

A YEAR OF CHANGE

Partners' Foreword

The last year has been one like no other for the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership (SSCP), with three major areas of change.

Covid-19

The first and most obvious area is the Covid-19 pandemic. With the country in lockdown it was essential to up our game to protect our most vulnerable children, young people and families and we are proud to say that all safeguarding services did just that.

At the start of lockdown in March 2020, partners across the SSCP came together weekly, working closely to assess risk and identify those children, young people and families who were of greatest concern to ensure robust safety planning was in place for them. Together for Children operated a business as usual model throughout the pandemic, though where possible conducting socially-distanced door-step visits where this did not impact on the service to the child and family. Children's homes continued to provide face to face care throughout, even when children were Covid positive; many staff spent several weeks at a time in children's homes, providing care to our most vulnerable children during the most difficult time of the Covid lockdown, often at the expense of seeing their own children and families.

Other frontline services, including police and health services which were dominated by Covid, have all ensured that capacity in their safeguarding children teams has been protected. Many of these services have adapted their delivery models, providing telephone or video conferencing services to maintain contact. These changes were welcomed by many children, young people and families at a time when they felt particularly vulnerable and it did allow some services to see young people more quickly or more frequently than in normal times.

Sincere thanks must be conveyed to all staff across the safeguarding children workforce, who have worked tirelessly throughout the whole period with unwavering commitment and compassion to serve our community, and without whom our children would not be safeguarded as well as they have been.

For professionals, video conferencing has been invaluable and has allowed them to continue to meet and share information in order to safeguard children. Multi-agency meetings, such as strategy meetings, core groups and child protection conferences have been better attended because of the flexibilities afforded through video meetings and the removal of travel time. It is likely that this way of working will continue for many professionals and so a hybrid model where a mix of physical and remote attendance at meetings will be established.

It is essential that we harness all of these benefits going forward and ensure we are more flexible in our approach to offering services to our families.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements

At the same time as dealing with the impacts of a global pandemic, the SSCP itself has undergone considerable change.

In September 2019 the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board made the transition to the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership and began to implement its transition plan. Between October 2020-March 2021:

- the independent chair stepped down, handing full decision making responsibilities to the three statutory safeguarding partners
- a full new business support team came in to post and is supporting partners to develop a long term strategic plan
- the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements were implemented, with a rationalised structure and a new focus on learning
- an Independent Scrutineer was appointed to act as a critical friend to the partnership.

These new arrangements need time to bed in before we can evaluate the impact and understand if any changes are needed to improve partnership working.

Improvement journey

All of this is happening at a time when social care services for children and young people are on an exceptional improvement journey. Children's social care services receive regular Ofsted monitoring visits following the inadequate judgements of 2015 and 2018. The latest visit in March 2021, which focussed on the services' response to children and families during the pandemic, recognised the **many** improvements that Together for Children has made and despite the pandemic TfC continues to strive to improve even further. The contribution that partners make in helping keep children safe from harm was also recognised.

A full inspection of children's social care is expected in the summer of 2021 and the signs of a positive outcome are evident.

Next steps

During 2021-22, through our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and business plan, we will continue to provide leadership and support across the safeguarding system, championing the voice of the child and promoting a multi-agency learning culture.

Add pictures of three safeguarding partners

Overview from Independent Scrutineer

I was appointed as Independent Scrutineer for Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership in November 2020. Previously independence had been provided by an Independent Chair. My appointment reflected a change in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) for children in Sunderland in light of the revisions to Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. The role is distinctly different from the traditional independent chair and is to provide critical challenge and appraisal of the multi-agency arrangements. Mine is a more 'hands on' approach; facilitating deep analysis of safeguarding issues bringing practitioners from different agencies together, sometimes with wider stakeholders including children and families, to explore and build better practice.

The new MASA came into effect on 5 August 2019. The Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board was replaced with a Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership to ensure the coordination of effective arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children is equally shared by Chief Executive of Sunderland Council, the Chief Clinical Officer and Accountable Officer of Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group and the Chief Constable of Northumbria Police.

The MASA provides a more streamlined structure with a stronger focus on learning and improvement. The development of a 'Practitioner Forum' is a welcome new addition to the functioning of the partnership by providing a vehicle to 'deep dive' into an area of concern and to develop new ways of working and improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

As this year commenced the Covid-19 pandemic had altered life in the United Kingdom beyond recognition as we were all advised to stay at home. Many shops and services were forced to close their doors. The Chancellor of the Exchequer introduced the 'Furlough' scheme to protect jobs. The Bank of England had intervened twice, finally cutting interest rates to 0.1% in an effort to prop up the fragile economy and prevent a deep recession. We saw infection rates, hospitalisation and deaths rise sharply.

The challenges to healthcare, education and social care and early help have been immense. Living and working from home with restrictions placed on our lives is difficult for anyone, however the austerity that the pandemic brings just exacerbates the pressure on those families in greatest need. The impact of a year of fragmented education will be felt for many years and is particularly acute for those making the transition to secondary school and those preparing for national examinations.

Social isolation particularly impacts on young people, affecting their mental health, making them vulnerable to online exploitation and bullying. Worryingly the rate of suicide is increasing amongst children and young people nationally, as is the demand for mental health services.

Finally, given the impact of the global pandemic, it would be remiss not to raise the issue of Domestic Abuse. Research indicates it has become more frequent and more serious during the lockdown, particularly sexual abuse. In addition to the damaging impact domestic abuse has on children living 'with it', sadly often children and young people are victims themselves.

Against this back drop the safeguarding partners in Sunderland pulled together to ensure that the most vulnerable were safeguarded. Most front line services have continued to operate largely "business as usual" and where this was unsafe or not possible, alternate methods were used to support and safeguard children and young people. Video conferencing became the norm, not just to facilitate case conferences and online lessons but to provide support and therapeutic services to children too. Schools remained open, providing services for vulnerable children and key workers' children throughout the pandemic. Social workers, early help workers and partners in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub worked a mixture of office and home working to ensure that social distancing measures could be observed in the workplace, they continued with home visits. Children's Homes remained open. Safeguarding Children health professionals roles were

preserved despite the increased demand to release medically qualified staff to the Covid wards. Our police officers continued to work as usual, despite high absence rates due to Covid infections and Track and Trace isolation periods.

I have discovered a real pride in Sunderland the place, a passion for safeguarding children and young people and a commitment to working together to improve outcomes. It is clear that the partnership generally but particularly Together for Children have been on an improvement journey and I have found both Children's Social Work practice and the Safeguarding Children Partnership in a far stronger place than when graded inadequate by Ofsted. Ofsted's Covid Assurance visit in March, whilst identifying some areas for improvement, was very positive about how Children's Services and the wider partnership had continued to keep children safe despite the challenges presented by the pandemic.

I have been impressed by the energetic leadership within TfC and the open and honest relationship between the Statutory Partners and the wider membership of the SSCP, which provides a firm foundation as they continue to tackle the more complex issues that require a robust partnership approach.

I have found excellent mechanisms in place to hear the voice of children and young people. The work undertaken by the inspirational Change Council (a group of cared for and care experienced children and young people) is particularly impressive. Their *Change the Language* campaign to encourage professionals to update their language to be more inclusive and less stigmatising, is to be applauded. We should all rise to their challenge.

The first Practitioner Forum which focussed on Complex Adolescence, was well planned and well attended with representation across a wide range of agencies. This new way of delving into an issue, looking at the data, listening to practitioners, and identifying what is working well and where the gaps are, provides an excellent platform to design new ways of working and commission new services. I look forward to seeing where this work stream strengthens our multi agency approach to the safeguarding of adolescents from the complex risks they face.

Despite the best efforts of front line practitioners and senior leaders we have seen greater stress on the system, with increasing referrals to social care (a significant proportion due to domestic abuse in the home and for babies under 1 year), increasing numbers of cared for children, and a rise in harmful sexual behaviour and teenage pregnancy. At the same time, we have seen a significant increase in the number of children being Electively Home Educated which is a concerning trend.

Whilst progress against the specific priorities for this year has been impacted by Covid, much has been achieved in terms of the partnership responding to the emerging risks from Covid, learning through Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, continuing to embed "Signs of Safety" and strengthening multi agency working at the front door and through the MSET process (Missing, Slavery, Exploitation and Trafficking).

New priorities have been set for the next 3 year period and Practitioner Forums are planned to lead service improvement in safeguarding vulnerable babies and tackling domestic abuse. In addition, a joint development day with the Sunderland Safeguarding Adults Board (SSAB) identified some joint priorities where a broader approach across both safeguarding partnerships will be beneficial.

The SSCP continues to collaborate regionally and share emerging good practice through the Tyne, Wear and Northumberland Safeguarding Partnership.

Some key challenges for the coming year:-

Strategically and operationally a great focus will be on managing the health, wellbeing and safety of children, young people and families through the pandemic and beyond. It is the 'beyond' which will provide the greatest challenge to the partnership as they deal with the 'hidden harm' that is now in clear sight. To do this, the partnership will have a focus on:

- Rolling out "Signs of Safety" across the partnership
- Managing the increase in referrals to Children's Social Care
- The continued safe reduction in Cared for Children, particularly those placed out of Sunderland
- Ensuring those children being electively home educated are supported and safeguarded
- Strengthening the multi-agency approach to safeguarding vulnerable babies
- Strengthening the multi-agency approach to complex adolescence (including sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and other harms outside the home)
- Working with other partners across Sunderland to tackle domestic abuse
- Strengthening links with schools
- Ensuring accessible and effective mental health support services are available locally
- Continuing to provide high quality training and development, support and supervision for all practitioners with safeguarding responsibilities.

I have highlighted some of the themes where the partnership needs to focus its efforts to strengthen both individual agency and multi-agency responses in order to continue to effectively safeguard children and young people across Sunderland.

What have we achieved in 2020-21?

The SSCP Priorities for 2020/21 were agreed as:

- Complex adolescents
- Neglect
- Mental health.

It is only fair to acknowledge, however, that as a result of the changes in the business unit specific actions were not developed and the impact of Covid meant that the overriding priority for the partnership became the need to safeguard the most vulnerable children and young people during these exceptional times.

That is not to say the partnership has not undertaken any activity to improve outcomes; more that the foundations for the future strategic direction of the partnership have been laid. Between October 2020 and March 2021:

- a revised MASA has been published which reflects the current partnership arrangements
- a new SSCP Executive has been established
- relationships with schools have been strengthened, linking in with well-established arrangements and adopting a learning focus to respond to schools' concerns and requirements
- the Practitioner Forum process is underway, which provides an opportunity for staff on the frontline to influence the improvements that are required for children and young people
- priorities for the SSCP for the 2021-2024 have been agreed and improvement plans are being developed
- the SSCP has developed a whole systems approach, linking with other partnerships wherever possible rather than developing bespoke action plans. This includes the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Partnership.

During the period of this report, the SSCP has agreed its priorities for the three years to 2024. They were determined through:

- the wealth of data that is available to us from children's social care, our health services and the police
- intelligence from our frontline staff in relation to what they deal with on a day to day basis
- inspection reports from Ofsted, the CQC and HMICFRS
- information available on the voice of children and families
- outcomes from Serious Case Reviews, Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and other local learning reviews
- the national safeguarding context, to understand if the same issues faced by children, and families across the country are experienced to the same extent by those in Sunderland.

The priorities agreed are:

1. Covid-19 Recovery
2. Domestic Abuse
3. Contextual safeguarding
4. Vulnerable Babies
5. Mental health of children and young people
6. Strategic safeguarding approaches.

Business plans will be developed in 2021 and progress against these will be reported in the next annual report. For domestic abuse and mental health of children and young people, links will be established with the citywide Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) Partnership and the

Domestic Abuse Partnership Board to ensure a Whole Systems Approach is adopted and that we are not working in silos.

Responding to Covid-19

In terms of demand for services, save for the first few weeks of lockdown, referrals into children's social care have been fairly steady, hitting peaks when restrictions have been eased as would be expected. In Q4 of 2020/21, coinciding with the easing of restrictions in March 2021, referrals into the front door have been exceptionally high. As part of this, our 0-19 services have reported a 93% increase in referrals for its service for the calendar year 2020, and a further 62% increase in Q4 of 2020/21. The hospital trust has recorded increases in the numbers of referrals for unborn babies and the police have dealt with exceptionally high rates of domestic abuse.

Specific issues in Sunderland are:

- Exceptionally high number of contacts into the Initial Contact and Referral Team, particularly as we emerge from the third lockdown.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
No. of referrals to social care	671	1269	1967	2833

This places considerable pressure on staff not only on the front door, but throughout the partnership as agencies strive to meet the needs of families

- Like nationally, we have seen a rise in referral rates for babies under 1 year. From a high in recent years of 50 in May 2019, referral rates had fallen and were at a steady rate of 31-33 each month. As society reopened after the first lockdown of March 2020, referrals for under 1s have fluctuated from May 2020 and we have seen a steady increase from November 2020 to a high of 49 in March 2021. The majority of these referrals are from health services.
- The numbers of cared for children have also increased steadily over the course of the year

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Number of cared for children at the end of the period	599	623	628	624
Rate of cared for children, per 10k of the population, at the end of the period	109.21	113.59	114.50	113.77

There are a number of reasons for this, including at one end more young people becoming cared for, and at the other delays in the family court system as a result of lockdowns

- The impact of Covid on those suffering domestic abuse has been significant. Northumbria Police were called out to 2,236 domestic abuse case in the city between April and June 2020 (Q1) – a 14.7% rise on the same quarter in the previous year. This was the first reporting period after entering lockdown. The increase in cases for the whole year was 5.8% compared to 2019/20. The rate of incidents where a child was present rose by 15.2% in Q1 2020/21, and by 6.7% for the whole of the year compared to 2019/20. The SSCP will work closely with the Domestic Abuse & VAWG Executive Partnership to develop Sunderland's strategic approach to tackling domestic abuse

- A steep rise in the numbers of children and young people who are electively home educated is evident, which is believed to be linked to anxieties in relation to spreading Covid-19. Whilst this is not necessarily a safeguarding concern, these children are no longer as visible to universal services and therefore there are fewer opportunities to identify when these families need support. For those families who have decided to home educate, Together for Children's Early Help Service always conducts an initial home visit to check on the child's welfare and for the reasons for the decision as part of the EHE pathway. During periods of Covid lockdown in 2020 and 2021, the Early Help Service conducted additional welfare visits monthly. Because of this, some parents were supported to re-register their children with a school and others were signposted to other support services.
- As we have come out of the third lockdown, a marked increase in the number of teenage pregnancies is evident. Young parents can be vulnerable, especially if they do not have the support of their families. Pregnant teenagers receive support from the Family Nurse Partnership within the 0-19 Service. The 0-19 service also provides preventative services for young people in relation to sexual health and contraception both within the community and in schools.
- There has also been a rise in harmful sexual behaviour, particularly inappropriate sharing of images and some peer on peer physical offences. Since the easing of restrictions, 62 referrals had been made, requesting support for children and young people.

The SSCP has responded to the issues that have presented. Towards the end of 2020/21 Sunderland CCG was able to allocate an additional £100,000 non-recurrent funding to support services with Covid Recovery to safeguard and promote the welfare of our vulnerable children, young people and their families. Around 75% of this funding has been allocated to supporting young people who have experienced harmful sexual behaviour, supporting the multi-agency front door through the provision of additional business support to process referrals, and Child and Family Workers who will support social workers to deliver the support that families require.

Our Roadmap to Recovery assists us to identify emerging risks and opportunities where we can mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on children and families.

Other areas of work

A major change under the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements is the introduction of the **Practitioner Forum**. This is a new approach to developing improvement planning and disseminating information and learning across the partnership. The first Forum began in February 2021, bringing together frontline practitioners from a whole range of agencies to discuss complex adolescents. Feedback from this first Forum is that it was a much needed exercise and practitioners found the opportunity to come together, share their own experiences and exchanges ideas for improvement extremely valuable. Four task and finish groups emerged from the practitioner forum, focussing on transitions; males; families and; data and intelligence. These task and finish groups are developing action plans which will form part of the SSCPs three-year business plan.

The implementation of **Signs of Safety** has continued in earnest. It is now a well-established model used within children's social care and in multi-agency child protection meetings. Signs of Safety is a relationship-based model of child protection practice, which focuses on what works for professionals and families in building meaningful safety for vulnerable and at-risk children. In the last annual report we reported that through Signs of Safety we had "turned the curve" on the demand into the system. Unfortunately, the impact of Covid-19 has altered that trajectory, however we are absolutely confident that through this model, children, young people and families' lives are being transformed for the better. Over the next two to three years, the focus for the partnership will be to roll out the programme so it is fully embedded into the practice of all partners.

A **pre-birth team** has been established. It is hosted by Together for Children and includes agencies from across the partnership including the midwifery team and health visiting service. This team, with such a specific focus area, is proving highly effective in helping and protecting vulnerable children either to remain safely in the care of their parents or to achieve permanence with extended family or by adoption.

Children in infancy are especially vulnerable to abuse and neglect due to their dependency on adults. In Sunderland, there have been a number of incidents, including a Serious Case Review, where babies have been seriously harmed and either died or suffered life changing injuries. Ofsted has also reported abuse of babies has increase by a fifth during Covid-19. In response to this, **ICON** is being implemented across the city. ICON is an evidence based parental programme designed to prevent abusive head trauma in infants. It consists of a series of brief interventions that reinforce the simple message making up the ICON acronym:

- I Infant Crying is normal
- C Comforting methods can help
- O Its ok to walk away
- N Never, ever shake a baby.

ICON will be launched on 12 April 2021 via social media platforms. Training will be provided via Microsoft TEAMS to partner agencies and health care providers including Midwifery, Sunderland and South Tyneside Safeguarding Team, Health Visitors and Early Years Practitioners, Perinatal Mental Health Services and Together for Children. A train the trainer model will be implemented to support dissemination of this important message across the services, and resources supplied including posters and leaflets.

Within primary care, training for GPs and their primary care team will be provided via the primary care networks. Leaflets, stickers and posters will also be delivered to each GP practice which include QR codes for direct access to the ICON website for further information.

Relevant charities and voluntary organisations will also be offered training including Wearside Women in Need, Centrepont, and kinship carers.

Domestic Abuse Funding

In early 2021, the SSCP was awarded £39,600 from the DfE as part of the 'Multi-Agency Safeguarding: Implementing the Reforms' programme. The funding will strengthen Sunderland's multi-agency response to incidents of parental conflict, domestic abuse and domestic violence by developing a clearer understanding of the thresholds in respect of domestic violence and abuse and the interventions and support already available for families.

Working directly in schools, GP practices, housing providers and voluntary sector organisations such as the Salvation Army and youth groups, the project will be piloted in the Southwick area of the city and will be incorporated into the SARA project (Southwick Altogether Raising Aspirations), promoting a Think Family approach. The funding will:

- provide an Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) directly into schools to train and support staff to recognise the signs of parental disharmony and conflict and to respond more appropriately to Operation Encompass alerts
- train six IDVAs to work directly into partner agencies
- feed the learning from this into revised multi-agency threshold training for all partners (strategic and operational).

The project will begin in April 2021 and feedback from the revised training package and IDVA support will be analysed in January 2022, when a plan for sustainable continuation will be developed and rolled out.

Regional working

All areas across the North East of England deal with many of the same issues and concerns. To this end, statutory partners across the region agreed to establish the Tyne, Wear and Northumberland Strategic Safeguarding Partnership to share learning and best practice and explore areas of concern that would benefit from a regional approach. Sunderland continues to be a key member of this group, and Jill Colbert, the local authority statutory safeguarding partner in Sunderland is chair of that regional partnership. Throughout the year, the partnership has:

- developed a draft common performance framework, which is to be agreed by the partnership
- commissioned research in relation to Tackling Child Exploitation
- began to explore how we can streamline work across the region in relation to Missing, Slavery, Exploitation and Trafficked (MSET)
- undertaken an exercise to commission e-learning across the region to benefit from economies of scale and provide a more accessible and user-friendly platform.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR) are designed to identify improvements in systems and processes so that agencies can learn lessons and improve the way they work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people. A CSPR may be carried out when a child or young person dies or is seriously harmed and abuse or neglect is suspected or is a known factor.

In some cases, the criteria for a CSPR will not be met, however partners may conclude there is still learning for the partnership in how agencies work together to safeguard children and young people. In these cases, a local learning review will be undertaken.

The SSCP has completed one CSPR and two local learning reviews during 2020/21.

Serious Case Review – Baby Kate published in October 2020

The key features of this case related to vulnerable babies and domestic abuse. The recommendations have been incorporated into the improvement plans for these two priority areas for the SSCP and will also form part of the planning for the practitioner forums on the same areas which will take place June to September 2021 and October 2021 to January 2022 respectively.

Local learning review – Baby John, published November 2020

Similar to the review above, the key feature in this review was vulnerable babies and domestic abuse and the same approach applies as that for Baby Kate.

Local learning review – Young Person Clare, finalised in December 2020

The key feature in this review was mental health and wellbeing of young people. This review highlighted the lack of therapeutic beds available for children and young people who suffer with severe mental health difficulties and these findings have been raised with the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, recommending that a national review is undertaken to identify actions at a nationwide level.

Young people's views

There is no doubt that being in lockdown has had a significant impact on children and young people. There have been a number of surveys undertaken with children and young people throughout periods of lockdown to understand their views on the services that they have accessed and how they have coped during the pandemic.

A group of young people with special educational needs attending Sunderland College were asked about their experiences with virtual learning. The majority reported they disliked receiving their work in this way, did not like working on Zoom and missed their friends. Some could navigate the system the college used, but most were reliant on another adult to help them with reading and completing the work. One young person felt advantaged by using technology because they were able to type in the chat box to communicate and felt this was the first opportunity they had to have their voice heard.

Independent Reviewing Officers have asked Change Council (a group cared for and care experienced young people) about their experiences of online services. In the main, they liked having the option of using video calls to speak to their workers at first, but soon tired of it.

A group of cared for and care experienced children shared their experiences of lockdown. One person, who lived in a children's home, said they like isolating – it gave them time and space to themselves. On the other side of the spectrum, another young person talked about it being “the worst year of my life” as a parent had died the previous year and they could not visit their grandparents or siblings to discuss how this had affected them.

When asked about how they had spent their time, some young people talked about how isolated they had felt, others talked about how they used this time to develop new skills at home, including cooking, using technology in different ways to create a YouTube channel and developing video games as well as practicing music. Young people talked about the things they have missed, mostly to do with face to face contact or shops not being open. Some young people also talked about how they missed not seeing their parents and how they had not been able to access health services.

Generally young people didn't feel they had missed out on education – they had received online lessons and those who hadn't needed to sit exams felt that this wouldn't impact on them.

The group also discussed anxieties linked to Covid-19 and expressed concern that the vaccine wouldn't work, or that it would be harmful. They also worried the virus would continue to spread and they talked about general concerns like worrying how things will change because of the virus.

Quotes:

Covid has affected me massively. It meant I didn't have the end to secondary school that I expected and that my prom was cancelled. It also meant that I was unable to see my family and friends in person which I found upsetting. However, I have learnt a lot of new skills during lockdown such as how to cook family meals that are vegetarian and vegan. I have also matured during lockdown and I have learnt to appreciate the little things in life.” (Young Person, aged 16)

Being in quarantine has allowed me to discover more about myself and what I want in life. (Young Person, aged 16)

My life in lockdown has been a big struggle because I was very isolated from my friends, didn't get to have prom and I missed school more than I thought I would. (Young person, aged 16)

Covid has had a huge impact on my life, I missed the opportunity of going to university this year and having to redo a year at college. My hospital check-ups have been delayed a lot due to Covid but

I've managed slowly but surely. However it's given me a chance to think about my future life plans and put concrete plans in place. I can't wait for all this to be over so life can go back to being relatively normal again. (Young Person, aged 18)

Change the Language

In 2020, Together for Children launched the Change the Language Campaign. This campaign was created by the Change Council, a group of cared for and care experienced children and young people and it is designed to update the language we use when referring to them.

This is something that young people feel passionately about. They feel some of the language used about them is outdated, impersonal and often confusing.

As part of our commitment to hear the voices of children and young people, the SSCP has promoted the Change the Language campaign across the partnership and encourages everyone to 'change their language' and show young people we are truly listening to them and taking on board their views.

Details about Change the Language and how young people prefer to be described can be found [here](#).

Training

As with most things, training has been impacted by Covid-19 as people have been unable to come together. We have been able to move some of our training online, and have even delivered some face to face training in a socially distanced environment for single agencies, though by and large training has been limited.

In November 2020 the SSCP appointed a Training Officer who is making swift progress to ensure:

- the SSCP website includes Quick Guides to Safeguarding which will provide headline information into specific topics and signpost to further reading
- a regional e-learning offer is implemented to provide a comprehensive, value for money e-learning package and give consistency across the region. This will have added benefits to partners who work across local authority boundary areas. It is hoped that the regional e-learning offer will be in place by the end of 2021
- in-house training is developed or commissioned in line with our priorities
- a multi-agency team of trainers is recruited to deliver quality training across the partnership.

Looking forward to the year ahead and beyond

The SSCP has agreed its priorities for 2021-24 as being:

1. Covid-19 Recovery
2. Domestic Abuse
3. Contextual safeguarding
4. Vulnerable Babies
5. Mental health of children and young people
6. Strategic safeguarding approaches.

The rationale for focussing on these areas is set out below.

Covid-19 Recovery

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on families and services alike, and that is why Covid-19 Recovery is the first priority in our business plan. We will continue to monitor the areas identified within this annual report and identify any emerging issues so that we can respond appropriately as a partnership. Additional funding to support services has been identified and we will need to understand the impact this funding has made and whether there is a need for ongoing support. It is likely that we haven't seen the full impact of Covid-19 on children and young people as yet and that might not be fully understood for years to come. Through this priority we can ensure we are ahead of the situation and working together to ensure services can respond to the needs of families.

Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is of growing concern, with increases in the numbers of cases both locally and nationally. Covid has had a massive impact on the numbers of domestic abuse cases being reported and Sunderland has been significantly affected. In Q1 of 2020/21, there was a 15.2% increase in the number of incidents police attended where a child or young person was present compared to the previous year; this was the first reporting period after the nation went in to lockdown. Domestic abuse is also the main reason for contacts in to children's social care by a significant margin. Furthermore, in 2020/21 a Serious Case Review was published by the SSCP as well as a local learning review. Domestic abuse was a concerning feature in both of these reviews and will inform our improvement planning. In the coming year, as a response to the Domestic Abuse Act a local Domestic Abuse Partnership Board that will be established and the SSCP will work closely with this Board to ensure that the impact on children and families is represented and the voice of children and young people is evident in any plans and strategies.

Contextual safeguarding

Contextual safeguarding is an approach to safeguarding children to work with children and their families to keep children safe who are vulnerable to harms outside the home. Sunderland, as with many other local areas, is concerned about contextual safeguarding and is seeing an increase in the number of young people affected by harm outside the home. The data for 2020/21 shows significant rises in offences against children in relation to child sexual exploitation (CSE), peer on peer physical abuse including the inappropriate sharing of images and online grooming and young people reported to the police as missing from home. In addition, over the last three years there have been three Serious Case Reviews and/or Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews where young people have died, having been seriously harmed or their lives have been significantly affected by factors outside of their family home.

Vulnerable Babies

The welfare of unborn and infant babies in Sunderland, like nationally, is a concern. To respond to these concerns a pre-birth team, with strong partnership working to protect unborn and newborn babies and their parents, has been established in TfC with some truly outstanding examples of support. This is just part of the journey to improve the safeguarding of babies and with two Serious Case Reviews and a local learning review in recent years where babies have been involved, and rising numbers of referrals into children's social care in the year, this remains a priority for the SSCP.

Mental health of children and young people

Sunderland has consistently high numbers of children and young people referred to mental health services and is third highest across England for admission episodes for under 18 years olds in relation to mental health. Many of our most vulnerable children and young people in Sunderland require access to mental health services, including cared for and care experienced children. Ofsted recently commented that some of our *"cared for children have waited too long to access emotional and mental health support when they have needed it."* (March 2021). The SSCP has also completed a local learning during the where significant mental health difficulties was the overriding factor. Covid-19 is widely reported to have had a major impact on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people and it is likely we have not felt the full impact of this as yet.

The SSCP will work closely with the CAMHS Partnership to ensure that the welfare of children and young people with mental health is promoted and share relevant information and intelligence in relation to safeguarding issues.

Strategic safeguarding approaches

This relates to those areas that provide strategic direction to the children's safeguarding workforce and will enable them to better support vulnerable children, young people and their families. Through this priority we will continue to build on work already underway including the roll out of Signs of Safety and promoting the Change the Language campaign developed by the Change Council. Trauma informed practice is also an area of emerging importance in how we promote the welfare of children, young people and families who require safeguarding services. The SSCP will explore ways in which we can develop a coordinated approach to this area to provide consistency in how we support families.

Business plans for each of these priorities will be developed in 2021 and progress against these will be reported in the next annual report.

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

To be presented as an infographic on publication

The purpose of this section is to give an overview of the safeguarding landscape in Sunderland. It will be presented as an info graphic, to be developed when all indicators for inclusion are agreed

Those identified are:

Early help

No of Early Help plans – 881 compared to 838 in 19/20.

Rate of EH Plans per 10k of the population – 306 compared to 323 in 19/20

Social care

No. of CIN Plans - 2339

Rate of CIN Plans per 10k of the population - 426 compared to 409 in 19/20, 463 regional, 324 national

No of CP Plans – 414 compared with 367 in 19/20

Rate of CP Plans per 10k of the population – 75 compared with 67 in 19/20, 70 regional, 43 national

No of cared for children – 624 compared with 582 in 19/20

Rate of cared for children per 10k of the population – 114 compared with 106 in 19/20, 108 regional, 67 national

Percentage of children who become subject of a plan for second or subsequent time – 23.9% compared to 22.6% in 2020, 20.8% in NE, 22.10% England

Education

% of children permanently excluded – 0.14 19/20 compared to 0.22 – 18/19; 0.1 NE; 0.06 England

No. of children electively home education at the end of the academic year – 206 in 19/20 compared to 139 in 18/19

% of care experienced young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training – 49% compared to 50% in 19/20, 43% NE, 39% England

16-17 year olds in Education or Training – 92.37% compared to 89.98% in 2019, 92.18% NE; 93.21% England

Mental health

No. of children referred to T2 mental health services - 2636

Average waiting time for T2 mental health services – 35 days

No. of cared for children referred to T2 mental health services - 76

Average waiting time for cared for children to T2 mental health services – 42 days

No. of children referred to T3 mental health services - 2687

No. of CYP attending A&E for self-harm – 197 compared to 299 in 19/20

No. of CYP admitted for self-harm – 88 compare to 95 in 19/20

Rate of admissions for mental health (PHF) – 164.1 in Sunderland, 101.5 regional; 89.5 national

No. of CYP attending A&E for self-harm – 197 compared to 299 in 19/20

No. of CYP admitted for self-harm – 88 compared to 95 in 19/20

Domestic Abuse

No. of domestic abuse incidents – 8434 compared to 7970 in 19/20 – equivalent to 21.5% of all force incidents

Domestic incidents with a child involved – 3484 compared to 3264 in 19/20 – equivalent to 21% of all force incidents

Arrests associated with domestic violence incidents with child involved – 881 in 20/21 compared to 813 in 19/20 – equivalent to 21.5% of all force

DV Victim age 16 or 17 – 67 20/21 compared to 86 19/20 – equivalent to 16% of all force area

Contextual safeguarding

No. of CYP attending A&E who have been assaulted - 41 – 110 in 19/20

No. of CYP admitted who have been assaulted -2 – 9 in 19/20

All children reported missing to the police as missing from home - 1,278 compared to 1399 in 19/20, equivalent to 30% of whole region

Number of Individuals missing from home – 608 compared to 412 in 19/20 – 35% of the whole region

First Time Entrants to the Youth Justice System per 100k of the population – 383.2 in 2019 compared to 311.6 in 2018, 273.8 NE; 208 England

Offences against children: CSE – 37, compared to 21 in 19/20 – 17% of whole force area

Offences against children: Modern Slavery – 14 compared to 6 in 19/20 – 46.5% of whole force area

Under 18 conception Rates per 1000 girls (15-17) – 24.3 in 2019, 21.8 NE; 15.7 England

Under 18 Hospital Admissions (Alcohol related) - rate per 100,000 – In 2017/18-2019/20 - 82.4, Sunderland; 55.4, NE; 30.7 England