% from the previous year.
- School attendance for the whole looked after cohort was 92%, almost 3% better than the previous year.
- Suspensions remain low at 5% (34 children)
- Two young people were permanently excluded.
- 53% had an identified special educational need (SEN), which is an increase of 4% from the previous year.
 - 23% are supported by an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
 - 30% had a school SEN Support Plan, an increase of 2% from the previous year.
 - Social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) were the primary need for 31% of primary aged children, a decrease of 8% and 55% of secondary aged children, an increase of 4% against last year.

The Virtual School are proactive with SEN to ensure young people are known, and that interventions are available for schools to access as early as possible. If a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is moved out of the Local Authority area to have their care needs met, it is important that Durham retain the plan for that child until an appropriate setting has been found. In Durham, every child who is looked after who has an EHCP now has an identified SEND Caseworker as well as their PEP Caseworker.

- For 2021/22 examinations our young people returned to formal examinations. Despite a significant number of the young people in this cohort attending Special Schools and not following a GCSE curriculum, results remained above the National level for CLA in 2019; the last cohort to have sat formal GCSE examinations. English grades were roughly in line with those achieved by the Durham CLA cohort in 2019, with Maths remaining above both National and Durham CLA in the same year.

- For 2021/22 children did sit their Key Stage 2 SAT's Outcomes this year are below those achieved in 2019 for Durham CLA, which we expect is in part due to the disrupted learning experience of this cohort. Reading is above the National CLA outcomes from 2019. This cohort will be tracked closely in PEP meetings as they move into Secondary education, with a focus on academic gaps.

Virtual School Sub group

The Corporate Parenting Panel's vice chair is Cllr Michelle Walton, who provides challenge to the Virtual School. They have an oversight of the support offered to CLA of Statutory School Age and an understanding of the additional work focusing on Early Years and Post 16.

Education fun fund

The Virtual School transferred £5,000 PP+ money to the CICC for an Education Fun Fund project. This enabled them to continue the project from last year.

Young people from the CICC set up the project, and developed an application process whereby young people can apply for up to £150 for non-educational items, which would not typically be funded in this way for example, sport and exercise equipment, boxing lessons, art and craft supplies, instruments and music lessons etc.

Young people from the CICC contributed to the Durham CLA Education Policy which was shared with all schools in September 2021. This sets out expectations for successful working with CLA.

Post 16 young people attending further education colleges continued to be part of the government pilot where they have received PP+ funding for another financial year. This has supported them to access the wider college life and has encouraged good attendance. A Mentor was employed to provide additional pastoral support.

Emotional Wellbeing

As part of our focus on emotional wellbeing and the identified need of SEMH being a strong factor when identifying special education needs of CLA we have continued to raise awareness in all schools and settings of the impact of early trauma and insecure attachment on behaviour and learning and have supported schools to review policies and implement change. We have developed a strong offer to schools and settings to support the emotional wellbeing of CLA and the therapeutic offer through Full Circle.

More information on our virtual school is available here www.durham.gov.uk/durhamvirtualschool

Education/Employment & Training

A range of support is provided to support Care Leavers to progress into education, employment and training.

DurhamWorks Programme for Schools

DurhamWorks Programme for Schools provides support for Children Looked After, to help them to make a successful progression from Year 11 into post 16 education, employment and training. Children Looked After can access individual careers guidance; participate in group based activities focused around themes such as transition support, motivation, and work related learning; as well as receive one-to-one mentoring support.

Workplaces Project

A new Workplaces Project will be commencing during 2023-24, whereby Children Looked After in Years 10 and Year 12, will have opportunities to gain a valuable insight into the world of work and find out about the skills and aptitudes that employers value through bespoke visits to employer premises. Children Looked After will learn about specific employment sectors, different job roles within those sectors, as well as recruitment processes. They will also spend time with employees to find out about their pathways into work, in order to show them that employment is an achievable goal.

DurhamWorks

Care Leavers aged 16-24 who are NEET, are supported by DurhamWorks to enable them to progress into and remain in education, employment or training. The programme is led by Durham County Council and is delivered in conjunction with partner organisations.

Care Leavers who are engaged with DurhamWorks receive transition support, the opportunity to obtain English and maths qualifications, as well access to a range of learning provision and activities to support their progression into education, employment or training. There is a focus on securing employment outcomes for young people within a defined timeframe and, to this end, employer engagement activity is a key feature of the programme. Since January 2022, DurhamWorks has supported 1,763 unemployed young people, of whom 145 have been Care Leavers.

Sessional Employment Programme

A Sessional Employment Programme provides Care Leavers with the opportunity of paid work experience within Durham County Council. Work placements are identified which meet the talents, interests, and aspirations of each individual Care Leaver. A Sessional Employment Co-ordinator collaborates with Young People's Advisers, Human Resources colleagues, as well as Service Managers to deliver the programme.

Care Leavers can be in education, employment, training, or NEET to access Sessional Employment and work placements are paid at the rate of the Durham Living Wage. Examples of placements undertaken include:

- Farming in a protected landscape with North Pennines AONB: this placement coincided with a young person's qualification in agriculture at college.
- DurhamWorks: upon completion of a placement with DurhamWorks, a young person subsequently secured a support worker role for young people with disabilities.
- Human Resources: a young person undertook a placement to complement their degree course at university.
- Mechanics: a young person accessed a work placement to enhance their qualification at college.
- Data: a young person completed a placement with DurhamWorks data team in preparation for starting a new role as an Intelligence Analyst with Durham County Council.
- Brickwork: a young person accessed a placement during the summer after completing a brickwork qualification at college, in order to enhance their employment prospects.
- Investing in Children: a young person accessed a placement outside of Durham County Council through links with Investing in Children. This has led to the young person being offered employment, supported by a DurhamWorks employer grant.
- Peterlee Leisure Centre: a young person undertook a placement as a gym assistant with Peterlee Leisure Centre.

Durham County Council Apprenticeships

Support was provided to 10 Care Leavers to apply for an Apprenticeship vacancy as part of the annual recruitment activity undertaken by Durham County Council. Of these, 4 young people were successful, 3 of whom commenced their Apprenticeships in September 2022. The other successful candidate decided to go to college instead of taking up their offer of an Apprenticeship.

Overall, the current number of Care Leavers employed by Durham County Council as Apprentices is 5. Discussions are taking place with Human Resources to link the Sessional Employment Placements Programme to Durham County Council Apprenticeship recruitment as a potential progression route in 2023.

Pupil Premium Plus Pilot Scheme

Durham County Council is one of 30 Local Authorities that successfully bid to take part in a six month Pupil Premium Plus Pilot Scheme to support Care Leavers in academic years 12 and 13 who were attending a Further Education College. The aim of the pilot was to support sustained participation in learning by providing Pupil Premium Plus funding in a similar way to how additional funding is provided to school age Children Looked After.

Durham County Council utilised the funding to appoint a dedicated adviser whose role is to support a caseload of Care Leavers who are enrolled at a Further Education College, as well as provide a 'Keep In College' weekly cash incentive of £20 per week to Care Leavers with over 80% authorised attendance.

The initial Pupil Premium Pilot scheme ended in May 2022 and supported 52 Care Leavers who attended 14 Further Education Colleges. An evaluation showed that the Pupil Premium Pilot Scheme was well received by all Care Leavers who participated, as well as their carers. The consensus was that the additional £20 per week was an incentive for Care Leavers to remain in college. The scheme also enabled them to experience social activities in a way that they may not have been able to do otherwise.

Durham County Council has received further Pupil Premium Plus funding from November 2022 through to the end of the 2022-23 academic year. The scheme is being delivered in the same manner, with a cohort of 76 Care Leavers attending 14 different Further Education Colleges.

Bus Pass Incentive

Anytime Travel top ups to existing bus passes were issued to Care Leavers who were attending one of the four Further Education Colleges in County Durham (Bishop Auckland College, Derwentside College, East Durham College, New College Durham). Bus passes were provided by either Arriva or Go North East travel companies and were valid for evenings, weekends and holiday periods up until the end of the summer term at college.

A survey undertaken with Care Leavers who received an 'anytime travel' top up showed that they used their enhanced bus pass to meet friends from their Further Education College during evenings and weekends. It was also used to access part time employment, alongside college study. Some Care Leavers reported an increase in confidence in using public transport to travel to different places, in addition to their Further Education College. A similar 'anytime travel' top up incentive has been provided during the 2022-23 academic year.

Higher Education

A Young Persons Adviser supports Care Leavers who are studying at a University. This role involves preparing Care Leavers for their transition into Higher Education, liaising with universities to ensure Care Leavers have access to available support, as well as keeping in touch and visiting Care Leavers at their places of learning.

All information is available on the [DurhamWorks website](#)

Aycliffe Secure Centre

Our Mission Statement

“ Through developing and investing in our staff and infrastructure, Aycliffe secure centre will continue to provide each young person with a safe, secure, caring home and school. Encouraging and motivating each young person to be the best they can be in an environment they can enjoy. ”

Aycliffe Secure Centre provides secure homes and an onsite school for up to 34 young people: up to 8 young people who are sentenced or remanded by the Youth Custody Service and 26 young people who are looked after for their own safety or others safety. They are placed with us under section 25 of the Children’s Act 1989 and are commission by Local Authorities. We also look after young people under PACE in order to prevent young people being kept in police custody overnight.

The building and furnishing of our Transition Home, Maple House is completed, and we are awaiting registration in the very near future.

Over this last year we have been gradually increasing our occupancy of young people and staffing levels following a Covid19 recovery model. This has included “re-opening” Auckland House on 20 June 2022. We have prioritised recruitment of staff over this period and have a Senior Management working group as this is one of our key priorities to not only recruit the right staff but retain them. We have developed ways in which to support staff including a Listening Service, staff recognition schemes and also enhanced training and buddying and mentoring systems.

The philosophy of the centre is that of “Exceptional Parenting” underpinned by an integrated model of trauma informed care. We have continued to be an active part of the National SECURE STAIRS framework and received our second annual review post the 5-year pilot which continued to highlight the exceptional work and support offered to young people and staff alike. Through this trauma informed care young people understand their journey and work to build confidence, positive self-esteem, and resilience. Young people have enhanced multi-agency care and support and have been encouraged to have a significant voice and have been part of the mantra “no decision about me without me.”

The introduction of Character Education in the curriculum and rolled out across the centre has helped build Motivation, Resilience, Respect and Self Awareness in our young people.



Inspection and monitoring at Aycliffe

As a secure children’s home, we have two unannounced inspections every year, with the full unannounced Inspection in Autumn 2022 that was judged as **Good Overall with Outstanding in Health**.

The opening line was,

“Children enjoy positive experiences and make good progress in the home. For some children, their experiences are life changing.”

In February 2023, Aycliffe had its Assurance Inspection, and it was acknowledged that all recommendations and requirements from the previous inspection were fully implemented and there were no causes for concern.

One child said about staff, “they’ve kept me alive, and they’ve made sure I’m okay. I know they care.”

Over this last year we have continued with our recovery model and have used lessons learnt from our Covid19 experience to shape and develop the centre.

The four key priorities within our Strategic Development Plan are;

Staff - An exciting place to work that invests in staff and offers opportunity and development

Care – Provide trauma Informed care and offer outstanding levels of multi-disciplinary care

Environment - All 6 Homes home open, vibrant and thriving within the centre

Stability – Explore the changing landscape of childcare and ensure Aycliffe remains a market leader

Some of the activity over this year includes:

- The centre has continued to make progress against objectives within its Strategic Plan April 2022 – March 2025. The Senior Management team have met several times to consider the key objectives for the forthcoming years. Consultation with the workforce was a key factor in having a plan everyone believed and bought into. Alongside this feedback from re-connection meetings and the Enabling Environments (EE) baseline assessment are being undertaken. Further consultation with the wider workforce will be sought in order to work within the philosophy of EE.
- Continued roll-out of the SECURE STAIRS framework and work is underway with national leads to determine how connections to other settings are maintained including a focus support group for buddying secure children's homes. Fundamentally SECURE STAIRS is fully embedded within the centre.
- To further embed the use of ClearCare throughout the centre. The system has been in place for over a year and is well embedded across the centre. Further review will be undertaken to identify any needs in terms of training or staff support, as well as gathering feedback regarding recording practices, workflow and reporting tools. Work is being undertaken on the dedicated Maple House site, with 'go live' date planned to coincide with the opening of the home. The centre has moved to phase 2 of the implementation plan in the early part of 2023. This will include exploring use of the young person's interface, expanding recording of house processes such as safety and security checks, and exploring further use of the system within school.
- SystmOne implementation within the residential service to enable electronic logging of admin of medication. There have been unexpected delays in this area, however the centre is now at the training phase including training 'superusers' within each house team to support the systems application.



- Further implementation of the Education Development Plan, including observational walkarounds, have been completed.
- Further implement the findings of the Tri-annual Buildings and Facilities Inspection (November 2021). The centre has a comprehensive action plan which is being progressed.
- Upgraded technology within meeting rooms. The meeting rooms have been fully upgraded, ensuring that hybrid working can take place. This is being used successfully for internal and external meetings e.g., partnership and Multi Agency Team Around the Child meetings.



- Continued development of the young people's participation workstream. Significant progress is made within this workstream including co-production of developments within the centre.

- Continue to implement the recruitment and retention plan, ensuring that the workforce is fully staffed, and that staff are well supported and developed in line with their role and supporting skills enhancement and succession planning. Significant progress and development has been made in this area. The appointment of a workforce development officer to co-ordinate and support recruitment and also to develop a retention plan.

- We have further promoted and ensured that regular time is protected to enable staff meetings and reflective practice session to take place to allow staff to feel a sense of team, aid good quality communication and collaborative decision making. Alongside this being able to create safe spaces for staff to feel able to share thoughts, views, and feelings in a supportive environment. This time has been protected for all teams across the centre as it continues to be recognised that this is essential for strong and effective team working and morale. In addition, team away days were facilitated in this period, with all teams having their own input around focus/activities. This allowed time for reflection and celebration.

- The Reopening of Auckland House to provide further placements for young people who are referred to the national Welfare Hub and move forward from the impact of Covid 19 on the workforce. Auckland House was re-opened on the 20 June 2022; occupancy is gradually being increased in line with staffing levels.



Key performance data 2022-23

- There were 1068 children in care at the end of March 2023. This is higher than last year, however our rate of children in care per 10,000 children in County Durham remains lower than in the North East and our Statistical Neighbours.
- The National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children started last year and there are now 59 currently looked after by Durham County Council
- 68 children were adopted in 2022/23. This equates to 18% of all children leaving care which is higher than in England and the North East in 2021/22.
- A similar proportion of children in care in Durham are in a foster placement to our comparators (71% compared to 70% in England and 71% in our statistical neighbours in 2021/22).
- Around a quarter of our children in care are placed outside of County Durham, but the majority are within neighbouring local authority areas. Often closer to their home than if placed in other areas of the county. This continues to be consistently lower than in our comparators.
- We continue to experience significant placement pressures which has led to an increase in children having 3 or more placement moves and long-term stability for some of our children aged under 16 who have been in care for more than 2.5 years.
- We have seen an increase in the number of children in care reported as missing alongside the number of missing episodes, with some children regularly reported as 'missing'. Multi-agency work is ongoing with Police and other partner agencies to monitor, understand and address this.
- Performance in relation to our care leavers remains positive in relation to accommodation suitability and education, employment and training remains above or at benchmarks.
- Educational attainment data is included in Virtual School and EET sections.

Achievements

IIC Membership Award

The membership award gives organisations national recognition for the good practice and active inclusion of children and young people in dialogue that results in change.

At present, 15 Durham County Council Services have an active IIC Membership Award, which recognises and celebrates examples of imaginative and inclusive practice across Children's Services.

Peer mentoring

Young people continue to undertake the training to become peer mentors. IIC and the CICC are working with DCC staff to ensure that the young people taking part in the programme have the support that they need to make sure they feel safe and know what to do with any information that is shared or disclosed during these sessions. The peer mentor programme is being implemented slowly to ensure all plans and support are in place.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) work

A document explaining the role of the IRO has been developed with young people from the CICC. This will be sent out with the invites for the review meeting so that young people know who their IRO is, how to contact them, and what will happen at their meeting.

The young people have also developed this animation which explains the role of an IRO

www.youtube.com/embed/GEM-w-x7xtc



Social worker profiles

It was suggested by young people that social workers (and Full Circle/CAMHS workers) provide profiles of themselves so that young people know a little bit about them e.g. if they have children, favourite foods, movies they like etc as well as their work contacts and a picture of themselves.



Language

We continue to have regular discussions about the language we use, and as a result of this some changes have been made based on young people's suggestions e.g.

- Young people did not like the word 'placement' so as well as considering where and how we use this, our 'placement team' has been renamed and is now called our 'home finding' team.
- Disruption meetings are also now referred to as 'next chapter' meetings.

Good Luck cards

We realised that exam times can bring a lot of pressure to young people, and thought it would be nice to send a good luck card to our young people who are due to sit theirs. The message inside read:

“
**‘Good luck in your exams.
Be proud of what you can achieve.
We are proud of you.
With best wishes from Durham Corporate Parents’**
”

Young people fed back that they really appreciated this, and it is something we have committed to do annually moving forward.



Proud moments



In response to young people telling us that they sometimes faced stigma and discrimination, agreement was made by the Corporate Parenting Panel that proud moments would be shared at each meeting to highlight young people's achievements and successes - no matter how big or small.

Some of our proud moments include;

- The Service Manager for Children and Young People spoke of the good progress made by a young person who had recently moved back into the county and required a different approach to their care. They had settled well and were engaging in education and growing in confidence in their new environment. She spoke of how pleased she was to see the young person thriving and paid tribute to the staff who had gone to great lengths to work as a team to understand and respond to the needs of the young person.
- A group of asylum seeking young people formed a football team, comprising young people of various nationalities who despite their language barriers, were communicating with each other through their shared passion for football. It is heart-warming to see the young people enjoying themselves and encouraging other care experienced young people and care leavers to develop football teams, in the hope that this will lead to the establishment of a football league in the future. A flyer has been developed to promote the football teams.
- Caitlyn and Luke, our young people's co-opted reps from the CICC were offered places at University. Caitlyn will study social work, whilst Luke will study business.
- One young person who had gone to great lengths to ensure the facilities at the Care Leaver's Hub were at their best for the visit by the Ofsted inspectors, was praised. The young person had acted of their own volition to ensure the inspectors received a warm welcome.
- The Service Manager, spoke of her pride at a young person who had made a concerted effort to engage in employment after initially showing some reluctance. The young person had secured voluntary work in retail which led to the opportunity to study for a level 2 retail qualification, and the young person is now looking forward to a positive future.
- The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel of a ringing endorsement of the quality of care provided by a new foster care couple, which had been received from a Children's Guardian. The Guardian praised the new foster carers saying they had the competence of foster carers with years of experience, adding that their warmth, attention and child-centred home environment had led to a significant positive change for the children in their care.
- Staff caring for a young person, approaching the age of 18 spoke of their pride in them. Despite some very challenging times, they are flourishing in their transition and wholeheartedly embracing the changes ahead with positivity.
- The Practice Lead spoke of how immensely proud she was to see a positive change in a young person who had previously struggled to engage. The Panel heard that the young person was making a real effort to work with the Virtual School and participate in education and focus on a positive future.
- Praise also came for a care leaver who showed great maturity and strength of character in their efforts to challenge the current situation to achieve the housing accommodation outcome that she believed she deserved for herself and her child.
- A care leaver who moved into a home of their own as part of the 'staying close' pilot, made excellent progress, staying in touch with the key workers at their previous children's home who provided assistance and companionship as the young person gradually adjusted to the transition. One of the workers leaves her dog with the young person to provide company for them throughout the day.
- A young person with disabilities was thrilled to be selected to star in the TV programme 'Saturday Mash Up' to fulfil their dream of becoming a police officer for a day.
- Another young person with disabilities is hoping to go on a holiday abroad and they have been offered the opportunity to prepare for the flight by using a flight simulator to overcome their fear of flying.
- A young person has been selected to join the Royal Navy and they paid tribute to their foster family for all their support.

- A young person resident in a children's home who previously had anger management issues had benefited from the long-term support provided by their Independent Visitor. The support helped the young person to address their issues, to feel more positive about their future and engage in education. Furthermore, the young person is showing empathy and is keen to help others with their welfare.
- A Councillor expressed pride at the young people and carers who had attended an event held at Durham Town Hall, where their artwork was on display.
- The Practice Lead read a letter from a care experienced young person to their social worker, which provided testament to their special relationship. The 'thank you' letter gave a very moving account of how much the social worker meant to the young person, who thanked the social worker for their selflessness, thoughtfulness, patience and empathy. The young person explained how these qualities had helped them to feel safe enough to have hope for the future, to take each day as it comes and had ultimately changed their life for the better. The young person concluded the letter by saying they hoped they had made their social worker proud. The Practice Lead spoke of the positive impact of these words from the young person and how much the social worker valued the sentiments.
- A young person whose behaviour had tested staff on occasions, had been accepted onto a training course which had proved to be a turning-point for them, and they were beginning to look to their future with new-found optimism. The young person was positively engaging with staff, had volunteered to decorate the Christmas tree and had discreetly bought Christmas presents for staff. The Practice Lead commented on how pleased and proud staff were to see the young person's positive attitude and their kindness had meant a great deal to the staff involved.
- The Panel paid tribute to the young people who contribute to the work of the Fostering Panel and thanked them for all their hard work and the value they bring to the work, through sharing their experiences.
- Tribute was made to the children and young people who were participating in their own

decision making, understanding the positive and negative impacts of their choices, accepting responsibility for their actions and making good decisions as a consequence.

- Luke's commitment to supporting children looked after and care leavers in the work he does in addition to his contribution to the Corporate Parenting Panel and alongside his studies, was praised. It was noted that Luke attends regular meetings with the Chief Executive to discuss what more the Council can do for young people in care and care leavers. The Panel commended Luke's commitment to championing the care community.
- A young person who had previously been in the care of Durham County Council, is now working as a Young Person's Advisor with plans to train as a Social Worker. The young person was progressing well and spoke very positively of their care experience whilst in Durham.
- The panel shared their pride when a Service Manager spoke about the progress of a teenager who was new to care. The young person had engaged well with staff and experts to receive help and during a recent Ofsted visit, they spoke to inspectors about how much they valued the care they received.
- Members of the CPP were delighted to receive a progress update on Caitlyn, who was a Co-opted rep from the CICC, and who is now in her first year of a social work degree. She achieved 75% in her first assignments, which is equivalent to a first class degree.
- The Mockingbird fostering hub supported a young person when their main carer was admitted to hospital. The young person, who has learning difficulties, had settled well in the care of another foster carer in the hub and had benefited from the familiarity which had helped to maintain routines. The young person said that they felt really safe and stayed positive while their carer was away.
- Some Councillors have committed to running a race to raise funds for the CICC.
- Finally, the young people are proud of the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, who continues to donate 'corporate grandparent' gifts of hand-knitted baby clothes, for those of our young people who have children of their own.

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