

Children first and at the heart of all we do

DUDLEY CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SELF-EVALUATION | 14 June 2022



Working as One Council in
the historic capital of the Black Country



Children first and at the heart of all we do

‘We want Dudley to be a wonderful place for children and young people to grow up, where they will be happy, healthy, safe, and enjoy a good inclusive education’



Welcome and thank you for taking the time to consider our self-evaluation. This is our current analysis of the quality and impact of the support provided for children, young people and their families in Dudley.

Our report provides an overview of our understanding of our strengths, clear identification of where we still need to improve, and action we are taking together to improve life chances for children and young people in Dudley.

Children, young people, and their families are part of our community and Dudley’s corporate priorities are important for them as they are for all residents. We will work together as a whole service within the directorate and as part of Dudley’s one council approach to improve outcomes. It is in this context that Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council has adopted Child Friendly Dudley.

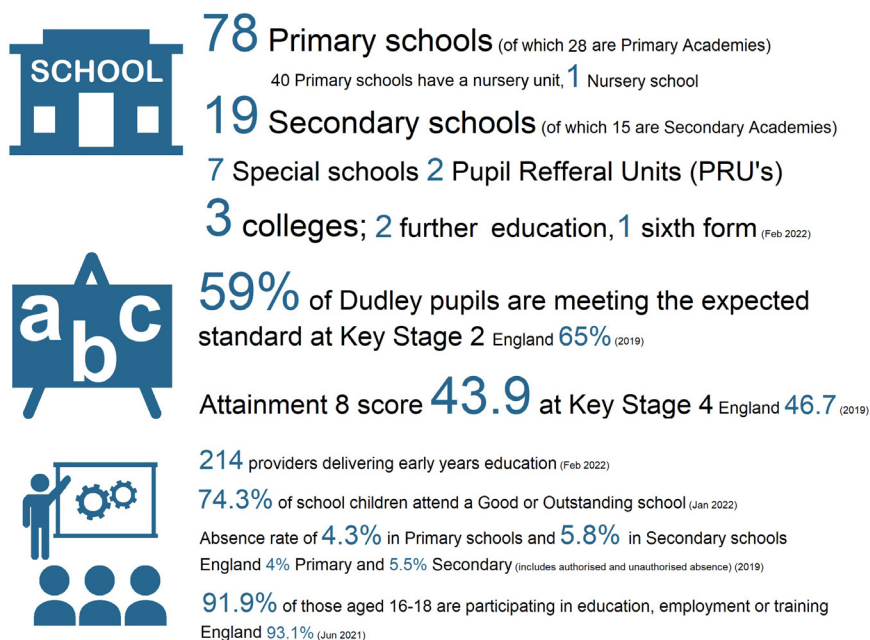


Children in numbers

Population Aged 0-18 73,171 (2020)



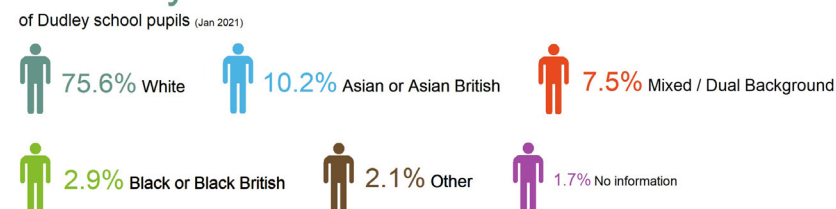
Education



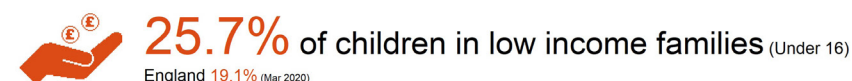
Social Care

85.2 children looked after by the local authority per 10,000 under 18 (Mar 2022)
Statistical neighbour **83.5** per 10,000 under 18 (Mar 2021)

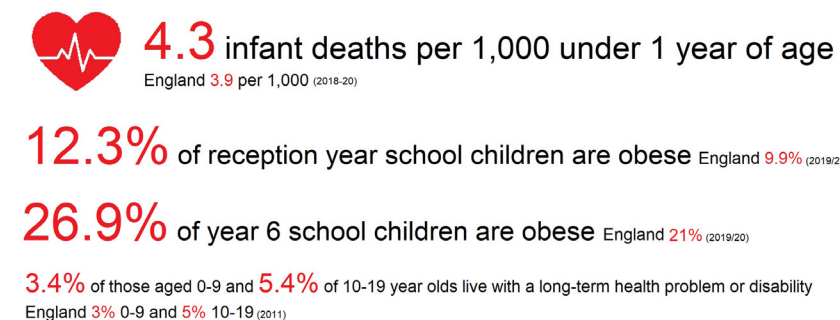
Ethnicity



Income Deprivation



Health



COVID JOURNEY

Notwithstanding practice challenge for the authority at the start of the pandemic, the response across children's services was positive.

Children were seen and actions taken to improve the lives of children. Partnerships with schools were particularly important and supported high levels of attendance of vulnerable children including those with additional needs. Early Help services saw an increase in demand and responded effectively in supporting children and families who were adversely affected during lockdown

What we did

- Virtual conferences – we were able to move our CP conferences on line quickly, ensuring no delay in the planning for children
- RAG rating through management oversight to set out contact arrangements for children including face to face
- Safe spaces if children needed to be looked after
- The Virtual School put good systems in place quickly to ensure effective support to children
- Successful move to on line foster carer support groups and seamless delivery of training
- Practical support to carers with PPE
- Good links made to support and guidance through universal services

Working with children

- We learned from the roll out of IT devices and have continued this in recovery phase; we have targetted accelerated learning for identified young people through virtual school
- Use of outdoor space in meeting children 'safe space walks'
- A care experienced young person told us that WattsApp contact with young person advisor made their experience more 'real time' and meaningful
- During the pandemic, collaborative working between children's services and schools has resulted in good attendance at education by vulnerable children
- A number of young people shared with their IRO that they felt more able to contribute to a virtual review

Impact for families

- We sought early feedback from families in our move to virtual conferences (June 20) and used this to shape service
- Families described 'feeling less intimidated' virtually; one mother suffered with anxiety and felt more able to contribute virtually; we have moved to a more hybrid arrangement as we come out of pandemic
- Some parents told us they felt less involved in the planning during CP Conferences held on line; we have progressed a hybrid approach through our Family Centres to support these families more quickly
- Head teacher noted that the conference chair 'constantly placed the YP's thoughts and feeling at the centre'

THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN WHO NEED HELP AND PROTECTION

1169



Children supported in Early Help

78

Care applications
in 2020/21
Reduced – from
157 in 2018/19



1924

Children in Need; we are focussing on the length of time with a CiN plan and now have 31% of children at 2 yrs, reducing from 39% in previous reporting year

317



Children with a plan of protection – this is a 19% reduction from March 2020

98%

of children are offered a return home interview, although not all take this up (74.6% in 72 hours)

101

children with Families come First (Jan – April 2022); one child has needed to become looked after



How we capture and use the voice and influence of young people and families?

Families have said to us that it was 'good to know senior managers were observing the meetings as they would then know what can be done differently or better' (Practice Week observations)

Feedback from parent explains she was frustrated at not receiving timely minutes or plans, but she also considered the social worker to be 'respectful. [We are] listened and supported'. Timely distribution of information is essential in our drive towards best practice and should be a tangible feature of respectful work with families.

"For me & K we feel more relaxed at home , we work together better as parents, the behaviours still happen but we now deal with it differently". " I think Edge of care is a fantastic concept, the way its implemented is good , the approach is good, it aint like you're being judged"

Families come First feedback – to assist our service development

Mother on the impact of the multi agency plan of protection:

" People are speaking to her at school and she can see I am getting the help and people are talking to me.....now understands the situation with E more and why he is not living with us.....[the work] is helping us all"

'I haven't been to a youth club before, it was good' (*young person*), 'if we have more stuff like this, I will definitely behave' (*young person*) and 'he has been talking about the music session all week' (*mother*).

DEx / youth service group work trial which has shaped our future plans

THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN WHO NEED HELP AND PROTECTION – IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO NEEDS AND APPROPRIATE THRESHOLDS



What do we know about the quality and impact of practice?



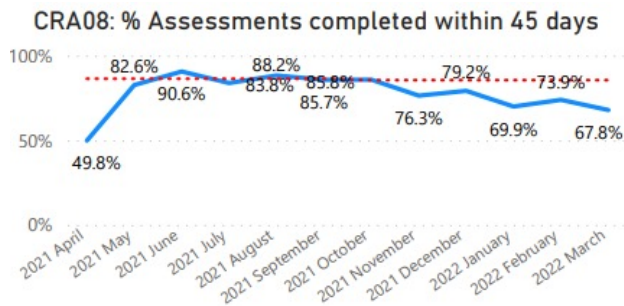
- We have re-established a timely response to contacts in our MASH, which is key in enabling effective identification of risk and need. There is evidence of good management oversight in decision making
- Our threshold guidance has been refreshed and supported the launch of our on line portals (September 2021) for MASH and for Early Help, which have been well received by partners
- We have seen an increase in referrals through to Children's social care in the first three months of 2022, which is an area of challenge when a larger cohort of our children are found not to be in need at the end of an assessment. Re-referral activity can be variable but ChAT identifies less than 20%
- We have established with partners a more focussed daily triage around domestic abuse, which supports front line agencies to address need rather than 'send info in'; this is underpinned by our embedded arrangements for Op Encompass
- Launch of our Early Help Strategy (March 2022) supports local access to early intervention and assists partners in identifying 'right time, right approach' for families

THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN WHO NEED HELP AND PROTECTION



How do we know it?

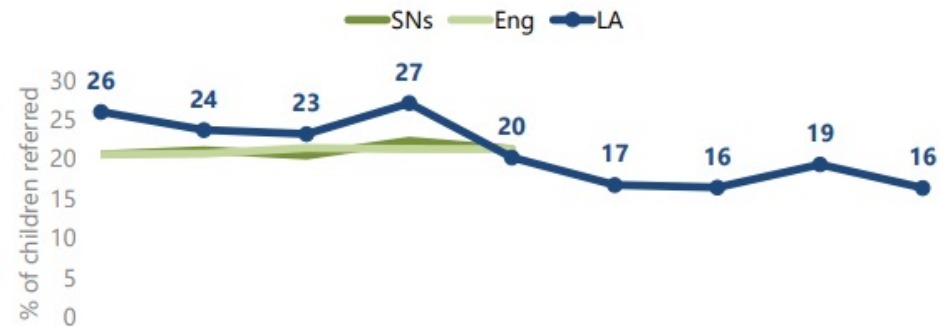
- Worcestershire Children First led a diagnostic across the Front Door (October 21) and found in audit 91% good decision making; they also identified highly positive workforce in the MASH
- Timely contact decision - March '22 at 85%
- Effective EH support where fewer children step up into social care
- Re-referral activity at 12 months has been reduced
- Assessment timeliness -average days to completion 44.5 days (Jan – March '22)
- 68% of assessment were completed in a timely manner as at end March '22



EH02: Number of closed cases where Family Centres have recommended Step Up to Children's Social Care



12 month re-referral activity (ChAT April 22)



THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN WHO NEED HELP AND PROTECTION – ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING



What do we know about the quality and impact of practice?

- We have reshaped our service so that assessments are undertaken by the appropriate service (to reduce additional transfers for children) – including DEx (our exploitation team) and Families come First (edge of care) and directly to children in care teams for our unaccompanied children
- Assessments are not yet consistently completed in a timely manner for all children
- The most likely outcome of an assessment is that children need no further intervention, which asks us to consider why this intensive intervention was helpful or relevant – maybe our coding too....less than 1% are referred to other agencies
- We have rolled out Assessment and Analysis training across our front line practitioners and this has been completed by 71 staff in frontline teams in the past year
- We undertook a review of our pre-birth planning Sept 21. We have good evidence of impact of pre birth assessments in timely decisions for infants; we have established more rigorous commitment to the multi agency Unborn Baby Network
- In January 2022, our Children with Disabilities team moved to children's services from Adult social care; this reflects the commitment to children at the heart of what we do. We have completed a wide ranging audit (25% all children) to test out consistency and quality of practice and are recruiting a dedicated manager.
- For our children in need, we have regularly updated assessments and contemporary plans. Neglect continues to be the most significant feature for these children and as with other areas of practice, we have some good examples but the quality is inconsistent and tendency to be process led.
- Established Families come First in Jan '22- experienced lead seconded from Worcestershire – focus on multi disciplinary approach to edge of care support



What do we know about the quality and impact of practice?

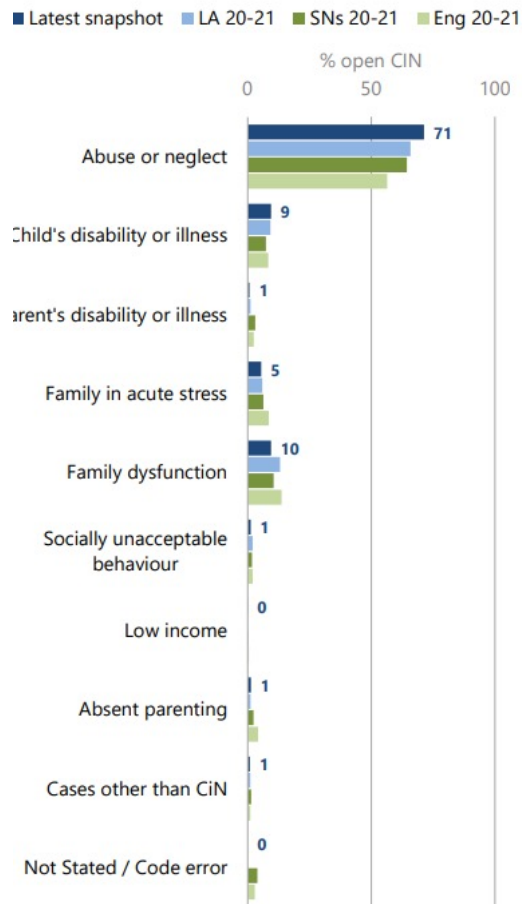


- 14 children have been subject to a plan of protection for more than 2 years (4.4%); children are unlikely to be subject to a plan of protection for more than 18 months
- We have identified some evidence of CP plans that may not have been necessary
 - cohort ending at 3 months; rate of CPP plans has stabilised and in line with SN's (46:10,000)
- We have sustained our visiting progress for children subject to CP Plan (March '22 80% of our children seen within the 10 days we set out), although this is not yet consistently good enough
- Our core groups are increasingly evident (85% upto date core group as at March '22)
- Although we have made progress in achieving better plans for children, there remains an inconsistency and some continue to be insufficient.
- Family Group Conference – a strong fit with our practice model 'working with and not doing to'; Awareness training sessions rolled out Autumn 2021; Restorative Practice Workshops in place; inclusion in permanency planning and in Legal Gateway all support appropriate curiosity for family led solutions.
- We have led the implementation of 'My Safety Plan' where exploitation is the key feature in risk for a young person; June '21 saw the launch of Exploitation Strategy through DSPP, with over 120 professionals in attendance
- We have been able to test out a pilot for group work alongside youth services and YOT for young people vulnerable to exploitation, which was well received by young people and their families



How do we know it?

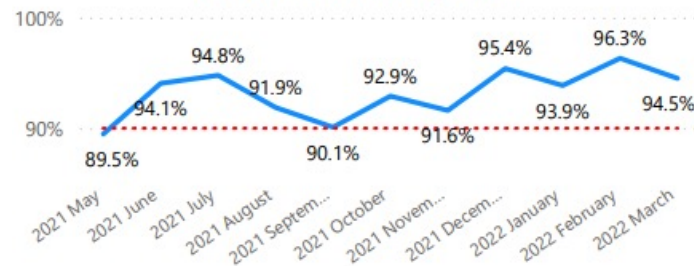
Comparing primary need of open CIN



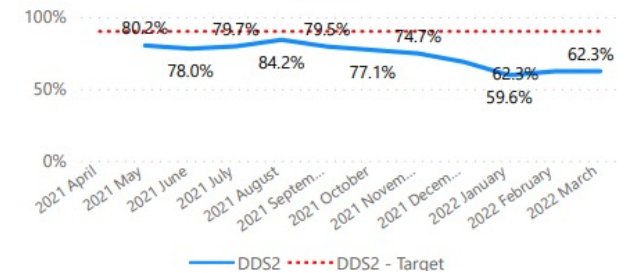
- South Tyneside judged the work with unborn babies and permanence planning to be 'effective, timely and child focussed'
- Not all plans are shaped to deliver impact (audit)
- Quality of plans and their impact 'gave the appearance of not being working tools but rather, a process that must be completed' (CIN Audit)
- CDT audit findings (April '22) identified the need for greater clarity in children in need plans rather than same approach for provision of - for example - direct payments

Child in need planning – timeliness in the delivery

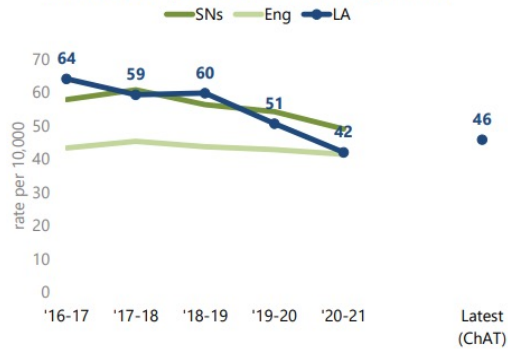
CIN04: % CIN whose plan has been updated in the last 6 months (excluding DDS)



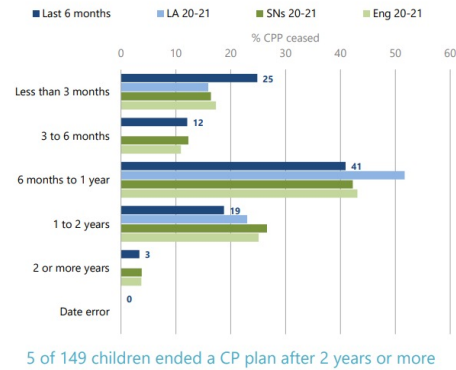
DDS2: % of children with a disability with an up to date CIN plan



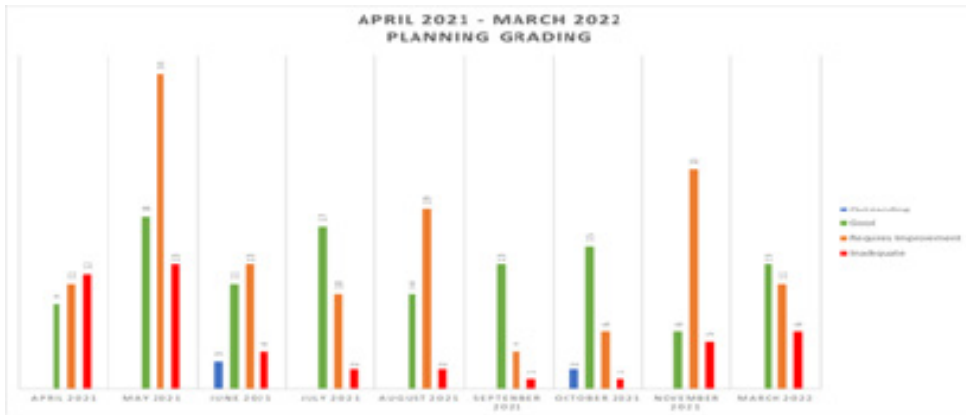
Rate of CPP per 10,000 children aged 0-17



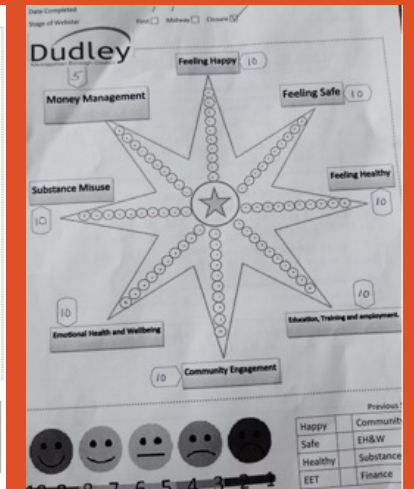
Comparing plan durations for CPP ended



APRIL 2021 - MARCH 2022 PLANNING GRADING



Inclusion of Webstar from FcF





What are we going to do over the next 6 months to maintain and improve practice?

- DSPP Sub Group - neglect - embedding Graded Care Profile tool - roll out of training targeting frontline staff in assessment and across safeguarding and support.
- Move to Integrated Front Door - partner and staff stakeholder events held (March and April '22); pilots to test roles in Front Door and step up/ down integration May - Aug 22
- Working with CP chairs to ensure timely conclusion on the child's records of their CP plans (impact on visiting arrangements)
- DCS assurance clinic established Jan 22
- Partner Attendance - and contribution to - conferences and core groups - manual count at present
- Dashboard to support manager and staff around exploitation; facilitate data analysis through sub group DSPP
- Recruitment of Designated Social Care Officer to support quality of EHCP assessment and plans (April 22)
- Exploration of Family Safeguarding Model
- Refresh of our joint housing protocol for 16 & 17 year old young people
- Reviewing the structure of the CDT service, with recruitment of dedicated manager



THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

597 children are in our care; 24 children fewer than a year ago (end March 21 and 22)

A year ago, the rate of children leaving our care was 14.5 and now it is 22 – we have made good inroads in securing permanency for our children

More children in our care have upto date health assessments – now in place for

95.6%

92.3%

of children in our care participated in their reviews (21-22) and is a slight increase on the previous year at 91.8%; we did significantly reduce 'blank' reporting from 55 children to 11

More children are achieving permanence and leaving care an almost **300%** increase in adoption (8 in previous year; 23 in this year) and with children secured through SGO (7 in previous year, 28 in this reporting year)

96% of our school aged children have their PEP with young people beginning to chair

We have supported **6** children in foster for adoption care this year (3 new arrangements)

THE EXPERIENCES AND PROGRESS OF CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

Feedback from our care experienced young people showed the barriers to apprenticeships without Maths and English qualifications....we have developed 6 Apprenticeships, ringfenced to Dudley care leavers, that also access Functional Skills Level 2 for Maths and English.

Our foster carer wanted the Service Manager to know that the social worker had a real impact; “ does struggle to trust people, [SW] always put him at ease and understands their extra needs. I would just like [SW] to be acknowledged for all the hard work and support that she puts into each person”

Our foster carer considered the child’s social worker to be ‘amazing....100% confidence they will get things done’ . To say what we mean and to do what we say.

In relation to her Young Person’s Advisor ‘ the question is, what hasn’t she done for me?’ – helped set up her first flat, developed her independence skills, supported improving her parenting skills and explored her aspiration – one of the ‘most positive and consistent people in my life’

Presenting at the Corporate Parenting Board working group, a care experienced young person shared their experience of moving into their flat – she used her week’s electricity allowance overnight with storage heaters..... Housing have committed to replacing old heating systems before tenancies for our young people – and within 5 weeks, had done so for another 5 young people

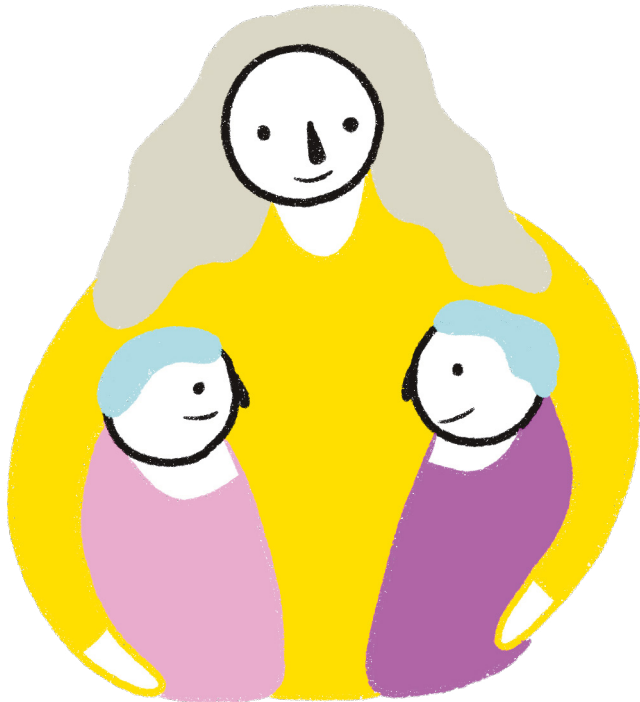
A young person text their social worker in readiness for moving on “Firstly this is my goodbye....before coming to the placement I never thought I’d come this far, I never thought that I would actually care.....I want to say a massive thank- you for not giving up on me and helping me get to where I am today...” (excerpt). The importance of consistency of the relationship

...I thought you should know that [SW] has been a massive help to our family.....she keeps in touch with us and always keeps us updated...” a parent who has two children in our care; it helps us understand that role that families continue to play in the lives of their children.

“When hope was all but lost you rose like a shining star...because of you and your focussed and unfaltering work we are building a fantastic future together, as both a family and individuals...” A family card for their social worker progressing reunification, and which sets out the impact of relational social work



What do we know about the quality and impact of practice?



- Strong development of permanence for our children – Adoption, SGO arrangements and long term matching with foster carers. Permanency and Fostering Advisors (2 posts established and recruited to)
- Strong practice in setting permanence plan by child’s second review; Performance for Permanence panel established and has been effective in identifying practice learning through use of performance information
- We have brought ‘in house’ the arrangements for kinship assessments – a significant improvement in quality and timeliness including for SGO assessments, viabilities and connected carer arrangement
- Reducing impact of change of social worker – children now progress directly to CiC teams for relinquished babies, non agency adoption, unaccompanied migrant children rather than through assessment service or safeguarding and support
- Inclusion in the Black Country Family Drug and Alcohol court
- We have screened 17 families for progression to FDAC in this year, with 3 accepted on the trial for change. Outcomes for FDAC are expected to be sooner than our current proceedings (one completed at 35 weeks; the remaining scheduled for 41 and 32 weeks)
- Since January 2022 we have cared for 4 young people in unregulated placements for short periods of time; this has been exacerbated by the lack of available resource for children with complex needs. We have worked closely with HMI throughout these arrangements



- We have strong relationships with health for annual health assessment (96% March '22) and have made good progress on dental checks (73% March 22); our arrangements as children become looked after (IHA) is more variable and is an area of focus
- Our use of pathway plans from 16 yrs is less effective and there has been an over reliance on continuation of a child's looked after plan
- We have a strong commitment from the Council in supporting our care experienced young adults including Council Tax exemption and a commitment from housing to install efficient heating with their tenancy
- We have developed an Apprenticeship offer as part of our Corporate Parenting oversight; the initial cohort has been for 6 Apprentices who have been additionally supported by a participation lead
- We have sustained good contact with our care experienced young people (95% within the last 8 weeks)
- For our 19-21 year old care experienced young people, just over half are in education, employment or training, with 22 of these currently at University.
- Strong completion of personal education plans (96%), with young people involved in chairing the meeting. We are seeing an increase in KS 4 outcomes for our children (37% securing grade 4 + in both English and Maths)
- Our care experienced young people have priority status with housing



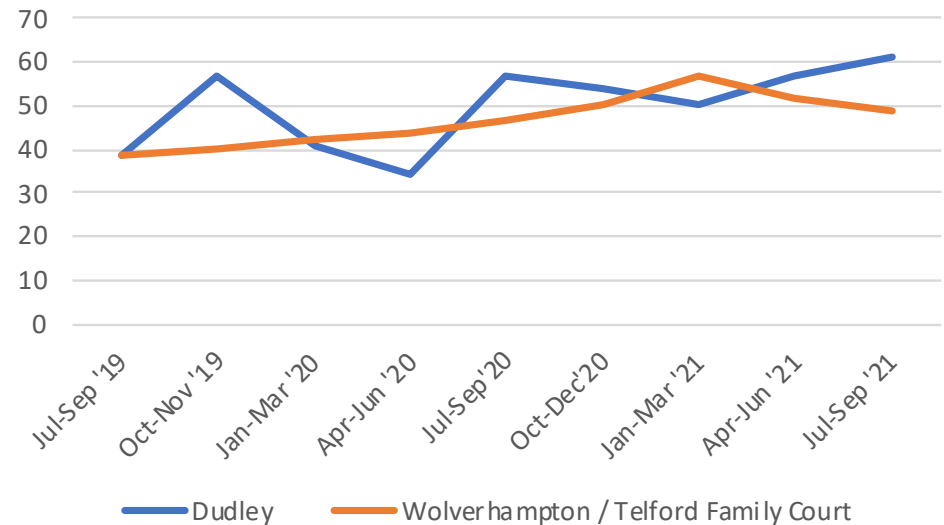
How do we know it?

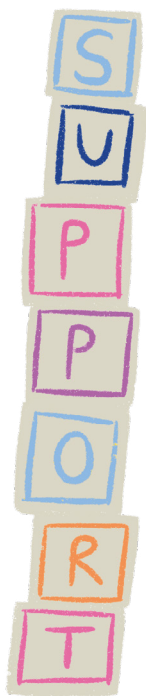
- For care proceedings, the average time to completion of proceedings is 62 weeks (full year info 2021/22) with 17% of matters concluding within 26 weeks
- Our SLIP feedback on our Legal Gateway Panel indicated the ask of social workers and team managers could be sharper – to be clearer with the plan rather than seek case management

CLA04: CLA with a Plan for Permanence at second review



Duration of proceedings by quarter





- June – Aug 2021 – analysis of the participation of the children and young people in 242 in care reviews supported more streamlined arrangement through the IRO's to gather their views
- We have supported 6 young children in foster for adoption arrangements this year
- In this reporting year, 23 children achieved permanence through adoption and a further 28 with a Special Guardian, 33 children have been rehabilitated fully with their family and their care order discharged
- SLIP found the quality and timeliness of viability and kinship assessments 'significantly improved' with the service now in house, and is seen in the greater confidence of the Courts

Securing permanence for our children looked after



CLA20: % CLA aged 16 and over whose pathway plan has been updated in the last 6 months





What are we going to do over the next 6 months to maintain and improve practice?

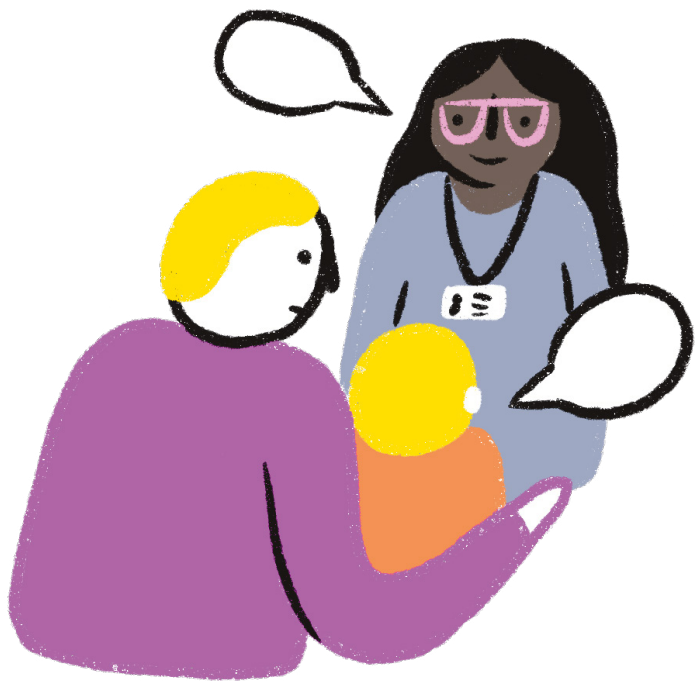


- Testing out a 'becoming looked after' panel to bring further rigour to concurrent planning and exit strategies for children
- Closure of two residential homes, which were not delivering the necessary care for our children
- Support and intervention with IRO team to be mindful of role of Pathway Plan (and needs assessment at 15 yrs 9 months)
- Actively utilising practice audit reviews and practice observations as an opportunity to contact children, young people and their families for feedback and to shape the service
- Our Virtual School works in close collaboration with Connexions to enable all Post 16 children in our care to access EET. We have 0 young people in Yr 12 who are NEET this year. In recognising the importance of employment, we support our young people with purchasing interview clothes and transport costs for attending.
- Virtual school is developing additional approaches to involvement of younger children in their PEP
- We have progressed our partnership with Juniper Training Provider (The Pathways Programme) to drive re-engagement and nurturing provision for our more vulnerable young people
- To continue with the Big Fostering Partnership to support children stepping down from residential care

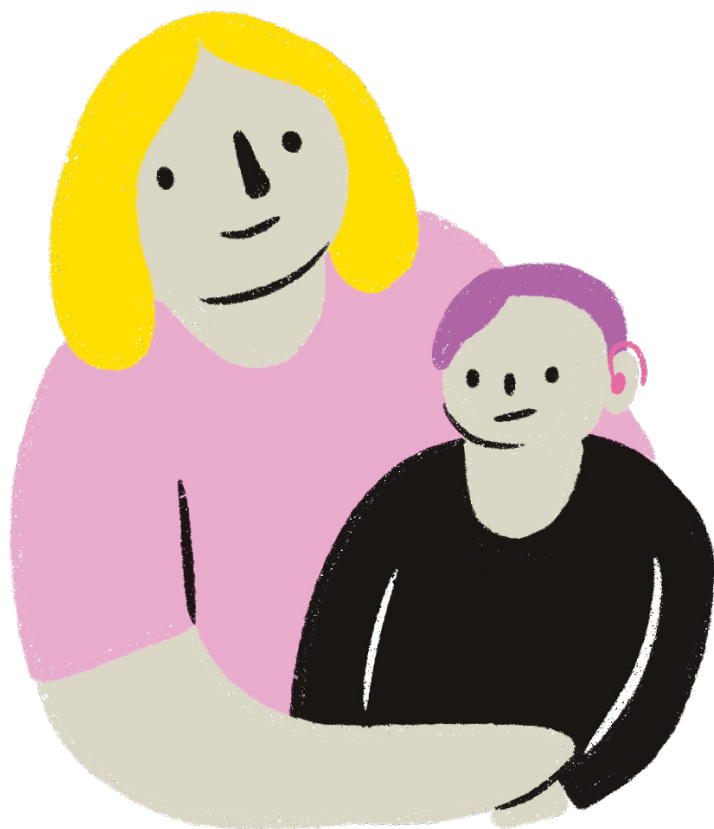
THE IMPACT OF LEADER ON SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



What do we know about the quality and impact of practice?



- Commitment to strengthening leadership presence and impact
 - Permanent appointment to leadership roles
 - Increase in service manager role to address span of control and support accountability
 - Bringing CDT into children's services, and establishing Head of Service role
 - Swift action to cover unanticipated gaps
- There is good visibility of the senior leadership team with monthly DCS and Service Director briefings and questions for all staff, alongside Dudley Dialogue and refreshed induction arrangements
- The DCS Assurance Clinic is now established and provides a good line of sight to front line practice and impact with families
- The Senior Leadership team have been leading practice observations as a central element of each Practice Week
- We ensured that the social work health check was completed and aligned with the Authority's approach to learning from staff



- The commitment to staffing recruitment and retention, including the use of two ‘managed teams’ for a defined period and the introduction of Market Forces Supplement, is evident in the reducing average caseloads
- The commitment to ‘growing our own’ social workers is well received; alongside the continuation of our relationship with Frontline, we have secured an additional 12 ASYE to start later this summer, including Frontline and Step up this will be 22 ASYE. We have maintained the high quality support and development for staff as they begin their social work career.
- Key decisions are not consistently captured for all children and at times, the accountability not always clear
- Our Quality Assurance Framework is embedded and is driving practice leadership
- Our DSPP now includes an Independent Children’s Scrutineer, whose role is bringing appropriate challenge to the partnership. We have established a programme of multi agency audit through DSPP, and are undertaking a ‘True for us?’ learning exercise using the Solihull JTAI findings
- Taken the opportunity to refresh our Dudley Children’s Improvement Partnership setting the clear focus for 2022 – 23 across 5 priorities (Restorative Practice Model; Whole System; Learning Organisation; Partnership; Workforce)



How do we know it?



- Our SLIP colleagues have set out that the QA framework is ‘robust, proportionate and is better engaging the practice leadership team’ (March 2022)
- South Tyneside have delivered feedback that our Senior Management Team were seen as ‘present, accessible and setting the direction of travel’ (March 2022)
- Our April 2022 audit of Children in Need identified variability in capturing decisions for children, finding it to be ‘generally good where it is evidenced, but across the sample there was too much variation in frequency and quality’
- Excellent feedback (and results!) at Compass Job Fair
- “ I can see myself working at Dudley, there’s something special about your all, and I believe that’s why there was so much interest at the fair”
- “...it made it a clear yes – that’s the team I want to be with. The passion came through and really solidified it for me”

WF02: Average caseload per SW





What are we going to do over the next 6 months to maintain and improve practice?



- Refreshed our supervision document to support more effective recording- released April 2022
- We are investing in Practice Development Supervisor Programme and Supervising the Supervisor training
- to build on the 5 day programme Reflective Supervision for Supervisors
- We are using the next phase of our work with South Tyneside SLIP to strengthen our focus on the front line manager role
- As part of DSPP, we are participating in the 'True for us?' benchmarking against the Solihull JTAI findings
- Provision of Market Forces Supplement for key front line practitioner roles to support retention
- Embedding the role of Practice Educator across teams to support our student offer
- Active access to and support of national development programme including Headline
- Formal exploration of the Family Safeguarding model is underway, noting the significant impact evident with colleague authorities
- Ensured continued focus and support with the Lead Member across the Local Authority, including release of resources for dedicated improvement programme
- Set next phase of programme of work with our SLIP; focus on impact of first line managers and operational oversight roles (eg Court Progression Manager), including use of performance information
- Partnership programme of work led by public health focussing on neglect, impact of key tools (Graded Care Profile) and effectiveness in achieving change

KEY CONTACTS PAGE

Dr Catherine Driscoll • Director of Children's Services

catherine.driscoll@dudley.gov.uk

Helen Ellis • Service Director - Early Help/Schools and SEND

helen.ellis@dudley.gov.uk

Andrea Stone • Service Director of Children's Social Care

andrea.stone@dudley.gov.uk

Karen Graham • Matrix - Interim Service Director of Children's Social Care

karen.graham@dudley.gov.uk