



Northumberland  
County Council

# Children's Social Care Self Assessment

2nd November 2023

[www.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk)

## Introduction

- The report is required by Ofsted and will be key document for the Inspection of Childrens Services (ILACS) which is due at any time. There is a Regional Director's Challenge which provides further challenge and scrutiny to the self assessment.
- Within each of the sections, we have identified what we have done well, what we could do better, detailed the key evidence of the impact in that area of work and then highlighted actions to take forward in the continuous improvement plan for 2023-2024. This will also include areas of development arising from national direction.
- The report does evidence continuing improvements in the quality of practice, despite ongoing challenges of workforce retention, placement sufficiency and increasing demand and highlights areas for further improvement and priorities for the continuous improvement plan for 2023-2024.

# Strategic Leadership (1):

## Early Help

- One of 14 Family Hub Trailblazers nationally.
- Early Help education team working well with schools.

## Corporate Parenting:

- Work on the Promises developed across the Council and with the private sector
- Care Leavers Covenant
- New children's home build progressed to open in Jan 24.
- Leading regional work on care leaver's covenant.
- Supported Accommodation: More flexible commissioning/preparation for inspection/regulation

## Virtual School

- Good progress meeting extended duty to promote the education of children with a social worker.
- Model cited as good practice by the DFE
- Leading the county's attendance strategy inc our effective Children Missing Education (CME) procedure and tracking panel.

## SEND

- Funding to develop an in-house short break service
- Implemented a resource panel to oversee the allocation of short break resources

# Strategic Leadership (2)

## Partnerships

- Effectively integrated the children's and adults safeguarding partnerships .
- Scrutiny arrangements praised by DfE.
- Maintained the ICB funding to support external placements.

## National Developments

- Data and Digital Children's voices project,
- Public Law Outline: Data development:
- DfE Pilot: Early Liaison CAFCASS and Local Authorities
- NE Regional Fostering pathfinder

## Workforce: Remains a key area of challenge

- Workforce strategy updated to reflect key priorities; dashboard further developed to monitor trends.
- Embedding of NEWST, Pre-birth and Early Help education teams with positive impact. Family Hubs.
- Success of our social work academy affirmed by Skills for Care review.
- Finalised admin restructure to provide more consistent support across the social care service
- Increased the use of Social Work Support Assistants to support social workers
- Staff feel well supported with good access to managers and effective learning tools.
- Better than national average for staff turnover, absence, vacancies, and use of agency staff

## Quality of Practice Framework

- Further developed and embedded

# Help and Protection (1)

## Early Help and Prevention:

### **Northumberland's Youth Justice service: HMIP inspection April 2023 :**

Overall judgment of Good with 3 areas being judged Outstanding

- Fewer children and young people enter the Criminal Justice system rates reducing and lower than the national, regional and force area.
- First-time entrants to the criminal justice system reduced significantly out of court disposals, 89 per 100k, is significantly below/better than the national average of 148.
- Re-offending far fewer children and young people are re-offending The re-offending rate in Northumberland is typically lower than the national, regional and force area rate (20-30% compared to 30-40%).

### **Early/Family Help**

- Successful outcomes and low numbers stepping up from EH to social work
- Child-centred practice and effective family engagement
- Positive feedback from families
- Improved sustained engagement in most deprived areas
- Education Early Help Assessments Team : Target to increase education led early help assessments (EHA ) exceeded ( target 200: achieved 420)

# Help and Protection (2)

## Safeguarding and Social Work

- Front Door: Good application of thresholds and children are receiving the right service at the right time.
- Numbers on child protection plans higher than national average: Quality of practice audits evidence appropriate decision making
- Children and young people are at the centre of social work practice, and staff members know their children and families well. Creative use of tools and methods
- Parents and wider family members and networks are engaged well :
- The acceptance of Return Home Interviews (RHIs) in 2022 was 80% which shows an increase from both 2020 (52%) and 2021 (73%).
- Good multi agency working has been evidenced across the service and assessments, plans and attendance at relevant meetings is strong.

## Areas for Practice improvement

- The timeliness of Child and Family assessments
- The consistency and quality of plans and timelines
- School attendance for children with a social worker
- Consistency of case supervision recording

# Children Cared For (1)

## Children Cared For

The Ofsted Focused visit on achieving permanence :

**“Social workers identify permanence plans for children at the earliest opportunity. This helps most children to achieve permanence in a timely way.**

- Lowest rate of children and young people in care in the North East (77 per 10K compared to 110), although our overall numbers have increased (from 73 per 10K in March 2022)
- Leaving care, more do return home than any other route (33% compared to 28% nationally).
- Reduction in the percentage of children re-entering care.
- Higher percentage leave care for adoption ( albeit lower numbers in year) and Special Guardianship (SGO) than comparators average (14% compared to 10%).
- The quality of our in-house residential care has been maintained.
- Increase our in-house fostering capacity: Implemented Mocking Bird model
- 74% of our children in care are placed within a 20-mile radius of the family home (national average of 69%)
- Direct work with young people extremely high quality meaningful creative and purposeful way

# Children cared for (2)

## Courts:

- Positive working relationships with CAFCASS and good feedback from District Judge
- Timescales for completion of care proceedings lower than national average
- Participating in DfE pilot to improve early liaison with CAFCASS in care proceedings

## Virtual School:

- Strengths:
  - no permanent exclusions: destinations at age 16: academic achievement of 19–25-year-olds; improvements mid-year school moves: academic performance at key stages 1 and 4;
- Areas for improvement:
  - Academic achievement in the first years of school and key stage 2, absence, and suspensions

## Health:

- 84% of our children had dental check,
- 97% their annual health assessment
- All of our children under 5 had a health development check. This is better than previous year

## Areas for Improvement/Challenges

- Placement sufficiency and stability
- Costs of external placements
- Timeliness of adoption



# Care Leavers

## 18+Care leavers

- All care-experienced young people have an allocated leaving care worker up until the age of 21
- Can re-contact our service for support up until the age of 25.

## Accommodation Service

- Supports young people to transition from care into accommodation suitable to their needs
- Sorted (Substance misuse support team)  
Designated 18+ care leavers worker

## Key Performance

- We are in touch with 118 care leavers aged 19-21 (98%) England/North East (92%) and statistical neighbour average (92%).
- 13% of our young people are Staying Put with former carers (National average 9%).
- We have 97% of 19–21-year-old care leavers in suitable accommodation: (national average 88%)

## Areas for Improvement

- Percentage of 19–21-year-old care leavers in education, employment and training (EET) (currently 52%).
- Alignment of academic and vocational pathways for Year 11 pupils with pathway plans.

## Improvement Priorities 2023 -2024

Improvement Priority	Areas to Cover
<p><b>1. STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP:</b></p> <p>To ensure effective oversight of the progress and implementation of key strategies and that management actions are in place to support continuous improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set up of satellite units linked to Childrens Homes to increase choice and flexibility</li><li>• Create In-house short break service</li><li>• Further scoping and planning for the needs of disabled children</li><li>• Response to and plan for the Stable Homes report developments</li><li>• Implement an Attendance Strategy and strengthen with the use of data</li><li>• Streamlining of the corporate parenting approach across the whole council</li><li>• Further development of Family Hub provision including links with Northumberland Communities Together service</li><li>• Action recommendations from HMIP inspection</li></ul>

# Improvement Priorities 2023 -2024

## 2. WORKFORCE:

Further developing the workforce, embedding family-focused practice, and supporting effective recruitment and retention

- Continue to explore wider options around recruitment and retention to re-energise our recruitment campaign
- Revisit career pathway and grading structure
- Supporting of experienced staff to complete national managers programmes
- Explore improvement of recruitment and retention within residential services to provide in house capacity
- Review Social Work Academy to determine effectiveness and identify any changes
- Sustaining of use of Signs of Safety model across all aspects of practice

## 3. SUFFICIENCY, STABILITY AND SUPPORT

To further improve the stability, range of and support for placements and for children and young people living away from birth parents

- Progress actions relating to the Sufficiency Strategy
- Embed regional fostering pathfinder, recruitment, and retention of foster carers
- Continue to develop the Mockingbird model
- Setting up of satellite homes (as Strategic Leadership)
- Create overnight short break provision (as Strategic Leadership)
- Determine and implement strategies to accelerate academic progress of children looked after
- Develop mechanisms to reduce persistent absenteeism and suspensions from school
- Continue to promote face to face reviews for children and young people
- Support accommodation providers ensuring regulation and good standard of accommodation for care leavers

## Improvement Priorities 2023 -2024

### 4. IMPROVING SOCIAL CARE PRACTICE:

Further improve the effectiveness, timeliness and consistency of social care planning and practice

- Further embed the use of the Quality of Practice Framework
- Agree and develop processes and practice where contextual safeguarding is a factor
- Build upon the Children's Voice pilot in collating and using feedback for shaping of service delivery
- Develop meaningful mechanisms for closing the loop regarding learning from quality of practice activities (including those undertaken within NCASP)
- Undertake mapping exercise regarding child in need cases in line with the recent social care review
- Workshops for staff regarding the practice areas which have been identified as areas for development: