



**DONCASTER
SAFEGUARDING
CHILDREN
PARTNERSHIP**

Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020-2021



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Foreword

The Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools, Nuala Fennelly who sadly passed away earlier this year. Nuala was a true advocate and champion for children across Doncaster, always passionate about giving our local young people a voice.

This annual report covers the period 1st April 2020 – 30th September 2021. This period has been like no other with the demands posed by the pandemic. Doncaster like many other areas has seen an increase in domestic abuse, neglect referrals and an increased number of children presenting with significant mental health problems. The pandemic has had the greatest impact on those living in households where there is already a vulnerability. We know that there are pressures and demands on services across the partnership including the 'Front Door', Child Protection and Children in Care services. The November floods, followed by the COVID 19 crises created additional needs in the communities we serve, and complex partnership challenges have been exacerbated as a consequence. The partnership responded well to the challenges that were posed. The main aim for all of us was to keep children safe and in education.

The partnership experienced a decline in safeguarding performance. This meant that the 'line of sight' to the quality and effectiveness of the safeguarding system was not as robust as the partnership would have liked. A voluntary Children's Partnership Improvement Board was established in November 2020 to both respond to the demand and address a consequent decline in performance. A plan was devised, focussing on five key priorities: the Front Door (including Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub), Early Help, Multi-agency Frontline Practice, Performance and Quality Assurance, and Governance and Leadership. This provided an opportunity to focus on 'getting the basics right' and to carefully review and consider a governance arrangement that is fit for purpose post pandemic. We are expecting the outcomes from the work of the Improvement Board, including revised governance arrangements to transition to the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership by the end of 2021-2022.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, work has continued across the partnership to protect children, young people and their families. The partnership has remained committed to ensuring services continued for those most in need and support reached those who were vulnerable.

We are pleased to report that children, young people and families were provided with a range of approaches to participate in services and to express their views. Excellent work was undertaken by our Young Advisors to help reduce isolation that some young people experienced during the pandemic.

Multi-agency case review and learning activity continued with five Rapid Reviews undertaken and the commencement of two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews as a result. Learning from reviews was shared across the partnership to support improvement in safeguarding practice.

Finally, in March 2020 the Doncaster Safeguarding Partners acted swiftly in the initiation of a Complex Abuse Investigation into two independently run specialist residential homes in the borough that accommodates children and young people nationally. Areas for local improvement has already commenced and national learning is being disseminated. An independent review of the Doncaster Joint Children and Adults Partnership Arrangements was commissioned to evaluate how well we are working together to safeguard children and young people in Doncaster. The review should support us to see how we can further strengthen our approach. The outcome of the review will be presented to the partnership and detailed in the 2021-2022 annual report.

Doncaster Safeguarding Partners remain committed to keeping our children and young people safe and will continue to listen to the voices of our children. We would like to thank everyone involved in working with us to safeguard children and promote their welfare in Doncaster during these challenging times.

Doncaster Safeguarding Partners



Doncaster
Council

Damian Allen, Chief Executive
Doncaster Council



Doncaster
Children's
Services Trust

Rebecca Wilshire, Deputy Chief Executive
Doncaster Children's Services Trust



South Yorkshire
POLICE

Ian Proffitt, Chief Superintendent
South Yorkshire Police



Doncaster
Clinical Commissioning Group

Jackie Pederson,
Chief Officer, Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group

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Introduction

The Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership's vision is that:

“We work together to help Doncaster children and young people to be safe!”

Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership is made up of the Safeguarding Partners (Doncaster Council (DMBC), Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), South Yorkshire Police (SYP) and additionally the Doncaster Children's Services Trust (DCST)) as well as relevant agencies as outlined in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. This includes health provider services, schools, early years settings, social care, children's homes, and voluntary, community and faith organisations. Further information is available on the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership's [website](#).

Independent advice and scrutiny of the safeguarding arrangements is provided by John Goldup, the Independent Chair of the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership, who took over in December 2020. John is furthermore the chair of the Safeguarding Adult Board and the combined joint safeguarding meeting.

There has not been enough time prior to the floods in 2019 followed by the pandemic to truly embed the arrangements that were set out as part of the Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements published in June 2019 by the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership. However, Safeguarding Partners have commissioned, through the independent scrutineer, a review of Doncaster Joint Children and Adults Partnership Arrangements which resulted in recommendations that will inform changes going forwards.

This report of the Safeguarding Partners covers the period from 1st April 2020 - 30 September 2021 (18 months), and is published as required by Working Together 2018:

“...the safeguarding partners must publish a report at least once in every 12-month period. The report must set out what they have done as a result of the arrangements, including on child safeguarding practice reviews, and how effective these arrangements have been in practice”.

The information in this report has been informed by reports to the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership, Doncaster Partnership Self Evaluation 2021 and Doncaster Council and Doncaster Children's Services Trust Self Evaluation 2021.

Local Context

Doncaster is the largest Metropolitan Borough in England at approximately **568** square kilometres

Doncaster's Population total is **308,940** (predicted to increase by 3.7% by 2030)



66,918 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Doncaster, this is **21%** of the total population in the area.

91% of Doncaster residents self-identify as white British

The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language:

12.0% in primary schools (national average 21.3%)

8.9% in secondary schools (national average 17.1%)



40 out of our **194** LSOA's (21%) have children living in an income deprived family



Life expectancy is 10.9 years lower for men and 8.2 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Doncaster compared to the least deprived areas.



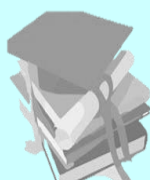
22%

of the local authority's children aged under 16 years are living in low-income families.



Poverty levels vary significantly across the borough with some lower super output areas (LSOA) having over 50% of children in poverty compared to other areas only having 5%

5.8% of our young people are 'Not in Education, Employment or Training, compared with **10.4%** nationally (As at August 2020)



Children and young people from minority ethnic groups account for **11%** of all children living in the area, compared with **27%** in the country as a whole.

Team Doncaster amid the pandemic continue to be committed and work collaboratively with partner agencies to tackle the complex causes and effects of poverty

The % of workless households in Doncaster is much higher than the regional and national average
Doncaster = 17.8%,
Yorkshire & Humber = 15%,
Great Britain = 13.9%
(around three quarter of these households having dependent children)



The proportion of children entitled to free school meals:

20.5% in primary schools (the national average is 17.7%)

19.5% in secondary schools (the national average is 15.9%)



Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership Priorities

The following agreed priorities are set out in the Joint Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership and Safeguarding Adults Board 2019-2021 Safeguarding Strategic Plan:



These priorities were delivered through partnership working and a range of subgroups and task and finish groups against the Delivery Plan (see Appendix 1). The work of the partnership is outlined further in this report in the sections covering assurance, review and training.

During the pandemic, the partnership felt that a more agile response was required in order to respond to emerging issues at pace. Hence, a temporary partnership oversight group, chaired by the Director of Children Services, was set up and met on a bi-weekly basis. A Children and Families Cell provided the operational response and both these groups formed part of the emergency response structures. Meetings of the Safeguarding Children Partnership took place less frequently and some of the sub-groups were paused. This meant that the 'line of sight' to the quality and effectiveness of the safeguarding system was not as robust as the partnership would have liked. When this became evident, a decision was taken to establish the voluntary Partnership Improvement Board. The appointment of an interim chair and scrutineer (John Goldup) afforded the partnership to bring about improvement to the safeguarding arrangements at pace and to review current safeguarding partnership arrangements to ensure it is fit for purpose. Recommendations regarding the Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements are being implemented which include a revised sub-structure of the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The Chief Officers Safeguarding Overview Group is where Chief Officers come together for oversight of the Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements. This has continued to meet on a quarterly basis. The Independent Chair presents scrutiny reports to this group which highlights key issues, risks and how the partnership could address these, which has re-focused attention to the safeguarding arrangements.

Response to the Pandemic

Doncaster experienced the November 2019 floods, and this was subsequently followed by the COVID 19 pandemic, creating further needs in communities, increased demand and complex partnership challenges, impeding partnership working at all levels. The pandemic impacted on both service capacity and the way in which services are organised and can be delivered. Health services were re-diverted, schools remained open for only the most vulnerable and early help services needed to find new ways of engaging with children and families away from face-to-face contacts in Family Hubs.

Safeguarding Partners remained focused on two overarching priorities during the height of the pandemic: Keeping children safe and in education. New interim arrangements were set up to support this, for example a partnership wide welfare call system was stood up where ALL vulnerable children from across health, education and early help were collated into one list and a team were set up to make contact with these families on a regular basis. The list included families where parents were identified as extremely vulnerable and therefore isolated.

The Family Hubs set up a virtual Family Hub to run interactive groups, read stories via Facebook etc. This has proven to be extremely popular and will continue post pandemic.

However, our safeguarding services experienced significant pressures, compounded by the limiting factors around home visiting etc. This has led to a decline in practice and performance. A key strength of the Children's Partnership is the early recognition of this decline and the swift action taken to address it.

The partnership was able to respond quickly to its workforce recruitment challenges, the environmental, social and economic challenges relating to the floods and the pandemic through a coordinated partnership approach. This was supported by strong political leadership, demonstrated by additional financial investment to respond to increased demands, which delivered:

- An immediate increase through additional agency worker capacity and more recently an increase in the number of social work posts in the Doncaster Children's Services Trust.
- Changes to social work pay allowing Doncaster to compete with neighbouring authorities in recruiting and retaining the best social workers.
- A further £1m investment in the improvement programme established in November 2020 and chaired independently.
- Funded additional capacity at the front door
- Doncaster Council funded meals during school holidays for families impacted by poverty.
- Hampers for those children who were living in households that were shielding in the initial lockdown in March 2020.
- Doncaster Council and School's Forum invested in the commitment to deliver holiday activities during the summer to help to bridge the gap during the summer holidays, encouraging increased attendance from September.

- Doncaster Council worked with an IT provider to make sure that all families who need it have access to remote learning.
- Additional Early Help and Education Welfare posts, to help pupils over the next 12 months.
- Investment in counselling services, to support children and young people, as part of a wider strategic plan around mental health.
- Additional funding to support children and young people, living in households where there is domestic violence, in particular around trauma informed support.
- 'Social and Emotional Mental Health' group. A national first, the group of multi-agency key influencers and decision makers meet every week to ensure children and young people receive the most appropriate and timely support.

A Safeguarding Partnership and Oversight Meeting was set up, bringing together senior staff from all local agencies, including statutory partners. This allowed for quick decisions to prioritise the things that made the most difference, and to swiftly respond when things changed as well as looking at how to support communities to recover.

The Children and Families Cell was set up to focus on support for children and families, which adopted a flexible approach to respond quickly and proactively to changing demands and emerging concerns, whilst maintaining oversight of the agreed multi-agency children service arrangements. It identified the biggest risks and, most importantly, agreed how to respond to these. The priority themes include:

- Increased risk to children in households at risk of domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse
- Potential poor emotional wellbeing and mental health for children and families.
- Impact of increased poverty on children and families.
- Children that may go missing

The partnership recognised that it needed to think differently in terms of how the most vulnerable children and young people were identified and responded to. This resulted in working closely with schools and setting regular meetings with school leaders, this allowed:

- Working to ensure vulnerable children and families were supported during holidays or when schools are closed.
- Set up virtual meetings to replace face-to-face discussion.
- Welfare calls to vulnerable families, sharing information across agencies to make sure a coordinated offer of support was in place.
- Working together to promote school attendance of vulnerable children. Weekly attendance increased and updates were shared across the partnership.
- Support for schools to develop a recovery and wellbeing curriculum to respond to the impact of COVID on children's education.

In addition, the partnership recognised the need to think differently about staff support and so it:

- Continued to meet regularly with staff, even when this had to be done differently.

- Ensured practitioners had the opportunity to engage in fora to speak up and speak out. The partnership has remained committed to hear their voices and act on their concerns.
- Worked with Public Health to ensure that frontline staff were a priority in the COVID 19 vaccination programme.
- Supported staff to ensure that their practice had the right impact.
- Worked with partners on the Children's Cell to coordinate a dashboard for emergency planning that holds shared data and intelligence across the partnerships to make the response to flooding more efficient.

Assurance

Doncaster Council and Doncaster Children's Services Trust commissioned the Partnership Improvement Board, which is independently chaired, to reset the partnership approach to improvement, holding each other to account, with the goal of getting the basics right, and allowing for the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership to re-focus within a post COVID 19 climate. The Improvement Partnership Board priorities are:

1. Front door including multi-agency access point
2. Early Help
3. Multi-agency Frontline practice
4. Intelligence led performance and quality framework
5. Governance and Leadership

The Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partners are represented on this group, including the Chair of the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership and as such is part of shaping the development for transition of the responsibilities from the Partnership Improvement Board to the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership. Key achievements to date include the development of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub; the agreement of an extended early help offer, fit for the current pressures on partners, and looking forward to an even earlier offer within localities; the agreement of a leadership charter and staff engagement framework; Partnership agreement on future governance arrangements to service the wider ambitions and priorities of the Children and Families partnership, including Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Ofsted Inspection

An OFSTED focused visit on 23rd and 24th of February 2021, found that despite the challenges of the pandemic, Doncaster Council and Doncaster Children's Services Trust responded swiftly to emerging issues and worked well together to provide coordinated support to young people and their families throughout the pandemic. This included working with schools to understand issues to provide a targeted response to support children with their school attendance. The creativity of staff to continue working and providing support to children and young people they work with during the pandemic was recognised. However, the following areas in social work practice were identified as requiring improvement to improve services:

- The focus on the quality and impact of intervention in case-file audits.
- The analysis of risk of children experiencing long-term neglect.
- The consistency of recording to provide evidence of multi-agency reviews of plans and progress.
- Visits to care leavers and management's oversight of the support provided to them.

A plan to address these areas is underway. This aligns with the Partnership Improvement Board plan and links into the work of the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership through its delivery plan.

Performance - Quality and Impact

One of the key roles of the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership is to evaluate the effectiveness of what is done by the partners both, individually and collectively, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and to advise them on ways to improve.

Whilst there was a wealth of information available to the partnership, it was recognised that there was need to establish a robust quality and assurance framework that provides data and analysis (rather than description) to assess the effectiveness of services and identify priorities for change, including where services need commissioning, de-commissioning and improving. Work is underway to develop a partnership quality assurance and improvement framework led by the Partnership Improvement Board, which includes the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership, to arrive at a unified partnership assurance framework.

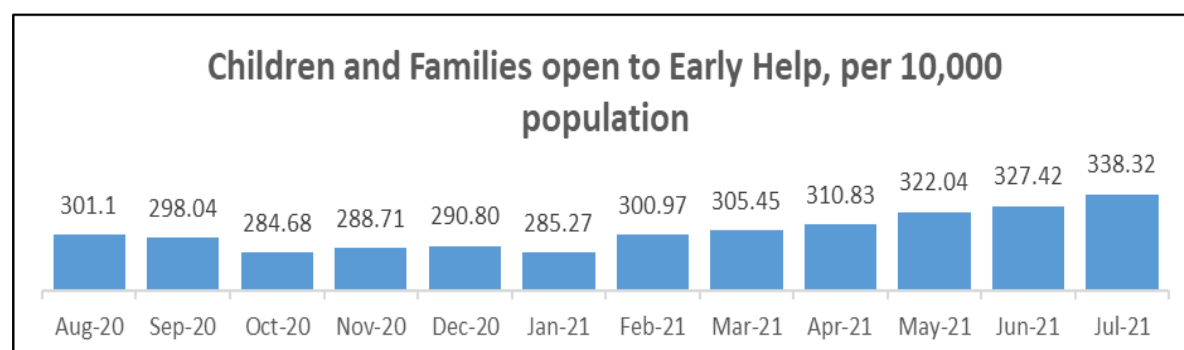
The information available demonstrates that there was an increased demand for support, putting significant pressure on the child protection services, as well as agency and partnership response to address this as detailed below.

Early Help

What does the information tell us?

In relation to early help intervention, the partnership continued to work across Doncaster to identify need early, however the data below, shows that following a previous decrease, from February 2021 (at 300.97) there has been a continuous upward trend, with 338.82 per 10,000 population at July 2021 receiving early help intervention.

Graph1: Number of Children and Families open to Early Help per 10,000 population



The lead practitioner role is undertaken by a range of organisations in Doncaster, however Q3 2020-2021 data below shows that Education led on the greatest number of cases at both level two and three, followed by the Doncaster Children Services Trust and then Doncaster Council, Health and the Voluntary Sector. This data refers to cases held on the Early Help case management system and does not take into account agencies that do not use this system but may have taken on lead practitioner role. This is being explored further to see how cases that are not recorded on the system are captured. Work is also on-going to support and challenge the partnership to increase the number of children and young people open on the early help pathway and to take on the lead practitioner role.

Graph 2: Lead practitioner role by organisation



What has been done?

- Investment for additional capacity (13 practitioners and 2 managers), to support more children and young people to step down from statutory services into early help and to take on the lead professional role and support partners to take on this role.
- Review of the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) arrangements led by the Council and overseen by the Partnership Improvement Board.
- The 1001 Day Offer pilot (running until March 2022) which brought together practitioners from key agencies into an integrated team to deliver a single offer of support from conception to the second birthday of children. Upon evaluation of its efficacy, it intended to embed any learning into the current offer and the revised Early Help Strategy.
- A well-developed Family Hub offer that provides in-reach walk-in support and outreach support in communities that is cited as best practice nationally.
- A Local Solutions Operating Model brings together staff from across the partnership, in communities, and empowers them to work together on issues relating to children, young people, families and their communities with a clear

focus on early intervention and prevention. There are early signs of families receiving support sooner and within their communities, with families getting earlier intervention support within three days, rather than waiting for an early help assessment to conclude.

What next?

There is need for assurance on how this improvement is sustained going forwards as the funding for capacity for additional practitioners was time limited.

Impact: The above led to improvements in the step-down arrangements within the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub and the Early Help Hub thus ensuring more cases are making their way to Early Help, and those that do, then go onto an early help pathway, for example the conversion of early help enquiries onto the Early Help Pathway increased, from 36% in December 2019 to 53% in June 2021.

Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub

What does the information tell us?

Doncaster experienced a high level of demand on social care services for children and young people during this last year. Contact within Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub continued to increase from the previous year. In April 2020, there were 1706 contacts in comparison to 2292 at April 2021, increasing to 2335 at July 2021. Work is continuing to assure the partnership that the 'thresholds are being applied correctly.

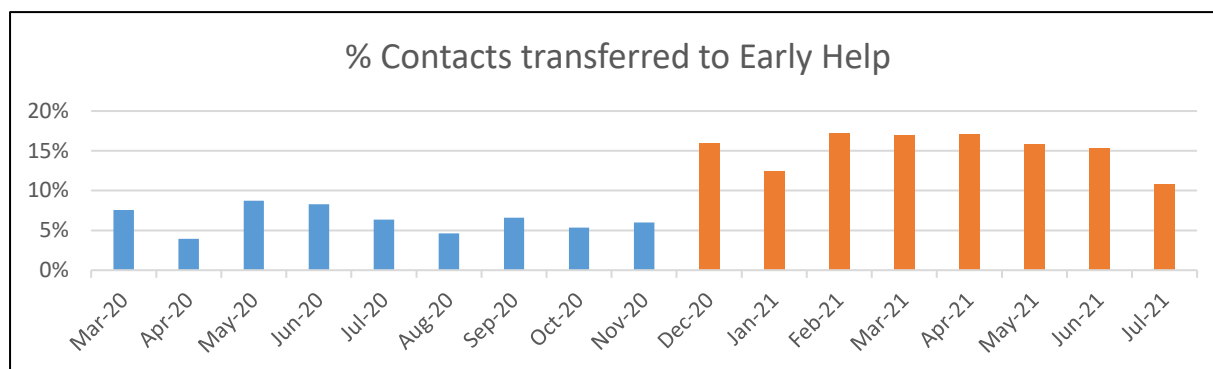
Following a review of the threshold document during this period, the Independent Chair of the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership raised a concern 'that the revised threshold and levels of needs descriptors set the bar for considering social work assessment and intervention too high, appearing to restrict access to children's social care to situations. Therefore, it is being reviewed further and it is anticipated that the updated document will be signed off by the Partnership

Table 1: Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub contacts 2020/2021

| 2020 / 2021 | April | May | June | July |
|--------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| 2020 | 1706 | 1678 | 1970 | 1909 |
| 2021 | 2292 | 2543 | 2533 | 2335 |

There has been a marked increase in the number of contacts being transferred to Early Help services. However, it seems that the majority of contacts were going to the Council's Starting Well Service and not necessarily being spread across the partnership.

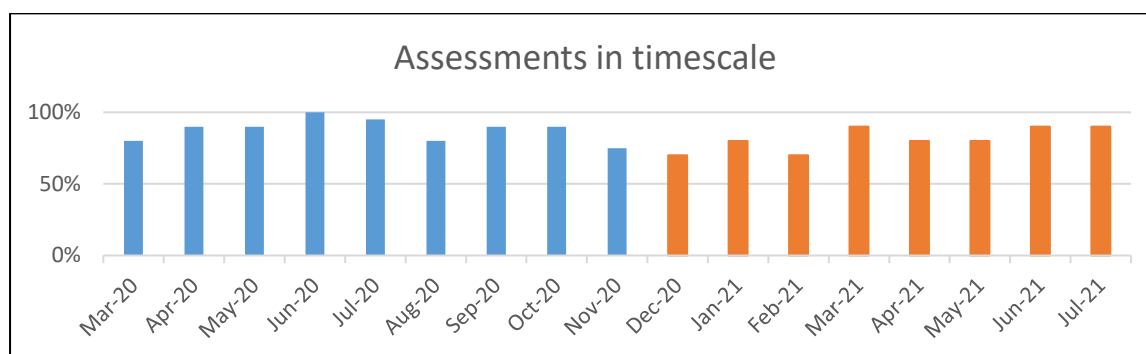
Graph 3: Percentage of Contacts transferred to Early Help



There was reduction from the previous year in referral timeliness (for a decision within a day). This was due to changes made to the process where all contacts were RAG rated and overseen by a manager and urgent (red) contacts were addressed. The early stages of the switch to MOSIAC, a new case recording and management system, within Children's Social Care and Early Help that was implemented in August 2021, posed challenges to performance and data management. This is being addressed and performance is anticipated to recover.

Assessment Timeliness was high, and following a slight dip around December 2020 and February 2021, performance recovered. This means that children received a timely assessment.

Graph 4: Assessments in timescale



Re-referrals, over the last four years were higher in Doncaster than regional and statistical neighbours, as shown in the table below. In Doncaster, this was linked to withdrawal of consent by families and also to domestic abuse referrals. For some cases, consent was an issue, leading to premature closure of the case where there has been no presence for meeting the criteria for the Threshold, to escalate these cases. Early help support would have been helpful for these cases had consent been given. It is envisaged that the introduction of Family First Meetings will help families to understand more about early help support and the need to consent for support.

Table 2 Percentage of Re-referrals into Children's Social Care within previous 12 months¹

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Doncaster | 25.5 | 27.0 | 27.6 | 25.4 |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | 22.9 | 24.6 | 23.8 | 22.6 |
| Statistical Neighbours | 20.5 | 19.4 | 20.9 | 21.8 |
| England | 21.9 | 22.6 | 22.6 | 22.7 |

What has been done?

Work was undertaken to review and develop the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub overseen by the Partnership Improvement Board in managing the demand through increasing referrals into the Early Intervention Service and managing the referral routes via one front door more effectively.

The Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (a team of co-located multi-agency safeguarding partners) was developed by the Doncaster Children's Services Trust, Doncaster Council, South Yorkshire Police, the Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group and Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Trust and Probation (CRC and NPS), to improve multi-agency information sharing to help safeguard children.

Impact: This has led to the reduction in the rate of referrals into Statutory (Level 4) Services, whilst increasing referrals into Early Help Intervention Services. This has resulted in less children requiring statutory assessment from the Assessment Service.

Child Protection

What does the information tell us?

In 2020-2021, the number of Initial Child Protection Conferences and number of children subject to Child Protection Plans increased significantly. The total number of Initial Child Protection Conference held was 315, (an increase from 229 the previous year), and involved 594 children (an increase from 381 children the previous year). The total number of children subject to child protection planning after Initial Child Protection Conference through the year was 531 children, (an increase from 381 the previous year). The number of Review Child Protection Conference held were 481 in 2020-2021 compared to 402 in 2019-2020.

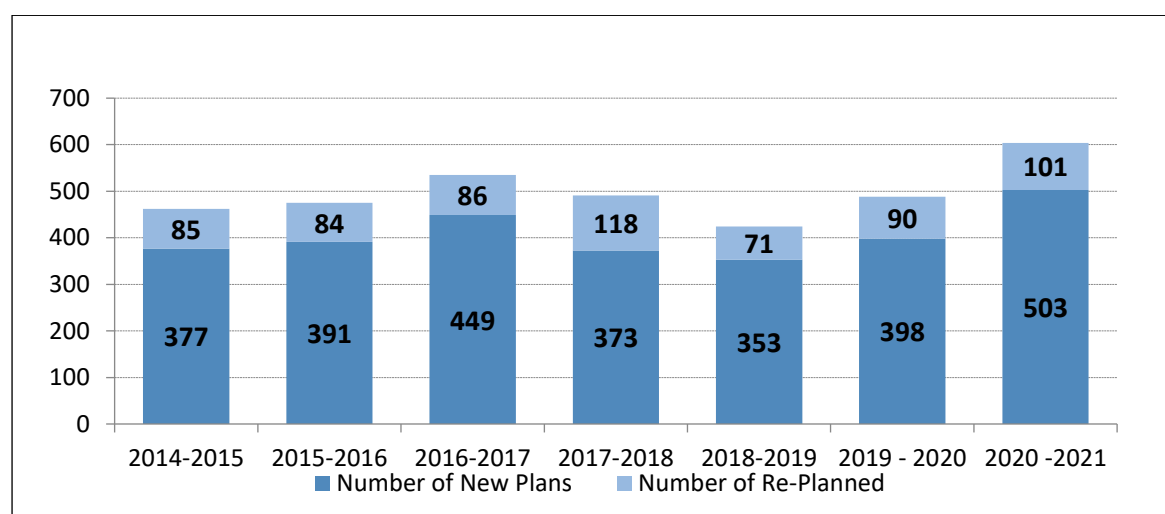
On a positive note, Initial Child Protection Conferences and Review Child Protection Conferences were consistently held with the statutory timeframe. Attendance by partner agencies at Initial Child Protection Conferences was strong despite a significant number of conferences being held. This demonstrated strong partnership commitment to working together to keep children safe. However, the need to improve on obtaining partner agency information and contributions was identified.

¹ [Local authority interactive tool \(LAIT\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The rate of children becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan for a second time provides a proxy indicator for the sustainability of interventions offered through the child protection process. For children and families this means that the support offered helps reduce risk and the positive impact of this work is sustained.

In 2020-2021 there were 101 repeat plans started in the year, compared to 90 the previous year. Whilst there was a slight increase in repeat plans, in comparison to the high level of children subject to new Child Protection Plans, the figures in the graph below shows that few of these are children have previously been engaged in the child protection system.

Graph 5: Number of repeat Child Protection Plans



What has been done?

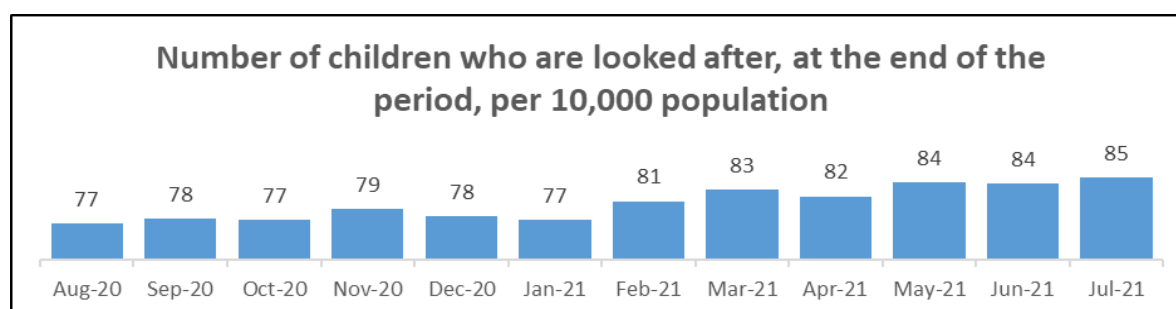
The increase in the number of Child Protection Conferences and children subject to Children Protection Plans was recognised as areas that required further exploration and consideration by the partnership. Significant work has been undertaken to understand thresholds across Doncaster. Workshops were held with a range of staff including Conference chairs and social workers to support the work to develop the updated threshold document. The outcome of this work will be shared in 2021-2022 annual report.

Children in Care

What does the information tell us?

There was an increase in the number of children in care. At 31st March 2021, there were 547 children in the care of Doncaster Children's Services, at a rate of 81.7 per 10,000 children. This was an increase of 25 children and young people compared to the end of the previous year, where the rate was 78.01 per 10,000 children. The current rate of children in care is higher than the national rate of 67 per 10,000, but lower than our Statistical Neighbour rate of 101, based on 2019-2020 out turns. Increases in children in care continued to be reported across the country and region, with statistical neighbours increasing from 95.1 in 2018-2019 to 101 in 2019-2020. (Figures for 2020-2021 will not be available until later in 2021).

Graph 6: Number of children who looked after, at the end of the period, per 10,000 population



The increase in the number of children in care was as a result of both admission rates increasing and discharge rates decreasing. At the end of July 2021, the number of children leaving care has been lower than the number entering for six of the previous seven months. Identifying suitable placements for children was particularly challenging as a consequence of both the impact of the pandemic on children's residential care sector and the wider availability of suitable placements. Intelligence at both a regional and national level indicated that this was a wider challenge. Sourcing a placement for the most vulnerable children became increasingly difficult and in some cases, placements were not available at the point they were needed. This results in placement delay and places incredible pressure on services to find suitable placements, in particular for those children who require specialist placements. This will be a focus in the Future Placement Strategy,

What has been done?

In relation to Children in Care reviews, all initial reviews were held within the statutory timescales. Reviews continued to be held as a series of meetings where required to ensure appropriate attendance by significant individuals. A training package was completed with plans to deliver from May 2021.

Since the lockdown the Virtual School, local schools and Social Care teams have worked closely together to ensure that all children in care have access to appropriate technology to support their education. Support was maintained throughout the different phases of the pandemic, with approaches being adapted to the circumstances at the time. This was supported by positive working between the Doncaster Children's Services Trust, Doncaster Council, Department for Education and local partners.

What next?

- On-going work to improve the timeliness of Initial Health Assessment with health colleagues;
- Work to deliver Personal Education Plan training to Social Workers
- Implementation of the NSPCC Reunification Framework to further strengthen this area and ensure reunification remains a priority when safe to do so.
- Alignment of preventative services such as Edge of Care and Family Group Conferencing to further focus on renunciation and prevention.
- Reconfiguring the fostering and connected person's team, this will include joint visits with the allocated social worker when undertaking viability assessments, so we consider SGOs at the start for children.

- Writing/Refreshing Sufficiency Strategy to ensure clear focus on sufficiency, for more provision for children
- Delivering the Future Placement Strategy - have more in house provision and delivering the Keys to you Future programme.
- Review of the current structure around Fostering, Connected and Placement to ensure the process is robust and serving children looked after.

Care leavers

What does the information tell us?

There were 194 care leavers open to Doncaster Children's Services Trust, during the periods between 2019-2020 and 2020-2021.

Prior to the national lockdown issues in Doncaster for care leavers, continued to be around accommodation, education and social isolation. Although, during lockdown many care leavers were able to remain in their properties, the lack of opportunities for education were reduced, and social isolation increased.

What has been done?

Doncaster Children's Services Trust reached out to young people in care and care leavers in a different way. Sessions on budgeting skills, completing housing applications, universal credit issues and cooking were made available via Microsoft Teams. In order ensure access to these sessions care leavers were provided with electronic devices such as laptops and tablets and where necessary Internet access. The sessions were provided to support care leavers, with any money issues, local job opportunities, and address social isolation.

What next?

- Further additions to the leaving care team such as, an Advanced Practitioner, a Social Worker and an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). This will provide much needed support to the Personal Advisers with quality of pathway planning and case recording. The Independent Reviewing Officer role will provide additional monitoring and scrutiny, giving the team with a better grip on the quality of the service provided to care leavers.
- Provide support to care leavers regarding emotional health and wellbeing and focused work on the projection of children leaving care.

Impact: A significant increase in children returning home under 'Placement with Parents' regulations and these are tracked to consider revoking orders when stability is gained. However, it is important to ensure that these places are assessed.

The implementation of a second Education Personal Advisor improved the overall Education, Employment and Training (EET) rate to 56.31%, from 52.88% at the beginning of this financial year; however, this remains low overall compared to wider Education, Employment and Training figures.

Section 11 Self-assessment

What does the information tell us?

During 2020, the joint process for the Section 11 self-assessment and the safeguarding self-assessment was completed by partners of the Doncaster Children Partnership and Doncaster Safeguarding Adults Board. The learning points, stated below, were taken forward through individual agency's action plans and sub-groups, including the Workforce Development Group as relevant. This provided a further opportunity for joint working and strengthening links across children and adult partnerships.

The self-assessment identified that proactive measures were taken by partners to engage with children and people using services to inform service development. The self-assessment reinforced the message that “*safeguarding is everyone's responsibility*”, and it was recommended that in the future the self-assessment continue to be completed by both adult and children services.

Table 3: Outcome of S11 self-assessment responses received by agencies

| Positives | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability regarding safeguarding within agencies with links to the partnership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reported widespread use of the Signs of Safety principles and Making Safeguarding Personal |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safeguarding procedures and training in place across the partnership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality assurance and audit activity |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good representation and engagement with Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership and Doncaster Safeguarding Adult Board | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong culture, systems and processes in place for sharing information |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proactive measures taken by partners to engage with service users and children to inform service development A clear focus on child neglect and domestic abuse | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good level of safeguarding self-awareness across the partnership and identification of areas for development |
| Development Themes | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidencing the impact of safeguarding activity on outcomes for children and adults | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of impact of training regarding the Mental Capacity Act 2005 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of training for staff in relation to allegations against people working with adults and children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using local information on diversity to plan and implement services |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delay in provision of training generally in relation to the adaptation to delivering virtual training as a result of the pandemic | |

Audits

Assurance in the form of performance information is supported by the exploration of the quality of practice obtained from multi-agency audits and other audit activity including those conducted by partner agencies. From April 2020-March 2021, due to the pandemic and Safeguarding Business Unit re-structure, multi-agency audits were paused, but resumed in July 2021.

The partnership agreed a multi-agency audit programme for 2021-2022 commencing with a neglect audit in July 2021. Six cases were audited through a multi-agency group, key findings of the audit are that:

- It was not evident in the case files that the views of the children or their lived experience were adequately captured.
- There was no consistent evidence of the Neglect Toolkit being used to support children and families to identify and respond to neglect.
- There needs to be consideration and development of how the quality and the care for children and families is tailored to meet their individual needs. This means allowing practitioners to do things differently, including stepping out of given/expected timeframes if required. As well as using a healthy challenge to ensure that the right service/care is provided to children and families.
- The current system is not set up nationally for services to deliver an individual approach to families and there is a local gap regarding exit strategies in the community.

As part of the audit process, it was identified that South Yorkshire Police have invested significant resource into understanding and acting on their powers where neglect is identified.

The findings of the audit have informed a multi-agency plan of action to drive continuous improvement and an effective response to neglect in Doncaster. Neglect is a priority for the Doncaster Safeguarding Partnership Board for 2021-2022.

Moving forwards the audit programme, will include deep-dive audit activity and focus on domestic abuse and the remaining priorities of the partnership such as child exploitation, and emotional health and wellbeing. However, there is a need for the development of a robust audit process, which enables both multi-agency audits and partner agency audit findings to be presented and discussed in a multi-agency partnership forum.

Practitioners Forum

What does the information tell us?

During 2020-2021, the forum provided a platform for senior managers and practitioners across the children and adult's partnership to share information and issues to help adapt to changing demand and drive-up standards. The forum, focused on the impact of the pandemic on front line staff and how services responded under lockdown. The forum identified that organisations adapted to using virtual technology

such as Microsoft Teams, which was a huge learning curve in a short timeframe, especially within Early Help, despite this staff reported that it had been positive engaging with families differently. There was increased attendance from agencies such as Health, South Yorkshire Police, Education, Local Authority and Third Sector organisations. Practitioners found it useful to share issues they had faced recently, for example around increases in referrals or access to support by some communities due to either language barriers or families not having access to digital technology.

The forum highlighted that due to recent circumstances, it is now more important than ever for everyone to be more diligent and raise awareness that “*Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility*”.

Moving forwards, the forum will continue to be a key vehicle for continuing dialogue that brings together senior managers and a wide range of children and adult’s practitioners and reflects Doncaster’s strong commitment to a whole family approach.

Impact: The engagement with families differently, has been positively received particularly within Early Help. The Forum offered peer support for practitioners from a range of agencies to share issues and be supported during challenging times.

Children’s Participation and Engagement

Children’s participation/voice in Child Protection Conference

What does the information tell us?

Overall, there was good participation of children and young people in Child Protection Conferences (Initial and Review), although there was a decrease from the previous year. A total of 110 children and young people were invited, 53 attended in 2020-2021, compared to 241 invited, and 158 attended in 2019-2020.

In 2020/21, there were 225 referrals to the Doncaster Children’s Services Trust advocacy service for children subject to Child Protection Plans, to support and encourage participation in the Conference process and meeting. Advocates provided support using a variety of methods and direct work tools enabling children to share their wishes and feelings and views to the Conference.

There was an increase in the attendance of mothers at 267 and fathers at 154 in 2020-2021, compared to 185 for mothers and 107 for fathers’ attendance to Initial Child Protection Conferences. However, there was decrease in attendance of the mothers at 181 and fathers at 56 in 2020-2021 compared to 286 for mothers and 147 for fathers’ attendance to Review Child Protection Conferences.

What has been done?

Virtual meetings were taking place and also consideration was given of any additional risks involved when the child is at home with the parents. Prior to the pandemic and virtual meetings, different methods were used for children and young people to attend including schools providing transportation.

The attendance and contribution of children at Conference remains a key priority, and is achieved through range of approaches to communicate with children and young people and offer opportunities to provide their feedback. This includes the 'Speak out Loud' participation group for children subject to Child Protection Planning, which provides an opportunity for them to share their views

Children's feedback on their advocate:

"My Advocate was very helpful. She listened a lot, to what I said and helped me word what I was trying to explain to the conference. She helped make sure that my voice was heard".

"We felt happy because you listened to us."

"I would recommend advocacy to other children for their conference. I felt listened to. I would like her to come again for my next conference."

Young person's feedback on the question - Has the Child Protection Plan been useful for you?

"Yes having every professionals and being able to talk to professionals and ask for help as without this god knows where I would be now".

"I am grateful for the cp plan, the support people have given me".

"No one would know anything about me before social services became involved nobody would listen to me. Professionals have helped me to manage what was happening with my mum".

Impact: Children and young people's attendance and contribution to Conference provides a shared understanding of their lived experience. This leads to smarter planning that better reflects the needs and experience of the child. There is also a greater likelihood of contribution and engagement from all those involved in the plan to achieve its aims and the safety and wellbeing for the child and young

Child Protection Conference Chairs received eight compliments (and no complaints) during 2020/2021, which include a young person thanking the Chair for listening to them and two parents, one thanking the Chair for being non-judgemental and the other thanking the Chair for treating them with respect and making them feel comfortable. Other compliments acknowledged how the Chair had handled conferences in relation to ensuring the voice of the child and family was heard and keeping the meeting focused on the child which resulted in positive outcomes.

Young Advisors

What does the information tell us?

Doncaster Council's Local Office of the Children's Commissioner recently employed 10 young advisors to consult with other children and young people, particularly those considered 'harder to reach', on service and practice developments. Doncaster Children's Services Trust has also employed Young Advisors for a number of years. The work of the Young Advisors has continued during the pandemic, and they helped improve service delivery by undertaking research through outreach work to find out what our children and young people would like to see in their communities, sitting on interview panels alongside professionals and working in collaboration with Youth Council members to co-produce the Doncaster Offer and a Transition video.

Throughout the pandemic, Young Advisors shared videos, including via twitter and notes describing the experiences of young people in lockdown. The most recent coincided with Children's Mental Health Week 2021.

- <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-COVID-19/blogs/doncaster-lockdown>
- <https://coproductionweek2017.blogspot.com/2020/07/co-production-in-changing-world.html>

The Young Advisors were shortlisted for three categories in the Young Advisor Network Awards November 2020: Best New Team, Best Team and Best Project with Lasting Impact. They won the Best New Team Award. They were also finalists for the Municipal Journal AWARDS 2021: Innovation in Children's Services.

Emerging Issues

Neglect

What does the information tell us?

In Doncaster, the number of cases open to Early Help where neglect is a feature by vulnerability, has risen over the past 12 months from 187 (June 2020) to 243 at June 2021. This is a 29.9% increase as illustrated in the table below.

Table 4: Early Help Open Cases where Neglect is a feature by Vulnerability

| Month | Jun 2020 | Sept 2020 | Dec 2020 | Mar 2021 | Jun 2021 |
|--|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Total Early Help Open Cases where Neglect is a feature | 187 | 201 | 215 | 236 | 243 |

From June 2020, there has been increase of contacts in relation to neglect peaking at March 2021 at 54.3%, as shown in the table below.

Table 5: Social Care Contacts in relation to Neglect

| Month | Jun 2020 | Sept 2020 | Dec 2020 | Mar 2021 | June 2021 |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Total Contacts | 1994 | 1998 | 4474 | 5738 | 6260 |
| Rate of Contacts with Neglect | 20.5 | 31.5 | 41.5 | 54.3 | 28.4 |

The number of contacts in relation to neglect, as well as the recognition that practice across the partnership in using the Neglect toolkit was inconsistent is of concern and led the partnership to focus on neglect.

In relation to Child Protection Plans, there is a significant gap between the categories of emotional abuse at 62% (representing mostly domestic abuse cases) and of neglect at 30.1% (statistical neighbor 49%, national 50% 2019/20 data).

What has been done?

Neglect has been identified by the partnership as a strategic priority and work is taking place to revise the Neglect Strategy for Doncaster. In addition, the partnership have committed to replacing the Neglect Toolkit with the NSPCC Graded Care Profile (GCP2) Toolkit, this will include a comprehensive training plan for implementation across the multi-agency partnership to ensure a borough-wide response to Neglect.

The multi-agency audit has taken place (as mentioned previously) and findings are being used to inform improvement in practice across the partnership.

What next?

The revised neglect strategy will be rolled out across the partnership. As part of this the NSPCC Graded Care Profile (GCP2) Toolkit, will be implemented. This will support work to increase practitioner understanding and response to neglect and using a common approach to risk analysis. There will be a need for endorsement and monitoring of the use of the NSPCC Graded Care Profile (GCP2) Toolkit across the partnership.

Domestic abuse

What does the information tell us?

As a result of COVID 19 and the subsequent lockdowns there has been an increase in domestic abuse cases both locally and nationally. The Home Office reported that in September 2020 within the UK there was a rise of 49% in the number of calls to domestic abuse services.

The Office of National Statistics identified that a Crime Survey for England and Wales in 2020 estimated 5.5% of adults experienced domestic abuse in the preceding year, which equates to approximately 11,164 potential victims in Doncaster.

There was a significant increase in domestic abuse referrals across the partnership in Doncaster as shown in table below. The majority of the information received in relation to domestic abuse is from the police. All police call outs in relation domestic abuse

incident, where children are known to be living with the adults, are shared with the Doncaster Children's Services Trust. For those children attending a school, which has signed up to Operation Encompass, a notification is sent to the school identifying that there has been a domestic abuse incident so that the child can be supported.

Table 6: Domestic Abuse referrals

| Year | Hub | | IDVA | | DCST | | Police 2019 and 2020 | |
|---------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|--|--------------------------------------|
| | Referrals | % change | Referrals | % change | Referrals | % change | Incidents | % change |
| 2019/20 | 1567 | +18.57% | 904 | +55.53% | 1145 | +47.34% | DA Crime 5347 DA Non Crime 3114 | DA Crime +14% DA Non Crime |
| 2020/21 | 1858 | | 1406 | | 1687 | | DA Crime 6096 DA Non Crime 3735 | +19.9% |

The Office of National Statistics survey reported nationally in 2020 an increase of 9% of Domestic Abuse crime whilst Doncaster was 5% higher with a 14% increase. The survey found that the contacts were not necessarily new victims, but ones known to services. In relation to Doncaster, during 2020-2021, Independent Domestic Violence Advisers (IDVA) recorded 587 victims, 179 (41.82%) of which were repeat victims whilst the Domestic Abuse Hub recorded 921 victims, of which 180 (19.54%) were repeat victims.

The Office of National Statistics report found that there was generally an increase in demand for domestic abuse victim support services, including a 65% increase in calls and contacts logged by the National Domestic Abuse Helpline between April and June 2020.

Domestic Abuse was also a dominant theme in one of the Child Safeguarding Learning Reviews. Much of the strategic activity emerged from the learning of this review.

What has been done?

Domestic abuse as a concerning emerging issue was recognised by the partnership and work to address this included:

- Re-modelling of the 'front door' services, including the development of a Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub to share information between co-located partners and help improve responses to children and their families (as mentioned previously).
- The review of thresholds included review of the descriptors, which should allow for practitioners to identify and respond appropriately to domestic abuse.
- The Doncaster Children's Services Trust developed a practitioner toolkit to support a more thorough assessment and response to children who are living

with or experiencing domestic abuse, this includes work with perpetrators as well as the victims (adult or children).

- Social workers now attend a Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference where they are working with a family who is being discussed. This ensures a fuller sharing of information and a focus on the child.
- The re-investment in the Domestic Abuse Navigators Service which uses the whole family approach. A success for the service is in relation to repeat referrals. Whilst in the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor and the Domestic Abuse Hub repeat referrals are significantly high, the repeat referral rate for families working with Domestic Abuse Navigators are between 0% and 1%. Even when Children's Social Care are working with the families the repeat referral rate falls between 9% and 26% for the same period. This also correlates with reducing the number of children who have to be moved from the parental home because of Domestic Violence and Abuse and therefore provides a significant benefit. The Domestic Abuse Navigator service continue to offer specialist advice, support and training to professionals around the impact of domestic abuse on children and young people and stalking and harassment and also training to foster carers.
- Creation of dedicated domestic abuse police investigation teams.
- A refreshed domestic abuse strategy developed by the Safer Doncaster Partnership.

What next?

Moving forwards, across the partnership there is a need to improve the early intervention response to domestic abuse. Community outreach is being extended through the deployment of a Domestic Abuse Community Navigator.

Impact: There is extensive work taking place in Doncaster to tackle domestic abuse, an issue that affects every community at all levels.

COVID 19 has had a significant impact on domestic abuse. Nationally there is increased demand on domestic abuse services. However, in Doncaster demand on services continues to be higher than the national average.

The Doncaster Partnership Self Evaluation 2021, recognised the work being undertaken by all agencies for a more localised, evidenced based and 'whole family approach' to ensure the needs and risks of adults and children are properly considered within all approaches and practice across the partnership.

Cross partnership working through the Strategic Board has shown the importance of linkages between the Partnership Domestic Abuse Services, South Yorkshire Police, the Children's Front Door, Safeguarding Teams, St Leger Homes, Probation, Early Help, Probation and Stronger Families initiatives.

This means that families experiencing domestic abuse are being identified sooner across the partnership, enabling a whole family response.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

What does the information tell us?

The impact of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns on the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people, due to social isolation and lack of direct access to support and services has been a concern locally and nationally.

In Doncaster, there was a strong partnership response to supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. This was supported by Doncaster being the second largest trailblazer in the country to pilot a new NHS CAMHS service 'With Me in Mind' as part of "The Green Paper" setting out plans to transform children and young people's mental health. Doncaster was also successful in gaining further wave 8 funding. This means the offer can be expanded to more schools with more mental health support teams and provide more support.

What has been done?

- To respond to an increase in self-harm and / or suicide intentions at the Accident and Emergency department, the Doncaster partnership quickly set up and established the 'Social and Emotional Mental Health' group. A national first, the group of multi-agency key influencers and decision makers meet every week to ensure children and young people receive the most appropriate and timely support.
- The police form part of this team. As a result, they are more sighted on local children at risk, who may have become more vulnerable during the pandemic. The Police also support parents and carers who may be at risk of domestic violence.
- Deep dives were conducted to ascertain and share information with schools so that appropriate support could be provided to children and young people
- The Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group and Doncaster Council have set up and chair a mental health strategy group to lead on the local strategic response to mental health over next five years. This group jointly fund and commission services to provide support to communities and address the social determinants of mental health rather than just the symptoms.
- In the last year, all children and young people deemed to be an emergency were seen within 2 hours, those urgent within 24 hours and those non-urgent within 4 weeks, which means Doncaster has some of the quickest access times in the country.
- For those children with higher levels of need, including episodic periods of crisis, there is an effective multi-agency group that meets on a weekly basis to manage risk and seek solutions. This has helped to reduce the number of children and young people who need an acute service and has been cited as best practice by NHS England.

In the last year, four young people were admitted to an acute in-patient bed with a mental health crisis. Although current data is not available, Doncaster has consistently seen fewer admissions than both regional and national comparators in recent years.

Table 7: Inpatient Admission rate for Mental Health disorders per 100,000 population aged 0-17

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Doncaster | 41.00 | 60.20 | 59.80 |
| Yorkshire & Humber | 58.90 | 69.90 | 73.50 |
| Statistical Neighbours | 85.22 | 78.44 | 70.01 |
| England | 84.70 | 88.30 | 89.50 |

What next?

Moving forwards a new wellbeing curriculum has been developed with schools alongside a comprehensive training package. Sixty-six schools have so far have undertaken the training, and virtually all schools now have a named mental health and wellbeing lead and our ambition to be a trauma informed Borough continues, with 600 professionals trained.

Doncaster remains committed to implementing the complete mental health and eating disorder pathways. As a health, education and social care system, they acknowledge early help and prevention is instrumental to enable positive mental health and wellbeing for children and young people

Mental health is a priority for the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership for 2021-2022.

Impact: Mental Health Services in Doncaster are reviewed regularly through the Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group's Clinical Quality Review Group to assess both performance and quality. An external Clinical Triangulation Audit conducted in October 2020 reviewed a sample of sixty patient records to consider whether best practice could be demonstrated in the quality of care records, risk assessments and multi-agency working.

The audit concluded that the service consistently achieves good results in a number of key areas including care planning, multi-agency meetings, risk management and patient/carer voice. Accurate recording of information was identified as an area for

Exploitation

What does the information tell us?

There is a robust multi-agency response to children at risk of exploitation. At 28/09/2021 there were 23 children tracked at the Multi-agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Panel, which meets on a weekly basis. The majority of children were classified as medium risk, which is a consistent picture across the past 12 months. Cases classified as low risk are reviewed at a minimum of every 12 weeks, every 8 weeks for medium risk and every 4 weeks for high risk. Where there are particularly significant concerns children are reviewed more frequently, sometimes weekly.

What has been done?

Doncaster has an established Child Exploitation Team based in the Children's Trust. Key partners including South Yorkshire Police, Children's Social Care, National Probation Service, Doncaster Council Localities Teams, Specialist intervention providers as required (for example forensic psychology), Health and Education are represented at the MACE panel. The panel utilises the Vulnerable Adolescent Tracker (VAT) created by the National Crime Agency and Bedford University. Children are RAG rated based upon several set risk indicators, which provides an overall score indicating the level of vulnerability, either low, medium or high. This can be overridden by professional decision making where significant concerns exist in one or more domains.

In addition to the MACE, the Youth Offending Service (YOS) oversees the mapping of children, by ward, this includes children who are not yet in the criminal justice system or actively being exploited. However, their known associations mean they may be at risk and the Doncaster Children's Services Trust and its partners are committed to identifying and reducing the likelihood of exploitation in the future.

Community based interventions are utilised via the Encouraging Potential Inspiring Change (EPIC) team. EPIC work with young people in communities to reduce the risk of offending and exploitation through engagement in street based, sporting and positive activities. EPIC also delivers directly into schools in terms of a preventive education offer and where required provides direct, 1-2-1 support to young people as determined by MACE.

What next?

An Adolescent Strategy is in development. The aim is to focus and bring services together to enable this cohort of vulnerable young people to access the right support at the right time to meet their needs and reduce risks posed to them. This is an area for further development.

The plan is to bring this together more with Edge of Care Services, Family Group Conferences, MST and Lifelong links to enable families but specifically Vulnerable Adolescents to have a robust intervention and support within one service area.

The Child Exploitation Strategy is being refreshed. The work and intelligence from this group feeds directly into the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership Board's Child Exploitation sub-group to provide assurance that robust processes are in place to manage and respond to Child Exploitation.

Child Exploitation is a priority of the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership for 2021-2022.

Impact: Doncaster's MACE population has reduced significantly in the past 12 months, which is directly attributable to the successful imposition of gang injunctions orders. These orders have restricted the movement and activity of one particular organised crime group, known to target young people.

The South Yorkshire MACE model, which is consistent across all four authorities, has been recognised as a good practice model by National Police College.

Complex Abuse Investigation

There is a complex abuse investigation underway that focusses on a large provider of residential care. This provider works across the Country and provides services for both adults and children. The focus of the Complex Abuse Investigation is on children's homes that are based in Doncaster. This was initiated in February 2021 and the police and partner investigation will be ongoing for at least 2 years. The findings of this review may not be published for some time however learning relevant to the Local Authority Designated Officer role will be incorporated into service development activity as this is identified rather than waiting for the conclusion of the review.

During the course of the investigation issues were identified with regard to the Local Authority Designated Officer response during 2019-2020 and an independent review of the function was undertaken. Although this review was conducted during 2021-2022 the focus on activity in the year covered by this annual report means that it would not be sensible to exclude the findings.

The external review of the Local Authority Designated Officer function identified issues with regard to the quality of recording and management oversight. There were also issues identified in relation to the understanding of the Local Authority Designated Officer role in Children's Social Care and across the wider partnership. These issues are being addressed through an action plan. Training for the social work workforce started immediately (5th October 2021) and will be rolled out across the partnership through the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership and will include the escalation process as required.

Critically the review identified that Local Authority Designated Officer practice has since improved and was positive about the current team. Despite this, we recognise that there is still considerable work to be done to address all areas identified by the review.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

The Case Review sub-group continued to coordinate the work around case reviews on behalf of the Safeguarding Partners in accordance with Working Together 2018.

During 1st April 2020-31st March 2021, five Rapid Reviews were conducted, resulting in two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPR) and three local learning reviews taking place. Local learning reviews also took place on a further three cases that were referred to the Case Review sub-group.

The cases varied in complexity and featured babies to teenagers, and therefore the learning identified was diverse and include the following issues:

- **Families that do not or will not engage** – identified as a repeating issue in previous and new cases
Outcome: A new Managing Engagement training package has been developed and was launched in January 2021. The course content included practice skills and improving confidence around being persistent and to keep trying; tools of

reflection were included and links with actions to consider around disguised compliance.

- **Self-harming and suicidal behaviours of an inpatient** - identified in relation to one case
Outcome: Discussions were held with the NHS England regional lead with the responsibility for Tier 4 beds, and assurance provided that the hospital was subject to a review following the reported incidents and documentation would be sent. It was acknowledged that NHS England are managing this accordingly as they have oversight of the hospital.
- **Information sharing** – identified as repeating issue in previous and new cases
Outcome: A Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub has been developed to promote information sharing. This included key partners and National Probation Service. The revised Threshold guidance document is expected to be published early in 2022.
- **Care records management system** - Risk to Children (RTC) and Hazard markers
Outcome: Clear practice guidance has been issued in relation to the use of “Risk to Children” markers not “Hazard” markers, in relation to known violent offenders.
- **Communication** - Written communication when communicating with families where English is not the first language as it a potential barrier to care
Outcome: Assurance around agencies communication including written communication to families where English is not first language to be included in the future Section 11 self-assessments.
- **Domestic Abuse** - Social Work representation required at MARAC meetings.
Outcome: From October 2020, a Child Protection Chair attends MARAC. Where there is one the allocated case social worker also attends to provide all relevant information and take responsibility for actions and provide updates.
- **Partner agencies response to perpetrators of domestic abuse –** management of work with perpetrators (prolific); professional curiosity in relation to perpetrators, children’s paternity (identifying and involving fathers) and understanding who else is in the family home.
Outcome: agencies are providing training/awareness raising around the need for staff to be curious when working with children and families, to include who is or has been in the household, including curiosity in relation to perpetrators. Policy, procedures, guidance and practice has also been reviewed and developed where required.
- **Neglect** - Consideration of risk in context of previous concerns
Outcome: The Neglect Strategic Sub-Group is leading on the revision of the Neglect strategy and the implementation of training in relation the NSPCC Graded Care Profile (GCP2) Toolkit for neglect across the partnership.

Impact: The Case Review Group has led on multi-agency work to deliver on Chapter 4, of Working Together 2018, to safe children. As a consequence of work of the group, improvements have been made to local multi-agency safeguarding practice as set out above.

Multi-agency Safeguarding Training

At the beginning of the pandemic multi-agency 'face to face' safeguarding training courses, were initially postponed, until online systems could be set up. A suite of online training was developed across children's (via [Buy Doncaster](#)) and adults (via [Learning Pool](#)) and the following courses were delivered from autumn 2020:

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Early Help Supervision | Introduction to Early Help, Thresholds and Guidance | Outcomes, Plans and Closures |
| Signs of Safety | Role Of Lead Practitioner | Managing Engagement |
| | Child Exploitation | |
| Early Help for Experienced Practitioners | Outcome Star | Coercive and Controlling Behaviour |
| | Domestic Abuse | |
| Honour Based Violence, Forced Marriage and FGM | Self Neglect | Reducing Parental Conflict/ Relationship Matters |

During 2020-2021, 391 people attended virtual training on a range of safeguarding topics from across the multi-agency partnership. Of these 55 people provided feedback.

The feedback was positive with 51 out of 55 stating that they either agreed or strongly agreed that the training was a good use of their time and that it would have a positive impact on their safeguarding practice.

"The ability to join an experienced group was helpful in challenging my practise and making me think beyond the usual introduction. Thank you"

"It was good to consolidate my understanding and knowledge and have time to reflect on practice"

"As a new member of staff and no previous experience of Early Help, the course was very informative and interactive and has provided me with confidence in my role"

"Good for the role of lead practitioner but not very useful for safeguarding practice particularly if you are DSL and not a lead practitioner"

Completion of a monitoring/evaluation form for multi-agency safeguarding training is not currently mandatory and moving forwards the partnership will explore how this can be implemented.

The impact of delivering courses online was regularly reviewed. It was found that the majority of attendees prefer the flexibility of on-line training as it reduces traveling time and there are fewer restrictions on delegate numbers. Moving forwards the proposal is to offer a blended approach to the delivery of courses.

The group developed a Joint Workforce Strategy, outlining how the workforce in Doncaster meet the required competencies to safeguard children and adults. This will be supported through the relevant training courses and the implementation of the Core Principles for Working with Children and Adults in Need of Care and Support.

In relation to single agency training, the Section 11 self-assessment identified that many agencies deliver training for example the mandatory safeguarding training to all new staff, including volunteers on induction with robust processes for refresher training. GPs received safeguarding training biannually delivered through their Target sessions and South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue have developed a pocket guide, which is provided at training on induction.

Impact: Staff understanding their safeguarding duties and increasing confidence around safeguarding in their role.

Multi-agency Safeguarding Procedures

The Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership's multi-agency safeguarding online procedures are maintained by Tri.x and are available on the Partnership's [website](#). The procedures, updated for August 2021, include - Child Conference Plans; Children and Families Moving Across Boundaries or Abroad; Victims of Modern Slavery, Trafficking and Exploitation; Domestic Abuse; Fabricated or Induced Illness/Perplexing Presentations; Parents with Learning Disabilities; Safeguarding Unborn Babies and Guidance for Safe Recruitment, Selection and Retention for Staff and Volunteers.

Independent Chair's Scrutiny Report

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires that the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements published by the statutory safeguarding partners (the local authority, the police, and the Clinical Commissioning Group) "must include arrangements for scrutiny by an independent person of the effectiveness of the arrangements." It also requires that arrangements are in place for independent scrutiny of the partners' Annual Report. I have acted as independent chair of the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP) and independent scrutineer of the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements since January 2021. In that role, I offer this commentary on this Annual Report.

The period under review was of course dominated by the impact of the Covid19 pandemic. The emergency response of the Doncaster partnership was rapid and impressive, and is well described in this report. The arrangements put in place, through the Safeguarding Partnership and Oversight Group and the Children and Families Cell, enabled real time identification of the most vulnerable children and young people and co-ordinated and rapid responses. Working Together 2018 requires independent scrutiny to consider how effectively the arrangements are working for children and families as well as for practitioners, and how well the safeguarding partners are providing strong leadership. The multi-agency Social and Emotional Mental Health Group, meeting weekly to review the needs of young people who had presented at A&E with mental health problems and to ensure a co-ordinated response to those needs, is a particularly impressive example of the strength of the operational partnership response, and the leadership of that response, to a wholly unprecedented set of challenges. The Council made very significant additional investments during this period, both to increase capacity in a social care system under great pressure and to support the expansion and strengthening of early help services.

It is clear, however, that for much of the period under review, and in the context of these pressures, the broader multi-agency arrangements published in 2019 to meet the requirements of the 2017 legislation did not operate effectively. They failed to identify in a timely way the deterioration in practice which led to the establishment of the Improvement Board in November 2020. The arrangements depend essentially on the effective functioning of a Chief Officers' Safeguarding Oversight Group (COSOG) and a broader Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board. COSOG brings together the Council Chief Executive, the Accountable Officer of the CCG, and the responsible Chief Superintendent in South Yorkshire Police with senior leaders of NHS provider agencies and the Doncaster Children's Services Trust (DCST). It was intended to provide strategic leadership and direction, and to be the site of the ultimate accountability of the statutory safeguarding partners. The DSCP Board was intended to operate as the 'engine room' of the partnership, holding partner agencies to account and driving action to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

I completed a review of the arrangements, commissioned by the safeguarding partners, in June 2021. I found little evidence of COSOG taking an effective strategic role, and it was unclear how it exercised its accountability, given that it received no systematic information about the performance of the multi-agency system. The DSCP Board had drifted, had not established any clear priorities nor a plan to deliver them, and had far too little time allocated for its meetings to allow it to achieve anything of substance. Crucially, at neither level in the structure was there the clear line of sight

into the quality of frontline practice that is essential both to the assurance and to the improvement of multi-agency work to safeguard children. I acknowledged, of course, in coming to these conclusions, that I was presenting the review at the end of an eighteen-month period in which circumstances had given the arrangements no chance of embedding themselves fully, with the devastating floods in November 2019 followed so rapidly by the Covid19 pandemic. All the recommendations which I made in my review were accepted without reservation by the safeguarding partners. This reflected a really positive openness to independent scrutiny and challenge, which I think creates a very strong foundation for change and improvement. Much work has been undertaken since June 2021 to implement these recommendations, and much has been achieved. Both COSOG and the DSCP Board are more effective, although there is still much to be done. Partner engagement and leadership is strong, although I am concerned that Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, providing acute and emergency health care to Doncaster's children, has not been represented at the DSCP Board since May 2020. I think that acute hospitals are critical partners in safeguarding, and I urge the Trust to play their full part in future in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. The clear line of sight into practice is not yet firmly established. This turns on two issues in particular. Neither the DSCP, nor by exception COSOG, are yet receiving the systematic multi-agency performance information which would enable both assurance and accountability. Completing the work currently in hand to remedy this is a priority for completion in the next period. The other priority which I would identify is the need to embed a more robust approach to the audit of multi-agency practice. A programme of multi-agency audit has been re-established; but the first such audit presented to the DSCP, while containing some valuable findings on both good practice and areas for improvement, was clearly overoptimistic in some of the conclusions it drew from the cases audited.

Some of the work overseen by the time-limited Partnership Improvement Board has made significant and encouraging progress. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is firmly established, and there is a detailed MASH Continued Development Plan in place, which will ensure that improvement against a number of outstanding performance issues can be robustly monitored. The Annual Report details an ongoing upward trend in the number of children and families engaged with early help services, and a reduction in the number of new referrals drawing children and families into involvement with children's social care. The Doncaster partnership has made a strong commitment to early intervention and working with the whole family to prevent problems and difficulties escalating to a point where statutory intervention is required. It is developing a very innovative Locality Solutions model, geared to resolving issues in a community context at an even earlier stage. There is a powerful drive to ensure that children and their families get the right service, at the right time. This is an approach I strongly endorse. Some caution is, however, necessary. This Report highlights that the re-referral rate – cases referred back to social care within 12 months of being closed – is higher in Doncaster than it is nationally, regionally, and in statistical neighbour authorities; and has been so consistently for at least the last four years. An increase in the number of children and families routed into early help, while reducing the pressure on children's social care, is only positive if the "right" families are diverted in that way, and if decisions about the right response are based on a clear evaluation of need and risk. A similar caution applies to the increase in 'step downs' and the increased number of children on care orders placed at home, referred to in the report. I am mindful that Ofsted commented, following their focused visit in February 2020,

that they had identified some children being stepped down from a child protection plan based on insufficient evidence of sustainable change or reduced risk.

Despite the work undertaken by the Improvement Board, concerns remain about some aspects of practice, in particular the response to neglect, and the pace of improvement. Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews are taking too long to complete. I am particularly concerned about the accuracy of the profile contained in this Annual Report of children and young people at risk of exploitation. The estimated reduction in the number of young people at risk of criminal exploitation, described as directly attributable to the successful imposition of gang injunctions orders restricting the movement and activity of one particular organised crime group, known to target young people, is very welcome. However, the most recent information presented to the DSCP Board states that that currently (December 2021) only 16 young people in Doncaster are identified as at risk of sexual exploitation. All Board partners agreed that this is likely to be a significant underestimate. It is imperative that the safeguarding partners satisfy themselves that all agencies maintain a relentless focus on ensuring that potential victims of child sexual exploitation are identified, listened to and supported, and their abusers pursued, prosecuted and brought to justice wherever possible.

In the year I have worked with the Doncaster partnership, I have found some ambiguity in the relationship between the Council and the Doncaster Children's Services Trust in terms of where responsibility and accountability sits: for example, until recently it has not been clear where the decision to notify the national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel of a "serious incident" rests. The Trust has not always been responsive to challenge: for example, it was clear to me from first reading that the Thresholds and Levels of Need document agreed at the beginning of 2021 was dangerously restrictive and probably not legally compliant in its assertion that referrals should only be made to children's social care if a child was at risk of immediate harm. It took many months for these concerns to be heard and responded to, and I am pleased to confirm that a revised document has now been agreed and is being disseminated throughout the partnership. The appointment in May 2021 of a new Director of Social Care within the Trust, and the close involvement of the Director of Children's Services in the Council, appears to me to have led in the second half of the year to a more transparent and constructively challenging relationship, and if this is maintained I think it bodes very well for the future.

All three statutory safeguarding partners clearly recognise their shared and equal responsibility for the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and this is demonstrated by the seniority of those who represent them at the Chief Officers' Group. It seems to me, though, that there is scope for more active sharing of the responsibility for driving work forward in between COSOG meetings, which does appear to rely heavily on the Council's Director of Children's Services and other local authority staff. This may be partly because there is greater stability in the local authority. There have been recent changes at both Chief Superintendent and the relevant Superintendent level in South Yorkshire Police; and the Clinical Commissioning Group is about to dissolve into the new South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board. It is essential that, in spite of ongoing change, the senior leaders of the safeguarding partners consciously and actively model their commitment to shared and equal responsibility and accountability. There is a great deal of innovation apparent within the Doncaster partnership, a strong commitment to locality-based early intervention, and an impressive and active commitment to engaging with and listening

to children and young people. The formal governance arrangements did not function well during much of the period covered by this report, though I would emphasise again that the operational leadership of the pandemic response appears to have been exceptionally strong. There has been a substantial reset and strengthening of the safeguarding governance arrangements in the more recent past, and I very much hope that going forward this will be sustained and consolidated.

Priorities for 2021-2022

Looking forward, the Doncaster Safeguarding Children's Partnership will continue to progress the Joint Safeguarding Children and Adult Strategic Plan 2019–2021 and will also focus on the following priorities for 2021-2022:

1. To work with the Partnership Improvement Board to ensure alignment of the work and priorities, and to prepare for the transition of the Improvement Board's work into the "business as usual" of the Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership by the end of 2021-2022
2. To support and challenge work to deliver a more effective multi-agency response to child exploitation in Doncaster
3. To support and challenge work to deliver a more effective multi-agency response to child neglect across the partnership
4. To support and challenge the multi-agency response to mental ill health among children and young people
5. To ensure that schools and other education providers are at the centre of the safeguarding partnership
6. To ensure the embedding, dissemination, and evaluation of learning from the full range of quality assurance activity
7. To ensure effective multi-agency safeguarding response in the recovery phase of COVID 19 pandemic
8. To ensure that multi-agency policies and procedures are kept under review, commissioning any work required as a consequence, and effectively scrutinising proposed new multi-agency policies and procedures.

Appendix 1: Doncaster Safeguarding Children Partnership Delivery Plan 2021-2022

| Strategic Priority | To deliver this priority, we will: | What will success look like |
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| 1. To work with the Partnership Improvement Board to ensure alignment of work and priorities, and to prepare for the transition of the Improvement Board's work into the "business as usual" of the DSCP by the end of 2021/2022 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Actively participate in the work of the Partnership Improvement Board, ensuring effective two-way communication between the IB and the DSCP b) Schedule regular meetings between the PIB and DSCP Chairs to ensure ongoing alignment c) Keep the DSCP structure and functioning under review to ensure that it is in a position to take forward the priority improvement work undertaken by the PIB in its 2022/23 Delivery Plan. | <p>DSCP and Safeguarding Partners will be assured that arrangements are in place to ensure that the improvement work undertaken by the PIB will be consolidated and taken forward in strengthened partnership arrangements in the priority areas agreed by the PIB:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The multi-agency front door • Early help • Multi agency front line practice • An intelligence-led performance and quality assurance framework • Leadership and governance |
| 2. To support and challenge work to deliver a more effective multi-agency response to child exploitation in Doncaster | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Agree a revised multi-agency strategic response to exploitation, with a strong focus on community engagement and early intervention and an action plan to deliver it b) Monitor the delivery of the Exploitation and Missing Action Plan agreed within DCST c) Establish a task and finish group to review the delivery of the South Yorkshire Police Missing from Home and Care Protocol 2020 in Doncaster, its impact and any action needed to improve its effectiveness. | <p>There is evidence of strong community engagement in the production and implementation of the strategy.</p> <p>Fewer young people become involved in exploitation.</p> <p>The DSCP and Safeguarding Partners are assured that there is an effective response to young people who go missing and are at risk of exploitation.</p> <p>The DSCP and Safeguarding Partners are assured that the multi-agency response to young people who go missing is having a positive impact, and that action needed to improve the effectiveness of that response are clearly identified and actioned.</p> |
| 3. To support and challenge work to deliver a more effective multi-agency response to child neglect across the partnership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Implement the NSPCC Graded Care Profile across the partnership. b) Improve the analysis of risk in cases of long-term neglect c) Ensure full multi-agency participation in the SYP programme to improve the response to neglect d) Identify and act on learning from the SYP analysis of historic child neglect cases | <p>100% compliance with use of Graded Care Profile when neglect identified</p> <p>Audit and Ofsted inspection confirms improvement in the analysis of risk and the response to neglect</p> <p>Reduction in referrals involving child neglect to children's social care</p> <p>Multi-agency engagement in training offer</p> |

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| 4. To support and challenge the multi-agency response to mental ill health among children and young people | Work with the Mental Health Strategy Group to strengthen multi-agency practice in responding effectively to mental ill health among children and young people | <p>The partnership has a clear and evidence-based understanding of the scale and impact of mental health issues affecting children and young people in Doncaster, the multi-agency response, and areas for improvement.</p> <p>A local transformation plan for child and adolescent mental health is in place, with clear milestones and measurable outcomes.</p> |
| 5. To ensure that schools and other education providers are at the centre of the safeguarding partnership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Expand DSCP membership by recruiting members from infant, primary, secondary and post-16 educational sectors. b) Establish termly reporting to DSCP of key safeguarding issues and challenges identified by education providers c) Review outcomes of S157 / S175 audits and support action to address areas for improvement | <p>Schools and other education providers are confident that their key frontline role in safeguarding is understood and supported by the wider partnership.</p> <p>The DSCP can evidence effective responses to issues and challenges raised by partners in the education sector</p> |
| 6. To ensure the embedding, dissemination, and evaluation of learning from the full range of quality assurance activity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Streamline the reporting of multi-agency performance data to DSCP, ensuring areas for improvement clearly identified b) Establish programme of quarterly multi-agency audits of the effectiveness of multi-agency frontline practice c) Receive annual reports from statutory partners in health and social care on single-agency audit activity undertaken, outcomes, and action taken. d) Develop a plan for ensuring that the DSCP hears, listens to, and acts on the voice of children and young people e) Engage with and learn from frontline practitioners in order to disseminate and embed learning from audit, case review, and inspection activity. | <p>The DSCP can evidence that it has a clear line of sight into frontline practice</p> <p>There is evidence of continuing improvement as an outcome of performance monitoring, audit, and engagement activity.</p> <p>Both practitioners and young people confirm that they feel their voice is consistently heard, listened to, and acted on by the DSCP</p> |
| 7. To ensure effective multi-agency safeguarding response in the recovery phase of COVID 19 pandemic | Identify the ongoing risks and challenges from the impact of the pandemic, and monitor and support multi-agency planning to address them | The DSCP and Safeguarding Partners are assured that effective plans for the recovery phase are in place and effectively delivered |
| 8. To ensure that multi-agency policies and procedures are kept under review, commissioning work required as a consequence, and effectively scrutinising proposed new multi-agency policies and procedures. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Agree a revised Multi-Agency Threshold Document, and review impact by the end of 2021/22 b) Review all existing DSCP policies and procedures, and agree schedule for any necessary revision | Safeguarding Partners are assured that multi-agency safeguarding policies and procedures are comprehensive, up to date, and regularly reviewed |