

Northumberland

Children and Young People's Safeguarding Annual Report 2020/21



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Foreword

Every year we create a Report for the organisations that work with children and young people to tell communities in Northumberland what we have done to keep you safe.

This year we have written a version for children and young people too.

This is our report for the year between September 2020 and August 2021.

In the middle of the pandemic, that can seem like a long time ago, and although it may have felt different, our work for you has continued during this time.

Working directly with children and young people is what we do, and this report tells you about some of the most important things we did.

Paula M. Mearns

Independent Safeguarding Scrutiny and Assurance Chair of Northumberland Strategic Safeguarding Partnership



Introduction

The Children Act 2004 makes sure that the council, health services and police (known as the Safeguarding Partners) and other agencies, relevant to children and young people, work together to promote their welfare. This report takes a look at how we did last year, setting out our work that aims to keep you safe, including:



the impact we have had on supporting and safeguarding children and young people, whether that's providing Early Help or support to Care Leavers.



a review of areas where there has been little or no progress.



actions taken by the partners to apply the recommendations from child safeguarding reviews that looked at those children and young people who experienced serious harm.



ways in which the partners have sought feedback from children and families to plan their work and influence service provision.

The full report is published on the [NSSP Website](#)



What we've done at a glance...

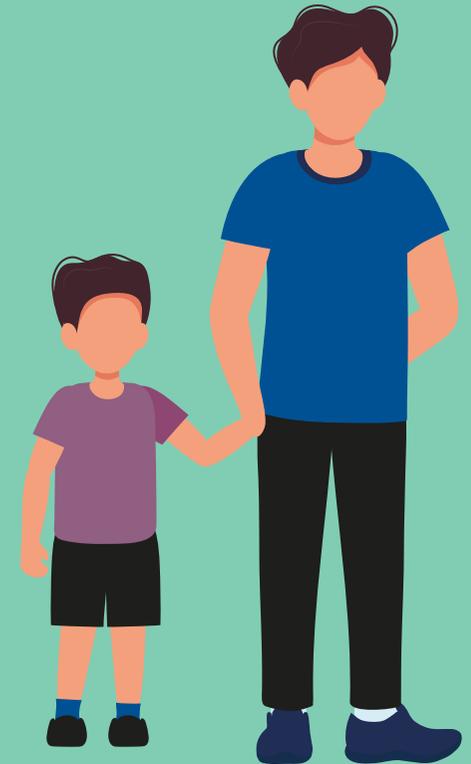
We've supported more children, young and people and families at the earliest opportunity, particularly between lockdown in December 2020 and schools fully reopening in March 2021.

The number of children who need to be Looked After by the council has been reduced by supporting families to care for their children at home or within family networks.

During COVID-19 lockdown we met with our most vulnerable families face to face. We also provided some support programmes virtually. Some families tell us this was easier for them.



- Reports into serious cases tell us we need to ensure dads of unborns and babies are considered/talked to in order to ensure they are able to meet their children's needs.
- A project developed in Northumberland called 'Sharing Information Regarding Safeguarding' has been recognised as national good practice and involves protecting children under 1 year from non-accidental injury caused by male carers.
- We know more young people who go missing are talking to us on their return, which has enabled young people to receive additional support and advice relating to their situation to help them stay safe in the future.
- By focussing on preventing harmful sexual behaviour in Northumberland, we aim to create safer communities for our young people to live and thrive in.
- Tackling Criminal and Sexual Exploitation is an important area for us, including Trafficking and Modern Slavery. To ensure all agencies work together to keep you safe, professionals are trained to recognise and support young people and their families



Our Priorities

1. Understanding how COVID-19 and the lockdowns have impacted on children and young people and what we are doing to support you.

We asked all our partners to identify the risks of lockdown to children, young people and their families. This helped us put actions in place to manage these risks.

In April 2020, referral rates of children and young people to safeguarding services were lower than before the pandemic, which may have been due to the support from the Early Help service, or harms may not have been spotted by agencies during lockdown. However, at the beginning of 2021, referrals were higher than during the same period in 2020. These referrals, mostly from health services, had increased significantly.

The big things affecting families at this time included fears about unemployment and losing a wage, and the impact on people's mental and emotional well-being. We ensured vulnerable children, including children with disabilities, were able to return to school, although few did initially, due to parents' Covid concerns. This worried us, however attendance numbers did increase, especially for children with Special Education Needs.

As part of Disability Awareness Day December 2020, we worked with young people from Collingwood Special Needs school to focus on positive images of disability and a [YouTube video outlines what young people said made them feel safe.](#)

Covid-19 hasn't gone away! So, we need to keep working on supporting children and families.

We know Covid-19 has been a very challenging time for children and young people's mental health.

Not being able to see your friends and family members in person, people confined to the same space, and not having access to emotional health support services has had an effect on children and young people.

Our Disability Dashboard shows us that Autism and ADHD are the commonest categories of disability for children and young people with a child protection plan.

We know that disabled children are more vulnerable and we continue to develop our ways of supporting them and their families.

In 2021, there's been a slight increase in reports of bullying in schools compared to 2020. We wonder if that's because schools were closed for longer periods last year.



What did we do...



Mental health services, at the beginning of the pandemic, assessed who needed the most support. A daily meeting was held to discuss changes to a young person's risk due to deterioration in mental health, and to plan what steps were needed to support them.



As Covid-19 has resulted in a rise in mental health issues, we've increased the number of staff.

Average waiting times for mental health services have more than halved between April 2019 and March 2021.



The Crisis Team provides 24/7 provision.

Within 1 hour of attending A&E (and 4 hours if admitted to the Paediatric Ward) children and young people are reviewed by the Psychiatric Liaison Team.



You said... children and young people wanted safe places to go in their own communities.

What did we do...

- Virtual Youth clubs have offered issue-based youth sessions as well as arts and craft activities within your own homes. Detached youth work has provided sexual health advice and opportunities for you to talk about issues affecting you.
- Listening to children and young people is crucial and your opinions are taken seriously. Over the past year over 80 children and young people have been supported to get their points of view across to the people they want to listen through the support of the Advocacy Team.
- 95% of children looked-after by the local authority took part in or contributed directly to their reviews. Virtual meetings helped more professionals involved in helping to attend the meeting and hear what the young people had to say.
- Young people open to the 14+ Team are asked "Do you think your social worker has made you: Safer, Happier, Less Worried." 100% of the young people said that they thought their social worker made them safer and happier and 67% said that their social worker made them less worried. One of those young people also commented...

"The best way social services has helped me is by giving me (a) life my parents couldn't."

One young person said:

"It was good to be able to talk to the youth workers that were doing detached work as I have found lockdown really hard and am feeling lonely, I really appreciated having a catch up with them and talking about a few things that have been on my mind. They said they will support me either when they are doing detached or I can call them if I need to talk in between."



Our Priorities

2. Neglect

Neglect is still the highest category of abuse in Northumberland and numbers continued to rise. Over half of child protection plans were labelled as neglect with emotional neglect and physical neglect being the most significant factors.

We are also taking a close look at educational neglect, medical neglect and nutritional neglect so support can be provided at the earliest opportunity.

Reassuring news - Child neglect offences have decreased by 5% from 2019/20 to 2020/21

Twice as many children with learning disabilities now have annual health checks. This means we are more aware of their changing needs and supporting them accordingly

Northumbria Healthcare Foundation Trust has ensured children with a learning disability who attend hospital have reasonable adjustments in place to support them

What did we do...

'Ally', age 10, was referred by school following a number of concerns including poor school attendance and bereavement.

The family were allocated an early help worker, who completed an Early Help Assessment (EHA) following a first knock on the door which showed the home cluttered with empty bottles of alcohol on benches. Rubbish and unwanted items were piled up inside a damp house. The quality of that first interaction was instrumental in mum opening up to support and admitting she was not coping following the death of her husband. She was leaving her two children in the morning to get ready for school alone whilst she went to work. She was at work in the evening leaving them unsupervised, something which raised anxieties for Ally who feared being left by her mum.

The worker used the Neglect Toolkit (which is a resource to help work with families) with mum and the children, to identify what needed doing to make things better and how these could be done and what support was needed. The views of the children were essential in mum committing to making positive changes to deliver best outcomes for the children.

Mum worked hard with the team to make changes and the use of the Neglect Toolkit proved a useful tool for her, encouraging her to reflect on her actions and the home situation whilst working out how to improve outcomes for herself and her children. Their home became de-cluttered and a comfortable place to be. Mum changed her working arrangements to ensure her children were a priority and, with support around benefits from the workers links to the Dept. for Work & Pensions (DWP), the stress regarding finances was alleviated.

Dealing with these basic issues enabled the family to begin to address their grief which had underpinned the situation they found themselves in. The worker accessed resources to support the children with their grief whilst they awaited the support from the counselling service they had been referred to. Attendance improved for Ally.

The family all recognised the improvement in their lives and appreciated the hands-on approach the worker had provided with the Neglect Toolkit and listening to them all had helped them come up with to their own plan on how to make changes resulting in a better place to call home and Ally attending school.



Our Priorities

3. Impact of Domestic Violence on children - Including Child to Parent Violence and Abuse (CPVA)

We know domestic violence referrals have increased during the pandemic. This has included child to parent violence and abuse, otherwise known as CPVA.

Police records show that Northumberland saw the largest increase of domestic violence incidents and arrests in the Northumbria Police area where a child has been involved.

- 50% (9 victims) were 16-17 years old
- 57.9% (11 victims) were from ethnic minority groups

What are we doing...

- More awareness training for Adults and Children's Services around CPVA with joint family safety plans
- Additional funding has enabled the development of an information menú
- Child Concern Notifications (CCNs) regarding domestic abuse and missing children are shared with GP practices to improve awareness and information sharing
- Schools agreed that the support through Operation Encompass safeguarded and helped our young people
- There is a domestic abuse practitioner on the hospital site



4. Safeguarding children under 1 year old includes non-accidental head injuries and co-sleeping

We know that babies are eight times more likely than older children to be killed or seriously harmed.

What are we doing...

- It is important we tackle this through early identification and prevention for those babies most at risk, at the same time as providing support to all parents
- One learning review made recommendations about how all parents could be supported to cope with babies who cry a lot using a process called ICON.

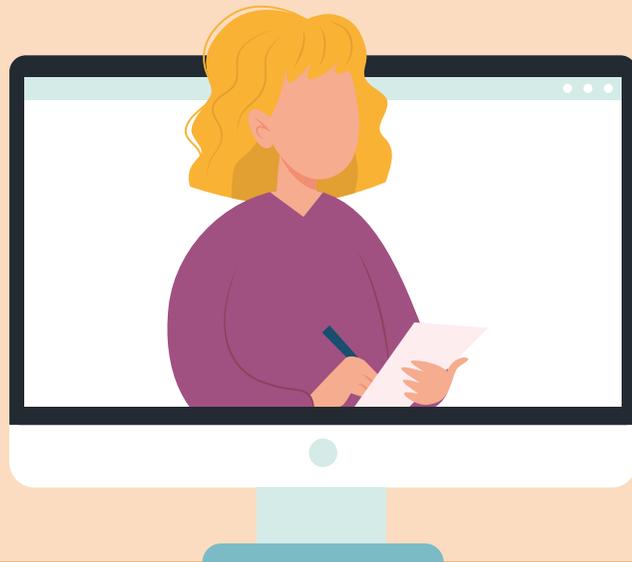


Our Priorities

5. Criminal and Sexual Exploitation (Includes preventing harmful sexual behaviour)

What are we doing...

- Northumbria Police are working with schools around sharing self-produced indecent images among other children and young people. Sessions included the Paedophile Online Investigation Team explaining to young people what can happen to these images once posted on the internet and the longer-term consequences of this. Raising awareness remains a priority for us. Sessions in October 2021 highlighted the effects of malicious communications and online bullying focussing on those sharing indecent images



What was said about the impact of training on exploitation...

"We are in the process of starting to develop an exploitation awareness programme to run with young people in schools in Northumberland to help young people identify the issues."

"I am working with a Mum at the moment. Since this training I have realised just how vulnerable she is, and that despite her young age at the moment she may need continued support throughout her journey as a mother."

"I can now consider what County Lines means, including signs and indicators. I have a much better and clearer understanding of Child Criminal Exploitation and the key things to look out for. This has helped me consider how best to work with young people that may be involved in these really difficult and dangerous situations."

"I have a better understanding of county lines and how this operates in Northumberland. It has expanded my knowledge in terms of how deeply young people can become involved in this and the impact that it can have on them and their families which may prevent them from seeking help. I now know how to spot the signs, and the terminology used by young people which will help me to recognise when young people may be involved in exploitation."

Good practice and what we need to do more of



Strong, child centred, multi-agency work that is based on evidence.



Further work is needed with children and young people to seek and support their views. The partnership needs to understand and apply children and young people's 'lived experience' at a strategic level.



We're strengthening our corporate parenting approach for care leavers. We are starting to see the benefits of councillors and senior officers asking "is this good enough for my child".



Police have launched an Early Help Intervention Strategy and delivery plan and are planning a Vulnerability Awareness training programme to all front-line staff with a focus on Early Intervention. Police will view incidents through the eyes of the child, ensuring officers focus on underlying issues and explore their mental health rather than simply a Criminal Justice approach.



Further work is needed to tackle harmful sexual behaviour in the community as well as in school settings.



Conclusions



We know there is an association between a family's social and economic circumstances, and a likelihood of a child experiencing abuse or neglect.

Children experience neglect, and children experience happy and safe childhoods across the socio-economic spectrum, so it is vital partners understand this; recognising the role stigma and shame play in preventing families from accessing support must be central to the design of any activities or interventions agencies put in place to ease the impact.

Too many interventions are activity focused; confronting the socio-economic difficulties that families face is key to relieving pressure and opening families up to opportunity. Evidence shows that relieving the emotional and financial burden of the extended holidays, building support networks, and establishing hobbies with peer groups, is a key safety net for families and a fundamental aspect of social mobility.

We need to make best use of partners' relationships to work with families, understanding the challenges they face and the opportunities they would like to see and be part of.



Appendix 1. Northumberland; Context & Information

- Population: 322,434
- Child Population: 59,050
- Clinical Commissioning Group: 1
- Police Force: 1
- GP Practices: 38
- Foundation Trust (acute and Community): 1
- Mental Health Trust: 1
- Ambulance Trust: 1
- Schools: 164 (49 Academies including 1 Free School Academy);
 - First and Primary: 121 (27 Academies including 1 Free School Academy)
 - Middle: 17 (8 Academies)
 - High School: 16 (12 Academies, plus 1 all age)
 - Special School: 9 (2 Academies)
 - Pupil Referral Unit (PRU): 1
- Northumberland is twice the size of Luxembourg, but has half the population size
- 97% of the county is classed as rural
- 50% of the population live in 3% of the south-east urban area
- Population density of 64 people per square kilometre; 427 nationally
- Northumberland is the 116th most deprived area (out of 317)
- 45,550 pupils attending schools - 19.6% received Free School Meals, 98.0% have English as first language
- 3.9% of pupils with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP), 11.5% with Special Educational Needs support
- 73% of under 2s in targeted areas are engaged with a Children's Centre
- 660 Early Help Plans
- 836 Child in Need Plans
- 337 Child Protection Plans
- 436 Looked After Children
- 58,801 0–17-year-olds. The number continues to decline; at the same time there is an increasing elderly population in the county

