

Corporate Parenting Panel

21 June 2024

Children in Care Annual Survey 2024



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report is to inform Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) of the findings gathered from the annual feedback survey completed by children in our care. Findings include what children think about the support they receive, what they feel is working well and what they feel could be further developed.

Executive summary

- 2 Listening and responding to the voice of the child/young person is at the centre of how we practice in County Durham. Undertaking this survey and hearing from as many children as possible about their experience of the service is a key way in which children and young people can have their voices heard and responded to. This feedback is essential to ensure that we continue to develop the way we work with children, their families and carers, to achieve the best outcomes.
- 3 This survey will be repeated annually and will provide us with assurance of the quality of practice and service delivery, and evidence to continue to drive further service improvement consistent with our Quality Assurance Framework.

Recommendations

- 4 Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
 - (a) Consider the content of this report.
 - (b) Agree with its recommendations.
 - (c) Agree that the survey should be repeated annually.

Background

5. Durham Children's Services is committed to an annual survey which is shared with children in our care, to provide children and young people with an opportunity to share their views and experiences of the support they have received and for their feedback to be considered and shape further service development.
6. The survey was created by the Service Manager for Children in Care with the support of the Participation & Engagement Officer, Safeguarding and Professional Practice. The survey was created as a SNAP survey by the Consultations Team allowing for both easy access and submission, as well as for the child/young person to be able to complete the survey with their carer, independent of their worker.

Methodology

7. The survey was completed during a 9-week window and launched to coincide with Celebrating Practice Week (26 February 2024). This ran for 9 weeks until the 30 April 2024.
8. The survey was either completed independently with a link being sent to the child or their carer, or the child was supported by their worker to complete the survey either in person or during a telephone conversation.

Findings

9. In total, 30 surveys were completed by our children. This number is low considering that we currently work with a cohort of 691 children. The survey was sent out to social workers and team managers with a rationale for completing the work, and time given to complete this. This survey was specifically designed to gather the views of all children cared for by the children in care service.
10. The positives identified within the survey were:
 - Children overwhelmingly felt they enjoyed positive relationships with those who are important to them. 97% of respondents said they get on well with the adults that they live with. 96% said they had someone with whom they can talk about their worries.
 - Children who responded also told us of the value they place in their relationship with their worker. 93% of respondents said that the worker does what they say they're going to do. The same number (93%) said that they felt involved in decisions about their

own lives. Importantly, 90% of the children who responded said that their worker took the time to get to know them. 89% responded to say that they found their worker friendly and easy to talk to. 86% said that their worker helps them to understand things.

- 89% of children who responded said they know where they could get help if they needed to.
- 93% of children said they felt safe.

11 A key consideration from the findings was:

- 83% of children who responded said that their worker/s have helped them understand why they couldn't live with their family.
- 89% of respondents said that they were helped to see their family and friends as often as they would like. However, two children who responded to the latter question disagreed and said they did not get help to see their family/friends.
- We know from our children and young people that having a clear understanding, that develops as they mature, around why they need to live separately to their parents is exceptionally important.

12 Other key learning points from the survey were:

- 74% of those who responded said that school was good. 4 children however said their experience was not good.
- 82% of respondents said their health and well-being was good, but 2 children said it was not.
- In respect of involvement of the child in their plan, whilst 60% of children reported that they found it easy to understand their care plan, 4 children of those who responded said they found it difficult.

13 There were views presented in the survey which we need to further consider. For example, three children said they didn't know the name of their social worker. This contradicts earlier findings whereby 93% of children told us that their worker does what they say they are going to do. A review of the questions will consider how questions can provide more clarity regarding children's experiences. Two children out of 30 said that they didn't feel happy about the service they had received. The survey is anonymous and therefore it is difficult to determine the context behind some of the views shared and given the anonymity it is not

possible to respond on an individual basis to those children raising concerns, for example, ensuring they know who their social worker is.

- 14 There is further learning to be applied around what we ask. For example, 80% of the children who responded said that they had four or more workers since coming into care. However, in retrospect, it would have been useful to have built into the survey the period being referred to so that we can more accurately understand the extent to which this is a concern.

Conclusion

- 15 Most children who completed the survey told us that they have positive relationships with those that are important to them, that they value the relationship with their social worker and that they know where they can get help and that they feel safe. It is acknowledged that there have been changes in the workforce and this impacts on children's relationships with professionals. We continue to support the workforce with the investment in training. We are introducing tighter performance measures that will support the social workers to spend more time with the children.
- 16 There were some children who advised that they did not know the name of their social worker which is a concern. This highlights the need for social worker 'About Me' profiles to be rolled out across the Children in Care teams to ensure that the children and young people have details of their social worker and how to get in touch with them. Workforce stability is a priority to ensure that meaningful relationships are built between children and their social worker. Some children said they were not happy with their education. This highlights the importance of children and young people's views being actively incorporated into their PEP meetings so their views around education can be heard and responded to. Some children also reported that they did not understand their care plan. The Children in Care Service is continuing the journey of improvement and is undertaking work around communication and care planning to permanence. This will include a focus on education, training and employment as well as care planning and building and maintaining relationships.
- 17 We are committed to further developing this survey as an important part of our quality assurance process. We will develop a consultation group with children and young people to shape and develop questions for the next annual survey for children in care. We also plan to create surveys for parents and carers to gain additional learning and assurance about our services. We want to ensure that we have explored the pertinent

areas that help support and develop practice for County Durham and that produce good outcomes for children and young people.

Current Developments

- 18 There has been an investment in our Children in Care service “Clarity and Confidence”. The aim is to develop expertise with regards to permanence and care planning. These sessions are specifically designed to empower practitioners to utilise the tools and to develop confidence to support children during their journey through care. We will continue to support practitioners to undertake meaningful visits with their children to discuss their care planning and important matters such as education, family time and life story work.
- 19 Additional management capacity has been created within the Children in Care service, which will support the management team within the service to increase management oversight on performance and quality of practice.

Next Steps

- 20 In view of the low number of surveys returned into the CIC service, it is proposed that there is a review of the processes and learning from this. There will be a focus on the barriers that prevented children from completing this task. A task and finish group is proposed within the Children in Care service to develop a plan around this for future survey returns. This will include a review of the questions, methods of engagement and management oversight of the process. The aim will be to ensure that all children in care have an opportunity to be heard.
- 21 The Children in Care service management team have created a Mission Statement for the Children in Care service, which will be launched across Children’s Social Care and with children and families. The principles that will shape and support the work we undertake with children have been identified within the Mission Statement. This promise to our children will shape the work that we do, which will include collaboration with families and creating care plans that support permanence, create stability and support transitions.
- 22 The service will introduce the “About Me” profiles that will help children and young people know and understand more about their social workers and the Children in Care Service.
- 23 Dip sampling will continue across the service in relation to care plans, PEP and education, training and employment. This will consider children’s views regarding their education and how they have been able

to participate in meetings. Learning will be fed back to the service for development purposes.

- 24 The Children in Care and Care Leaving services are in the early process of developing a Pathway to Independence project that will support our children to develop the real skills for transition into adulthood, which will support with care planning and ensure that children are more actively involved in their plans and develop skills to prepare them for adulthood.

Background papers

- Data summary (Appendix 2)

Authors

Rachael Riley

Tel: 03000 264893

Lee Peacock

Tel: 03000 264443

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

No budget requirements.

Consultation

Children in care engaged in this survey.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The service continually seeks to address inequalities and the survey is designed to further support and address equality and diversity for children in our care.

Human Rights

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Crime and Disorder

Not affected.

Staffing

Existing staff will support the survey.

Accommodation

Not affected.

Risk

Safeguarding of all young people will be a priority of the group, which is supported by Children's Social Care Staff. Surveys were confidential and voluntary.

Procurement

Not affected.