



# Lead Member for Children's Services

## Annual Report September 2024

**To:** Borough Council

**Date:** 3 October 2024

**From:** Councillor Bill Suthers, Lead Member for Children

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This is my first annual report as Lead Member for the Children & Families Directorate. We also have a new Director of Children's Services, Danielle, who has made a solid start in the role. All members will know that there are major financial issues for this authority and many others, with Children's Services at the forefront of budgetary concerns.

1.2 We face challenging times with an increase in demand for support for children, but we also have much to celebrate which is set out in this report. The new government recently set out their intentions for children's services in the Kings Speech with the introduction of a Children's Wellbeing Bill. The aim is "to raise standards in education and promote children's wellbeing".

1.3 What will the Bill do?

- The Children's Wellbeing Bill will ensure our education and social care systems transform life chances for millions of children and young people in England.
- The Bill will remove barriers to opportunity for children and their families by:
  - keeping children safe, happy and rooted in their communities and schools by strengthening multi-agency child protection and safeguarding arrangements.
  - requiring free breakfast clubs in every primary school to ensure that every child, no matter their circumstances, is well prepared for the school day and can achieve their full potential.
  - introducing legislation to limit the number of branded items of uniform and PE kits that a school can require to bring down costs for parents and remove barriers from children accessing sport and other school activities.

- The Bill will improve the education system and make it more consistent and safer for every child by:
  - creating a duty on local authorities to have and maintain Children Not in School registers and provide support to home-educating parents. These measures will ensure fewer children slip under the radar when they are not in school, and more children reach their full potential through suitable education.
  - making changes to the legislation about regulating and inspecting independent schools, including by providing Ofsted stronger powers to investigate the offence of operating an unregistered independent school. These measures will help keep children safe and ensure they are receiving a suitable education.
  - making changes to enable serious teacher misconduct to be investigated, regardless of when the misconduct occurred, the setting the teacher is employed in, and how the misconduct is uncovered. This will protect and safeguard more children.
  - requiring all schools to cooperate with the local authority on school admissions, SEND inclusion, and place planning, by giving local authorities greater powers to help them deliver their functions on school admissions and ensure admissions decisions account for the needs of communities.
  - ensuring greater consistency between academies and maintained schools by requiring all schools to teach the national curriculum, giving every child a broad and rounded education. This measure will be commenced after the review of curriculum and assessment is concluded and is reflected in Programmes of Study. The review will set the foundations to equip every child with the essential knowledge and skills for the future.
  - recognising the status of the teaching profession and the difference that teaching makes to a child's education by ensuring any new teacher entering the classroom has, or is working towards, Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). This will be accompanied by recognising the essential role of support staff in schools by giving them a national voice in the setting of their pay and conditions.
  - bringing multi-academy trusts into the inspection system, to make the system fairer and more transparent, and enable direct intervention when schools and trusts are not performing to the highest standards.

1.4 In addition The Department for Education (DfE) have published several statutory guidance documents:

- Working together to safeguard children in December 2023. The 2023 edition replaces Working together to safeguard children 2018. The main changes are:
  - multi-agency expectations for all practitioners
  - working with parents and families
  - clarifying the roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners
  - the role of education and childcare providers
  - multi-agency practice standards
  - support for disabled children
  - tackling harm that occurs outside the home.
- Working together to improve school attendance - Statutory guidance for maintained schools, academies, independent schools and local authorities 2024
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2023 – this sets out safeguarding responsibilities within schools and education settings
- Statutory framework for the early years' foundation stage - Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five 2023.

1.5 Children's services face significant financial and social pressures. This was highlighted in the previous lead member's report and these pressures continue to be felt by the sector nationally and include: the growth in child poverty, placement sufficiency for children in our care, rising costs for placements, rising EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plans) applications, high needs block deficits, special school place sufficiency, SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) tribunals, home to school transport costs, social work agency pressures and a lack of trained professionals. The new Director continue to discuss these challenges with the government.

1.6 Regionally the Directors for Children's Services are working together to review whether we can jointly address some of these issues: recruitment of foster carers, reduction in number of agency workers, and inclusive practice in schools.

## **2. EDUCATION AND SKILLS**

### **2.1 Performance**

In the last academic year, we have seen an increase in school attendance for children in our care from 91% in 2022/23 to 93.6% in 2023/24. We are particularly delighted to note the increase in Secondary attendance from 83.7% to 93%.

Overall, school attendance has slightly decreased in this academic year. Primary School Attendance has decreased from 94.3% to 92.4% and Secondary School Attendance has decreased from 89% to 87%.

We have continued to see a rise in the number of children with an Education Health Care Plan and at the end of the 2023/24 there were 1507 children with a plan.

In relation to Year 12 and 13 pupils who are accessing education, employment or training we have seen a positive increase in this academic year for young people with Special Educational Needs with 93.1% of pupils accessing Education, Employment and Training (EET) at the end of the 2023/24 Academic Year. We have seen a slight reduction in Year 12 and 13 Children in our Care participation from 63.8% in 2022/23 to 61.5% in 2023/24 and work continues with young people who are at the risk of disengagement. Overall, it is a positive to note that there has been a slight increase in all Year 12 and 13 pupils accessing education, employment or training at 90.5% in comparison to 89.9% for the previous year.

The number of suspensions has continued to rise in the last academic year, and we have seen a 13.7% increase from 7032 to 8065 (with 87.7% Secondary School pupils). We have seen a similar increase in relation to permanent exclusions from 82 last academic year to 97, a 16.7% increase.

At the end of the Academic Year there were 92.6% (50/54) Schools within the Borough rated good or better.

### **2.2 Wraparound Programme and Extended Early Years Entitlement Update**

#### **Wraparound Childcare Programme**

The nationwide rollout of the Wraparound Childcare Programme is set to commence in September 2024, with a goal of ensuring universal access to wraparound care by September 2026. The wraparound programme team is working hard to meet this deadline and Department for Education (DfE) has recently approved our delivery plan and released funding for the 2024/25 financial year.

The programme objective is to support parents' entry into new employment, return to work, extend their working hours, or work more flexible hours. It will be universally available to all children and families, with funding primarily sourced from families themselves, with support from existing Government subsidies such as tax-free childcare and the childcare element of Universal Credit.

A significant challenge has been the delays in DfE's approval of our delivery programme, which has impacted our initial timelines. These delays were out of the Council's control and were related to the general election. However, with the recent funding release, we are now progressing in line with our revised schedule.

We also continue to face issues in expanding wraparound care within special schools due to barriers such as transport, finance and staffing. Other local authorities have also reported similar challenges. We are working with Childcare Works (programme delivery partner) to overcome these challenges.

We have identified 19 mainstream schools in need of after school care and have prioritised 6 schools which are lacking any before or after-school care. A total of 15 schools need to extend their hours to meet the 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. guidance. Our Wraparound Co-ordinator is also collaborating closely with two special schools, Kilton Thorpe School and Kirkleatham Hall School, to assess and address parental needs.

### Early Years Extended Entitlement

As part of the Early Years Entitlement, the new 15-hour entitlement for eligible working parents of children aged 9 months to 2 years has been introduced from 1 September 2024. This entitlement is a significant expansion of the current offerings, aimed at providing more comprehensive support to working families with very young children.

The introduction of this entitlement requires substantial planning and resource allocation. The Council is tasked with ensuring that local childcare providers are prepared to meet the increased demand. This includes adjusting the funding models to reflect the cost of providing care for younger children, which typically requires higher staffing ratios and more specialised facilities.

One of the primary challenges is ensuring that sufficient high-quality childcare places are available to meet the needs of eligible families. There is also a need to communicate effectively with parents to ensure they understand their eligibility and how to access the entitlement. The success of this initiative will be measured by our ability to meet these needs without compromising the quality of care.

## Childcare Reforms Grant Panel

The Childcare Reforms Grant Panel has been established to oversee the allocation of funding under both the Wraparound Childcare Programme and Early Years Extended Entitlement. The Panel ensures that funds are distributed transparently and in line with government guidelines to enhance childcare availability, affordability and quality.

- The Council has been selected at random by the DfE to join a group of 20 nationally representative Local Authorities (LAs) for the formal evaluation of the National Wraparound Childcare Programme. We are awaiting evaluation guidance, which was delayed by the DfE on 3 July.
- The team will continue to work closely with local childcare providers to ensure readiness for the new EY extended entitlement for children aged 9 months to 2 years.
- Distribute the first round of funds following the next Childcare Reforms Grant Panel meeting.

## Thrive at Five

The council is working in partnership with Thrive at Five to help children in the early years develop strong foundations for life and learning. Thrive at Five is a registered national charity that aims to build capacity in communities by supporting parents and carers and enable collaboration across the public, private and voluntary sectors to achieve sustainable change in early years outcomes. They are a place-based initiative bringing capacity to the areas where they operate.

Thrive at Five are currently recruiting a local team and a board has been established to oversee the progress of the work and its impact. Thrive at Five are committed to reach all parents in identified communities, particularly those who do not currently engage with our services and whose voices are seldom heard.

### 2.3 Supporting schools and settings for all children to achieve their potential

The team have been working together to develop their leadership skills to ensure that they can support schools and settings effectively. They have focused on:

- Developing a cohesive school offer for maintained schools with continual review
- Taking the school wrap around project from inception to delivery
- Moderation of KS2 writing

- Shifting the narrative with schools and key partners onto the shared 4 priorities –
  - Mitigating impact of poverty
  - Mitigating impact of contextual safeguarding challenges
  - SEND
  - Improving pupil mental health and wellbeing
- Building relationships with schools and trusts and establishing an in depth understanding of the maintained schools.
- Establishing a multiagency School Readiness strategy with a task group committed to delivering it.
- Delivering key strands of Building Confidence Thriving Children especially around SENDCO (Special Education Needs and Disabilities co-ordinators) leadership and transition across all school phases. This is ongoing and leading all elements of Delivering Better Value (SEND) will support rapid roll out and begin to create impact.
- Implementation of a system share intelligence about schools for more joined up and impactful ways of working.
- Reviewing the outdoor learning contract with key partners – saving the education budget approximately £6000 per year.
- Building a relationship with Thrive at Five and being a key partner in the delivery of the project.

We have several ongoing challenges that we will focus on in the year ahead:

- There is resistance from some maintained schools to embrace support and challenge and we will continue to strengthen our relationships with them
- A need to reinvigorate primary headteacher meetings so they are valued and well attended
- Impact of governance in some maintained schools – recent school evaluation visits and Ofsted outcomes have indicated that governors do not know their schools well enough – we will review our offer to schools to improve this situation
- There has been a small decline in Good Level of Development at the end of Reception – this will be addressed within the School Readiness Strategy.

## 2.4 Attendance

During 2022 to 2024 Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council received funding from Anglo American to enable the Local Authority to engage a consultant: Alan Graver – Skyblue Research. The work undertaken with partners to develop a Theory of Change linked to improving attendance across schools and colleges, this is the first Theory of Change linked to improving persistent absence (PA) – children missing more than 10% of their education and severe absence (SA) – children missing more than 50% of their education.

We are now working with partners to develop and test solutions. The long-term system change programme is collectively named 'Making Attendance Everyone's Business' and the aim is that in the future it would be highly unlikely for a child/young person to be PA/SA from school/college.

Three workstreams were established (lived experience, data & intelligence and systems & services) and engaged 150 stakeholders. There were fifteen workshops and individual subject specialist meetings to understand: the local context, the size of the problem, the characteristics of young people struggling to attend well at school or college and the local assets and services that exist in the wider system. The following goals have been developed:

### **Short-term goal to end 2026**

We will seek to learn together how to prevent the risks, and reverse the levels, of persistent and severe absence by children and young people in Redcar and Cleveland by the end of 2026 compared to the prevailing situation in 2023.

### **Medium term goal to 2030**

To upscale the effective aspects of the proposed 2024-2026 place-based pilot(s) to more communities across Redcar & Cleveland, systematically eliminating the barriers to PA/ SA through joint working. As a result of the pilot(s) an increasing number of children, young people and families have their individual needs met successfully and they feel resilient for the future.

### **Long term goal to 2040**

A system throughout the Borough, where it is exceptional for any child or young person to miss more than 10% of their education. Redcar & Cleveland is a place renowned for providing modern, flexible approaches that motivates, equips and supports children and their families to want to be at school college or other inspiring learning setting.

All the work undertaken to date can be view through a dedicated website. Home page ([skyblue.org.uk](http://skyblue.org.uk))

## **2.5 Suspensions and Permanent Exclusions**

Work with schools to reduce suspensions and permanent exclusions continues to be a focus. There have been some improvements with suspensions for EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plans) pupils and Years 3 and 4 in primary have decreased from previous years. The reasons for suspensions are regularly monitored and there has a been a decrease in for physical assaults, verbal abuse, bullying and damage. Instances of sexual misconduct and drug or alcohol related incidents have shown significant decreases being 13 and 23 respectively. Of the 50 schools who issued suspensions, 18 issued less than last year and a further 5 were the same as the previous year.



Permanent exclusions showed a decrease in primary schools and years 10 and 11 in secondary, with reductions in physical assault and verbal abuse to pupils and drug and alcohol related incidents. Three of our secondary schools issued fewer permanent exclusions this year than last and 12 pupils have successfully returned to mainstream settings following a permanent exclusion, with another 10 scheduled for September. Twenty-four permanent exclusions were rescinded due to the intervention of the inclusion team.

There are improvements however there continues to be challenges. There has been a rise in both suspensions and permanent exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour. Officers will be working with schools for them to identify patterns so we can introduce interventions, which have shown impact particularly with regards drug and alcohol incidents. There is an emerging trend in proportionally higher suspensions and permanent exclusions for girls. Research is ongoing to understand the lived experience of the girls, and this will be shared with schools in the Autumn term. Emerging findings include social isolation by peers and a lack of agency referrals by schools.

Other issues that remain a concern is that suspensions and permanent exclusions are increasing for our most vulnerable children – Children in Need, Child Protection and Children in our Care. There has also been an increase for pupils receiving more than one suspension. There is one school who has issued more than a third of the total permanent exclusions. Ongoing work is being undertaken with that school.

## 2.6 Increasing participation in education

The Post-16 Progression and Careers Team sits within a multidisciplinary team of education professionals who provide support and guidance to schools, colleges and training providers, children, young people and families.

The team works with all schools to support key stage 4 to key stage 5 transition. The team undertake the following,

- ensuring all young people have a suitable offer of education or training in line with the September Guarantee Duty,
- tracking young people's participation in education or training and providing individualised careers guidance and support for young people who are NEET, this includes identifying their starting point and implementing a collaborative plan to remove barriers and move them into education, employment or training based on their individual needs.
- Although not a statutory duty the team work with schools to identify young people in Year 11 who are at risk of becoming NEET(Not in Education, Employment, Training) (all schools have adopted the Requiring Additional Support Indicator – RASI), providing additional transitional support, with schools also encouraged to complete and share robust transition plans with post-16 providers for the most vulnerable young people.

- Year 11, Electively Home Educated young people are also supported through the team with their transition as most have had no careers guidance.

A specialist officer works specifically with care experienced young people to move them into education, employment or training. In addition, they provide employment brokerage and provide guidance and training for employers to enable them to recognise and understand Adverse Childhood Experiences and attachment issues and learn how to adopt a trauma informed approach to support care leavers in employment. A flexible funding grant has been provided by Anglo American (who are a private sector investor in the area) to be used to remove any barriers a young person may have to entering work, including transport costs/interview clothing.

Unique to Redcar and Cleveland, a Transition Mentor is embedded in Middlesbrough College, Redcar and Cleveland College and Prior Pursglove College, working alongside pastoral and attendance teams to identify and support young people who could be at risk of dropping out of college. Regular meetings are held to discuss concerns about specific young people and particularly the most vulnerable cohorts. This role has helped reduce the numbers of young people withdrawing from college who would have otherwise become NEET.

Funded through Anglo American, the Business Mentoring Programme recruit volunteers from industry, delivers training and undertakes safeguarding checks before matching the mentor to a mentee to support a young person's progression into work, whilst helping to broaden the young person's social networks. This provision prioritises NEET young people, care leavers and young people with SEND, the programme will continue until 2026.

Through identified gaps in provision, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council have commissioned specialist provision with both Redcar and Cleveland College and Prior Pursglove College for children and young people post-16 with social, emotional, mental health (SEMH) needs. The Resolve Programme at R&CC offers individualised 1:1 and small group work with young people, providing a graduated approach to re-engaging them back into mainstream provision. The young people build up their hours over time and work towards qualifications in an area of interest, many then progress to Foundation Learning. A specialist SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs) tutor is supported by 2 youth workers and wider learning support, the programme has seen good results over the past 3 years, preventing more than 30 young people becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, Training). The Endeavour Connect programme works with young people who are socially phobic, so home learning commences first with a view to building the young person's timetable and gradually introducing steps to move them into college in a safe and supportive environment.

Every local authority in England has been awarded a grant as part of the Internship Works Programme, with the aim of increasing the number of supported internships, a supported internship is the most effective way of moving a young person with a learning difficulty or autism into mainstream work. A supported internship is a study programme but most of the learning is delivered through work experience, with additional learning and qualifications undertaken at college. In Redcar and Cleveland, both Redcar and Cleveland and Prior Pursglove Colleges already offer supported internships but have engaged in the programme to improve quality and increase access, with Redcar and Cleveland College delivering the programme through their Prince's Trust programme, numbers of supported internships are expected to double by March 2025.

The Council and members have made a commitment to providing opportunities for young people in the Borough, with paid work experience available for Year 11 to Year 13 students, work-experience placements available to every school, the Inspiring Women Schools Shadowing Programme (now extended to boys), volunteering and supported internship placements.

## 2.7 Careers

Working strategically with business partners and the Combined Authority, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council ensure that Careers Education, Advice and Guidance, including specialist STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) provision is embedded across all schools and colleges (including primaries).

The Building Our Future Primary Careers Programme is funded through Dogger Bank Windfarm until 2026 and raises awareness and aspirations about the STEM careers that are available now and in the future on the children's doorstep, a partnership with Dogger Bank RCVDA and RCBC. During the first 2 years of the programme the following has been taken place:

- Engaged 32 primary schools (out of 44) and 3 SEND schools.
- Had over 1300 children taken part in the full Building our Future workshop programme
- 5 schools successful embedding the Skillsbuilder Accelerated CPD programme, with funding per school worth approx. £2700
- Developed an Employer Network, of over 70 business ambassadors, who have offered nearly 400 hours of volunteering
- 52% of schools now have a career strategy in place
- 100% of our children understand that they learn about jobs and careers in school, and this is predominately when they receive visitors into their classes
- 100% of our children have had the opportunity to hold a career conversation with 90% stating they can share an aspiration
- 90% of our children feel confident and positive about their own future choices after participating in Building our Future

Priorities for the next 2 years are to embed the programme in schools, so they are able to deliver it themselves, develop and implement a transition programme linked to Building or Future, increase parental / carer engagement and develop an early years model.

## 2.8 SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

There continue to be pressures in the SEND system, with a small increase in requests for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment and Education, Health and Care Plans. This is in line with the national picture. Completion of Education, Health and Care Needs assessments within timescales is a challenge, primarily due to lack of capacity in the Educational Psychology team to fulfil statutory duties as well as some difficulties in securing specialist provision for some children.

Increasing capacity and skills within the mainstream sector to meet the needs of children with SEND continues to be a priority, and the paragraphs below give details of the main areas of work we are focusing on:

Work in this area has focused on the delivery of the Building Confidence Thriving Children (BCTC) programme funded via the DfE's Delivering Better Value programme.

- SENCOs (SEND co-ordinators) in secondary and special schools have engaged in a professional development programme with Whole Education. They have undertaken self-evaluation of their school's effectiveness in meeting the needs of children with SEND and engaged in regular peer coaching to increase effectiveness and leadership skills. Update across our secondary and special schools has been good; and primary schools are invited to join the programme from October 2024
- Work is ongoing to support more vulnerable learners in their transition from primary to secondary school. Pupils identified by schools have received support from the specialist teaching and educational psychology service to ensure that they are well prepared for transition, and that they settle well into their secondary schools. In addition, schools have worked with us to develop some 'minimum standards' for transition applicable to all children at all stages in their education journey (starting school, moving to secondary, moving to post 16 education) linking with the school readiness strategy and post-16 RASI (Requiring Additional Support Indicator) arrangements. Good practice guidance and information for parents will be developed by January 2025 to complement this.
- We continue to develop our systems for analysing our data to ensure that we know and understand our cohort as well as we can.

20 primary schools are working on the PINS programme (Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools) from April 24- April 25. Redcar and Cleveland was one of two local authorities selected for this programme in the North East, which is joint funded by the Dept of Health and DfE. Each school will receive support to deliver a personalised action plan to increase their capacity to meet the needs of neuro diverse learners, and our Parent Carer Forum is working with each setting to ensure that positive home-school relationship lead to good communication, planning and support for ND children.

We are seeking to develop more resource provisions within our schools so that more children can receive a more bespoke package of support for their SEND needs within the mainstream sector and without recourse to specialist provision. Our initial focus will be developing these within secondary schools.

## 2.9 Virtual School

The Virtual School team champions the educational achievement of young people in care from the ages of 2-18 in Redcar and Cleveland. The cohort is fluid and in total currently sits collectively at 385 in September 23-24, our record number in total. Rising yearly, ( 21-22 289, 22-23 313, 23-24 356).

The Virtual School team who support the children in our care cohort, work tirelessly to improve attendance and prevent suspensions and permanent exclusions for all of our children and young people. Whole school attendance at the end of this academic year is 93.56%, up from 90.99% last year. Y11 attendance has improved significantly in July 2024 secondary attendance stood at 93.03% up from 83.73% at the end of the previous academic year (22-23). Significant reduction in both persistent absence and severe absence this year in comparison to previous academic year. Persistence Absence end of Summer 2023 84/273 pupils (30.76% of cohort) reduced to 52/304 pupils (17.10% of cohort) by end of the 23-24 academic year. SA end of Summer 2023 54/273 pupils (19.78% of cohort) reduced to 24/304 pupils (15.58% of cohort) end of the academic year. This is due to the significant work with our schools and across educational services, challenging and cross-checking systems, training and upskilling staff. Attendance was and will continue to be a key focus in our service

Suspensions and permanent exclusions have increased across the borough and nationally We remain concerned about rising number of suspensions. At the end of academic year 319 suspensions had been issued for Children In Our Care, which 136 more than the previous year. The number of days has also hugely increased with 528 days lost to learning which is 226 days more than the previous year. This also includes 2 permanent exclusions, the first ever for RCBC since 2011. However, a further permanent exclusion was rescinded. It is also notable that the highest year group for suspensions 2022-23 was year 8 (12 pupils) and this has translated to year 9 being the highest for suspensions this year also (14 pupils).

This year's year 9 cohort lost almost 3 times the number of days (238.5 days) that the next highest year group did (year 7 88.5 days). It is worth noting that this year group were in year 6 when COVID hit, and they missed out on any transition to secondary school. We will continue to focus on the now Y10 group and work across services, working with the Inclusion team to support schools and trusts with strategies and interventions, as well as continuing to offer support and advice with trauma informed training.

This is the Place (TiTP) weekly music sessions for foster carers and their 0-5 years olds have now begun at Kirkleatham Hall museum and due to the successful bid, will continue to be funded for 3 years, providing essential opportunities for building relationships and attachment, as well as learning valuable early speech and language skills and social skills through the medium of music making. TiTP providing foster carers with a musical song book bags plus press release in Autumn 1 celebrating the success of the programme. A Virtual School Inclusion officer has voluntarily picked up the session from a colleague who in on a year's maternity cover. This shows our commitment to the programme and the flexibility of the Virtual School team.

Back in the summer of 2023, Caedmon, Whale Hill and Grangetown Primary pupils joined together over a half term for a weekly session of drama activities in a project set up by RCBC Virtual School, in collaboration with Blue Cabin and the Mee Mee Theatre. Whilst this was some time ago, we are delighted to announce that this project was nominated in the *Chris Drinkwater Creative Health in Primary Schools Awards 2024* and received the runner up prize. The aim of the project was to develop confidence, build relationships, develop creative skills and for the young people to achieve a national award through Arts Award. Thanks go to all the brilliant children and staff at Caedmon Primary, Grangetown Primary and Whale Hill Primary, Rachael from Virtual School, our artist Pady O'Connor and Jane Grey at Blue Cabin.

The previous Deputy Headteacher of the Virtual School, Pauline Douglas, has been appointed to take over the headship at the start of September. Therefore, a comprehensive handover has taken place over the summer, with a smooth transfer of information, systems and processes.

Appointments for the post of Deputy Head of the Virtual School have been made over the summer, Helen King, and lead for the Extended Duties of the Virtual School, Leanne Longstaff. Helen is in place from 1 September and Leanne will join the team after the October half term and both will fully compliment the team. Appointments to back fill a Virtual school Inclusion Officer as well as and a VSIO for a 2-day appointment, to cover a member of the team who has taken flexible retirement from October 2024, are in the process of being advertised.

### **3. SOCIAL CARE AND EARLY HELP**

#### **3.1 Performance**

Following the Family Hubs transformation work over the previous 12 months, we have seen an increase in the number of 0–3-year-olds registered with Family Hubs from 67.7% to 74% at the end of 2023/24. We have also seen a rise in the percentage of babies that are breastfed at 6-8 weeks from 28% to 41%.

There continues to be high demand across the service and greater complexities. Despite this teams have increased the percentage of assessments undertaken within timescales from 75.9% in 2022/2023 to 86.6% ensuring children and families have access to support quickly.

The numbers of children in our care have continued to fluctuate and between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024, increased from 399 to 412, 3.2%, following a 15.7% increase the previous year. There continues to be national shortages in placement availability, particularly those with specialist support for children with complex needs. As such, we have seen an increase in the need for residential and supported placements.

Performance in supporting our Care Leavers remains strong with 99% of 18-20 year-old Care Leavers in touch with the local authority, 100% of all Care Leavers with a Pathway Plan and 91% of all Care Leavers living in suitable accommodation.

The number of children who are subject to or at risk of VEMT (Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing or Trafficked) fluctuated throughout the year but when comparing from March 2023 and March 2024, this has slightly increased from 24 young people to 26. Despite this increase, we remain concerned around the potential risks posed and increased levels of organised crime within the Borough and have developed both the SAFE (Safeguarding Adolescents From Exploitation) and SHiFT Teams to support children subject to or at risk of VEMT.

#### **3.2 Early Help (council delivery)**

Our Early Help services cover our Family Hub services, 0-19 health child programme, EH (Early Help) co-ordinators in the MACH team, EH intervention team, Supporting Families and Youth service.

It is of note that performance has improved in the last year in relation to those that have had an early help assessment not escalating to social care within 12 months after closure (average 75% in 2022/23 up to 82% 2023/24). This shows that the work was robust and has enabled families to remain together. However, we know that where there is insufficient early help resource to support families, this can quickly lead to the need for statutory social care intervention at greater cost.

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Early Help not only provides support for children and families to help them remain together which is augmented by youth services that provides our young people with diversionary activities and opportunities, which in turn should support them to make good choices. We are proud of the work that our teams do to support our families within our Early Help Offer. This is often complex work and without timely support being available to families, their situation can worsen, and their needs escalate into statutory services.

### Family Hubs

There have been many developments in our Early Help offer through the significant transformation funding that has been received to develop the DfE's new Family Hubs Framework resulting in our 9 Family Hubs undergoing a major transformation. One notable statistic is that during 2022/3 we had on average 53% of 0-3 year-olds registered with our Family Hubs, whereas during 2023/24 this improved to 72% of 0-3 year olds registered. This reflects the significant increase in universal activities available in our Family Hub centres, and the ways in which Midwives, Health Visitors and our Family Hub staff seek to reach out and support all new parents to access the start for life offer.

One way we have done this is by providing more Health Visitor-led clinics and universal stay and play sessions for parents to get together for peer support and advice from our qualified Early Years Practitioners. During 2023, 1,957 individuals attended 'Little Explorers' and 749 individuals attended our 'Baby Buddies' group for new babies and their parents. Our Preparation for Parenthood course also increased our reach, becoming a universal antenatal offer across the Local Authority; all expectant parents are invited to attend and receive practical advice about caring for their newborn and the birth experience. Since April 2023, 82 individuals have accessed this course across the borough.

The new model and significant grant funding (up to £2.6m to develop our Hubs over three years), has transformed the delivery of services to children and families by improving access to services and delivering an integrated service provision so parents/carers can drop into any Family Hub to access support services and advice. Our early help offer includes universal and targeted public health and prevention services provided by specialist public health nurses within our health visiting and school nursing teams. We have brought together the delivery of the healthy child programme 0 to 19, which provides an invaluable opportunity from early in a child's life to identify families that may need additional support and children who are at risk of poor outcomes. We now have a range of co-located services including the Indigo Midwifery team which works with vulnerable parents-to-be, and Family Action who support parents with poor mental health in the period after birth.



A number of new groups have been developed thanks to our Parent/Carer panel's suggestions and ideas, such as: a Young Parent's Group for parents aged under 21 years old (53 individuals attended up to July 2024) and a new Sensory Kidz group which runs from Ormesby and Skelton Family Hubs for children 0-5 years with neurodiversity concerns (including those on the portage waiting list). Since April 2023, 65 individuals have accessed this group. In addition, a new Neonatal group for parents whose babies were pre-term and required additional support has been accessed by 42 individuals. This is a lovely group supported by staff from James Cook Neonatal Unit alongside our Peer Support Worker. The Neonatal Outreach Sister has sent a briefing paper to the national pre-term birth enquiry and Dame Andrea Leadsom, about the good practice and excellent partnership working between the Trust and the Family Hubs to support these vulnerable families after discharge into the community.

Significant work has also taken place on supporting children and parents with the home learning environment/ early language development. One of the DfE funding streams is to specifically focus on supporting the poor speech and language of 3-4 year olds following the pandemic, with the aim of improving the Good Learning and Development (GLD) scores for these children at the end of Reception and ultimately their life-chances. Speech and language drop-in sessions have been held across the Family Hubs facilitated by a Speech and Language therapist to offer support to parents and professionals. A new programme called 'Early Talk Boost' has been delivered to 143 staff in over 40 PVI (Private and Voluntary childcare settings) and Primary Schools; resources and ongoing support/mentoring has been provided by our team to deliver this programme to targeted 3-year-olds. In addition, 'Early Words Together at 3' has been delivered in 7 primary school settings to parents along with their 3-year-olds, by Family Hub and school staff facilitating it together, with more planned from September. A new tool (ELIM) is also being used by the Health Visiting team to better assess communication and language delay at the 27-month old, mandated check.

In 2023 we received requests for interventions for 658 families compared to 394 referrals the previous year. This is a 40% increase in referrals compared to 2022 and a 50% increase on 2021. Referrals peaked in October 2023, following the successful re-launch of the Family Hubs Service in September 2023. These interventions included support for children to meet their development milestones including supporting with early literacy programmes, parenting support, guidance around healthy eating and general family support. Infant massage is our most popular intervention and there were a significant number of referrals for this programme, accounting for 37% of all referrals. This intervention supports bonding and attachment between parent and child but also helps with gastric issues such as colic and constipation. It is a very popular course and also has the biggest take-up from families. Following this, 26% of targeted work consisted of 1-1 parenting and 22% was for Speech and Language interventions.

### EH co-ordinators in MACH team

Another key role of our early help service is provided by our Early Help Coordinators in the Early Help Assessment Team who are co-located within our MACH (multi-agency children's hub). This team screen early help referrals and undertake initial Early Help Assessments (EHAs), working in a similar way to the social work assessment teams.

In July 2023, during Ofsted's focussed visit whereby the Inspectors looked at the local authority's arrangements for the front door of children's services, they spoke to the Early Help Co-ordinator Team Leader and considered our Early Help processes, decision making and assessments within the Child & Family Intervention teams. In the main, the Early Help service received positive feedback, but we are particularly proud of the inspectors recognising that *"Early help assessments are co-produced with children and families and plans are fully informed by what children have shared during creative and sensitive direct work. Early help support is making a positive difference to children's lives."*

From April 2023 to March 2024, the Early Help Coordinators based in our Children's Services 'front door', screened a total of 3,421 contacts, in comparison with the previous year where 4,583 contacts were screened. This represents a 30% decrease in the number of contacts coming through to the EHCs for screening, after a decision has been made in the MACH that it is appropriate to be considered at an early help level. This mirrors the decrease in the overall number of contacts coming into the MACH which also dropped by 14% when compared to 2022-23. The possible reasons for this are numerous. A lot of work has been undertaken with partners to make them better understand when it is appropriate to make a social care referral (SAFER), but also the newly appointed MACH service manager has made some procedural changes to the way that some of the information comes into the MACH is processed. Simple requests for information or other service referrals are no longer recorded as a contact as there are no safeguarding worries, for example, referrals for Occupational Therapy. The team also undertake return home interviews for children and young people who are not open to a social worker at the time they were reported missing. Between April 2023 to March 2024 the co-ordinators completed 212 return home interviews.

### Supporting Families

Last year, the report celebrated our Supporting Families programme reaching its central government target of successfully working with 191 individual families. This year's new and ambitious target set by DfE was to work with and evidence significant and sustainable progress for 308 families. Out of this target, we achieved 209 claims (68%), leaving a shortfall of 99 potential claims which was disappointing, but in line with the national picture where the majority of LAs were unable to reach 100% of their target within the new programme framework.

The team continue to work with our partner agencies and internal early help colleagues to increase the cohort of families we can monitor to make our claims, particularly as we have a bigger PBR target of 381 claims by March 2025. Amongst other things, this will require us to significantly increase the number and quality of partner led EHAs being submitted to us by agencies such as Health Visiting, Schools, and the VCS. We have reviewed and updated our paperwork to try to reduce any barriers to our partners completing these assessments.

### Youth Service

The Youth Service is an essential part of our Early Help offer and our youth workers understand the needs of young people can be complicated and sometimes hidden. And that to connect with the most vulnerable it is best to engage with them in an environment in which they feel safe with their peers. Our open access youth clubs provide this safe and stimulating environment so that once the young person has built up relationships, they will start to open up and further support can be signposted.

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, the youth service engaged with 8,902 young people across all of its projects. 1,128 young people became members of our open access sessions with 294 (25%) of these members being from vulnerable groups (e.g. open to social care, early help or Children in our Care). In the Greater Eston area which includes South Bank and Grangetown wards, this figure increased to 65% of our members being particularly vulnerable.

189 young people accessed our service through our targeted youth projects - Youth Work Plus and Join Us Disability clubs. In addition to working with our registered members, the Streetz Detached Project delivered 116 detached youth work sessions, reaching 4,814 young people out in the community and our Substance Misuse Roadshow project delivered drug awareness sessions to 2,808 young people in years 6 – 11 within schools across the borough. As part of the Holiday Activity with Food (HAF) programme, the youth service offered 860 free places across the borough for young people on free school meals to attend our Easter and summer holiday programmes.

As well as managing all the diverse youth projects, the Neighbourhood Youth Officers manage the 9 Youth & Community Centres based across the borough, with 6 of them in the 10% most deprived areas. Our Youth & Community Centres are fantastic resources accessed by their local communities, young people, partners, the voluntary sector, health, council staff, training providers and small businesses. During 2023 - 2024 an amazing 64,847 community attendances were recorded at our centres, averaging over 16,000 a quarter. This was 20% more than in 2022-23 when there were 53,702 attendances by the community.

Since June 2023, our Youth Music, Media & Arts Co-ordinator based at Tuned In has facilitated a wide range of music-making activities including DJ workshops, instrument tuition, songwriting and performance opportunities at local events including the Christmas Light Switch On, Kirkleatham Christmas Markets and our bi-weekly open mic showcase events at Tuned In! this was funded by a £30,000 grant awarded for a two-year music project by Arts Council England. Tuned In! acts as the main central music hub for this programme, with a total of 36 sessions being delivered there up to the end of March 2023. There were also 6 sessions delivered at Skelton Youth & Community Centre, 7 sessions at 25k Youth & Community Centre and 3 sessions at Grangetown Youth & Community Centre. Over 130 young people have participated in some element of the project so far.

Elections took place at Tuned In on the 15th February 2024 for our new Member of Youth Parliament (MYP) and Deputy. Sophie Bloomfield, from Laurence Jackson School was elected as the MYP for Redcar and Cleveland and Simron Dhillon, from Normanby Outwood School was elected as the new Deputy MYP. Sophie and Simron are working closely together and one of their passions is to get as many young people as possible to learn British Sign Language. They are both currently working on collating a piece of work to be delivered across Youth Centres and schools throughout RCBC.

### 3.3 MACH (Multi Agency Children's Hub)

Since becoming independent of the South Tees MACH in July 2020, the service has been on a journey of improvement to success. The standout achievements and which were acknowledged in the July 2023 OFSTED Focused Visit were: strengthened processes, risk responded to promptly and children receive the right help and support at the right time. These achievements were highlighted by OFSTED. Staff/managers were described as having a relentless focus on doing what is right for children and visible leadership. The visit agreed with our intentions to work more closely with partners to increase understanding of thresholds/framework of need and improve quality of safer contacts. This has been a focus for partnership working; we have offered sessions to 25 schools which was positively received and made changes to the triage process with Police which creates an opportunity (where PPNs are not accepted) to give feedback to the officer via the MACH decision maker. We saw a reduction of around 120 safer contacts from police in Q4 23/24. We have streamlined how information is recorded on the system to better reflect demand for children where there are safeguarding worries. We have seen a 14% decrease in contacts in Q4 23/24 in comparison to Q4 22/23.

What's next: MACH Operations Group takes place every 6 weeks and is attended by partners. We have been growing our virtual membership to the MACH to ensure timeliness of decision making (1 working day decisions sit at 88%) and joined up decision making. We have developed the agenda for the group to move away from wholly reporting on MACH data and performance towards individual partners presenting info/updates about their services – we have already found this helpful to share knowledge of services, but also identify any learning/gaps and the impact on quality of safer/understanding of a framework of need. We are going to be taking part in multi-agency auditing work with STSCP and joined with Middlesbrough this month to focus on enhancing the quality of contacts with Police, School and Health, identifying areas of strength and for development.

### 3.4 Vulnerable children

#### SHiFT

SHiFT is a national registered charity and aims to break the destructive cycle of offending behaviours in vulnerable children by radically transforming the way current services are designed and delivered to reduce reoffending and unnecessary public spending. At the heart of SHiFT's approach is the relationship the child or young person has with a "Guide." Guides do whatever it takes to build trust and find a connection that can bring change. In Redcar and Cleveland we have developed a SHiFT team recruiting Guides from different backgrounds including, residential, youth service, youth offending service, police, drug services and education.

Our model is focused upon trying to reduce multiple professionals becoming involved in a child or young person's life and therefore creating greater capacity in existing systems whilst creating space for trusted relationships. Several children and young people in high-cost placements are being supported alongside children who are showing some significant needs, indicating that they may end up coming into our care if circumstances do not change.

Initial findings suggests some key support needs: increased contact between children and their families, supporting into education, post 16 placements, supporting with appointments such as with drug service etc and increased focus on building relationships.

SHiFT is working across Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough, with the official launch taking place on 25 September.

#### SAFE (Safeguarding Adolescents From Exploitation)

We formally launched our safeguarding adolescents from exploitation (SAFE) team at the end of April this year. We had worked relentlessly during 2023 to secure funding through the DfE and public health to create a team that would have capacity support our most vulnerable and exploited young people.

Following a successful recruitment drive we appointed practitioners between December and June, with our specialist education worker commencing in post in September with a specific remit to work with children regarding their equal access to education. We continue to raise awareness with schools regarding exploitation and associated risks for children and young people. To date we have reached approximately 2000 teaching staff through our contextual safeguarding training to schools.

Since the launch in April 2024 the team have worked with 30 children and young people. All referrals into the SAFE team arise from our existing VEMT (Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing and Trafficked) processes where we maintain multi agency oversight of exploited children. We are seeing some real successes, particularly as this relates to the development of trusted relationships with children, their parents and carers, our increased knowledge of community demographic and harm, our ability to work within our partnership to successfully disrupt and safeguard on an individual child level and in community hotspots where levels of harm and serious violence are particularly high. The feedback we have had both from within our partnership and from the children and young people, parents and carers with whom we have engaged has already been particularly positive. We are excited to continue this work, not only to see a reduction in the harm that our children suffer but with the ambition of having a real impact on the number of young people who require care through building safety within their family network and community.

### ROTH (Risk Outside of the Home)

We continue our work with Professor Carlene Firmin, Durham University and the DfE, currently engaged in phase three of the ROTH pilot. This work directly links with the Working Together 2023 and in the development of the national agenda to raise understanding of harm outside the home and ensure local authorities and their partners are responsive in their practice. Our evaluation to date shows the success of this approach; we can see already that when a young person is subject to a child protection and ROTH plan, the duration of the plan is significantly less, with an average of 6.9 months. This we attribute to our intensive approach and the joint work within the partnership. We are very excited to see how this work develops and proud to be a part of national practice development.

### No Wrong Door

Our No Wrong Door Hub has been registered with Ofsted since January 2023. We have had 6 young people reside in the home since opening, two young people remain resident with us (as at Sept 2024). Two young people have seen successfully transitioned back to their family and network.

We are proud of the work that the team in the Hub do to support young people and how they have been instrumental in reducing worries for young people with a significant reduction in missing from home episodes, criminal behaviour and the evident savings for the local authority in having the young people live in our own home as opposed to an external provider. The team have continued to provide support to other young people who are on the edge of requiring our care, this year we have extended our age range from 11 – 18 to 8 – 18. We have recently been inspected by our regulator, OFSTED, and we have been graded 'good' overall in terms of the quality of care the children receive and the leadership standards.

### 3.5 Children in Our Care

We recognise the importance of involving the views of care experienced children, young people and families in decisions that affect them and the services they receive. Their feedback helps services understand how well they are doing, what they need to improve and develop new, creative ideas to improve the lives of children in families in our borough. All children and young people have the right to have their views, wishes and feelings considered when decisions are being taken about their life. These decisions could be about their family, school, or life in the community.

Previously participation with children and young people was covered by in house staff. From 1 September 2023 the Junction service was commissioned to undertake this, initially for 36 months. The Junction have worked well to develop and expand our children in care council:, primarily through the 'Have Your Say' group.

The young people are central to all the decisions made for the group, examples already include – recruiting more members to the group, a change in venue for the group, making short introductory videos to present to the Corporate Parenting Board and arranging an awards evening for children in our care. The group are currently working on a music project and the music will be used as a background to a short film, to promote the positive nature of being a child in our care. This follows on from a video the 'Studio of Fostered Heroes' the group made in early 2023, via Blue Cabin. The video was shortlisted and the Have Your Say Group were finalists in the Northern Cultural Education awards. Two members of the group attended the Awards Ceremony in Wigan and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

### 3.6 Fostering

In March 2024, Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Service had 100 foster carers providing foster care to 118 children. In addition, there were 30 connected care foster carers caring for 26 children. The focus on recruitment continues in our fostering team and this year 9 mainstream foster carers were approved at Fostering Panel, which provides the potential to care for 15 children in our care. Unfortunately, this year 17 mainstream carers either resigned or retired from fostering and one transferred to an Independent Fostering Agency.

Foster with Northeast (FwNE) was launched on 27 September 2023 supported by the Department for Education. This is a regional pathfinder and is the first port of call for prospective carers offering a welcome, directing enquiries to their local authority, and providing support throughout the application process. FwNE progress expressions of interest from prospective carers to the local authority. The model also ensures that that applicants have an experienced foster carer as a buddy, to support them from the initial stages of assessment through to approval and beyond. It is difficult to quantify the impact on recruitment, at this stage, however we are closely watching how performance, and results, for Redcar & Cleveland Fostering Team are compared to neighbouring and regional local authorities.

The Mockingbird model continues to support 6 Satellite families and benefits 14 Children in Our Care, offering them the support an extended family would bring.

Positively we have had some investment into the fostering team, part of which is hours for a recruitment officer post. Having a dedicated recruitment officer, working closely with the team and Foster With North East and the comms team should positively impact on the recruitment of foster carers for Redcar & Cleveland.

Where possible children and young people move to live with family, friends or connected Carers. This number has increased. Clearly, wherever possible, the best place for children is with family, rather than a stranger foster care. This means that children feel safe and connected to their network and retain their identity and sense of belonging. We continue to support connected carers where in the best interests of our children and young people.

### 3.7 Separated Migrant Young People

The team are currently supporting 25 young people and 46 care leavers. They continue to meet the mandatory requirements of the national transfer scheme and liaise regularly with colleagues in Kent.

When the young people first arrive in our region, we know that support needs to be intense. These young people have faced significant trauma and challenge on their journey to England. They have left families, have lost family and are arriving not knowing anyone or what will happen to them next. It is important that we support them to develop friendships, support networks and that they can integrate into communities and feel safe. Some of our young people value being close together, having the support of one another and the mutual understanding of their significant traumatic experiences.

Suitable accommodation is always being sought and the team are awaiting the opening of the building (formerly known as the Ridings), which will also provide an office base for the team.



### 3.8 Care leavers

The dedicated care leavers team are currently working with and supporting 142 care leavers. The young people are provided with advice and guidance, and we support them to develop their independence skills. Many of our care experienced young people do not have close family networks for support and the team help build this up, so they have reliable people to call on when needed.

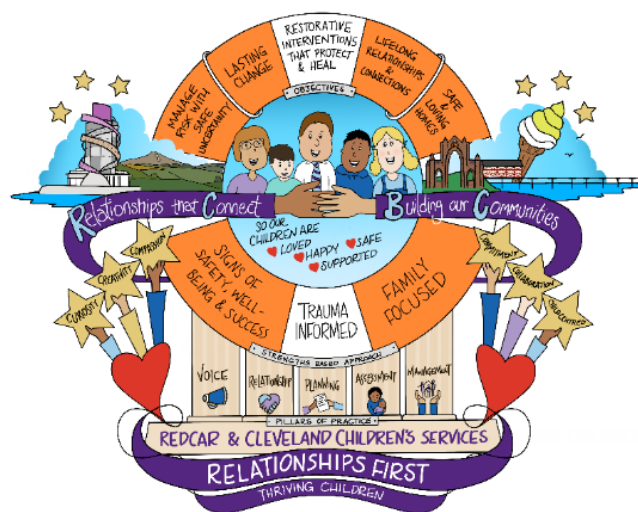
Work is proposed, through levelling up funding, to transform the current care leavers building into a care leavers hub with a completion date for a launch of the Hub on 1 December 24. Our care experienced young people will be able to drop by to see their Personal Advisor or another team member if they wish. A new kitchen area will help support with cookery classes and essential independent living skills. It will also provide access to a 'pantry' for care leavers, at times, should they need additional help with food.

### 3.9 Quality Assurance & Practice Development

Our approach to Quality Assurance has been further strengthened during 2023/2024

#### Relationships First - Practice Model and Practice Development

There have been several activities over the last year to develop our Practice Model and Framework - this has involved our staff and partners. Feedback from this engagement made clear that everyone attending thought 'relationships' were key, be that relationships we have with each other, relationships with partner agencies or with the children, young people and their families we seek to support. This led us to name our practice model, Relationships First, and develop the tagline "Relationships that connect; Building our Communities", as set out below.



Our practice model is underpinned by systemic theory, and blends strengths-based approaches including Signs of Safety, trauma informed practice and Family Seeing. Relationships First is consistent with Social Care National Framework published in December 2023. Practice Standards have also been developed, aligned with our five pillars of practice.

#### Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)

The Quality Assurance Framework was first developed in 2022; it has been reviewed and revised in January 2024 alongside the development of our Relationships First Practice Model and Standards. The key aims of our Quality Assurance Framework are improving services and outcomes for children and families; A restorative and collaborative approach; ownership and understanding of quality assurance. Our Quality Assurance Framework now provides the structure and tools needed to make the difference we all strive for every day in our work, to deliver practice so that children are loved, happy, safe and supported.

#### Audit Activity

In August 2023, we launched a revised collaborative audit tool to support greater focus on practice and outcome. The collaborative tool now specifically seeks to capture organisational and systemic learning to inform continuous improvement and workforce development. Collaborative case audits take a long-term lens on a case, up to 12 months, to enable the worker to reflect on their practice, identify any patterns or trends in the case rather than considering the immediate presenting need.

Brief Case Reviews (BCRs) continue to be used to focus on a single area of practice which is *chosen by the auditor in collaboration with their Manager* and is then reviewed over several cases identified by them, and from their own team / service area providing a “snapshot” of practice. These audits interrogate practice in a strengths-based way, identifying learning for individual workers as well as the wider system. The findings from BCRs are then fed into team development plans.

The Quality Assurance team also undertake both collaborative and thematic audits; key findings are collected, and recommendations identified. Practice Development workshops are provided in response to the findings to help support and drive practice improvement.

#### Observations of Practice

We have reviewed and revised the Observation Framework and templates as part of the development of our Practice Standards and revision of our Quality Assurance Framework. Our Practice Standards now explicitly state that, ‘One formal observation of practice is completed for each practitioner by the supervising manager at least once a year.’

## Children's Social Work Academy

The Children's Social Work Academy offers Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) a positive and strong induction into statutory children's social work, promoting the development in the quality, consistency, and effectiveness of social work practice to ensure that children's outcomes are positive.

The Children's Social Work Academy sits separately to the core social work teams under the oversight and management of the Principal Social Worker. The learning environment of the Academy affords NQSWs a high level of supervision, particularly at the initial stages, and an individual development plan during their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE). The Academy is a valued part of Redcar and Cleveland Children's Services, and NQSWs are supported to feel a valued part of the wider service through their 11 months based within the Academy during which they also spend time with host teams, shadow practice, and develop a good understanding of the reality of practice in Redcar and Cleveland. There are 12 Academy places each year from September 2024.

The Children's Social Work Academy is founded on a long-term plan and commitment to support a significant reduction in the use and reliance of agency workers to fill Social Worker vacancies within the authority. Increasing the number of NQSWs recruited to the Academy annually is a cornerstone of this ambition.

As the Children's Social Work Academy has evolved, our recruitment of NQSW's has increased and expanded. Cohort One consisted of 3 NQSWs when the Academy launched in November 2022. Our current Cohort Two currently has 10 NQSWs who started in September 2023, and Cohort Three due to commence in September 2024 will have 12 NQSWs. Cohort Three received twenty applicants; this is the highest number of applicants for any Social Worker post within Redcar and Cleveland.

In April 2023 we transitioned our Cohort One NQSWs into their permanent teams, with one NQSW joining the Assessment Team and two NQSWs joining Locality Safeguarding Teams.

Cohort Two began with 9 NQSWs joining us in September 2023 (initially it was planned that 10 NQSWs would join the Academy in Cohort Two, however, one applicant withdrew her acceptance due to reasons beyond our control). The Academy Team also committed to long arm support of an additional four NQSW's who had secured employment within another service area. Therefore, the academy core team was supporting 13 NQSWs whilst also hosting adult NQSW's monthly.

We want our Academy filled with passionate, motivated, and creative social workers. As Newly Qualified Social Workers' careers unfold, the Academy will support them every step of the way. We have created an environment where excellent practice can thrive, and Newly Qualified Social Workers are supported beyond their Assessed Supported Year in Employment; the door will always be open with a warm welcome to provide guidance and help find solutions.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

As stated at the beginning of this report there are many challenges facing Children's Services nationally and locally however this report details how our workforce continue to strive for excellence. We continue to challenge ourselves to understand what is working well and what we could do better. We have a relentless focus on making the lives of our children and young people in Redcar and Cleveland the best they can be.