

# Corporate Parenting Panel

11 April 2025

## Children with Disabilities Annual Update



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### Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, CYPS, DCC

#### Electoral divisions affected:

Countywide.

#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report provides an update on the progress of the Children with Disabilities Team within the last 12 months and the vision of how to continue moving forward.

#### Executive summary

- 2 Any child or young person with additional need is entitled to an assessment of need as set out under S17 of the Children Act 1989. The children's parents and carers are also considered as part of the assessment. The child or young person's level of need will determine which team is responsible for completing this assessment.
- 3 The Children with Disabilities Team (CwD) undertake assessments with the purpose of meeting the needs of children and young people, who have a permanent or severe disability. The team are a specialist service targeted at those children and young people who are aged 0 to 18.
- 4 Durham aspires to support families to care for their own children, and we do this by promoting the local offer, [www.durham.gov.uk/localoffer](http://www.durham.gov.uk/localoffer).
- 5 The local offer is designed to help families find the very best support for children and young person, from 0 to 25 years with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). It provides information, advice and guidance about the types of services and support available.
- 6 Our children are some of the most vulnerable children therefore strong multi-agency working is critical ensuring children are safe and there is good evidence of this in the work of the service.
- 7 We believe that young people should always be able to participate fully in their lives and to share their views when decisions about them are

being made. The Children with Disabilities team strive to ensure our children's voices are heard using a range of direct work tools.

## **Recommendations**

- 8 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
  - (a) note the contents of this report.

## Background

- 9 The Children with Disabilities Team has an eligibility criterion that means they support the most complex of children and young people whose needs are so specialist they cannot access the targeted provision within the Local Offer.
- 10 There are children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) with social workers within the Families First Teams, whereby their assessed need does not require input from the CwD Team however there are established links between teams should additional advice and support be required. There has been work completed across the service to raise awareness of the Local Offer and the need to ensure parents/carers are supported to navigate this, accessing support services within their locality.
- 11 As of 13 January 2025, there are a total of 306 children open to the CwD Team (an increase of 13 of the number of 293 that was shared with Corporate Parenting Panel in 2024) of which 28 are children in our care. There are two other children in care due to move to the CwD team in the coming weeks, which will mean we will be supporting 30 children in our care (an increase of 3 young people from last year's panel). There are 2 children subject to a child protection plan (1 less than last year) and the remaining children receive social work support and services under Section 17 (Children Act 1989). Many children receive packages of short breaks support to enable them to meet and socialise with other young people in the community and to enable their parents/carers to have a break from their caring responsibilities.
- 12 The Navigation Team continue to support as co-workers for children and young people from the age of 14 and take full case responsibility from the age of 18. The Children with Disabilities Team and the Navigation Team work closely together to ensure effective joint working to support young people to transition into independence in a planned way for our children and young people.
- 13 Last year we shared with Corporate Parenting Panel that a new forum had been established to ensure that the Navigation Team are made aware of children and young people at an earlier stage, this has now been established over a year and all children and young people who are open to the CwD team and are aged 14 or over have been presented at this forum and accepted and will be allocated a navigation worker when this is needed in the preparation for adulthood. Those children and young people who receive support outside of the CwD team who are aged 14 and over, are also discussed within this forum.

## **What we told you was our next steps in the Corporate Parenting Panel 2024**

- 14 Preparation for Adulthood to be a focus on every child and family assessment for 14 plus and focused, in all plans for disabled children;
- 15 We are pleased to update Corporate Parenting Panel that of the 306, over 100 of these young people are 14 years and over and all these young people have a 'transitions implications' aspect of their child and family assessment completed, this incorporates all the preparation for adults' headings that are required in a Care Act adults' assessment. All these children and young people have been presented at the navigation forum and are open to the Navigation Team. All children have an annual reassessment in line with their birthday month and as such there is a referral made in line with the 14<sup>th</sup> birthday to the navigation team. This is featuring in Care Planning and Social Care Advice for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) completed by the CwD team.
- 16 Social Care advice to be completed alongside every annual reassessment and shared with education provisions;
- 17 We are pleased to inform that this is in place for every child open to the service and is being completed in line with annual reassessments. We are confident that social care advice is completed for all children who are open to the Children with Disability Team with an active plan, whether this be a child in need, child protection or child in care plan.
- 18 The quality of Social Care Advice provided by the CwD Team are, within audits recognised to be of good quality, accurately reflecting their social care needs. There continues to be a focus upon this area following the SEND inspection, and work is ongoing across the Partnership to ensure such consistency is evident across all agencies.
- 19 Continue to develop new and creative ways of communicating and getting the voice of our most vulnerable disabled children who do not have words to communicate;
- 20 This will continue to be an action as we support children and young people with the most complex of needs. We use a variety of tools including Picture Exchange Communication System, symbols, some signs, Mind of My Own Express where this is accessible, pictures and social stories for the children and young people we work with, and some lovely examples are shared in the accompanying presentation.

- 21 Continue to develop opportunities for disabled children for short breaks through our commissioned services and personalised pots of funding to support specialist creative packages;
- 22 In the last 12 months our colleagues in Commissioning have worked hard to develop a flexible framework and supported with provider engagement sessions that has led to us having a much broader framework that we hope will allow much more choice around short breaks for disabled children. We have continued to use a personalisation pot that is accessible to all teams to make applications up to £200 for children not accessing a service from CwD and up to £100 for those accessing a service, this needs to be specific in a creative solution to provide a meaningful activity for a disabled child and allowing their carer a break. We have seen lots of creative applications that have included specialist swim lessons, sports classes that require a 1-1, sensory activities and equipment. This will continue to be used in this way, the smaller pots mean that a larger number of children and young people with additional needs are benefiting from this in County Durham.
- 23 Continue to work closely with our home finder team around identifying specialist homes for our disabled children close to home.
- 24 In the last 12 months we have of course needed to identify specialist provisions for our complex young people, but we have been able to, on the whole, identify these much closer to home than we have historically. We have linked in with new provisions and we have had two young people come into specialist residential provisions that we have been able to identify in the local area and they have remained close to their family home. This will continue to be a work in progress because we continue to support some children and young people at a distance from County Durham but we continue to look for ways for them to be closer to their family links.

### **What our SEND Inspection of Durham Local Area Partnership told us**

- 25 Durham County Council had an area SEND inspection take place in 2024. As always, we are guided with areas for learning and development. The CwD Team were a real focus within this inspection and the feedback highlighted the positive work that has taken place in the recent months and years.
- 26 Highlighted what the area partnership is doing that is effective as follows:

- *The CwD social care team conducts thorough assessments of disabled children's needs. Children have their needs quickly and accurately identified. For example, social workers identify any needs arising from disability or environmental issues, and when needs are identified, social workers make prompt referrals to services and ensure support is quickly put in place. Specialist services are brought into holistic planning as needed.*
- *Early Help workers and CwD social workers are knowledgeable about the support available to children and young people and their families. Navigation workers ensure that support features in young people's future planning and continues into adulthood. For example, planning to support children with SEND as they approach adulthood starts when they become 14 years old. Navigation workers complete Care Act assessments and capacity assessments as needed. This ensures that young people who need continuing care and support from adult services post-18 have their care packages agreed in advance.*

## **A Child's Story**

- 27 Last year we told you about a young person called Emily who until 2023 had spent some time living in a specialist children's home in London, we shared that we had found her a home in the North East and the social story that we had completed to support her with this transition. We wanted to update Corporate Parenting Panel that Emily is now 16 and continues to live in the North East in the same home. She has started college and is really enjoying her time there. Emily likes that she is able to see her family more often and they love that they can pop and see her without this needing to be a lengthy trip to London.
- 28 As part of our Investing in Children annual membership award Emily was visited for the annual report and her feedback was incorporated:
- *Emily explained: "I wanted to see my mam and my family more", which is happening more often now. It was really encouraging to learn about how much of a positive relationship Emily has with her social worker: "I can ring her; I really like her and she is nice and helped me see my mam more".*
  - *Emily has had her Social Worker for the last 4 years, and this relationship was clearly very important to Emily who had faced some difficult times in the last few years. Emily was given a piece of wedding cake from her Social Worker's recent wedding, which Emily was really happy about and really felt like she was always there for her.*



## **Education Health and Care Plans**

- 29 All children open to the CwD Team have EHCPs, the improvements that we told Corporate Parenting Panel have been fully embedded and there is evidence of social care advice on every child's file that has been contributed to the EHCP review.

## **Short Breaks for Disabled Children**

- 30 Short Breaks for children and young people with disabilities can be sometimes the only social opportunity for children to engage with their peers. This not only provides the children to have social opportunities but allows parents and carers to have a much-needed break. Having short breaks regularly means that children can remain to be cared for at home by their parents, carers, or foster carers.
- 31 As noted above, Commissioning colleagues have undertaken a huge piece of work in developing a flexible framework of providers who can support in identifying short breaks for disabled children. This has been a piece of engagement work across providers and has generated a larger pool of providers that we can approach for short breaks.
- 32 The waiting list for commissioned short breaks has significantly reduced with children and young people being matched to a provider within 8 weeks and usually sooner from the agreement to search for a commissioned provider.
- 33 The SEND Empowering Inclusive Communities (SENDEIC) has continued to grow capacity and increase access to universal community activities, expand the offer and remove any barriers to access. This is Durham's local offer around providing better access for disabled children to mainstream services. If a disabled child would like to access a community group, our Empowering Inclusive Community's Coordinator will support to overcome these barriers. There are more providers being commissioned through this offer and we are seeing a more proportionate intervention for children who may not necessarily need a social worker.

- 34 The CwD Team continue to believe that children and families are the expert in their care and strive to support in providing person centred care and where there are assessed needs that can be met through a direct payment, we will support this. Where a child lives with parents, meets our eligibility criteria and has assessed needs for short breaks, a direct payment can be offered for them to recruit a support worker on their own behalf, this allows families to be more creative in how their support needs can be met and also provides more flexibility. This is our preferred way to support families where possible. It can mean a wait when parents can't identify someone, and in those circumstances, we will support families to consider other support options.

### **Multi Agency working**

- 35 Many children with disabilities, have complex health needs and their care packages are often co-ordinated jointly between Children's Social Care and Children's Continuing Care. The packages of support can be jointly funded and supported by a social worker alongside a continuing care nurse. This can include a specialist trained professional coming into the home for overnight stays and specialist hospice care. Like short breaks, this provides the same opportunities with specialist trained staff on hand to keep our children and young people safe.
- 36 There continues to be close working relationships with other colleagues across Children's Social Care, Navigation Team for young people 14 and over, Children in Care Teams. The CwD Team work closely alongside the SEN casework team and our virtual school. The team also offers a monthly step up and advice clinic to other teams.
- 37 We have established good and effective working relationships with our partners in Education, Health i.e., Occupational Therapy services, Continuing Care Services, Police, Local Authority Commissioning Teams, Health Commissioners, Early Help colleagues and the voluntary services, Advocacy service and with Durham Carers.
- 38 The Local Authority commission Durham Carers to complete parent/carer needs assessments for carers of children with additional needs.

### **What others think**

- 39 As a team we encourage feedback from other's experiences. This enables us to assess the quality of our working relationships between children, families and practitioners. It also enables the team to celebrate good practice, build on strengths and take steps to make improvements where needed.



- 40 Durham County Council's Participation and Engagement officer has completed visits independently to get feedback from children and families about their experiences
- 41 One child fed back that they knew their worker well and felt that they could easily talk to their worker.
- 42 One child fed back that the support he got from Park House (our in-house short breaks unit) was a positive one for him.
- 43 One child fed back that they trusted their worker and she gave time to him.
- 44 One young person asked that the care team meeting was clearer with her which we have listened to, and her worker will continue to explore this with her.
- 45 Collaborative file audits have consistently found children and young people's case files within the CwD Service to be of a high quality with all scores out of 4 being 3 or 4 in the last 12 months.

### **Next Steps**

- 46 The new flexible framework has just been established, in the next 12 months we would like to see that this is fully embedded and allows for better choice around short breaks for disabled children.
- 47 A new process is being developed to streamline the process from assessment of needs to implementing a care package that is to be embedded.
- 48 New work is taking place around the Local Offer and increasing the accessibility for parents and carers of disabled children.
- 49 Continue to work on identifying places for disabled children to live that are close to their networks and families.
- 50 Continue to upskill the workforce around creative ways to record children's wishes and feelings.

### **Conclusion**

- 51 The report reflects a great deal of positive and effective working. The CwD team are passionate and committed about achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people in our care with disabilities.
- 52 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel will have oversight of the work of the CwD team during the previous year, and will understand the plans for the team as we move forward.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

The Children Act 1989 sets out the legal requirement on the local authority to support children in need and to carry out safeguarding investigations and where necessary, issue care proceedings to ensure that children are protected from harm.

The Children Act 2004, requires that all higher education institutions do not discriminate against disabled students and prospective students. The Act establishes clear standards for promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people and for providing high quality services that meet their needs.

The Equality Act 2010 for disabled children covers disabled children and young people whether or not they have SEN. For the purpose of avoiding discrimination, anticipating and making reasonable adjustments, and meeting wider responsibilities, schools need to know who their disabled pupils are

The Children and family Act 2014, Part 3, sets out how local authorities work with children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs.

### **Finance**

No implications.

### **Consultation and Engagement**

No implications.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

No implications.

### **Climate Change**

No implications.

### **Human Rights**

No implications.

### **Crime and Disorder**

No Implications.

### **Staffing**

No Implications.

**Accommodation**

No Implications.

**Risk**

No Implications.

**Procurement**

No implications.