

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

AGENDA

Meeting to be held on Monday 28 June 2021 at 4.00pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Sunderland

Part I

ITEM	PAGE
1. Apologies for Absence	
2. Declarations of Interest	
3. Minutes	1
Minutes of Meeting held on 19 April 2021 (copy attached).	
4. Change Council Update	-
Report of the Change Council (copy to follow).	
5. Health of Cared for Children	9
Report of the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children (copy attached).	
6. Adopt Coast to Coast – Regional Adoption Agency Update	13
Report of the Head of Service, Adopt Coast to Coast (copy attached).	
7. Children’s Independent Reviewing Service – Annual Report	15
Report of the Independent Reviewing Service (copy attached).	

8.	Regulation 44 Visits – November 2020 – April 2021	49
	Report of the Independent Reviewing Service (copy attached).	
9.	Virtual School – Headteacher’s Report	67
	Report of the Headteacher of the Virtual School (copy attached).	

ELAINE WAUGH
Assistant Director of Law and Governance

Civic Centre
SUNDERLAND

18 June 2021

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

**Minutes of the Meeting held remotely via MS Teams on Monday 19 April 2021
at 5.30pm**

Part I

Present:

Members of the Board

Councillor L Farthing (in the Chair)	Washington South Ward
Councillor S Foster	Castle Ward
Councillor J McKeith	St Peter's Ward
Councillor P Smith	Silksworth Ward

All Supporting Officers

Councillor C Rowntree	Deputy Cabinet Member, Children, Learning and Skills
Jill Colbert	Chief Executive, TfC
Linda Mason	Headteacher, Virtual School
Nikki Donaldson	Participation and Engagement Officer
Jess	Change Council
Elishia	Change Council
Dr Sarah Mills	Designated Doctor for Looked After Health
Jo Morgan	Designated Nurse Looked After Children
Kelly Haslem	CYPS, Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear Foundation Trust
Suzanne Miller	
Gillian Kelly	Governance Services

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Heron, Marshall, McDonough and Potts.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

26. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

Change Council Update

The Board had received a copy of the Change Council report and this was presented by Jess and Elishia.

The Change Council had continued to meet face to face fortnightly in a Covid secure venue and senior managers had been regular visitors at Change Council to ensure that they were listening and responding to what young people were saying.

Four young people had expressed an interest in being part of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and Rhiannon had been successful and was now part of the national EbE Board.

Members of the Change Council had taken part in International Women's Week and had recognised what social care professionals had meant to them as part of Social Work Week. National Care Day 2021 had been supported virtually through creative activities including baking, drawing and quotes.

Change Council had met virtually with the Regional Children in Care Council and young people across the region had identified six themes as follows: -

- Reduced or free Council Tax for all care experienced young people no matter which area they lived in
- More apprenticeships for care experienced young people and work training opportunities
- Reduced travel costs
- More work done around isolation and trusted key adults for care experienced children and young people
- Children and young people designed and delivered training for front line staff both in and out of councils
- More changes in the language used within the care system.

Researchers had met with members of the Change Council and young people from across the region to understand what had happened during the pandemic for Children in Care councils and the Change Council had delivered a presentation to Ofsted as part of a focused visit in March 2021.

Going forward, the Change Council had identified a number of activities including the launch of the cookbook, the Change the Language campaign, the Takeover Challenge, recruiting a wider representation of young people and looking at the isolation of care experienced young people.

The Chair congratulated Rhiannon on her appointment to the EbE Board and asked if Sunderland's Change Council had expressed a view on what was the most

important theme which had been identified regionally and it was noted that the Change Council had not discussed this yet.

The Chair thanked Jess and Elishia for presenting the report and suggested that they forward her the link for the cookbook and she would forward this to all Councillors.

27. RESOLVED that the Change Council update be noted.

Health of Cared for Children

The Designated Nurse for Looked After Children submitted a report providing an update on health activity for looked after children.

The purpose of the report was to: -

- Demonstrate the duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children looked after
- Assure the Corporate Parenting Board that support and health services to children looked after were provided without undue delay or geographical prejudice
- Demonstrate the aim of the Looked After Health team for sustained improvement in the health and wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers
- Assure that the child's voice around health was included wherever possible
- Report on compliance with statutory targets from the Looked After Health Team for South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

The data being presented was for Quarter 3, October, November and December 2020 and the Board were advised that following the implementation of further restrictions in December 2020, assessments had returned to being by carried out virtually or by telephone. It was planned to reintroduce face to face appointments during April 2021.

There had been an average of 623 children cared for in quarter 3 which was a slight increase from the previous quarter and represented 107 children per 10,000. This remained higher than the national average.

61 Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) had been carried out and there had been 95% compliance. Two health assessments had been done outside of timescale because of siblings having to self-isolate and one young person was seen out of timescale because they had other appointments which took priority.

126 Review Health Assessments had been carried out in the quarter and this was 98% compliance with timescales. Of these, 19 appointments had been missed but the majority were re-booked within timescale. One child was out of time and six young people had refused their health assessments and the refusal pathway was followed in these cases.

The compliance for out of area RHAs was 92%. It was noted that there were 37 children placed outside of the North East and the CCG assured all of the out of area health assessments for quality. An audit was currently being completed to provide assurance that cared for young people placed outside of Sunderland were receiving timely, quality health assessments and that unmet needs identified on health action plans were met within timeframes. When young people were placed out of the area, nursing staff now shared a 'medical summary' to ensure that all health needs could be met in the local area without delay.

18 Health passports had been issued during the quarter which represented 100% compliance. The Signs of Safety scaling system was being embedded into the health assessments to align with the Together for Children Signs of Safety model.

Health Profile Data continued to be collected at each health assessment and this would be used to improve services for cared for young people. A project around obesity had been completed and a leaflet about abnormal eating behaviours in cared for children was being produced to support carers in managing weight gain when children come into care.

The Chair commented that she would be interested to see the re-audit of the outcomes for Asthma and Epilepsy care in 2022 and said that anecdotally she had heard about cared for children having issues with eating disorders and thanked Jo for raising it.

Jill Colbert asked if there was now routine access for oral health for cared for children and Dr Mills stated that this was variable according to the dentist but carers were being encouraged by the looked after health team to register with a dental surgery and to make appointments.

Having considered the report, it was: -

28. RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

NTW Sunderland Looked After Children Data

The Board received a report from CNTW for the period December 2020 to February 2021. Kelly Haslem advised that there had been seven referrals in December, ten in January and 13 in February. Five young people were discharged unseen during the period as they were deemed to be inappropriate referrals, another was declined as the young person was undergoing care proceedings and one young person requested that the referral was retracted as they did not wish to engage with CYPS.

The CYPS Intensive Community Treatment Service (ICTS) now sat within the Universal Crisis Team and offered a 24/7 service, 365 days a year. The ICTS would respond within one hour by telephone and would see all urgent cases before referring to CYPS. There had been no emergency appointments required during the period but there had been five urgent referrals.

Waiting times were still within the target with the wait to treatment in February being five weeks. During Covid the service had continued to accept all referrals, complete assessments and interventions and face to face appointments were offered when clinically necessary.

The Pathway for cared for children was now well established and focused on two areas; direct therapeutic work with the young people and non-direct work with foster carers and staff working in residential homes. Young people were offered priority appointments with CYPS and would access treatment within six weeks.

The CYPS caseload had increased slightly and children looked after represented around 6.1% of all referrals. The team had recently appointed a Principal Psychologist which was a specific post working with TfC to support foster carers.

The Chair commented that it could be disorientating for a young person if their therapist changed whilst they were receiving treatment and she emphasised the need for consistency for young people.

Councillor Smith asked how the team felt about the caseload and was it at an expected level. Kelly Haslem said that it had been stable for quite a long time and she did not feel that there were any changes of concern.

29. RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

Virtual School – Headteacher's Report

Linda Mason, Headteacher of the Virtual School submitted a report providing information about cared for children since the last report to the Board in January 2021.

At the current time there were 625 cared for children in the city, a slight reduction since January and the report highlighted that the cared for population was dynamic. It was noted that the vast majority of cared for children who were able to access early year provision did so and the Chair said that it would be interesting to know the percentage for the next meeting.

Within the cared for school age population, 223 (45%) had an identified SEND, with 137 receiving SEND support in school, and 17% of the total had an EHCP. Of those children, 82% attended a specialist education provision. The report set out the primary need for those who had been identified as having SEND with the majority (32%) having primary need in relation to Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), followed by mild learning disabilities (MLD) and Communication and Interaction.

Linda Mason highlighted that there were a lot of boys with SEMH; this could be passive or active and boys were identified more as active. This analysis fed into work which was being done on how the identification of need correlated with children becoming cared for and the period leading up to that decision.

The Chair agreed that early identification of needs in early years was very important and Linda stated that as part of the SEND Panel for EHCP assessments she had noticed the difference in the early years referrals coming through and that the information and evidence provided was very good.

In terms of progress and achievement, the Virtual School had a good three-year trend and this was monitored termly through the ePEP. Schools would set targets for children and young people and would identify progress against targets. 97% of ePEPs were in place for school age children, 96% for post-16 and 75% for Early Years. The focus was now on quality assurance and the feedback was generally positive.

School attendance in the Autumn term had been 94.9% and during the Spring term 60.9% of cared for children were actually in school with 38.4% accessing remote learning. Since the return to school on 8 March 2021, 99% of primary children had returned to school and 96% of secondary children. Overall attendance was 93.2% and all of these figures were above the national average. The Chair congratulated everyone involved in supporting the cared for children back to school.

There had been no expulsions of cared for children from school in the last three years and there had been 40 suspensions in the Autumn term, totalling 151.5 days. The report showed a breakdown analysis of cared for children who had received multiple suspensions.

79% of cared for young people were in good or outstanding schools. The Board had previously been advised that children would not automatically be removed from a school if it was judged to Require Improvement or was Inadequate, there were many factors which would be considered in relation to whether it would be in the young person's best interests to remove them from the school.

The Governing Board of the Virtual School had been re-established and there were Headteacher representatives from all phases involved. The Chair of Governors, Councillor Geoff Walker had recently passed away and would be greatly missed. Councillor Claire Rowntree had now been appointed to the Governing Body.

The Virtual School had continued to ensure that it had membership of key groups to enable effective partnership working.

The Pupil Premium Grant would be fully utilised in support of improving educational outcomes as expected by the DfE Grant conditions. The local authority received £2,345 per cared for child and schools received £1,800 annually and the Virtual School retained £445 per child. Centrally retained funding was used for services such as tutors, alternative provision, 1-2-1 tuition, Welfare Call and Education Psychology reports.

Linda highlighted that the Covid response of the Virtual School, noting that a lot had been done to ensure that young people were in school, laptops had been provided and welfare checks were carried out on those viewed as most vulnerable. This had paid off hugely in the levels of attendance of cared for children.

The Chair thanked Linda for the comprehensive report and asked if a cared for young person was in school, who would pay for any school trips or activities. Linda stated that it could be the carer as part of their contract, but there were some very able young people who would argue that the school use PPI to enhance their learning in this way.

Upon consideration of the information, it was: -

30. RESOLVED that the Virtual School – Headteacher’s Report be noted.

Corporate Parenting Review

The Board received a report which had recently been presented to the Council’s Cabinet on an external review into the Council’s corporate parenting arrangements and proposing a number of changes to the Council’s approach.

Jill advised that the review had been carried out by Karen Simmons and crystallised some of the conversations which had taken place around corporate parenting over recent months. The refreshed model for corporate parenting was intended to reinforce governance arrangements to evidence that the Corporate Parenting Board was proving effective scrutiny of the strategic plans and making a difference to the lives of cared for children.

An overarching strategy and vision for corporate parenting would be developed; this would not be a lengthy or complex document but would articulate what TfC wanted for cared for children in Sunderland. The Change Council would be part of tracking progress and impact and there would be greater access to regular training for all elected Members and officers.

Councillor Smith referred to discussions which had taken place in the past about the involvement of elected Members in Regulation 44 visits of Children’s Homes and where these conversations had got to.

Jill advised that Regulation 44 visits would be addressed as part of the review of governance which would be undertaken by the DfE, Together for Children and the Council. The Chair noted that the visits were only a small part of what TfC did, highlighting that she had sat in on a foster care review, and that Members could aim to get a wider grasp of what was going on. A way forward could be building an understanding with the young people and then being invited into the homes by them.

Jill added that often ward members would have relationships with the homes in their area and highlighted that the Area Committee had funded the purchase of a therapy dog for one home.

31. RESOLVED that report be noted.

(Signed) L FARTHING
Chair

CCG Sunderland update
Report to Corporate Parenting Board
28th June 2021

1.0 Purpose of the report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Demonstrate our duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in care
- To assure the corporate parenting board that health services to children in care are provided without undue delay or geographical prejudice
- To demonstrate the aim of the Looked After Health team is for sustained improvement in the health and wellbeing of children in care and those leaving care
- To assure the child's voice around health issues are included wherever possible
- Report on compliance to statutory targets from the Looked After Health Team for South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

Please note that data reported within this report is Q4 data (January, February and March). This is due to the time of this meeting. With an overview of the years data 2020-2021

1.2 COVID-19

- 1.2.1 The health team have recommenced face to face health assessments from April 2021.
- 1.2.2 The team continue to have cancelled appointments due to young people isolating but from recent updates they are managing this well.
- 1.2.3 55% of young people were seen face to face over the pandemic period April 20-March 21
- 1.2.4 The team did gather feedback from young people and there was an overriding preference from them that they preferred to be seen face to face.

2.0 Compliance data for health assessments - Quarter 4

In Quarter 4 there were, on average, 625 cared for children, this is a slight decrease from the previous quarter. Current rate in Sunderland is 106 per 10,000 Children Looked After¹. This remains higher than the national average.

2.1 Initial Health Assessments (IHA)

¹ Children's services analysis tool, ChAT, April 2019

- 2.1.1 Local Authorities are responsible for ensuring a health assessment of physical, emotional and mental health needs is completed for every child within 20 working days of becoming looked after.

Table 1 - Initial Health Assessments

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Number	47	60	61	73	241
Compliance	96%	96%	95%	86%	93%

*unfortunately, 11 initial health assessments were out of timescale in Q4. This was due to a combination of young people of carers having to self-isolate, a surge of young people requiring care close to christmas and missed appointments.

- The Health Team have been able to demonstrate that they have continued to offer appointments within timescales and external factors have impacted on the compliance towards the end of this financial year.
- 224 initial health assessments have met compliance, with only 17 falling outside of this period.
- There has been a steady rise in Initial health assessment requests throughout the year.
- No one has refused their initial health assessment throughout the year period.

2.2 Review Health Assessments (RHA)

- 2.2.1 The RHA must happen at least every six months before a child's 5th birthday and at least once every 12 months after the child's 5th birthday within the month they became looked after.

Table 2 - Review Health Assessments

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Number	135	167	126	185	613
Compliance	100%	99%	98%	99%	99%

*only 1 young person was completed out of time scale in Q4

- The review health assessment requests increased in Q4
- Only 4 young people had their health assessment out of timescale during the year period.
- 11 young people have refused their health assessment over the year period.

2.3 Out of Area Health Assessments

Table 3 – Health assessments performed on behalf of Sunderland for children and young people placed outside of area

Assessment	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
IHA	0	0	2 (100%)	3 (33%)	5(60% compliant)
RHA	10 (100%)	7(100%)	12(92%)	10(50%)	39(85% compliant)

*7 of the 13 out of area requests were completed outside of their due date in Q4, this was due to capacity of the out of area team and a late notification for the Initial Health Assessments (2).

- 2.3.1 There were 44 requests to out of area providers over the year period. 8 of these were out of time scales.
- 2.3.2 A pathway is now in place for the quality assurance of health assessments, and all out of area assessments are quality assured by the Designate Nurse Sunderland CCG.
- 2.3.3 An audit has been completed to provide assurance that our cared for young people placed outside of the area of Sunderland receive timely, quality health assessments and that unmet needs identified on health action plans are met within timeframes.
- 2.3.4 The nursing staff now share a 'Medical summary' when a child or young person is moved out of area to ensure all health needs can be met in the local area without delay

3.0 Health Passports

Table 4 - Health Passports Issued

Quarter	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Number	14	12	18	9	53
Compliance	100%	83%	100%	100%	96%

- 3.1 All of our young people are offered a passport at their last health assessment.

4.0 Looked After Health Team

- 4.1 Dr Emma Cadamy is taking on some of Dr Sarah Mills job role whilst she is on maternity leave.
- 4.2 Face to face Initial and Review health assessments have commenced April 2021

5.0 Service improvements

- 5.1 The medical team are completing an in-house audit of health assessments, to identify areas of good practice and improvement.

- 5.2 The Out of Area Health assessment audit; this identified good practice with regards to early notification to the out of area health teams, and the sharing of a 'health update' when a young person moves.
- 5.3 Recommendations included changes to wording within the assessment paperwork, as very little evidence that additional information was gathered from Social Worker, GP etc.
- 5.4 Priorities for 2021-2022 are:
- The LAH team will review the evidence and implement an agreed screening tool to assess children and young people's emotional wellbeing/ mental health at each health assessment.
 - The co-production and engagement of young people in service delivery and transformation and consider other alternative modes of communication with children and young people in completing health assessments.
 - The LAH team will review regional and national best practice in completing health passports in an aligned approach
 - The ACP trainee will be supported throughout the 2nd year. A framework of supervised practice and governance will be developed to enable transition into independent practice once qualified

6.0 Recommendations and Actions

The Corporate Parenting Board is asked to note the content of the report.

Jo Morgan
Designated Nurse Looked After Children
Sunderland CCG

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

28 June 2021

Update on Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt Coast to Coast

Report of Paula Gibbons, Head of Service, Adopt Coast to Coast

1. Purpose of the Report

To update Together for Children's Corporate Parenting Board on the progress of the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt Coast to Coast since its virtual launch on the 1st April.

2. Background

Together for Children and Adopt Coast to Coast are working in partnership as a regional adoption agency alongside Cumbria and Durham County Council's to provide adoption services in their geographical footprint through a hub and spoke model. Though Together for Children/Sunderland continue to have statutory responsibility for their adoption service (as do the other spokes), the Head of Service is accountable for the performance, service improvements and delivery of the agreed outcomes across the 3 spokes as detailed under the partnership arrangements. As lead for quality assurance across all aspects of adoption practice the Head of Service is ensuring the development of consistent practice to achieve our vision:

Children will achieve their full potential within a loving and secure family, and everyone affected by adoption will receive a high-quality innovative and sustainable service.

3. Responsibilities in Adopt Coast to Coast

Hub

The Head of Service has responsibility for the day to day coordination of Together for Children's Adoption Service to ensure the implementation of the agreed joint plans, policies and strategies approved by the Governance Board.

Communications and Marketing Officer – lead for centralised recruitment activity. Year 1 budget is £40K. Supported by new website, Facebook and Instagram.

The new enquiries and outcome system records interests in adoption and automatically allocates to relevant spoke.

Telephone number hosted by Durham.

Spokes

The 3 spokes, Together for Children, Cumbria and Durham continue to provide their current adoption services from first contact.

4. Performance

Spokes combined performance in 2020/21

- 78 Prospective adopters approved
- 24 Prospective adopters in stage 1*
- 23 Prospective adopters in stage 2*
- 18 Prospective adopters approved and not linked*
- 57 Children with ADM/SHOPA*
- 36 Children with Placement Order and no link/match*
- 11 Children with Placement Order for 6 months or longer*
- 20 Children who were placed via FfA/Concurrency
- 130 Children matched
- 60 Children placed via interagency agreement

*as at 31st March 2021

5. Recruitment Activity

- A range of pre and post launch activity has been undertaken to raise awareness of the Adopt Coast to Coast branding as distinct from that of the spokes. The Adopt Coast to Coast website, Facebook and Instagram accounts have had reasonable footfall. In the month of April there were 4624 page views to the website and 986 new users. By mid-June Facebook had 275 followers and Instagram had 105 followers.
- By 17th June 2021, 100 enquiries had been reached.
- The telephone number has had 60 calls and the reasons for these calls are being monitored to improve service delivery.
- Recruitment that has focused on actual children with a plan of adoption (though anonymised) has been incredibly well received and a campaign for a group of 3 brothers with plan of adoption agreed by Together for Children had a reach of 14,607 people via Facebook and it was shared by 117 people.

6. Key priority areas for 2021/22

- To establish Adopt Coast to Coast as the 'go to' agency for those interested in adopting
- To continue to monitor brand recognition to ensure it is recognisable alongside and separately to the LA partners
- To continually review the outcome of marketing activity to ensure best value and best return on investment
- To ensure the prospective adopters' journey is reviewed and streamlined through review and sharing of best practice
- To establish a regional adopter engagement group
- To establish early linking and matching
- To work across the partnership to develop the after adoption support offer

7. Recommendation

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to note the contents of this update.

Children's Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report

April 2020 to March 2021



putting
the child first



together for children SUNDERLAND

Report presented to: TfC Senior Leadership Team
Corporate Parenting Board

Report Authors: Stacy Hodgkinson, Service Manager
Gavin Taylor Team Manager
Heather Sutherland, Business Manager

Approved By: Sue Carty, Director

All data provided in this report for 2020/21 is provisional pending the submission to and publication of data by the Department for Education

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Highlight Summary	4
1. Purpose of the Annual Report.....	5
2. Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).....	5
3. Role of Child Protection Conference Chairs	6
4. Impact of IRO/Conference Chair Work.....	7
5. Professional Profile of the Children Independent Reviewing Team.....	9
6. Learning and Development	10
7. Regional, National and Local Links	10
8. Voice and Influence of Children	12
9. Highlighted Achievements in 2020/21	13
10. Profile of Children in Sunderland	15
11. Performance Summary - Child Protection 2020/2021	18
12. Participation and Views within Child Protection	21
13. Performance Summary - Cared for Children	22
14. Participation and Views – Cared for Children.....	24
15. Dispute Resolution Procedure (DRP)	25
16. Quality Assurance Work.....	28
17. Our Customer Feedback.....	29
18. Our Priorities for 2021 - 2022	32
19. Conclusion.....	32

HIGHLIGHT SUMMARY

What have we achieved?

The Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Child Protection Conference Chairs are all permanent experienced Social Workers. The Children's Independent Reviewing Team (CIRT) have a full complement of staff which means that most children have a consistent worker who spends time working with them directly to make sure their plans are on track.

We have continued to implement our strength-based model of practice, Signs of Safety and have worked closely with our partners, both at national and local level in developing practice and documentation. We have also continued to be influential at a regional level in arranging training for IROs and developing practice.

We have adapted our models of working in line with challenges presented by COVID-19. We have embraced new technology, offering a hybrid model to ensure parents, children, and professionals engage in child protection conferences and cared for reviews. IROs have continued to undertake pre cared for visits either in person, virtually or by telephone, giving children the opportunity to share their views and wishes regarding their care planning.

In response to the wishes of children, we have adapted our language, for example, 'looked after' has been replaced with 'cared for', family 'contact' replaced with family 'time' and 'care leaver' replaced with 'care experienced'. Our use of language will continue to be reviewed in line with child's views.

We have strengthened our tracking of children's plans to evidence the voice of the child and the impact that intervention is having upon them as individuals. We have also revised our Dispute Resolution Process to strengthen our recordings to better explain what we want to influence and how we can change outcomes for children.

We have worked with social care to implement a reviewing process for all cared for children who access sleepovers so that children with disabilities have a pathway of having their plans independently reviewed and considered in line with other cared for children.

We have maintained a high level of performance in 2020/21 including 88% of initial child protection conferences held in timescale, 98% of review conferences held in timescale, 99% of cared for reviews held in timescale with 94% of children participating in their reviews.

What are we worried about?

Recently children have fed back that in general they are feeling tired of virtual communication methods and are looking forward to having more face-to-face interactions.

We do not always receive child protection conference reports on time which means that we may not have important information to make decisions or that parents and children are not always prepared for conferences, so they have to be rescheduled.

We are still learning about Signs of Safety and Signs of Success model of working which has had to be delivered differently due to COVID-19. Although virtual/hybrid meetings have helped, the gradual lifting of restrictions will allow us to exploit the model more thoroughly.

What will we do next?

We will have more face-to-face meeting with children as COVID-19 restrictions begin to lift and we will continue to encourage children to chair their own cared for reviews and increase participation. We will make sure that we monitor plans and strengthen them for children via timely reviews.

We will continue to embed our Signs of Safety/Signs of Success model by providing our IROs & Conference Chairs with learning and training opportunities and influencing the future development of Signs of Success paperwork. We will also continue to foster good working relationships so that when we are worried, we are able to work directly with others to resolve the problems.

1. Purpose of the Annual Report

- 1.1. This annual report has been produced by the Children Independent Review Team (CIRT) in line with statutory guidance and covers the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. It provides an overview of the work undertaken by the service in relation to child protection and cared for children.
- 1.2. The report highlights what is working well, what we are worried about and areas for improvement. It identifies emerging themes, examples of good practice, and identifies priorities for the next 12 months.

2. Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

- 2.1. Our IROs chair reviews for children who are cared for by Together for Children and Sunderland Local Authority. IROs have an important role to make sure that decisions taken are the ones that are best for the child or young person, that safety goals are progressing, Care Plans are followed and that everyone respects the rights of children.
- 2.2. The role of the IRO was established by the Adoption and Children Act 2002, s.118 (amended s.26 of the Children Act 1989) with the responsibility of reviewing placements and plans for children in care. The 2008 Act extended the IRO's responsibilities to have more effective independent oversight of the child's case and to ensure the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.
- 2.3. The primary roles and responsibilities of our IROs is to:
 - Review and scrutinise care plans to ensure they are legally compliant and in the best interests of the children.
 - Chair children cared for reviews.
 - Ensure that the voice of the child is heard and given appropriate weight within care planning.
 - Promote corporate parenting to enable positive outcomes for children in the cared for system.
 - Chair placement order and adoptive placements, ensuring they are appropriate to the child's needs.
 - Provide a quality assurance and scrutiny function, and where appropriate challenge to Children's Social Care in relation to practice.
- 2.4. Another key role for our IROs is to resolve problems arising out of the care planning process. Where problems are identified in relation to a child's case (e.g. relating to care planning, implementation of the plan or decisions relating to it) the IRO will, in the first instance, seek to resolve the issue informally with the social worker or the social worker's managers. The IRO will make a record of this initial informal resolution process on the child's file. If the matter is not resolved in a timescale that is appropriate to the child's needs, the IRO will consider taking formal action.
- 2.5. The independent reviewing officers are seen to be well placed to identify both strengths and worries or concerns with regards to practice, including general themes amongst the cared for children population and strengths and weaknesses in relation to Sunderland's corporate parenting responsibility for cared for children. Thematic concerns are identified and raised with senior operational managers with a level of timeliness appropriate to their impact on the safety and welfare of children.

3. Role of Child Protection Conference Chairs

- 3.1. Child protection conferences are meetings that take place when we are worried that a child may be at risk of significant harm. The conferences are managed by an independent conference chair. Where concerns relate to an unborn child, consideration is given as to whether to hold a child protection conference prior to the child's birth.
- 3.2. An initial child protection conference brings together people who are important to the child. This includes family members (and the child where appropriate), supporters, advocates and practitioners most involved with the child and family who are best placed to make decisions about whether the child is at risk of significant harm. If they think this is the case, they will work with parents and the child (if present) to create a child protection plan that focuses on what people are worried about.
- 3.3. Our Signs of Safety approach makes the conference easy for everyone to understand. It helps everyone to identify what we are worried about, what is going well and what needs to happen to make the child safe – this means that people are asked to use language that everyone understands.
- 3.4. Once everyone understands what the worries are (danger statements), and what they are working towards (safety goals), the conference decides whether a child protection plan is needed, and the Chair uses a scaling question to help participants think through this decision. If it is decided that a child protection plan is needed, the final part of the conference will look at what needs to happen to enable the child to be safe from harm. This means identifying actions needed and the people responsible for carrying out those actions, including the parents/carers and when they will complete these actions. This is called the outline child protection plan.
- 3.5. Three months after the initial child protection conference, a review child protection conference is held. After that, a review child protection conference happens every six months. The review will consider whether the child protection plan should continue or should be changed. Reviews continue until it is decided that a plan is no longer needed to safeguard the child.
- 3.6. When chairing either initial or review child protection conferences, the role of our conference chairs is to ensure information is appropriately shared and concerns and actions are identified collectively to ensure children are kept safe. The chair will meet the child and parents in advance to ensure they understand the purpose and process. The chair will also ensure that parents are clear about any recommendations and plans made involving them or their family.
- 3.7. Our child protection conference chairs are all practitioners but do not have operational or line management responsibility for the child or young person. Wherever possible, the same conference chair will host all subsequent child protection reviews in respect of a specific child.
- 3.8. Another key role for our conference chairs is providing independent oversight of child protection work and planning and contributing to the raising of practice standards. Conference chairs must ensure that problems identified in relation to a child's case or practice, in the first instance, are raised informally with the social worker or the social worker's managers. The Chair will make a record of this initial informal resolution process and if the matter is not resolved in timescale, the chair will consider taking formal action.

4. Impact of IRO/Conference Chair Work

- 4.1. Below are some anonymised stories of work that our service has achieved for children. In terms of confidentiality names and dates have been changed but the stories are real examples from the past year.



MEGAN AND POPPY'S STORY

Megan and Poppy became known to TfC following worries of neglect and emotional abuse whilst living with their birth family.

Subsequently, Megan and Poppy became cared for and were placed with an independent foster family. Megan and Poppy's permanency plan was initially approved as one of adoption. However, in placement, Megan and Poppy's behaviour was a worry. The carer worked hard to build a relationship with Megan and Poppy in helping them recover from their early childhood trauma as this was believed to be the reason

for the behaviour of concern. The carer did this by providing a safe and loving home for both girls.

Megan and Poppy remained with their carers where they slowly began to heal. Megan and Poppy were aware that their current carer wasn't going to be their forever carer and that they would need to move for their plan of adoption to be achieved. The girls were able to share, through direct work that they did not want a new family and wanted to stay where they were. The girls told their Social Worker and IRO that they felt loved and safe and did not wish to be adopted. The plan for the girls was reconsidered and the plan changed to one of permanent foster care.

However, due to the girls being placed in an external placement a match could not be achieved due to internal processes. The Dispute Resolution Process was issued and listened to by Senior Management which led to TfC social care agreeing for the girls to remain with their current carer. In their subsequent reviews the girls have continued to tell their IRO that they are happy and settled with their carer.

BEN'S STORY

Ben is a young person who has had a history of Social Work involvement in his life. He has been subject to three Child Protection Plans and then following his 16th birthday had two experiences of being cared for by TfC.

After initially becoming cared for, for a period of 12 weeks, a reunification plan was made and Ben did return home, but sadly this did not work, and he returned to supported accommodation soon after this.

Ben has multiple complex needs and limited family support, however, did not meet the criteria for adult social care involvement. It became apparent to his IRO when undertaking his cared for review, just prior to his 18th birthday that Ben would hugely benefit from ongoing support from TfC post 18, however the position at that point was that Ben did not meet the criteria for Leaving Care Support.

The IRO challenged this decision via the Dispute Resolution Process to a senior management level requesting that the previous period of him being cared for with the current period were combined which would make him an eligible young person to receive support up until his 25th Birthday.

Following this challenge TfC agreed that the highlighted concerns of the IRO were valid and that it would be beneficial for Ben to receive ongoing support from the organisation. Ben is now allocated a Personal Adviser from the Next Steps Team who is working alongside him and his accommodation provider to ensure he is continuing to be supported into independence.





JOHN AND PAUL'S STORY

John and Paul are two brothers who were placed with their paternal grandparents under a S.31 Care Order. John and Paul have family time with their parents on a weekly basis. Their mum and dad are actively involved in their life but do not accept the reasons for them being cared for and believe that the boys should be returned to their care.

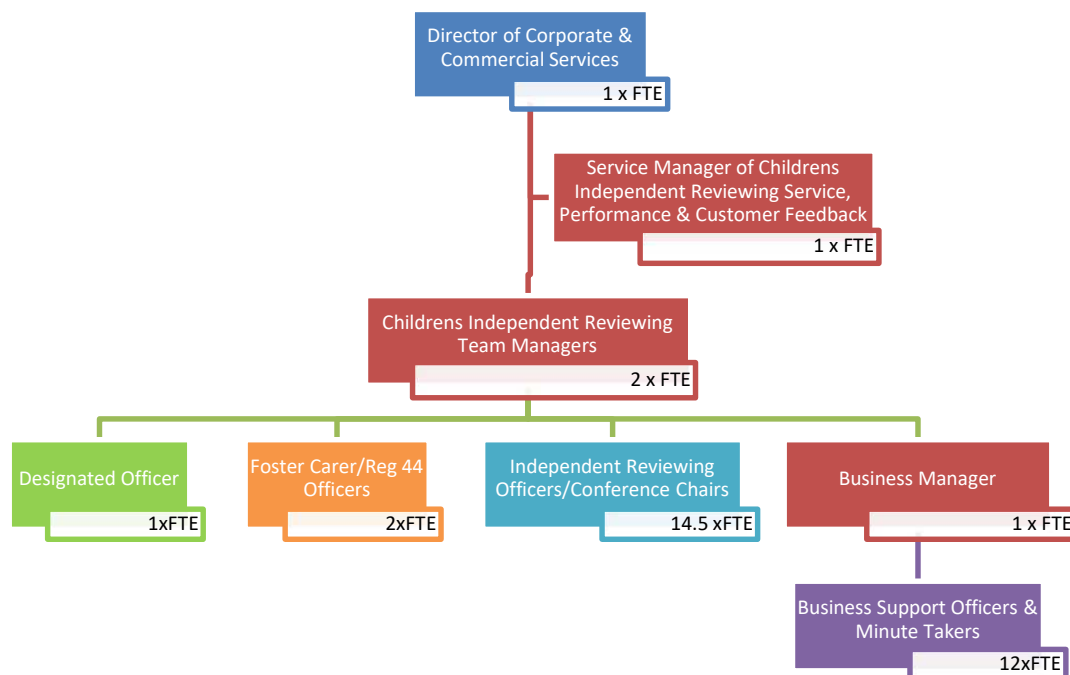
Words and pictures are one of the bottom lines for Signs of Safety practice. It was clear that in the cared for review for John and Paul that words and pictures had not been carried out by the Social Worker, even though it had been recommended in their previous cared for reviews. The IRO felt that words and pictures would help John and Paul to understand why they needed to be in the grandparents' care.

The recommendation was not supported by the Team Manager who felt that words and pictures, together with a life story book were duplications of work. John and Paul's IRO spoke with TfC's Signs of Safety lead who confirmed there was a difference between the two pieces of work and supported the IRO's recommendation.

Following the completion of words and pictures, the family members now understand why the boys are cared for which has supported parents accepting the reasons for the children not being in their care. The boys also have their life story book which outlines their journey to date and both documents are supporting the children and family's understanding of the reasons why they live with their grandparents.

5. Professional Profile of the Children Independent Reviewing Team

- 5.1. Our service sits within the Corporate and Commercial Directorate in Together for Children and is managed independently of children's social care line management. Our management capacity includes a Director, Service Manager, two Team Managers and a Business Manager. This provides us with the required management capacity to lead and develop our service and provide appropriate levels of support to our workers including supervision and monitoring.



- 5.2. We have 14.5 full-time equivalents (FTE) Independent Reviewing Officers/ Child Protection Chairs who are all registered Social Workers with at least five years post qualifying experience. From April 2021 we will move towards having two teams; 'Cared for' and 'Child Protection' to align with other regional models and to further strengthen skills and practice for children.
- 5.3. Our Business Support Team provides minute taking services and administrative support to the whole Children's Independent Reviewing Service and manages reception duties.
- 5.4. The profile of our team is diverse, offering a wide range of knowledge and practice experience. In terms of diversity, the profile of our service is representative of a range of ages, gender, ethnicity, and cultural backgrounds. We have benefitted from a stable group of Independent Reviewing Officers and Conference Chairs and have kept changes of Independent Reviewing Officers for children to a minimum with only two staff leaving the service this year due to promotions.
- 5.5. The structure chart shows that we also have the Designated Officer, Regulation 44 Officers and Foster Carer Review Officers in our service. A separate annual report is produced covering the Designated Officer role.

Caseloads

- 5.6. The overall average caseload for CIRT is 74 which is a slight increase from the previous year. The average caseload for child protection cases is 79 and the average caseload for cared for is 71. The current IRO handbook advises that IRO's should have a caseload of between 50 and 70 and we continue to await central government's updated IRO handbook for further guidance regarding caseloads.

Supervision

- 5.7. All workers within our service receive regular individual and group supervision and have access to informal supervision as and when needed. Group supervision includes a reflective discussion using Signs of Safety regarding individual cases. There continues to be a real commitment by the management of the service to ensure that the level of supervision and support is of the highest standards. The service provides monthly supervisions to workers which is monitored and reported at our monthly management meetings.

6. Learning and Development

- 6.1. As part of our commitment to ongoing learning and development, all our workers continue to have access to learning events such as legal briefings, staff briefings, LSCP training, and IRO specific training delivered by Edgehill University and funded by the North East Regional Network. We hold weekly team meetings at which research, practice guidance and learning lessons reviews are discussed and disseminated and have held Strategic Management-led workshops to continue to strengthen the voice of the child within CIRT recording. We also continue to learn from audit activity and customer feedback.

- 6.2. We identify training requirements through the supervision and appraisal process, training analysis and informed by external peer reviews, observations, and inspections. The following training has been undertaken within this reporting year:

- Alcohol and substance misuse (ADFAM)
- Signs of Safety language workshop
- Safe and together (induction and core training modules)
- Benzodiazepines impact upon young people (YDAP)
- Ecstasy Impact upon young people (YDAP)
- Advanced IRO Training (Edgehill University)
- IRO Dispute Resolution Training
- Cannabis Training impact upon young people (YDAP)
- Child Mental Health - CCG Funded training
- Data Confident - Data Protection
- Kothi
- Voice of the Child Team training

In addition to the above training courses the IROs/Conference Chairs have continued to access Community Care Informed database and Signs of Safety learning space which provide updates to articles and research in areas of social work practice.

7. Regional, National and Local Links

- 7.1. Our management team meets quarterly with IRO managers from the North East. This regional group considers changes to policy and practice, gathers relevant statistical information at a regional level and works toward consistent practice in the region and has led to the development of a regional training plan for IRO's. Over the last year, the regional group have met to discuss and consider how to respond to Covid-19 challenges to ensure services continue to be delivered to children and families.
- 7.2. We have a protocol in place which provides a framework for communication and working practice between Cafcass and our service. We also have quarterly meetings with Cafcass which has been extended to include representatives from our legal service and children's social care senior management to support and strengthen working relationships.
- 7.3. We seek to maintain direct working relationships and links with TfC children's social care services. The management team meets regularly with Service Managers in Social Care. The IROs and Conference Chairs meet with social care Team Managers where they agree an agenda in advance to discuss strengths or worries that they may have.

7.4. We continue to liaise with our local partners and are represented at the following groups:

- Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SSCP)
- Regional NE 12 IRO Managers Group
- NHS Complex Case Panel
- Liquid logic Operational Group
- Change Council
- TfC Children Resource Placement Panel
- TfC legal Services and Children Independent Review Team
- Corporate Parenting Board
- Care and Legal Gateway Panel
- Harrogate District NHS Foundation Trust & Children's Independent Reviewing Service Management Forum
- Northumbria Police & Children's Independent Reviewing Team Management Forum
- CAFCASS & Children's Independent Reviewing Team Management Forum
- Quarterly meetings with Councillor Farthing, portfolio holder for children within the city of Sunderland

7.5. Attendance at the above groups provides the opportunity for improved working arrangements, which in turn leads to better outcomes for the children and families that we work with. It provides an opportunity to influence practice and procedural developments, which ultimately supports Together for Children to deliver positive outcomes for the children of Sunderland.

7.6. We also support partners via training and development sessions. For example, we delivered training for Northumbria Police across their organisation with the purpose to support the organisation in having increased levels of staff available to represent them at child protection conferences.

8. Voice and Influence of Children

- 8.1. The voices of children play a key role in influencing our work and provide a vital grounding and reality check as to how things are working in practice. 'Putting the child first' is central to everything we do and therefore we want to offer meaningful opportunities for children to contribute their views and opinions, so they can participate in decisions and activities that shape and influence practice, policies and services that can impact on their lives.
- 8.2. Over the last 12 months, children have been telling us what is important to them and below are some examples of their views and opinions:

You said.....		We did.....
"We are sick of being contacted via teams since the start of COVID 19"	➔	We strengthened the options available to IROs for engaging young people.
"We want our pre-cared for visit to be the opportunity for us to talk to our IRO "	➔	Our IROs listened to the children's feedback and are ensuring that pre-cared for visits are arranged and focussed around the child being able to talk to their IRO.
"We want our reviews to be held outside of school time"	➔	Our IROs are ensuring, where possible that reviews are timetabled outside of the school day.
"Children told us that they want their IRO to provide closure whenever there is a change"	➔	When it is necessary to change a child's IRO, the current IRO will always aim to visit the child to say goodbye but if this is not possible a letter will be sent to the child with the name of their new IRO.
"Children want us to be in more regular contact with them between reviews"	➔	We are currently looking at how we could incorporate children in our tracking discussions.

8.3. Although we have taken positive steps to listen effectively to the views and opinions of children and have responded to the issues raised, we recognise that we can continue to improve especially as some of this work has been impacted by unique challenges linked to Covid-19. In 2021/22 we will:

- Extend invitations to Regional Children in Care Councils so that the child voice will be heard at the proposed IRO conference in 2022 and influence regional practice.
- Look to develop practice so that the voice of the child is captured during our tracking discussions by them being contacted by their IRO following the tracking discussion with their social worker.
- Explore more clear options for children in how their cared for reviews can be held with the aim of seeking to improve the number of children chairing their own reviews.
- Think creatively of ways to influence Care Plans and Pathway Plans so they are clear, accessible, and understood by children and adults.
- Review child participation in child protection conferences with the aim of seeking to improve children's engagement when considered appropriate.

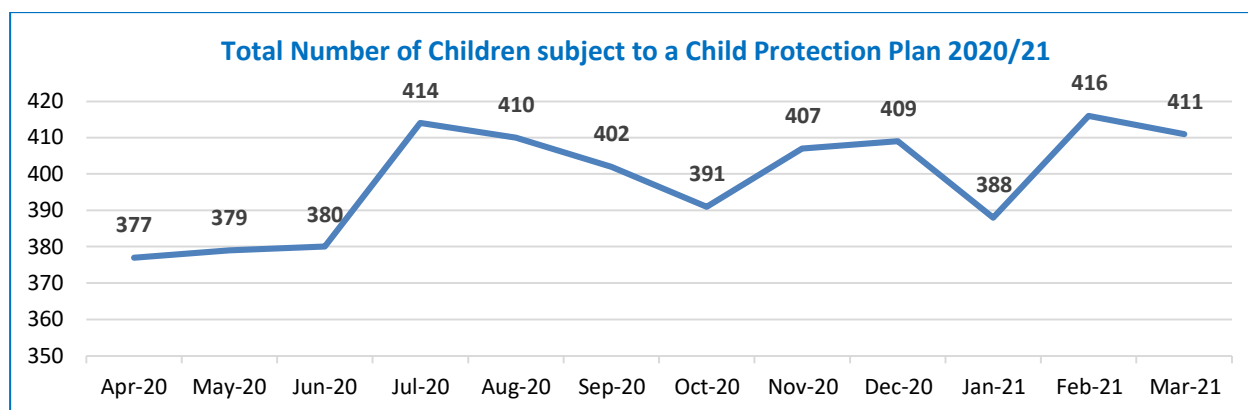
9. Highlighted Achievements in 2020/21

20/21 Priorities	Progress & Outcomes
Embed newly developed tools to encourage children to contribute their views, wishes and feelings so we can listen and act more effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have launched a Voice of the Child Toolkit to ensure each of our IROs has a wide range of tools to capture the voice of the child. • We have continued to seek children's contributions to their reviews by using a range of engagement tools and promoting Mind of My Own. • We have used Microsoft Teams and telephone contact to engage with children at those times during the year where COVID19 has impacted our ability to use direct work tools with children. • We purchased cellular tablets to support children who wished to engage in meetings via Microsoft Teams but did not have the means to access.
Feedback to be collected from children, parents/guardian, and professionals so they can tell us what they think of our service, what we do well and what we could improve upon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have continued to seek feedback from families by encouraging parents to provide feedback directly to service management, or via the TfC Customer Feedback Service. • CIRT management has listened to feedback and has taken opportunities to improve services whilst congratulating workers on positive feedback received. • We have continued to hold quarterly meetings with partners to offer and obtain feedback and to respond accordingly.
Improve the consistency, effectiveness and recording of informal and formal escalations by Conference Chairs and IROs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have worked with our Conference Chairs and IROs to improve the escalation process so that it is timely and delivers greater consistency. • We spoke with Children's Social Care to gain their views on the effectiveness of challenge and our proposals to improve the escalation process. • We made changes to our Social Care Case Management System (Liquid Logic) to allow IRO/CC challenges to be recorded without delay. • We audited IRO/CC/ escalations and provided individual feedback to workers together with collective actions to improve recordings relating to impact and the voice of the child.
Signs of Success to be further embedded within	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have continued to undertake reflective learning regarding our ongoing implementation of Signs of Success.

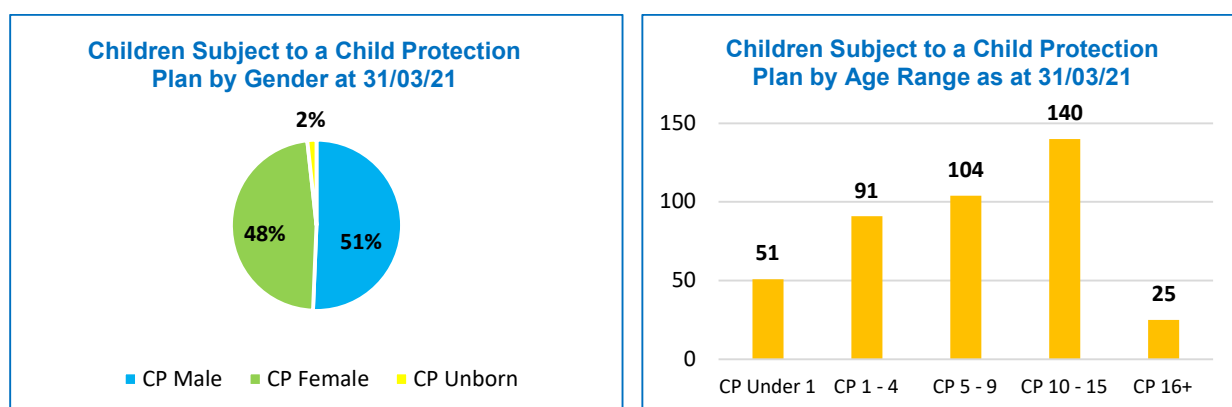
20/21 Priorities	Progress & Outcomes
the review process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have been part of national learning and influenced the designing of new documentation for cared for children. • We have offered support to other Local Authorities who are starting with their implementation of Signs of Success and shared learning to help improve practice.
Achieve greater consistency across the service with regards to holding meaningful mid-way reviews to track and review recommendations and the impact of these upon children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have audited midway review recordings and identified actions to strengthen the process. • We have changed our terminology so that we refer to 'tracking discussions' rather than 'midway reviews' to reflect that we track plans for children above and beyond the 'midway' point. • We have revised the template for capturing the voice of the child to strengthen the evidence about what needs to happen for the child to progress their plans.
Strengthen and support our influence in the wider organisational agenda for improving outcomes for children by greater engagement in auditing process and learning from current practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notwithstanding the challenges presented during this year of COVID 19 we have continued to meet virtually with lead organisations and representatives to develop practice. • With colleagues in the Children with Disabilities service we have re-established cared for reviews for children accessing short breaks under Section 20 Regulation 48. • We have taken learning from reflective sessions ran by SSCP and have started to consider with our colleagues in Social Care how we can strengthen our practice to teenagers. • We have undertaken thematic audits looking at repeat CP plans, children with disabilities, children having three or more placement moves, the use of the Personal Educational Plan (PEP) and how ethnicity is considered and recorded within reviews. • Peer observations have continued to be undertaken to help ongoing learning and development of individuals and to support consistency within the workforce. • IRO management observations have been completed on each staff member during the reporting period. • We have taken part in the SSCP Practitioner Forum and have CIRT representation in all four SSCP Task and Finish groups. • We introduced periods of themed management oversight on key areas of CIRT practice to help coach and support the strengthening of recording within the service.

10. Profile of Children in Sunderland

Child Protection

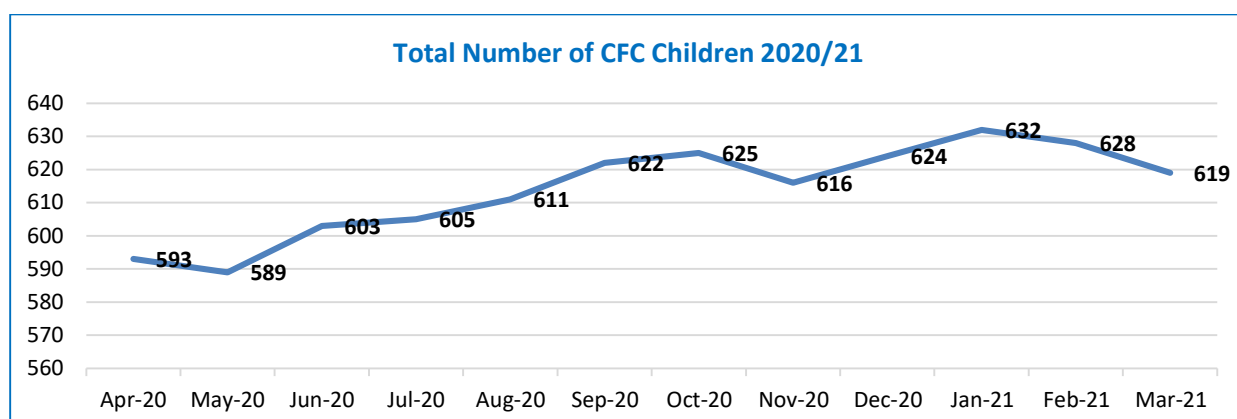


- 10.1. The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan in Sunderland has fluctuated across the year but overall has increased by 9% between April 2020 and March 2021. The peak in July aligns with the phased reopening of schools from June following the first national lockdown and the reduction in January aligns with the third national lockdown. The year-end position in relation to the rate of children on a child protection per 10k plan places Sunderland (74.90) above the median (63.35) when compared with Local Authorities in our region.

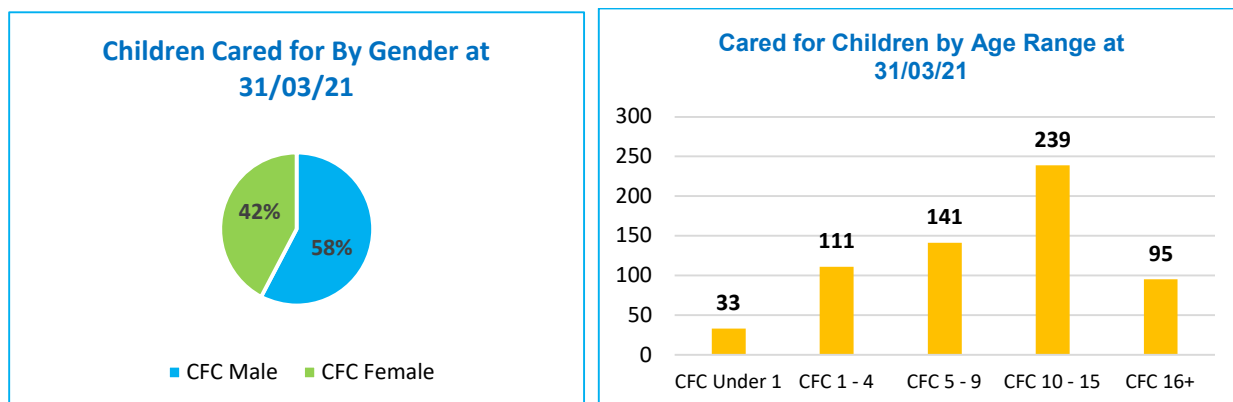


- 10.2. There is an even balance of male and female children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan. Most children on a plan are aged between the years of 10 and 15. In line with our learning from work undertaken with the SSCP, CIRT and Social Care are looking at different ways of working with teenagers. Whilst this work is in its infancy, it is envisaged that during the forthcoming reporting year this work will improve outcomes for the 10-15 age range.

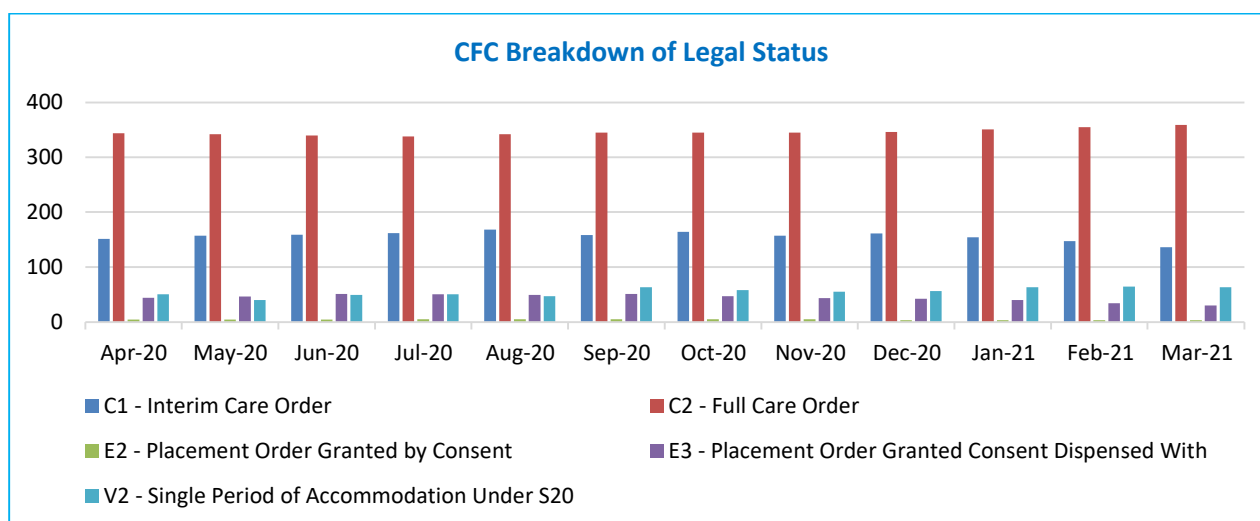
Children Looked After



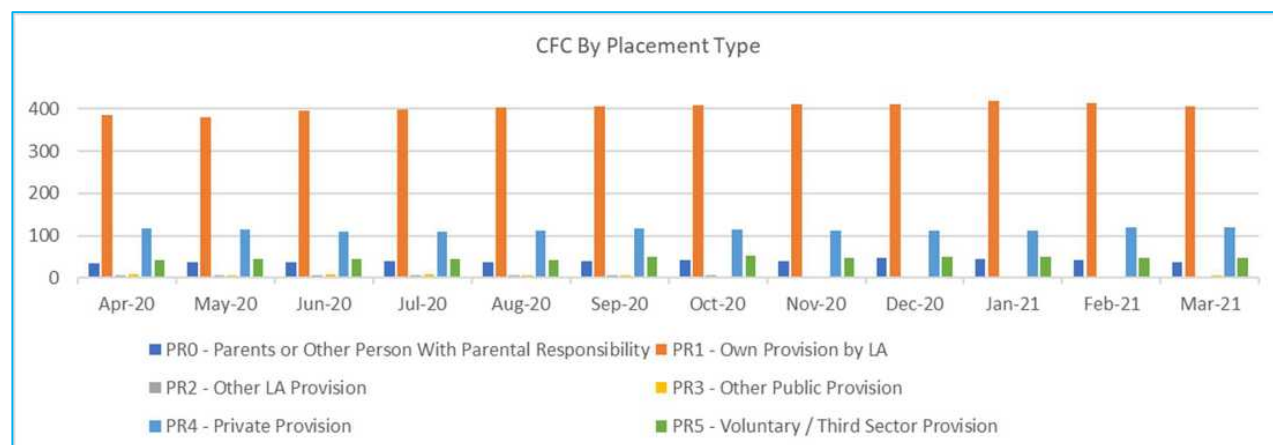
- 10.3. The number of children cared for by Together for Children has fluctuated slightly across the year but overall has increased by 4.4% between April 2020 and March 2021. The year-end position in relation to the rate of cared for children per 10k plan places Sunderland (112.0) below the median (113.75) when compared with Local Authorities in our region

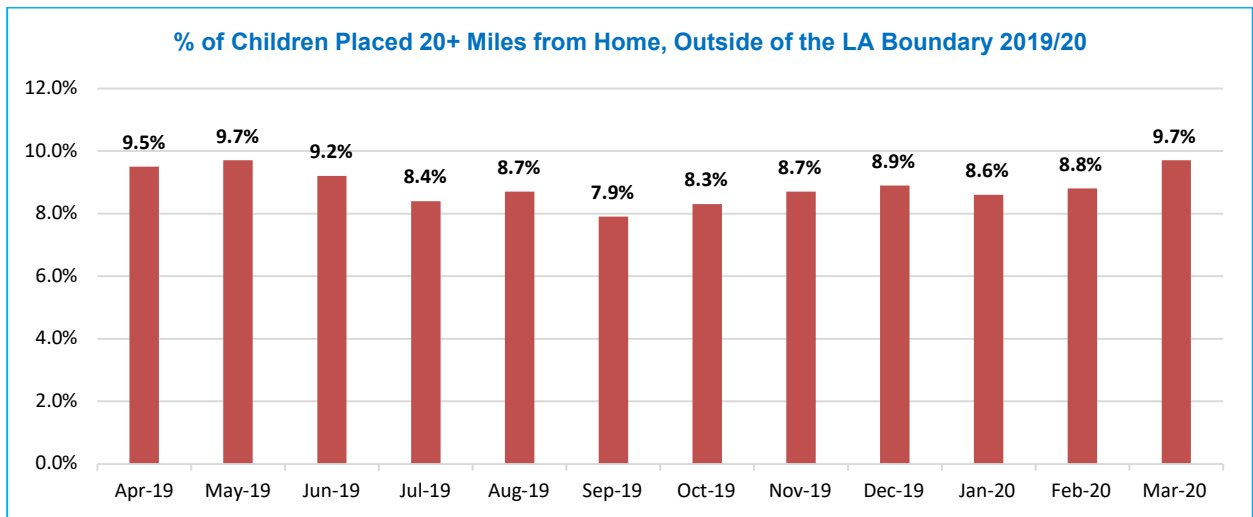


- 10.4. Slightly more cared for children are male over female. Most children who are cared for by Together for Children are aged between the years of 10 and 15 which is the same age group as child protection and highlights why TfC together with partners is considering how we can work differently to prevent the need for this age range to become cared for.

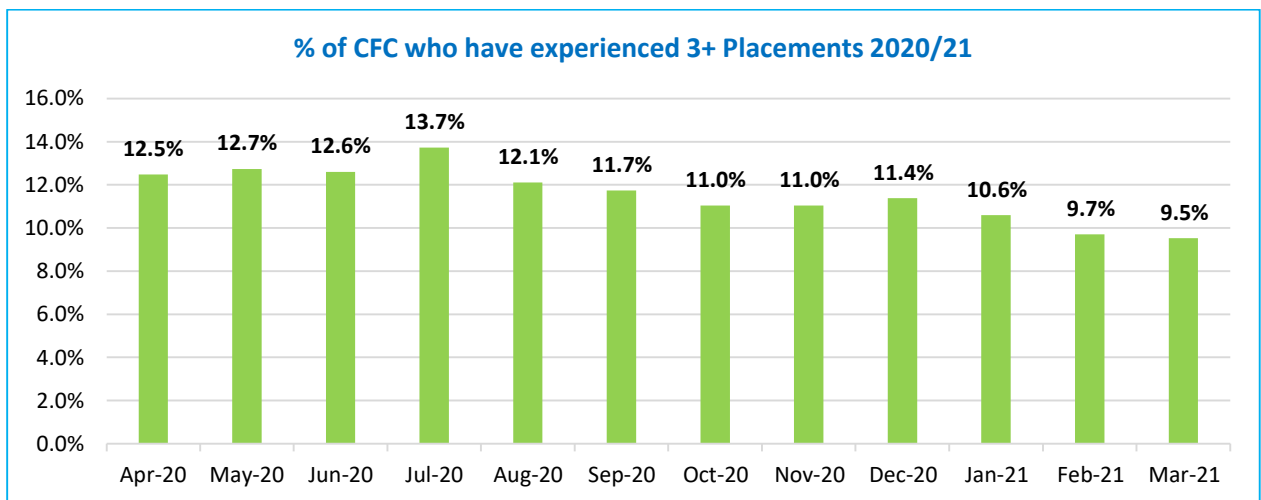


- 10.5. On the 31/03/21 there were 63 children accommodated via S20, which is in line with the previous year.





- 10.6. Notwithstanding the reduction of placement options and the pressures of COVID19, performance in this area has remained the same as the previous year with 9.7% of children cared for placed 20 plus miles from home, outside of the Local Authority boundary.



- 10.7. The year-end position for 2020/21 was 9.5% which is 1.5% less than the previous year meaning that a greater percentage of our cared for children are experiencing more stability in their homes.

11. Performance Summary - Child Protection 2020/2021

- 11.1. We have held a total of 901 conferences this year; 330 have been Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs), 12 transfer in conferences and 559 have been Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPCs). Overall, this is a reduction in child protection meetings of 9.5% when compared with the previous year.
- 11.2. Throughout the year our Conference Chairs have adapted to accommodate changes in practice because of COVID19. Participation in conferences has largely operated via a hybrid approach informed by family choice and the assessment of risk. All child protection conferences have been organised to enable families and professionals to consider the needs of children.
- 11.3. In 2020/21, a total of 584 child protection plans were ended:
- 205 ended under six months
 - 371 ended between six months and two years
 - 8 ended after two years
- 11.4. The reasons for children's plans ending is due to a mixture of improved safety for the child as the result of tried and tested safety plans and safety networks or due to changes in the child's living arrangements i.e. child becomes cared for or is placed with family members.

Timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC's)

- 11.5. An ICPC should be held within 15 days from the date of a strategy, where a child protection investigation has been carried out. The table below shows the current performance together with the latest comparator data.

% of ICPC Held in Timescale	Sunderland 19/20	Sunderland 20/21	Statistical Neighbours	England
	83%	88%	81%	78%

- 11.6. Within the last year, 88% of ICPC's were held within timescale. This represents an 5% increase in performance when compared to the previous year. We are performing 10% above England and 7% higher than our Statistical Neighbours.
- 11.7. The reasons for those ICPC's held out of timescale are detailed in the table below:

ICPC - Reasons for out of Timescale	19/20	20/21	Variance
Late Notifications	32	14	-18
Admin Errors	8	4	-4
Missing Information /Reports	5	10	+5
Non-Attendance by Significant Person	12	8	-4
Non-Attendance by Other Professional	1	1	-
Extension Agreed by Professionals	0	1	+1
Total Number of Children	107	68	-51

- 11.8. In 2020/21 there were 14 late notifications received which resulted in conferences being held out of timescale. 9 of the 14 late notifications were stood down as insufficient notice (five days) was given for external agencies to prepare and submit reports for the meetings. This specifically impacted Northumbria Police who require sufficient time to undertake police checks for inclusion in their reports.
- 11.9. There were 10 occasions this year where key information was not available for conference, and in the best interests of the child the meetings were stood down. A further 8 meetings were impacted by non-attendance by a significant person, this being the child's parent or carer.

- 11.10. There was a 50% decrease in the number of admin errors with 4 meetings being held out of timescale, three of those due to the strategy dates being listed incorrectly on the ICPC request form with the remaining due to data error on the conference invite.
- 11.11. Overall, initial conferences for 68 children were held out of timescale, which is a reduction from 107 in the previous year. The importance of conference timeliness for children who are at risk of significant harm, is that decisions are made quicker and that child centred protection plans are developed with a clear aim of what work is required for the child, to reduce risk. It should be noted however that on occasion it is good practice to stand down a conference if it is in the best interest of the child and family. For example, it is important that all those attending, including parents fully understand what the worries are and what needs to be done to reduce the risk to the child.
- 11.12. To assist with increasing the timeliness of initial conferences, we actively monitor conference meeting activity and provide weekly updates to Service Managers within Social Care. We have also continued to provisionally plan ICPC's at the start of the Section 47 investigation giving Social Care and other organisations the full 15 days to plan for the ICPC.

Timeliness of Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPC's)

- 11.13. A child protection plan should be reviewed at an RCPC within three months of the Initial Child Protection Conference and then at intervals of no more than six months. The table below shows the percentage on RCPC's held in timescale in Sunderland.

% of RCPC Held in Timescale	Sunderland 19/20	Sunderland 20/21	Statistical Neighbours	England
	94%	98%	91%	92%

- 11.14. Within the last year, 98% of all RCPC's were held within timescale which is a 3% increase in performance when compared with previous year. We are performing 6% above England and 7% higher than our Statistical Neighbours.
- 11.15. The reasons for those RCPC's held out of timescale are detailed in the table below:

RCPC - Reasons for out of Timescale	19/20	20/21	Variance
Calculation Error	0	2	+2
Missing Information /Reports	4	3	-1
Non-Attendance by Significant Person	14	5	-9
Non-Attendance by Other Professional	19	1	-18
Extension Agreed by Professionals	0	1	+1
Other (system errors)	1	1	-
Total Number of Children	75	25	-50

- 11.16. In 2020/21, 1 RCPC was out of timescale due to lack of quoracy. This represents a reduction in 18 cases from last year. The number of reviews delayed due to family availability has also decreased in this reporting year.
- 11.17. Overall, review conferences for 25 children are recorded as being held out of timescale which is a reduction of 50 children compared with data last year.
- 11.18. For those children, where conferences were out of timescale, plans were agreed to ensure their safety. We are taking a proactive approach in limiting the number of reviews that fall out of timescale by ensuring data is provided weekly to Children's Social Care Management, and that individual direct contact is made with Team Managers, where required.

Timeliness of Reports for ICPC and RCPC

11.19. Report timeliness for both ICPC's and RCPC's is an area where improvement is required.

20-21 Report Timeliness	ICPC 19/20	ICPC 20/21	Variance	RCPC 19/20	RCPC 20/21	Variance
Children's Services	44%	57%	+13	24%	34%	+10
Police	75%	58%	-17	29%	24%	-5
GP	42%	67%	+25	17%	48%	+31
0-19 Service	53%	67%	+14	20%	43%	+23
Education	32%	75%	+43	24%	26%	+2

11.20. Social Worker reports available by the required timescales have increased since the previous reporting year, with reports for ICPC's increasing from 44% to 57% and RCPC's from 24% to 34%. Whilst improvements have been achieved, performance remains below the TfC target of 80%.

11.21. The timeliness of reports submitted by agencies ranges between 57% and 75% for ICPC's and between 24% to 48% for RCPC's. All agencies apart from the Police have improved timeliness however further improvement is required. There is a dependency on the social worker returning invitations to allow sufficient time for confirming dates and for agencies to complete reports. This is a particular issue for the Police as without its updated list of adults around the child they are not able to undertake the checks required on their database.

11.22. We will continue to provide regular figures to Social Care and agencies together with any supplementary information that will help to improve timeliness.

Progression of Child Protection Plans

11.23. Where a child is subject to a child protection plan for longer than 12 months, we must consider the reasons why. Conference Chairs consider what alternative intervention is required to reduce the risk of significant harm to the child. The longer a child is subject to a plan can be an indicator that the plan may not be achieving the required outcome for the child.

11.24. Our Conference Chairs track the progression of the plans and use their position to resolve issues where there are concerns regarding drift and delay. Compared with last year, there has been a decrease in the number of plans open longer than 12 months from 47 children to 40 children as of the end of the reporting year.

11.25. In addition to the above processes children with Child Protection Plans over and above 12 months are also reviewed within the Care and Legal Gateway Panel where CIRT are represented so that decisions can be made regarding the potential need to escalate matters by issuing the Public Law Outline.

Child Protection Categories

11.26. The following table shows a breakdown of the categories for children subject to a Child Protection Plan.

Child Protection Categories	2019/20		2020/21		Number Variance
	No of Children	% of Children	No of Children	% of Children	
Neglect	191	51.90%	152	35.98%	-39
Emotional Abuse	165	44.84%	245	59.61%	+80
Physical Abuse	5	1.36%	3	0.73%	-2
Sexual Abuse	7	1.90%	11	2.68%	+4

- 11.27. The category of Neglect has 152 child protection plans; within these cases there is often evidence of a combination of risks which relates to; substance misuse, mental health and domestic abuse.
- 11.28. The number of children subject to a plan under the category of Emotional Abuse has increased by 80. During this reporting year there has been investment within the area of domestic abuse training, therefore increasing staff awareness and ability to identify the issues and concerns regarding domestic abuse. Nationally, during the pandemic there has been an increase in the incidents of domestic abuse and children being referred to services for support, therefore, this significant increase mirrors the national picture. Domestic abuse and its impacts upon children and society will be an area requiring targeted services to help children and victims overcome the impact of the abuse.
- 11.29. The category of Physical Abuse has seen a decrease in the number of children from 5 in 2020 to 3 in 2021. The category of Sexual Abuse has increased in the last year from 7 in 2020 to 11 in 2021. Work continues to ensure that categories are used appropriately and reflect the area of risk of significant harm for the child.

Tracking Discussion Child Protection Reviews

- 11.30. A tracking discussion describes a contact between a Conference Chair and the allocated Social Worker for a case. We plan that they should be held as soon as one is needed to track a child's plan is moving forward, but no later than the mid-way point after each review.
- 11.31. We held 1199 child protection tracking discussions within the reporting year which is an increase from 864 last year. This increase has allowed Conference Chairs and Social Workers to monitor children's plans, seek updates regarding their lived experience and review progress for the child. In this reporting year we moved from just tracking cases at midway point to tracking them on the basis of need, therefore, where it was considered by the Conference Chair that a child's plan was not progressing, earlier tracking would be undertaken to help move the plan forward for the child.

12. Participation and Views within Child Protection

- 12.1. Where children attend a conference, the Conference Chair will invite them into a pre-meeting half an hour prior to the start of the meeting to support their engagement. Where a child is not attending a conference, the Conference Chair will encourage the professionals working with the child to collect their views using the child protection conference pack or the Mind of My Own application which is a digital participation tool. During this reporting year we have continued to offer pre-meetings however due to the pandemic these have been achieved via a number of methods including telephone contact, conference calling, Microsoft Teams and face-to-face meetings where it has been risk assessed as safe to do so.
- 12.2. In 2020/21 our use of a parental questionnaires has been directly impacted by COVID19. As an alternative Conference Chairs have been encouraging families and professionals to provide feedback directly to CIRT Management or via the Customer Feedback service. The vast majority of comments received have been positive with parents and professionals confirming a positive experience in conference with comments such as:

"The ICPC was brilliant thanks to the Chairperson making sure everyone had the time to talk"

"The Conference chairperson rang us prior to the ICPC and this put us both at ease"

"The way in which the conference was ran wasn't scary or negative"

"I am grateful and pleased that there is a plan to work towards"

"I felt that the chairperson listened to me and that helped me listen to the worries being raised"

- 12.3. Notwithstanding the challenges linked to COVID19, participation has remained a core value for our service with parents and professionals expressing their appreciation for our professionalism and skills in enabling child protection conferences to remain child focused and relevant. COVID19 has challenged us in our ability to take Signs of Safety to the next level, however the above statements demonstrate how we have met those challenges successfully. As we progress through the Government's roadmap to fully lifting restrictions, we will welcome the opportunity for more face-to-face conferences so we can further support children and parents in their engagement.

13. Performance Summary - Cared for Children

- 13.1. As of the 31/03/21 Sunderland had 619 cared for children. The table below provides a summary of cared for activity.

Indicator	19/20	20/21	Variance
% of Cared for reviews held in timescales	96%	99%	+3%
% of Cared for reviews where a child participated within the review	93%	94%	+1%
% of Cared for children with an up to date care plan	N/ava	98%	-
% of Cared for children with an up to date PEP	82%	99%	+17%
% of CYP with an up to date health assessment	84%	87%	+3%
% of Cared for children accommodated under section 20	12%	10%	-2%
% of cared for children with a primary plan of permanence by the second review	N/ava	34%	-

Timeliness of Child Cared for Reviews

- 13.2. An initial Cared for Review is required within 20 working days of a child becoming cared for, a second review within three months and subsequent reviews six monthly. Reviews can be held early where there is evidence of a significant event in the child's life or where consideration is required for changes to the care plan. We have held 1,735 cared for reviews this year which is an increase of 96 compared to the previous year.
- 13.3. The percentage of reviews held in timescale has increased to 99% which is an increase of 3% from the previous year. We have listed the reasons for a child's review being held out of timescale in the table below.

Review OOT Reasons	19/20	20/21	Variance
Late Notification	13	1	-12
Administration Error	11	7	-4
Non-Attendance by Significant Person	24	6	-18
Extension Agreed by Professionals	12	4	-8
External Professional/Agency Unavailable	0	2	+2
Total Number of Children	60	20	-40

- 13.4. All categories have seen a decrease in this reporting year. Audit work completed in 2020/21 has provided greater insight to management and staff into reviews that are at risk of going out of timescale which has enabled preventative action to be taken.

Pre-Cared for Review Visits

- 13.5. An IRO arranges a Pre-Cared for Review Visit (PCV) with a child prior to their Cared for Review. This gives the IRO and child the opportunity to directly discuss the care plan and the structure of the child's forthcoming review to ensure it is firmly focussed on the child and their plan.
- 13.6. We have held a total of 1366 PCVs this year compared with 1235 in the previous year, which is a 10.6% increase. Due to COVID19 restrictions PCVs have been completed via a variety of methods such as Microsoft Teams, telephone calls and face to face visits where it has been assessed as safe to do so. During these visits the IRO will have discussed how the review was going to be held, attendees and 'agenda' for the meeting. Where appropriate, the IRO will have encouraged the child to chair their own meeting, providing them with an opportunity to identify issues important to them. It should be noted however that not all children wish to have a PCV. This can be due to several factors such as the child's emotional wellbeing, the stage of the care planning process, the age of the child and on occasion the child seeing a PCV as repetitive to their cared for review. If a child does not wish to have a PCV the reason is noted on liquid logic and within the cared for review documentation.

Tracking Discussions

- 13.7. A tracking discussion is a contact between an IRO and the allocated Social Worker for a case. Tracking discussions are planned after each review and take place as and when required, depending upon the progress of the child's plan. We have held 1753 tracking discussions in 1920/21 which is an increase of 321 compared with 2019/20. Tracking discussions provide the IRO and the child's allocated Social Worker with the opportunity to reflect upon how the child's care plan is progressing and provides the IRO with an opportunity to share their experiences and practice knowledge should a Social Worker be faced with an area of a child's care plan that is not moving forward.

Education

- 13.8. The number of children with Personal Educational Plans (PEP) has increased to 99% in 20/21. The PEP is the education plan that outlines individual targets and the support that will be put in place to help a child achieve those targets. The aim of the PEP is to support the child to overcome the disadvantages that research tells us they face, as a result of being a cared for child. A fall in the number of PEP's has a direct impact upon achievement; the impact of which would be considered within the Cared for review.

Secure Accommodation Panel Reviews (SAR)

- 13.9. With regards to children who have been placed in Secure Accommodation under Section 25 of the Children Act 1989, (Welfare Secure) a Secure Accommodation Review (SAR) panel must be arranged within 20 working days of the order being made and subsequently three monthly. We continue to have a reciprocal regional arrangement in place with South Tyneside and Gateshead

Local Authorities to accommodate the SAR panels as there is a requirement for three IROs to be in attendance, one of which must be independent.

- 13.10. In the reporting year we have had 2 children placed in secure accommodation. This is the same as the previous year.

14. Participation and Views – Cared for Children

- 14.1. This year, 94% of children participated in their review, which is an increase of 1% when compared to the previous year.
- 14.2. Throughout the year we have been auditing the quality of recording in respect of the pre-cared for review visits. In 2019/20 the IROs developed a bespoke participation toolkit, however its use has been impacted by measures that needed to be put in place as result of COVID19. As further restrictions are lifted these tools will further strengthen the evidence of the IRO's direct work with children.
- 14.3. Following the audit work, we have continued to dip sample and audit pre-cared for review visits and have seen improvements in the support offered to children in preparation for their review and in recording their voice. Whilst this is very positive, we also want to see the impact of our work more from the child's perspective in our recordings. Children tell us when we attend meetings that they value the contact that they have with their IRO and that the IRO is an important person to them so its important that our recordings fully reflect their views.
- 14.4. To ensure that the child's voice is heard we continue to foster relationships with the Children in Care Council (Change Council) by attending their meetings when requested. We also deliver activities for the children cared for Christmas party and attend the Regional Child in Care Conference.
- 14.5. In 2020/21 we have continued to provide children with introduction letters and IRO profiles when they become cared for. This process was introduced following the direct request from the Change Council.
- 14.6. Below are some of the positive things that children have said worked well during the last year.
- *My carers are a 'great family', 'everyone is very nice'.*
 - *My carer is like a 'comfy pillow I can sleep on'; and 'they look after me'.*
 - *We enjoy being part of our home meetings as we can make decisions about our home.*
 - *I feel like I am treated respectfully and felt listened to within my home.*
 - *My IRO is great and I like my meetings with them as I can have a laugh with them.*
 - *If I cannot go to live with my dad, then staying with my carer would be good as I feel safe.*
 - *I found my transition from a home to my own supported living flat to be easy and everyone helped me.*

- I'm so happy that when things didn't work out when I returned to live with my mam that I went back to live with my previous carer and she is going to keep us forever.
- I thought it was good that I had a choice of where I would move too, that my Social Worker and carer helped me choose where I would move to from care.
- I felt listened too.
- The 19 months that I have lived at the home I have felt safe, well cared for and valued by staff.
- My IRO is fabulous.

15. Dispute Resolution Procedure (DRP)

- 15.1. We reviewed our DRP process in 2020/21 following feedback from the IRO/Conference chairs and our colleagues in Social Care. The DRP process has four stages in total; the process ordinarily begins with a DRP ALERT which involves the IRO/Conference Chair (within 24 hours of identifying an issue) contacting the Social Worker or Team Manager by telephone to raise the concern with the aim of seeking to resolve the issue or concern immediately. Where this cannot be achieved, 10 days is given to seek to find an agreed resolution for the child. This is stage 1.
- 15.2. Following the 10-day timescale, should the issue remain unresolved or if the IRO/Conference Chair feels it necessary, they can escalate the matter up through the levels of Case Management. Once the DRP has been initiated the issue(s) should be addressed within an overall 20 working day timescale.
- 15.3. In 2020-21 we raised a total of 112 DRP's which is a decrease from 159 from the previous year. The numbers have reduced due to the positive impact of a more stable Social Care workforce, particularly at the 'front door' which has enabled stronger relationship building and has encouraged more proactive debates between Social Care and CIRT around how best to progress concerns i.e. through a stuck case meeting or through challenge.

DRP's – Child Protection

- 15.4. The table below shows the number of DRP's raised in relation to child protection.

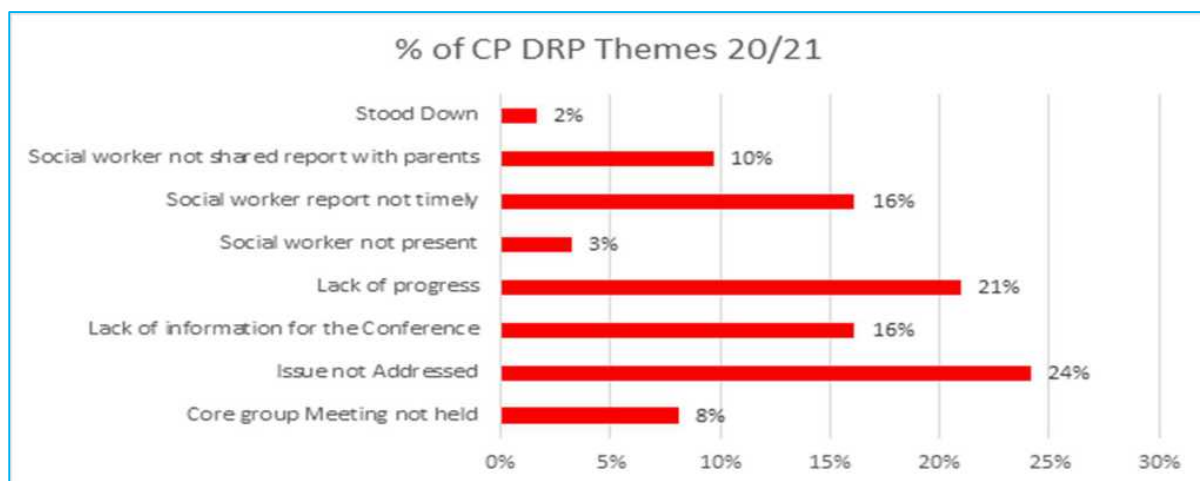
Child Protection DRPs	19/20	20/21	Variance
No of DRPs Raised	69	36	-33

- 15.5. The following table highlights the different stages in which DRP's have been resolved for children subject of child protection plans in this reporting year.

Child Protection DRPs	Alert	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Total
Stage DRP Closed	1	32	3	0	0	36

- 15.6. The vast majority of DRPs raised in respect of child protection have been resolved at stage 1 with only 3 progressing to stage 2.

15.7. The child protection DRP themes and issues can be seen within the chart below.



15.8. The highest themes remain in line with those from the previous reporting year; issue not addressed, lack of progress, late or no Social Worker report and Social Worker report not shared with parents.

15.9. Below are examples of DRP raised for children subject to a child protection plan.

DRP Challenge	Outcome for the Child
The conference chair raised a DRP as there was no Social Work report prepared for the RCPC which meant that the child's parents were not fully prepared for the meeting. The RCPC had to be rearranged.	As the child's parents had not been provided with an updated report, it was agreed that the RCPC would be stepped down and rearranged. By taking this action it enabled professionals to share their report with the parents and child prior to the RCPC, meaning that there was a greater level of understanding regarding risk and concerns and that more time could be given to focusing upon what was still needed to reduce the risk to the child.
The conference chair raised a DRP as there was no evidence that core groups had been held between the ICPC and RCPC.	The matter was raised with the Team Manager who acknowledged gaps in the case recording. Reassurances were given that core groups going forward would be held 4 weekly to ensure the plan for the child was progressed. The conference chair tracked this via a tracking discussion which confirmed that plans for the child were moving forward and risks were reducing. When the child was ready for further review their risks had reduced significantly to the point that the child protection plan could safely be ended.

DRP's – Children Looked After

15.10. The table below shows the number of DRP's raised in relation to cared for children.

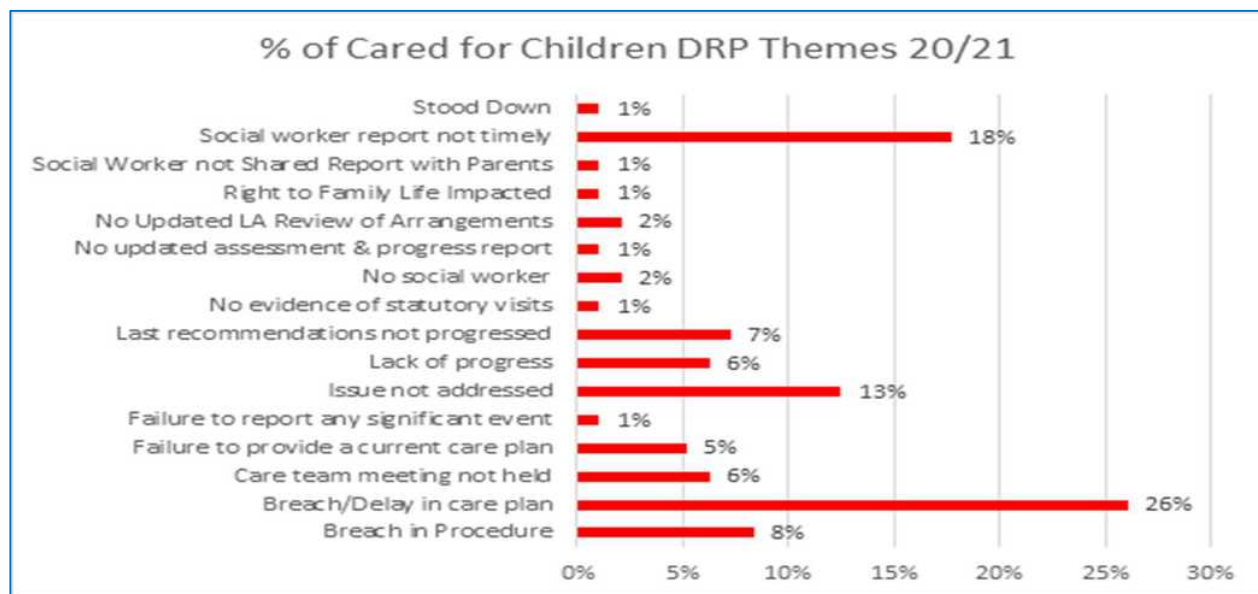
Children Cared for DRPs	19/20	20/21	Variance
No of DRPs Raised	90	76	-14

15.11. The following table highlights the different stages in which DRPs have been resolved for cared for children in this reporting year.

Children Cared for DRPs	Alert	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Total
Stage DRP Closed	16	54	5	1	0	76

15.12. The majority of DRPs have been resolved at alert or stage 1, with five progressing to stage 2 and one progressing to stage 3.

15.13. The children cared for under the themes and issues can be seen within the chart below:



15.14. The majority of DRPs raised (26%) were in relation to a breach/delay in care plans. This has increased from 20% in 2019/20. The second highest category related to social worker reports not being timely.

15.15. There was a 16% decrease in DRPs relating to 'no updated LA review of arrangements' when compared to the previous year and a 7% reduction in DRPs raised relating to 'last recommendations not progressed'.

15.16. Below are examples of DRPs raised for children who are cared for:

DRP Challenge	Outcome for the Child
The IRO raised a DRP as recommendations from the child's previous cared for review had not been addressed, meaning that the child did not have a plan of permanency and that a key referral to the Children & Young People Service had not been made at the time of the tracking discussion.	The Children Services Team Manager acknowledged the delay in planning for the child. A care team meeting was arranged within 10 working days with an agreement plan of how the outstanding action would be progressed in time for the child's next cared for review. Direct work was undertaken to help the child understand what needed to happen and by when. The Team Manager made a case note on the child's record to outline the action taken to ensure that a plan of permanency could be considered in time for the next review.
The IRO raised a DRP that a child had not been considered cared for, for the full period that they were not living with their parent as initially TfC viewed this as a family arrangement. The impact of this meant that the child did not meet the eligibility criteria for Post 18 support meaning that they would miss out on their care experienced grant and support to the age of 21 (up to 25 if in full time education).	Social Care reviewed the concerns raised by the IRO and agreement was given that whilst they still considered the child not being cared for at the initial stages of them living with family members that they would in fact honour ongoing support for the child post 18 years of age. This meant that the child would be supported in keeping with the eligibility criteria in the care regulations up until the age of 21 (25 if in full time education) giving them access to a care experienced grant. The child received the necessary support into their journey of independence and continues to have access to Next Steps services

- 15.17. Over the last year we have considered how best to raise challenge to achieve more timely outcomes for children. For example, we have developed our DRP forum, linking it with the 'stuck case meetings' that are undertaken with Social Care colleagues, utilising the Signs of Safety model. In addition, we are represented on the weekly Care and Legal Gateway Panel where discussions are held around the actions required for children whose plans are not progressing in a timely manner. We are seeking to influence practice using a triangulation method, using our independent position, knowledge and relationships to best support children and the organisation on its journey to improve.
- 15.18. We are continuing to reflect on the development and impact of our DRP processes to achieve the right balance in sharing knowledge, case experiences and best practice with Social Care colleagues whilst effectively and appropriately challenging drift and preventing delay, keeping the child central to practice and achieving the best outcomes for the child.

Reporting Positive Practice

- 15.19. This year, the IROs and Conference Chairs have continued to highlight to Social Workers and their Team Managers advising them of 32 instances of good practice, which has led to timely and positive outcomes for children. Some examples are listed below.
- I have just approved the notes from the ICPC held In June 2020 and I was very impressed with the high standard of the report for Conference. It is a pleasure to read the Social Worker's work and the family-friendly way they write.*
 - I would just like to provide some feedback from today's ICPC re XXs. It was evident from the detailed report and discussions that the Social Worker has taken time to get to know the family prior to the ICPC and was able to provide detailed information regarding the children and the family. I felt the Social Worker was clear and concise in her consideration of worries and strengths but also very clear and measured with the family about bottom lines and what needed to happen in the detailed timeline. While this was a difficult split meeting the preparation of the family and work pre-conference was clearly evident and certainly made it more productive and inclusive.*
 - I wanted to point out that the Social Worker has done a really good job working with this family, who have been subject to CP Plans for 15 months, until today, when these were ended. There are no outstanding issues to be addressed and the family have been stable since January 2020 and, in fact, benefitted over the COVID lockdown. Therefore, all present agreed that a CIN Plan would not be necessary going forward.*
 - I was adding my tracking note to the system for the above cared for child, when I noted the Social Worker analysis, and I thought this deserved a compliment to the Social Worker for their hard work on this case. I know it has, at times been difficult, but the Social Worker has remained tenacious in fighting to serve the best interests of the child. It is a pleasure working with the Social Worker, knowing I can trust her judgement and that she always keeps me updated on how the child is doing.*

16. Quality Assurance Work

- 16.1. Within the last year we have undertaken a range of quality assurance activities including:
- Audits and dip samples of Child Protection Minutes
 - Case note audit and weekly dip samples of DRP raised
 - Audits of IRO footprint on children with disability case files

- Audit of missing health assessments for cared for children
- Tracking Discussion notes audits and dip samples
- Permanency decision making for cared for children
- Bi-monthly group supervisions
- Observations of Conference Chair's and IRO's
- Quarterly peer observations
- Voice of the child within CIRT recording
- Children's Personal Educational Plans
- Audit of children being made subject of repeat child protection plans

16.2. Further quality assurance work is planned for the coming year as this enables us to look closely at our practice, influence change which directly effects our work. Some positive outcomes from the above quality assurance work includes:

- We have seen a rise (656) in the number of tracking discussions for both child protection and children cared for, which clearly demonstrates that active consideration is being given to children plans outside of their reviews.
- The weekly case note audit and dip sample has resulted in case notes which have continued to strengthen the voice of the child and the impact that our work is having on them.
- Peer observation continues to be promoted with staff organising quarterly reciprocal observations. This provides staff with the opportunity to learn from each other and is a mechanism to standardise practice.
- Following audits of meeting notes and minutes from conferences and training re the use of language we are starting to see a greater and consistent use of Signs of Safety language in our records.
- Membership of the Regional IRO manager group allows for the sharing of ideas and consideration of regional consistency, in the coming year IRO challenge is a theme that will be developed, this will support us to consider our process to ensure effective challenge on behalf to ensure children's plans are progressed in a timely manner.
- We worked with Bexley re the design of forms for Cared for Children, in September 2021 Sunderland will be one of the only areas to be testing the new IT forms in Liquid Logic which is acknowledgement of our commitment to the Signs of Safety model.

16.3. To date the audit work that has been completed in 2019/20 has helped to inform what we have been doing well as a conference chairs/IROs. The audit work has told us that as a service we have good established relationships with our children in care, that we have improved our case recording to ensure we capture the voice of the child and their lived experience, that we use our relationships with professionals and families to influence change on behalf of children. The audit work has also highlighted what we could do better such as improved consistency regarding recommendations and making them SMART to evidence the impact upon the child, that greater consideration needs to be given to a child's ethnicity and how we aim to meet these needs for cared for children, improved understanding and ongoing development of Signs of Safety/Success and its application within TfC.

16.4. The audit work has led to the development of a suite of improved guidance, tools and recording forms which are supporting us to provide evidence of the needs of children, and to share our learning and audit findings with other services in TfC. We are also represented on the SSCP Performance and Quality sub-group and CIRT management attend monthly audit moderation meetings with Social Care to moderate case file audits.

17. Our Customer Feedback

17.1. Our customer service feedback is captured in several ways, such as feedback sheets provided to participants of a meeting, training feedback sheets, meetings with children, Mind of My Own

application (an online feedback tool for children), the TfC compliments process and via email from professionals.

- 17.2. The service has received 27 compliments in the last year which is an increase from 10 in the previous year. We have also received additional positive feedback in relation to a range of areas including advocating the best interest of a child, listening to families and taking account of their views and wishes, being flexible to attend meetings at short notice, having great insight and case knowledge, supporting workers to develop plans of action and having our “fingers on the pulse”.
- 17.3. Below are some recent examples of feedback received:
- *A partner agency passed their thanks to CIRT for raising a concern and advised that both XX & YY acknowledge entirely that Children’s Social Care were correct to challenge their decision making and further advised that he is very grateful to TfC for highlighting this issue and praised the due diligence of all involved in recognising the concern.*
 - *“A Foster Carer provided very positive feedback about your involvement with the baby she recently placed for adoption. The Carer was very complimentary of the IRO role and support, and felt she worked very positively with you and others to progress the baby’s plan”.*
 - *“I would just like to share with you how wonderful the Conference chair was at managing a difficult meeting. They kept it ‘tight’ drawing parents back to the concerns and that itself was an effort. But they kept it together which allowed all professionals to have their say and dealt with parent’s comments appropriately. Thus, allowing the meeting to progress. I was very impressed...”*
 - *Health Professional – “I was in a ICPC meeting with the Conference Chair and it was one of the best Signs of Safety meeting I had attended. It was quick, efficient and also extremely well managed”.*
- 17.4. Within 2020/21 we received no new complaints relating to the IRO service. A complaint from 2019/20 regarding Children’s Social and CIRT (that was not upheld), has recently progressed to a stage three and is awaiting to be heard at a stage 3 panel.
- 17.5. The Sunderland Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (SSCP) received four complaints regarding multi-agency child protection conferences all of which were progressed with two escalating to stage two. The four complaints had 13 elements of which three were upheld, five partially upheld and five not upheld.
- 17.6. The themes of those upheld or partially upheld related to parents and carers not feeling prepared for a conference and agencies not sharing information appropriately. The SSCP has agreed the following actions:
- Agencies to be reminded of the importance of timeliness of reports for child protection Conferences (completed).
 - The SSCP will share information sharing guidance with partner agencies and will consider if this can be included with the report template for child protection conferences (both completed)
 - TfC to review current processes to see how we can support parents in seeing the child protection categories at the time of the conference if being held virtually (in progress).
- 17.7. With regards to our service, we will continue to liaise with the SSCP to reflect any learning with regards to parents and carers feeling more prepared for conferences.

17.8. Below are some examples of how we have responded to feedback received from families, our IRO's and Conference Chair's and our partnering agencies.

You said.....		We did.....
Northumbria Police said: "We would like some bespoke training in relation to Child Protection Conferences"	➔	We developed and delivered training to all staff from Northumbria Police Mash units re Child Protection Conferences.
Multi Agency professionals said: "We want to be able to access reports before child protection conference and reviews"	➔	We contacted our ICT department and developed a process that now enables us to share reports via secure e-mail or via SharePoint so that professionals are now prepared for the start of the conference/review.
A parent said: "They want to be advised of changes to the conference via text messages"	➔	We put in place a pilot of collecting parents' mobile numbers and sending them a text message to remind them of the date and time of their child protection review conference. If successful and will consider this as normal practice.
Several parents said: "They were not getting invites to their children cared for reviews"	➔	We have put in place an improved invitation process for cared for reviews so that when we receive a list of invites from the Social Worker a formal invite is sent from our service to the child, parents, and professionals.
Several parents said: "They did not have access to the Internet to use Microsoft Teams and due to COVID19 did not wish to attend a face to face meeting"	➔	We purchased four cellular tablets that did not require internet access to enable parents and children to engage in Teams meetings from the safety of their home. We delivered the tablets in a safe way and picked them up after the conference.
Our IROs/CCs said: Following the success of the Edge Hill University training that they wanted greater access to accredited learning	➔	We contacted Sunderland University and are currently exploring ways of IROs/Conference chairs having access to accredited post graduate training.

18. Our Priorities for 2021 - 2022

- Move towards having two teams; 'Cared for' and 'Child Protection' to further strengthen skills and practice for children.
- In line with the government 'roadmap out of lockdown', engage in more face to face meetings with children and their families to ensure the child is at the centre of practice and to support each other in our shared understanding of the needs of individual children.
- Embed our newly developed engagement tools to encourage children to contribute their views, wishes and feelings in their reviews.
- Establish meaningful options for children to help chair their cared for reviews.
- Evolve our practice to support and empower survivors of domestic abuse through the delivery of child protection conferences and reviews.
- Strengthen how plans are recorded so that they are SMART to help parents, carers and professionals understand clearly what is required to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child.
- Continue to embed signs of safety/ success into our day to day practice.
- Continue to work with Social Care and partners to explore different ways of working with teenagers.
- Use performance data more intelligently to produce greater insight and evidence regarding the impact that our work is having on children.
- Further improve the quality of our recording so that we fully demonstrate the impact of our work from the child's perspective.
- Continue to work with agencies and social care to improve the timeliness of child protection conference reports.
- Use our position as conference chairs/IROs within the wider Together for Children agenda to help to improve practice and outcomes for children.
- Seek to strengthen how we can impact upon more timely decisions regarding permanence at the second review.

19. Conclusion

- 19.1. Notwithstanding the challenges linked to COVID19, we have continued to improve practice within key areas of our work including improved timeliness of child protection conferences and cared for reviews, greater evidence of tracking children's plans and a reduction in delays regarding the progression of children's plans. Although COVID19 restrictions have impeded our development work regarding Signs of Safety/Success, we are looking forward to taking this forward in the forthcoming year.
- 19.2. While COVID19 has presented us with many challenges it's also provided opportunities with regards to the use of technology and given us wider options to promote engagement. Responding to the pandemic has made us think differently about how we can deliver services to achieve the best outcomes for children. We have introduced some innovative methods of practice that we would like to continue or explore further and take forward the positives from the last year such as professionals accessing conferences via teams, use of tablets, digital recording of meeting, text message alerts for children attending meetings.

- 19.3. In the forthcoming year we will be focussing on making plans smarter and ensuring families and those within the child's safety network fully understand the 'worries' and how they can best keep the child safe with the support of professionals. We will be working with social care and partners to look at different ways of working with teenagers to address the areas of need for 10 to 15-year olds. We will also monitor child protection categories to understand any further increases to the category of 'emotional abuse' linked to issues or concerns regarding domestic abuse. We will make sure that our practice continues to evolve so we support and empower the survivor, whilst having services that perpetrators can access to reduce the risk of harm that they pose to their child
- 19.4. Whilst we will face uncertainty in the year ahead, we are excited by the opportunities to make changes that will benefit children in Sunderland who deserve the best from their families and all workers within their professional safety net.

TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN	
REPORT AUTHORS:	Keith Munro, Jackie Amos and Danielle Rose Foster Carer Reviewing/Regulation 44 Officers
SUBJECT:	Regulation 44 report summarising visits from November 2020 to April 2021.
PURPOSE:	To provide elective members of the Corporate Parenting Board with an update on the findings in relation to the Regulation 44 visits.

Purpose of Regulation 44 Visit and Structure within TFC

The current Children's Homes Regulations and Quality Standards were released in their final form in April 2015.

Regulation 44 of the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 clearly states that the registered provider shall appoint, at the registered provider's expense, an independent person to visit and report on the children's home in accordance with this regulation. This is to ensure objective critical analysis with a view to improve safeguarding and service delivery for children.

The Regulation 44 Visitor must be able to evidence demonstrable independence and have the skills necessary to relate to children and young people, assess all relevant information and form a rigorous and impartial assessment of the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children in the home's care. This is achieved by scrutinising all relevant documentation, talking to at least one of the children and young people accommodated in the home, their parents or relatives, staff from the home and relevant professionals.

The service comprises of 2.5 FTE Reviewing & Designated Officer posts situated in the Children's Independent Reviewing Team within the Corporate & Commercial Services Directorate. In March 2021, a service review merged the role of Foster Carer Review/Regulation 44 Officer with the Designated Officer to create a new post Reviewing and Designated Officer. The reasons for this change was to formalise operational cover in respect of Designated Officer work and strengthen business continuity arrangements.

Performance Overview

The following table provides the date of the most recent Ofsted inspection and the dates Regulation 44 visits were completed during this reporting period:

Home	Recent Ofsted Inspection	Nov 20	Dec20	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	Apr 21
Colombo Road	18-19/10/19	24/11/20	11/12/20	08/0/21	04/03/21	05/03/21	16/04/21
Monument View	12-13/11/19	19/11/20	08/12/20	26/01/21	17/02/21	22/03/21	15/04/21
Grasswell House	14-15/01/20	09/11/20	08/12/20	07/01/21	04/02/21	05/03/21	16/04/21
Revelstoke Road	02-03/07/19	17/11/20	17/12/20	14/01/21	18/02/21	19/03/21	23/04/21
Nook Lodge	23/10/20	N/A	31/12/20	14/11/21	24/02/21	19/03/21	26/04/21

From March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ofsted made the decision not to inspect children's homes other than those newly registered i.e. Nook Lodge. Ofsted recommenced their monitoring visits in April 2021.

During November 2020 to April 2021, we have undertaken Regulation 44 visits via a hybrid model with physical visits being determined via individual risk assessments and in line with government guidance. Visits have been completed via telephone calls, remote access to files and Microsoft Teams where physical visits have not been possible. Photographs of the homes have also been shared with the Regulation 44 visitor to evidence their upkeep in accordance with the regulations. During this time the voice of the children and young people, their carers and parents have remained a central part of the visit.

Administration

On average, it takes seven hours each month to undertake the Regulation 44 visits at each of the children's homes which includes gathering and evaluating information to inform the report. The report is then distributed by the Regulation 44 Visitor to the managers of the homes within 5-working days and then sent to Ofsted at the end of each month. The visitors also complete a short letter to the young people at the home about their visit. The number of children's homes increased from four to five from November 2020.

Colombo Road

Colombo Road Children's Home remains approved for up to six young people of either gender, aged from eleven up to the age of eighteen. It is situated on a large housing estate in the Hylton Castle area of Sunderland. The home is currently fully staffed.

Since the last report to CPB, Ofsted have not inspected the home, therefore Columbo Road has retained the judgement of Outstanding.

Ofsted Rating	21-22/10/19 Judgement
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Outstanding
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding

Within the reporting period Colombo Road has provided care for the following numbers of young people:

Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
6	6	6	6	6	6

Colombo Road has received a Regulation 44 visit each month via the hybrid model to ensure safety. The number of recommendations made in this reporting period continued to be 4 which is the same as previous reporting period.

The recommendations were:

- Update a young person's risk assessment with information related to a recent missing episode
- Update a young person's risk assessment with information about a recent missing episode and complete a 1 to 1 session with the young person
- Amend the use of language in a young person's risk assessment and update the assessment with additional information

No of admissions in reporting period	No of discharges in reporting period	No of missing incidents	No of missing incidents over 24hrs	Number of recommendations in the reporting period
0	0	7	0	3

In the last report to CPB there was 1 missing incident reported to the Police compared with 7 missing episodes in this reporting period. The home has continued to demonstrate its effectiveness in working with children and young people they care for as this is the fifth consecutive report where 0 child/young person have been missing for over 24-hours. Staff have undertaken work with the children and young people around the COVID-19 restrictions who have responded positively to this work about their safety. The easing of lockdown restrictions for children and young people and their sense of seeking more freedom, is seen as a reason for more missing episodes as children and young people are eager to take advantage of increased opportunities to socialise with their friends outside of the home.

Sanctions were used on 2 occasions in response to inappropriate behaviour by the children and young people compared to 3 in the previous reporting period. The children and young people are always offered the opportunity of undertaking a restorative task as an alternative to having the sanction imposed. It is positive to note that 0 restraints were used by staff for the second reporting period running.

There were 2 critical incidents in this reporting period compared to 4 in the previous reporting period. All the incidents were appropriately documented and responded to in accordance with TfC policy. There were only 2 notifications made to Ofsted compared to 4 in the last reporting period.

The notifications to Ofsted were for the following reasons:

- An incident where threats to staff, racial abuse, and damage to the home by a young person
- A historic allegation was made by a young person about a member of their family

Voices of Children and Young People

The voices of children and young people and their lived experiences of living in their home is an essential part of the reg 44 visit. So during every visit effort is made to gather children and young people's views on the quality of care that they are receiving.

During one visit as the children and young people were finishing their tea, they advised that they had positive relationships with the staff and referred to them as the “Bro team”. This was evidenced by the warmth and humour in how they talked and listened to each other during the visit to the home.

The two young people informed the visitor that they had regular one to one-sessions with their link workers for example re smoking and the health risks. Although one young person commented that she does not want to give up at present time, staff have made her aware of the associated risks.

One young person said that she was enjoying her course at a local college which was being undertaken on-line.

There was a good discussion after tea which the visitor observed and joined in with. The issue raised by young people concerned the use of sensitive language in respect of people who are very small and those who are very tall. The discussion was well facilitated by the staff. Young people were encouraged to think critically and examine definitions via google and Wikipedia. This helped them to work out the most appropriate language to use when talking about or engaging with people who are very small or very tall.

Voice of a Parent/s

Parents in the 6 months covered within this report have consistently talked highly in relation to the care their children/young people have been receiving in the home.

An example of a young person’s father’s views on the home was that; He said the staff care for his son well “In fact 10 out of 10 for what they do”. He thinks his son has a good clothing allowance and buys nice clothes and is really enjoying his catering course at college. Staff communicate with him well “They even let me know about the little things in his life”. He went on to say his son has dropped hints to him that he is worried about where he will move to when he turns 18. The visitor said to parent that they would pass the information on to staff at the home so they could explore this further with them.

Summary

The number of sanctions, critical incidents and notifications to Ofsted reduced compared to the previous reporting period. This is a good achievement given the overall numbers from the last reporting period were very low. The use of restraints remained the same and the number of missing episodes increased which can be linked to the prolonged period of national lockdown. When missing episodes have occurred the home has followed its own safeguarding procedures to support the safe return of the child/young person.

The 3 recommendations from the Regulation 44 visits as stated above were accepted by the manager and implemented within the given timescales.

The management and staff team respond positively to the recommendations made in the monthly reports. They discuss the recommendations at team meetings, act upon them and view the recommendations as helpful to their ongoing development of practice and management of the home. The care practice detailed within the children and young people’s records throughout the reporting period has continued to be of a high standard. The home remains as judged by Ofsted to be outstanding for a fourth consecutive year.

The children and young people living at the home are settled and have high levels of attendance in education/training. The children and young people take up a wide variety of activities and personal hobbies inside and out with the home and take part in trips out with staff. These have taken place

within the context of the COVID-19 restrictions which have varied during the reporting period and activities are now taking place and being planned to take advantage of the easing of restrictions.

The fabric of the building of Colombo Road both internally and externally is maintained to a very good standard. The home feels relaxed, homely with a nice atmosphere that reflects the positive relationships that exists between young people and staff. Children and young people reported they felt safe during Regulation 44 visits. The home remains decorated and furnished to a high standard in a modern style. The kitchen refurbishment has continued to be successful with more children and young people engaging in activities such as baking and cake making during lockdown.

A COVID-19 risk assessment is in place to ensure the safety of the children and young people living in the building, staff working there and professionals who need access to Colombo Road. The assessment is reviewed regularly and updated by the manager. No children or young people have tested positive for COVID-19 during the reporting period.

Grasswell House

Grasswell House has continued to provide residential care for up to six young people of either gender aged 12-17. It is situated within Sunderland West. The manager and the leadership team have continued to work constructively to manage, motivate and support staff at the home on their journey of improvement ensuring the home meets the needs of the children and young people accommodated there.

Since the last report to CPB Ofsted have not made an inspection visit, therefore the home has retained the judged as being Good with improved effectiveness.

Ofsted Rating	Judgement 14/15 Jan 20
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good with improved effectiveness
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good with improved effectiveness
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good with improved effectiveness

Within the reporting period the home has cared for the following number of children and young people:

Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
5	6	6	6	6	6

A Regulation 44 visit has been completed every month via a hybrid model to ensure safety. The number of recommendations made in this reporting period has reduced from 6 to 3.

Recommendations have related to the following areas:

- Update a young person's risk assessment re the approach to be used when a young person does not attend education
- Place a copy of latest care plan in a young person's file
- Review and contextualise the information in one section of a young person's risk assessment

Staff support children and young people to engage in education and/or training and where they struggle to engage the manager and staff team work to support them to re-engage. When education resources are outside their control, the staff and senior managers have raised the issue and advocated for a young person to obtain an appropriate full-time education placement. There is

good evidence to show how staff work in partnership with children and young people, their parents, and relevant professionals to help the children and young people to achieve their true potential.

No of admissions in reporting period	No of discharges in reporting period	No of missing incidents	No of missing incidents over 24hrs	No of rec's in the reporting period
4	4	16	1	3

In the last report to CPB there were 16 missing episodes compared to 21 and 0 episodes of over 24 hours compared to 1 in this reporting period. There were 0 sanctions used compared to 1 in the last reporting period. It is positive that on 0 occasions staff needed to use restraint compared to 1 in the previous reporting period.

There were 11 critical incidents compared to 14 during the last period. The incidents were appropriately documented and responded to in accordance with TfC procedures. There were 4 notifications made to Ofsted compared to 9 in the previous reporting period.

The notifications related to:

- Young person had their nose pierced under-age
- Threats made to a young person at an organised activity in the community by other young people
- Young person assaulted in their home community by another young person
- Young person assaulted in the city centre by another young person

Voice of the Child/Young Person

An example of a young person speaking with the Regulation 44 visitor during the visit can be seen below. This details the discussion that the young person had with the Regulation 44 visitor regarding their moving out of Grasswell House.

The young person said she had visited several different options with her link worker and social worker and had chosen a supported lodgings placement rather than a semi-independent living project. The young person thought it was good that she had a choice of where she would move to.

The young person is still enjoying attending her Performing Arts course and plans to stay on at college for the next academic year to complete her level 3 and feels she has been supported well by staff to access a course she enjoys.

The young person commented she had “a good relationship” with her link worker and they got on “well” and he had gone with her to look at her move on options which she said she liked.

The young person reflected about the 19 months she has lived at the home and it was clear during her time at the home that she had felt safe, well cared for and valued by staff.

The young person could not identify any changes that she would like made at the home and at the end of the conversation the visitor wished her well for the future, in case he didn't see her again before she move on to supported lodgings.

Voice of a Parent

A young person's mother was spoken with by telephone. She said her son is spending a lot of time at home at present and his care plan was to return to her care soon. His mother said that staff communicate with her well and he has a good clothing allowance and he saves up and likes to buy expensive sportswear. She was not worried about the staff's concerns about her son's level of engagement in education and training and she thought this might improve when he returned to her

care. His mother was happy with the overall standards of care her son was provided with by staff at the home.

Summary

The number of missing episodes and missing episodes of over 24 hours, sanctions, use of restraint, number of critical incidents, notifications to Ofsted and recommendations reduced. This is a significant achievement by the staff team.

The information above needs to be seen within the context of 4 young people moving from the home as per their care plans. This included young people moving to semi independence or supported lodgings. Staff worked well with their new support providers to ensure the young people made smooth transitions to their new homes. The young people are now a younger group with different care needs that reflect their ages and stages of development. Considering these changes and looking at the figures overall, it is clear staff have supported the children and young people very well.

The recommendations from the Regulation 44 visits, documented above, were accepted by the manager, and implemented within the given timescales. The manager and staff remain committed to trying to improve the care they provide further with the hope this will be recognised during Ofsted's next inspection visit.

The young people living at the home are developing as a new group and staff are working with other professionals to ensure the young people have the most appropriate education placements which will improve their attendance in education/training. Young people take up a wide variety of activities and personal hobbies both inside and outside the home and take part in trips out with staff. These have taken place within the context of the COVID-19 restrictions which have varied during the reporting period. Young People and staff have begun to undertake and are planning more activities outside of the home as COVID-19 restrictions have been eased.

The fabric of the home is of a good standard internally and externally and is well maintained. The home is decorated and furnished to good standard in a modern style and the kitchen was replaced during the previous financial year. The visitor has seen young people enjoying the new kitchen facilities making themselves snacks. The home has a homely family feel due to the atmosphere generated by the young people and staff.

A COVID-19 risk assessment is in place to ensure the safety of the children and young people living in the building, staff working there and professionals who need access to Grasswell House. The assessment is reviewed regularly and updated by the manager. No children or young people have tested positive for COVID-19 during the reporting period.

Revelstoke Road

Revelstoke Road children's home provides residential care for up to six young people of either gender. It is situated on a housing estate within Sunderland North. In terms of management structure there have been no changes in relation to the senior team, this reporting period. The management team have continued to positively support and encourage team members to successfully achieve the best outcomes for the young people in a safe and nurturing environment, despite the difficult circumstances they have experienced due to the impact of COVID-19.

The following table shows the Ofsted Judgements for 2017 and 2018. The last Full Inspection was undertaken in July 2019, the overall experiences and progress of children and young people were judged to be Good. A recent Monitoring Visit was undertaken on 30.03.21, the overall outcome of which, was positive. One recommendation was made from this visit '*The registered person should*

ensure that staff can access appropriate facilities and resources to support their training needs and should understand the key role they play in the training and development of staff in the home. This should include all areas relating to the children's needs, specifically substance misuse and alcohol awareness'.

Ofsted Rating	Judgement 8 & 9/11/17	Judgement 26/06/18	Judgement 2 & 3/07/19
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good	Good	Good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement to be good	Good	Good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement to be good	Good	Good

Within the reporting period the home has cared for the following number of children and young people:

Nov 20	Dec 20	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	Apr 21
6	6	6	5	5	4

As highlighted in the grid above, the number of children and young people residing at Revelstoke Road, during this reporting period, varied between 4 and 6. One young person who returned to live at Revelstoke Road in October 2020, following a period in a secure environment, was discharged in January 2021 due to concerns regarding how his behaviour impacted upon the other children and young people. In addition, another young person was discharged in April 2021, due to similar concerns. The team at Revelstoke Road maintain contact with both young people and are planning to meet with both, separately, to support their on-going needs. Team members have received several referrals however, their aim is to ensure an appropriate match between the current children and young people living at the home and any potential child moving in.

No of admissions in reporting period	No of discharges in reporting period	No of missing incidents	No of missing incidents over 24hrs	No of rec's in the reporting period
0	2	51	2	8

The above table highlights that there has been a settled period, in terms of admissions in this reporting period. However, there has been a significant increase in terms of missing episodes compared to the last reporting period. As stated earlier, two young people were discharged from Revelstoke Road due to concerns regarding their behaviour and the impact their behaviour was having on the other young people. As a consequence, the young people and team members at Revelstoke Road experienced a very difficult few months between January and March 2021. The home is currently more settled and fewer missing episodes have been recorded.

The four young people at Revelstoke Road have developed positive relationships with team members. The team continues to use a therapeutic parenting model (PACE), centred on understanding trauma and focusing upon building relationships. Team members place an emphasis on celebrating achievements (59 celebrations this reporting period) and connecting with young people rather than punitive punishments. This appears to work well for the young people residing at Revelstoke Road.

Announced and unannounced Regulation 44 visits were undertaken during the period of October 20 to May 21, eight recommendations were made, during this reporting period. The recommendations were accepted by the manager and progressed appropriately, within timescales. An example of a recommendation made during this reporting period was a young person's Pathway Plan needed to be commenced.

Recommendations continue to be discussed at team meetings which enables the team to reflect upon their practice and improve standards. Positive support/guidance and advice was observed to be of a very good standard. Young people are looked after well at the home and are making progress.

The number of times young people were reported missing from home increased significantly from 22 to 51 missing episodes. The significant increase was seen during the months of January, February and March 21, three difficult months for the team and young people. Although the team had proactive plans in place to prevent young people from going missing, it appears these plans were not working. The team sought the advice and support from other agencies and professionals involved with the young people. In addition, two young people were discharged from Revelstoke Road as their behaviour was impacting upon the safety of the other young people. The team continue to offer the young people the opportunity to explore any worries /concerns they may have. All four young people are aware of the complaints procedure and have access to Mind of My Own, whereby they can share their worries and concerns with their social worker.

The number of missing episodes, this reporting period, over a 24-hour timescale was two, compared to 0 during the last reporting period, a slight increase. On both occasions one to one direct work was undertaken with the young person alongside an offer of a return to home interview. Three sanctions were recorded this reporting period, a slight increase when compared to the previous report when two sanctions were recorded. Five restraints were also used during this reporting period compared to two used during the last reporting period, these restraints related to two young people who required support to maintain their safe care. The risk assessments were updated following each incident to ensure that all aspects of a young person's needs are considered.

During this reporting period there were 18 critical incidents, 16 of which were reported to Ofsted. An increase when compared to the previous reporting period, which highlights the difficulties the young people and team were exposed to during the first three months of this year.

Ofsted inspected Revelstoke Road in July 2019 and rated the home Good in all categories. A monitoring visit was undertaken in March 21 where the findings, were once again, positive. One recommendation was made relating to training which the Team Manager and Assistant Team Manager are addressing. The team at Revelstoke Road present as competent, confident professionals who provide a nurturing and positive environment to support the young people to achieve their potential. They seek advice/support/guidance from other agencies and professionals involved with the young people when difficulties arise, to ensure they are working together to safeguard the young people, as far as practicable.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions being reduced, the young people returned to school in March 21, therefore have restarted their educational/training placements during this reporting period. The four young people at Revelstoke Road are being supported to engage in education/training although continue to require some support and guidance to do so. Team members have demonstrated their attempts to engage the young people to achieve their potential. Currently two young people attend school and two an alternative training resource.

Revelstoke Road is maintained externally and internally to a good standard and is decorated and furnished in a modern style. The main lounge, the rear lounge, the Hogwart room and both sleep-in rooms have been decorated and newly furnished. The home is comfortable and warm and well decorated. The young people are proud of their home and look forward to inviting their friends in, when allowed.

The team and young people at Revelstoke Road are welcoming however, sometimes the young people choose not to engage with the visitor, depending on how they are occupied. Visits have

been undertaken at various times to engage the young people more positively however, on occasions, the young people are either in the community, their bedroom or engaging in an activity. The summer house in the rear garden is now complete and looks amazing. This is used by the young people and the team for a variety of reasons, to include quiet time and meetings/training. Despite COVID-19 restrictions the team have continued to provide a wide variety of activities (games, baking, quizzes, drives out), adhering to COVID-19 restrictions.

A risk assessment is in place to ensure the safety of young people living in the building, team members working there and professionals who need access to Revelstoke Road. The assessment is reviewed regularly and updated by the manager reflecting COVID-19 restrictions which have varied during the reporting period. No young person tested positive for COVID-19 during this reporting period.

In summary, despite the impact of COVID-19 and the difficult three months the team and the young people have experienced, the team report that all have remained positive. The young people appear to be happy and settled now and I am confident that the two vacancies at Revelstoke Road will be filled with young people whose needs match the needs of the current residents. The team and the young people have worked together to enjoy as many opportunities as possible, under the circumstances. The team have worked relentlessly to engage the young people in education and have ensured, their safe care as far as practicable.

Voice of a Child/Young Person

The Visitor has briefly spoken to all the children and young people residing at Revelstoke Road and noted how polite and friendly they all are, although don't always wish to engage with the Visitor.

However, during the past six months two young people have made themselves available to discuss their wishes and views during Regulation 44 visits. Both expressed no significant concerns and are positively engaging in education, knowing that they want to access further education. Both young people were polite, engaging and co-operative, sharing their views regarding the care afforded to them and expressing their wishes and feelings.

No concerns were raised by any of the young people, this reporting period. Each of the young people interviewed spoke positively about team members, they feel well looked after, listened to and safe. This evidences a team who are caring, respectful and nurturing towards the young people.

Voice of a Parent

The feedback from the parents of the child and young people, during this reporting period, has generally been positive. During December 20 visit, one young person's grandmother stated 'Revelstoke Road team supported my grandson well', however, wishes he had accessed support regarding his substance misuse. The grandmother reported that her grandson enjoyed living at Revelstoke Road and that he liked the staff and had a good relationship with him. The grandmother expressed concerns regarding her grandson's misuse of substances but felt there was very little that could be done about that as he refuses support, regarding this matter.

Nook Lodge

Nook Lodge children's home provides residential care for up to three young people of either gender, 10 to 17 years old. It is situated on the outskirts of housing estate within Sunderland. Nook Lodge is a newly registered home, registered by Ofsted on 23rd October 20. The first resident

moved into Nook Lodge on 29th October 20, the second on 5th November 20 and the third on 11th March 21.

In terms of the management structure there are two senior members, one team manager and one assistant team manager. The management team have developed a positive, professional working relationship with each other, albeit their relationship is new. In addition, the newly appointed team are also developing their working relationships, to achieve the best outcomes for the young people.

Nook Lodge has not had an Ofsted inspection as the home is newly registered however, a positive Ofsted monitoring visit was undertaken on 29th March 21. The comments were:

The leadership and management standard is that the registered person enables, inspires and leads a culture in relation to the children's home that— (a) helps children aspire to fulfil their potential; and (b) promotes their welfare. In particular, the standard in paragraph (1) requires the registered person to— ensure that staff have the experience, qualifications, and skills to meet the needs of each child. (Regulation 13 (2)(c)) This specifically relates to the provider ensuring that all staff administering medication are suitably trained.

Ofsted Rating	Judgement	Judgement	Judgement
There have been no Ofsted ratings due to Nook Lodge being a newly registered home.			

Within the reporting period the home has cared for the following number of children and young people:

Nov 20	Dec 20	Jan 21	Feb 21	Mar 21	Apr 21
2	2	2	2	3	3

As highlighted in the grid above, the number of children and young people residing at Nook Lodge, during this reporting period, varied between 2 and 3 young people. This is because of the home opening in October 2020, when one young person moved in. As stated previously the second young person moved in November 2020 and the third March 2021. All three young people present as settled and happy. They are developing a relationship with each other and staff continue to be sensitive to the individual children/young people's needs.

No of admissions in reporting period	No of discharges in reporting period	No of missing incidents	No of missing incidents over 24hrs	No of rec's in the reporting period
3	0	0	0	4

The above table highlights that Nook Lodge is a new provision for three young people. It highlights a settled period from October 20 to date. Given that the home is newly registered it is impressive that only four recommendations have been made, this is indicative of a well-managed home. Announced and unannounced Regulation 44 visits were undertaken during the period of October 20 to May 21. The October 20 visit was a trial one due to their only being one resident in occupancy and the fact that it was registered and opened late in the month.

There have been no missing episodes or restraints recorded this review period. Two sanctions were appropriately recorded in respect of one young person. During this reporting period there were 8 critical incidents, 6 of which were reported to Ofsted. There are no comparisons to make due to this being the first report to the Corporate Parenting Board in respect of Nook Lodge.

The Regulation 44 visitor made 4 recommendations during this reporting period. The recommendations were accepted by the manager, shared with the team to enable them to reflect upon their practice and improve standards. The recommendations were progressed appropriately, within timescales. An example of a recommendation made during this reporting period was a young person's personal educational plan to be requested from the social worker and saved on file.

Due to the impact of COVID-19, during this reporting period, the young people were home-schooled from moving into Nook Lodge until 8th March 2021 when schools were re-opened to all young people. The team continue to support the young people to access education however, two of the young people's attendance is intermittent, for varying reasons however, they are being supported and encouraged to improve their attendance.

The team and young people at Nook Lodge are welcoming, the home is comfortable and warm, and the young people present as settled and happy during Regulation 44 visits.

Nook Lodge is maintained externally and internally to a good standard and is decorated and furnished in a modern style. The whole house has been updated and decorated except for the kitchen. However, the team have plans for the kitchen and the rear garden which is a work in progress. The young people are enjoying their new surroundings and are proud of their home, they are looking forward to the back garden progressing and have been instrumental in terms of undertaking garden tasks. The three young people are rearing baby chickens, all of whom have names.

A risk assessment is in place to ensure the safety of the young people living in the building, team members working there and professionals who need access to Nook Lodge. The assessment is reviewed regularly and updated by the manager reflecting COVID-19 restrictions which have varied during the reporting period. No young person has tested positive for COVID-19 during this reporting period.

In summary, despite the impact of COVID-19, to include imposed restrictions on the young people and the team, all have remained positive. The team and the young people have worked together to enjoy as many opportunities as possible, under the circumstances.

Voice of a Child/Young Person

The visitor has spoken to all three young people who made themselves available to discuss their wishes and views during Regulation 44 visits, this reporting period. All three young people were polite and engaging, willingly sharing their positive views regarding the care afforded to them. No significant concerns were raised by any of the young people. In addition, it has been a pleasure observing their relationship grow and welcoming a third person into their home in a considerate manner. During December 2020's visit, a young person briefly engaged with the Visitor reporting that he was looking forward to re-commencing education.

During February 2021's visit, two of the young people were keen to engage with the Visitor at the same time. Both talked about activities and explained that 'there are always lots of activities on offer'. However, both were keen for community-based activities to re-start. At that time, they were enjoying incubating chicks and look forward to their arrival.

No significant concerns have been raised, by the young people, this reporting period. The young people are developing relationships with each other and the team, although they have only been together for a short period of time.

Voice of a Parent

The feedback from the parents of the young people, during this reporting period, has generally been positive. Some concerns were raised by a birth mother and her partner regarding the lack of engagement between Nook Lodge team and themselves. However, on further exploration it appears the team were regularly in contact with the family. A second discussion with the same birth mother and her partner proved positive in respect of Nook Lodge however, her anxieties were more focused on the lack of engagement with the social worker and themselves. This was explored with the social worker and no further issues have been raised.

The feedback from another parent was positive, she is of the opinion that her son has settled well and the team are supporting his complex needs.

Monument View

Monument View Children's Home remains approved for up to six young people of either gender, aged from eleven up to the age of eighteen. It is situated on a large plot of land within the Shiney Row area of Sunderland. The home is currently fully staffed although the Registered Manager has announced his retirement as of May 2021 and recruitment is underway to fill this post.

During a time period that this report to CPB covers, Ofsted have not made an inspection visit, therefore the home has retained the judgement of Good.

Ofsted Rating	12-13/11/19 Judgement
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

Within the reporting period Monument View has provided care for the following numbers of children and young people:

Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
6	6	6	5	6	6

Monument View has had a Regulation 44 visit completed every month and as stated above this has involved a hybrid model to ensure safety. The number of recommendations made in this reporting period was 4 which is the same as in the previous reporting period.

The recommendations in this reporting period were:

- Complete a risk assessment for a young person who had recently moved into the home
- Share the outcome of a learning needs assessment with all staff in relation to a young person with a diagnosed learning disability
- Re-refer a young person to MSET due to the rise in missing episodes
- Files to be updated with the PEP and Health Assessment documentation for a young person

The management and staff team responded well to the recommendations made following visits, and they were all achieved by the next monthly visit. Management responses within the

Regulation 44 paperwork have been in depth and extensive, providing required context to the visitor.

Each child/young person within the home has an identified education and/or training provision and where the child/young person struggles to engage with education or training, the manager and staff team have explored alternative provisions which may be more suitable to the child/young persons level of need. Staff at Monument View have recently supported a young person who on admission to the home did not speak English to access mainstream education.

During visits the views of both the children and young people and their family have been gained, and these have all been positive, praising the staff for the standard of care provided. The children and young people have been able to identify specific members of staff they have built positive relationships with and all spoke warmly and highly of Monument View staff. Parents and carers have specifically identified communication as a strong point for the home and have praised staff for sharing information and making them feel included in the care of their children/young people.

Monument View's interior and exterior is maintained to a consistently high standard. Ongoing improvements to the home and grounds have been made during the lockdown period, and the children and young people have recently helped to build a large outdoor cinema area which the home uses to screen DVD's and televised sporting events. The homes location, garden and outbuildings provide a safe but stimulating environment and the children and young people have access to a large range of on-site facilities, such as a gym, 5 aside football cage, extensive gardens and animals alongside newly developed outdoor cinema.

No of admissions in reporting period	No of discharges in reporting period	No of missing incidents	No of missing incidents over 24hrs	Number of recommendations in the reporting period
2	2	14	2	4

In the last report to CPB there were 14 missing incidents reported to the Police. This has remained the same during this reporting period including two which were in excess of 24 hours. In all occasions children and young people were reported missing to both Police and EDT in line with procedure. A large majority of the missing episodes relate to one young person who has a significant learning difficulty and struggles to understand the safeguarding implications of not returning to the home at the agreed time. The home has shared information with all staff on how to ensure this young person receives clear boundaries and support in a format they are able to understand.

Sanctions were used on 2 occasions in response to inappropriate behaviour by the children and young people compared to 4 in the previous reporting period. Children and young people are always offered the opportunity of undertaking a restorative task as an alternative to having the sanction imposed and this often involves learning new skills such as plastering and painting. The home has a very low level of restraints and there has not been one recorded since 2016.

There were 10 critical incidents in this reporting period compared to 5 in the previous reporting period. Of the 10 critical incidents 8 involved one young person who has an identified learning difficulty and related specifically to incidents within the community which occurred outside of the home environment.

There were 5 notifications, this number has remained static despite the increase in critical incidents.

The notifications were for:

- A young person being assaulted within the community

- One allegation of harm against staff
- A young person making threats to harm themselves
- A young person arrested for violence towards staff and police officers
- A young person being involved in a racial assault within the community.

Voices of Children and Young People

This information was obtained from a visit to the home during the reporting period with a young person who has previously spoken to the visitor over the phone but had not met in person.

The young person was initially reluctant to speak to the visitor and was preoccupied by his phone, however warmed up to the discussion when he was asked what he enjoyed doing. He spoke about playing his PlayStation and going on days out with the home which he enjoyed. He stated, "this is much better than my last place" and when asked what made it better the young person replied "just... everything. The way they treat us is totally different, not like little kids." When asked if he could expand on that the young person stated, "they talk to you here, and listen, instead of just telling you what to do." The visitor asked if there were any staff in particular that the young person felt closer to or more able to talk about issues with and he replied that all of the staff were approachable and he felt comfortable in speaking to them all about any worries he has.

The young person stated the food was good and he likes everything they make to eat in the home. He also confirmed that he has everything he needs for his bedroom and this is a comfortable space. When asked about the other residents within the home the young person advised they were "alright" and he does not have any worries about anyone living within Monument View, although he did mention he did not spend a significant amount of time with the other young people and he is presently on a phased move back to his father's care.

Voice of a Parent

A young person's father was spoken with over the phone. He was very positive about the home and stated that the advice and support provided to both him and his son was "out of this world". He advised that the staff in the home keep him up to date and he feels entirely included in the decisions made regarding his son. The young person's father stated that Monument View appeared to have an excellent understanding of his child's needs and the work they had undertaken with him had "given me the son I recognise back." He stated he had no criticism of the home and would not recommend any changes.

Summary

Children and young people and parents continue to provide consistently positive feedback regarding Monument View and during the reporting period no issues have been identified by any resident of the home or their family.

The fabric of the building of Monument View both internally and externally is maintained to a very high standard and the en-suite bathrooms have all been recently refurbished. Additionally, the home benefits from a number of on-site facilities which have kept the children and young people stimulated and active during national lockdown. Children and young people within the home frequently praise the activities and leisure events the staff organise.

As with the last period both staff and management from Monument View have stressed to the independent visitor during visits that there have been difficulties managing the dynamics between the children and young people within the home, despite the discharge of some residents which were seen as central to these issues. Staff within the home may benefit from additional support to manage the challenging behaviour of some residents to ensure they are able to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people within the home equally, and minimise the

possibility that these concerns will undermine the home's ability to provide good quality care for all young people. Staff may also benefit from ongoing support regarding caring for a child or a young person with a learning difficulty to ensure their needs are consistently met and direct work with the children or young person is delivered at an appropriate level to their understanding and ability.

The number of Ofsted notifications in this period has remained static despite the rise in critical incidents. This may reflect further work required within the home to gain a clearer understanding by staff of Ofsted requirements in terms of information sharing to ensure that Monument View are submitting notifications when appropriate.

The 4 recommendations from the Regulation 44 visits as stated above were accepted by the manager and implemented within the given timescales.

A COVID-19 risk assessment is in place to ensure the safety of the residents, staff and professionals who need access to Monument View. No children or young people have tested positive for COVID-19 during the reporting period.

Analysis

In this reporting period each children's home have had visits undertaken in accordance with Regulation 44 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2015 and in line with business continuity arrangements due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The reports have been written and distributed to Ofsted, the Responsible Individual, Service Manager responsible for the homes and the Managers of the home within a given timescale.

Learning from recommendations is shared within individual homes and across all four homes. Managers, and the staff teams have used the recommendations made to assist them to provide standards of care which support young people to reach their true potential. In total there were 22 recommendations made by the Regulation 44 visitors.

Together for Children Sunderland's homes are rated Good to Outstanding by Ofsted. Ofsted inspections have not been undertaken during this reporting period as a result of COVID-19 but Regulation 44 visits have continued and the information from these visits show staff are seeking to provide stability and safety for the children and young people living with them.

All homes continue to show their commitment to providing the best possible care for vulnerable children and young people. The managers of the homes accept and act upon the recommendations made in the Regulation 44 monthly reports and are committed along with their staff teams to improving the standards of care they provide for children and young people. The homes are scored by the Managers in their monthly Regulation 45 reports using the Signs of Success model and by the Regulation 44 visitors in their reports using the scale of 0-10, with 10 being the highest possible score and 0 the lowest. This is in terms of the standards of care delivered by the home. Over the reporting period the scoring of the Regulation 44 visitors has only varied by 1 from that of the managers scores for each home in their Regulation 45 report, indicating the managers of the homes self-assessment of the services they are providing are realistic. Children and young people receive a letter from the visitor after each Regulation 44 visit thanking them for participating and to let them know the visitor's views about the standards of care they receive.

Service Review & Development

The annual programme of themed audits continues to be in place. A representative from the Regulation 44 visitors has continued to attend quarterly residential management meetings to share learning and to hear feedback with regards to the Regulation 44 visits.

We have introduced a read receipt process following a notification from Ofsted to inform us that they had not received 4 months of Regulation 44 visitor reports from Sunderland. It was evidenced that the reports were sent to Ofsted however this highlighted an internal process for Ofsted which they are responding into.

In the coming months as part of our roadmap, we will aim to increase the length of the Regulation 44 visit whilst seeking to reintroduce rotating the Regulation 44 visitor every 6 months.

In the coming months managerial responsibility will also move to the newly appointed IRO manager who is due to take up their position on 1 July 2021.

Keith Munro

Reviewing & Designated Officer

Jackie Amos

Reviewing & Designated Officer

Danielle Rose

Reviewing & Designated Officer

26th May 2021

TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

DATE:	28 June 2021
REPORT AUTHOR:	Linda Mason HEAD TEACHER Virtual School
SUBJECT:	Head Teacher's Report
PURPOSE:	FOR INFORMATION

1. SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda item is to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with updated information about cared for children since the last report in January 2021.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Board is requested to receive the report for information

3. Context - Cohort and Characteristics

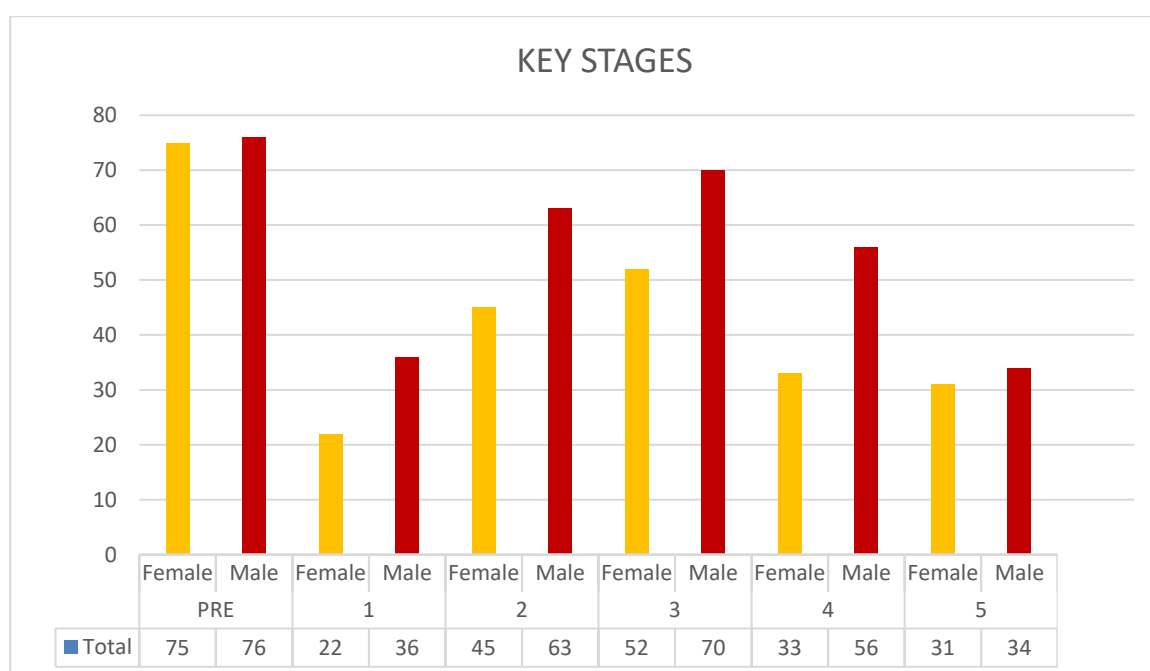
Currently as of 20 June 2021 (report written) we have 593 Cared for Children a reduction of 22 compared to 625 Cared for Children in April 2021.

Historical cohorts (when report written)

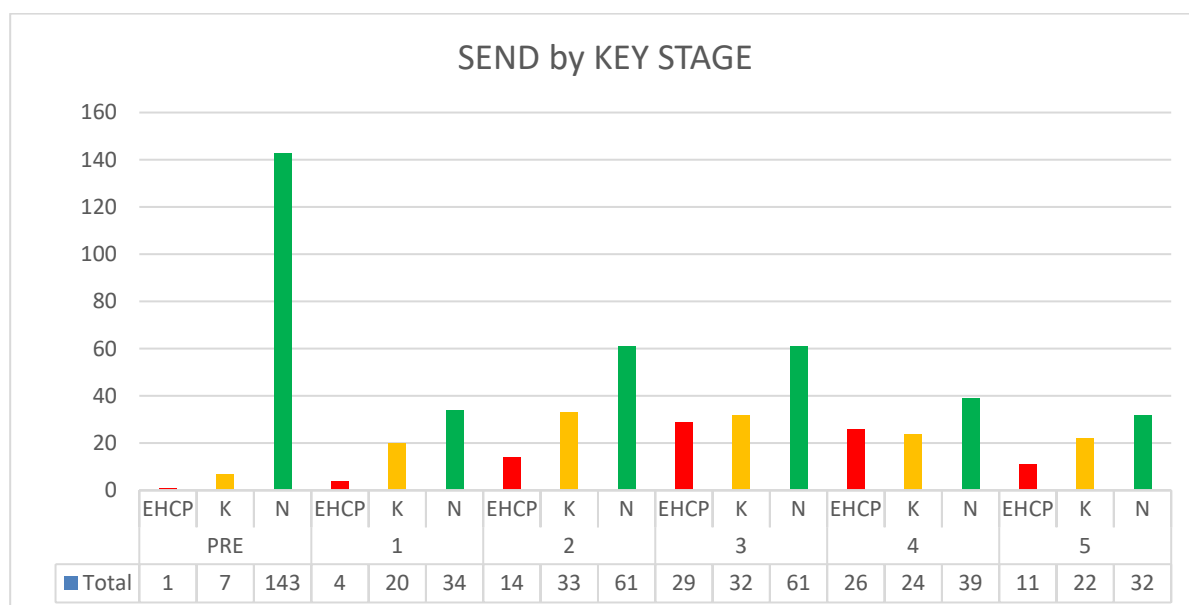
June	2021	593
April	2021	625
January	2021	633
October	2020	622
July	2020	578

3.1 COHORT

Source Virtual School Data 20 June 2021
Cohort Table by Key Stages



3.2 SEND



The Sunderland SEND cared for children school age population (Reception – Yr13) in total is 223 (SEND Support + EHCP).

- 42.5% of the cared for school aged population have an identified SEND.
- 138 or 26.5% receive SEND support in school with some support of external agencies. 64% male, 36% female
- 85 or 16.3% receive more intensive support due to having an EHCP. 79% are male 21% female
- 66 or 78% of those with an EHCP attend specialist educational provision in Sunderland and out of area.
- 27 or 32% with an EHCP are educated in specialist provision out of the area
- 6 or 7% with an EHCP are educated in schools with an ARP
- 2 or 2% with an EHCP are educated in Alternative Provision
- Compared with national data (LAIT 2019) we do not have as many cared for children with EHCPs as other similar authorities. However, our SEND support (K) is higher than the national figure. The reason behind these figures is currently being explored with schools and the SEND Service.
- Primary Need for those identified as in need of SEND support (national data in brackets):

SEMH	32%	(47%)
MLD	25%	(20%)
Communication and Interaction (ASD)	5%	(12%)
- Primary Need for those with an EHCP (national data in brackets);

SEMH	49%	(40%)
Communication and Interaction (ASD)	14%	(12%)
Communication and Interaction	18%	(10%)

The number of EHCP for cared for children is less than that nationally. An exploration of those currently receiving SEN support will take place to ensure that a move to an EHCP assessment is being considered where appropriate. This will be done in discussion with schools and when the EPEP is being completed. The EPEP meeting will be aligned to SEN Support Plan and EHCP reviews as much as possible to ensure consistency and to reduce the need for separate meetings but also ensuring compliance with statutory timeframes.

Further work with schools will focus on the gender difference and timeliness of SEND identification and assessment and this will be done directly with and through training of DTs and SENCOs.

Predominantly boys are more likely to have an EHCP than girls, we need to consider if girls needs are being fully met. SEND identification and EHCPs tend to increase towards the later stages of KS2 and KS3. Work is currently being done to determine how this correlates with when a child becomes cared for and the period leading up to this decision i.e. when a child may have been a child in need (CIN) or had a child protection plan (CP) and whether their SEND needs were identified during this period.

3.3 Ethnicity (current)

ETHNICITY	NUMBER	%
Asian Or Asian British Any Other Asian	3	0.5
Asian Or Asian British Bangladeshi	3	0.5
Black Or Black British African	4	0.7
Black Or Black British Any Other Black	3	0.5
Gypsy/Roma	3	0.5
Mixed Any Other Mixed Background (White & Any Other)	10	1.7
Mixed White & Asian	8	1.4
Mixed White & Black African	3	0.5
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	1	0.2
Other Ethnic Group - Other	6	1
White Any Other White Background	6	1
White British	543	91.5
TOTAL	593	

Nationally the figure is 74% white and 7% Black or Black British. The remaining categories are similar to Sunderland. This data reflects that of Sunderland's population demographic where 93.6% are White British.

4 Progress and Achievement

There will be no nationally reported data for any of the key stages in 2021. The Virtual School will collate the outcomes (teacher assessment) for Key Stage 4 once published.

Progress and achievement at individual child level is monitored termly through the EPEP.

5 Attendance and Absence monitoring

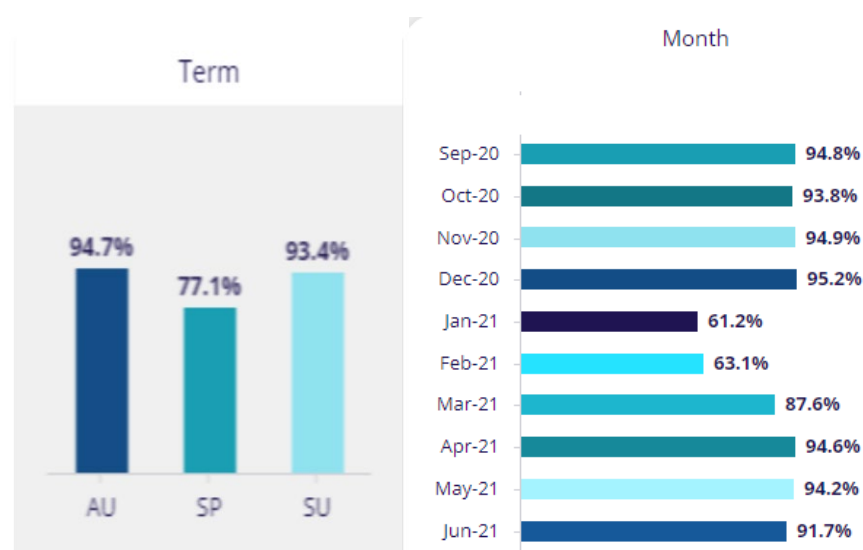
Autumn Term 2020	ACTUAL	94.9%
------------------	--------	-------

Spring Term 2021 up to March 4 th 2021		
attendance	60.9%	(40% nationally all SW)
authorised absence	38.4%	remote learning
pupils full time	57%	230
pupils fully remote learning	24%	101 of cohort (416)
blended learning	21%	85

Spring Term 2021 March 8 th up to 23rd March 2021		
Primary	99% returned to school	93% national
Secondary	96% returned to school	87% national
Current attendance overall	93.2% actual	90% national

SPRING TERM 2021	ACTUAL	77.1%
Please note this is the overall attendance figure which takes account of lockdown 3 attendance and authorised absence (remote and blended learning) during this period.		

WELFARE CALL ATTENDANCE DATA COLLECTION 2020/2021



The Virtual School monitors attendance daily through Welfare Call and contacts carers to ensure attendance at school is a key priority if concerns arise. Analysis of the detail behind the data occurs termly and virtual school staff work closely with schools, carers and social workers to ensure attendance is improved.

6 Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions

Spring Term 2021			
Permanent Exclusions	0	0	0
Fixed Term (Suspensions)	27	51.5 days	20 children

5 Cared for Children received more than 1 exclusion

2 are in residential homes

17/27 have had more than 3 placements

14/27 in area

4 EHCP (specialist provision)

2 SEND Support

9/27 are currently out of the area

1 EHCP (specialist provision)

3 SEND Support (2 EHCP assessment current)

The Virtual School works closely with schools, carers and social workers when suspensions occur to understand the antecedents and to ensure appropriate support and plans are put in place to prevent further suspensions. This includes the use of the SEND ranges to ensure needs are identified and resources are put in place, but also referrals to other agencies are aligned such as CYPS, CAMHS for example. The EPEP should include targets related to any social and emotional or mental health needs.

7 EPEPS

Phase	Total CfC	Statutory Compliance (within 6 months)	Green	Amber
Statutory	417	99%	362	60
Post 16	71	99%	28	0
Early Years	52	77%	32	8

Quality assurance has been a key area of focus this year. Each section of the EPEP is assessed and this is fed back to schools using a RAG rating. If there are concerns about the quality of the EPEP a meeting is held to consider how it can be improved. Virtual School staff are also involved in moderation exercises to ensure a consistency of judgements. This will be expanded in future training with Designated Teachers.

8 CURRENT COHORT INFORMATION – OFSTED CATEGORY

CATEGORY	TOTAL E Y - KS5	%	PRE	PRE %	Primary	Primary %	Secondary	Secondary %	KS5	KS5%
Outstanding	70	14.3	14	26	20	10.2	29	14	7	2
Good	322	66	39	72.2	163	83.2	102	50	18	52
Requires Improvement	63	13	0	0	10	5	43	21	10	29
Inadequate	35	7	1	1.9	3	1.5	31	15	0	0

80.3% of cared for children were in good or outstanding schools.

As stated in previous Board reports we do not automatically remove a cared for child from a school who goes in to a Requires Improvement or Inadequate category. The Virtual School does initially check the OFSTED report to see what is said about the performance of vulnerable children and what is reported in the “Behaviour and Attitudes” and “Personal Development” sections. Another check is how closely the curriculum matches the needs of the school population “that it is ambitious and designed to give all learners, particularly the most disadvantaged the knowledge to succeed in life”.

If a child is seeking admission to school, we fully expect that the child would be admitted to a good or outstanding school. The EPEP is also used to monitor progress and achievement on a termly basis.

9 PARTNERSHIP WORKING

To be an effective Virtual School partnership work is essential. The school has ensured membership of key groups which include;

- Secondary HT Primary HT Special School HT
- Behaviour and Attendance Partnerships Primary and Secondary
- Vulnerable Pupils Panel External Placements Panel
- SEND Panel Children with Complex Needs
- Corporate Parenting Board Social Care Team meetings
- North East Virtual School Head Teachers (Chair)
- National Association of Virtual Schools (Board Member)
- Previously Looked After Forum

10 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Pupil Premium Grant will be fully utilised in support of improving educational outcomes as expected by the DFE Grant conditions. The local authority receives £2345 per cared for child. Schools receive £1800 per cared for child annually (paid termly to schools) and the Virtual School retain £445 per child. School directly receive £2345 per previously cared for child (adopted, Special Guardianship Order and Child Arrangement Order) if schools are aware and have included the child on their January Census returns.

Centrally retained funding is used for:

Tutors	Alternative Provision	On-line learning
121 tuition	Transport	Premises
Salary Costs		
Welfare Call (attendance, exclusions, Analytics and EPEP)		
Education Psychology reports		

11 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

12 CONTACT

Name: Linda Mason
Position: Head Teacher Virtual School
Email: linda.mason@togetherforchildren.org.uk
Tel: 0191 5615696 07900 350502