



Together for Children Prospectus

together for
children
SUNDERLAND



About us

Together for Children (TfC) was created in April 2017 to deliver Children's Services on behalf of Sunderland City Council. We provide children's social care services, early help, prevention and targeted youth services, education and SEND services, and we are responsible for our own finance, workforce, property and support services.

We work closely with the Council and our partners to ensure we meet children's needs. Since 2017, when we were judged by Ofsted as inadequate, we have significantly grown our services, developed our workforce, transformed how we use our property, data and intelligence, expanded our residential capacity, and achieved an Ofsted 'Outstanding' judgement for our children's social care services. We are extremely proud of our journey, achieved through implementing a mixture of innovation and evidence-based models.

For our children, young people and their families, Sunderland is a fantastic, forward-looking city with a reputation for being welcoming and inclusive. It has many cherished cultural assets and activities and is brimming with creative potential that can inspire our young people.

For our staff, Together for Children provides a supportive, innovative and child-focused environment to thrive. It has ensured momentum and pace to improvement since 2017 and the voice of the child and family has been the centre point of that improvement activity.



Our offer

TfC will make experienced individual(s) available to work with your local authority/children's trust in improving services. Work may include leadership improvement challenge and support; producing diagnostic reports on specific highlighted areas of need; advising on the development of robust quality assurance mechanisms; advising on best methods to build social care capacity; analysing a range of quantitative and qualitative data to assess improvement capability and progress; challenging colleagues on what may be best placed to make the changes necessary to secure necessary improvement.

Possible areas of bespoke support include:

- Infant Safeguarding and Pre-birth practice improvement
- Family Group Conferencing implementation and impact
- Front door multi-agency processes including step-up and step-down processes with robust management oversight
- Virtual School improvement and learning
- Regulatory Services (children's homes and post 16)
- Quality of Children in Need (CIN) and Child Protection assessments.
- Voice of the child and successful implementation and use of the Mind of My Own app
- Quality Assurance Cycle and Outcomes development
- Creating a robust and successful school improvement work programme
- Improvement plan project management or project support
- Developing a suite of professional services with trusted expertise supporting schools in areas such as HR support, governor support, school improvement training, finance, educational psychology and communication



Social Care

We are proud of our improvement journey and the role that all services within children's social care have played in this. The full child's journey has strong management oversight and a robust process ensuring the child is at the very heart of everything we do. From our safeguarding 'front door', which despite the fluctuating complexity of contacts and referrals, has been able to adapt and respond effectively to cope with increasing demand. Throughout our Signs of Safety implementation and through to our support to independence service, the passion to do the right thing is strong and evident. The following is a sample of some of the areas that TfC is most proud of:

- High performing leadership team (leading on regional and national projects)
- Sustained and stable workforce (exceeding national and regional average)
- Strong management oversight throughout the child's journey
- Innovative implementation of a new model of practice
- Practice Standards, Procedures, and Guidance established and embedded
- Robust processes and strong multi-agency input into the integrated front door
- Pre-birth team providing improved practice across the service
- Panels established to ensure best outcomes for children, young people, and their families (Children's Resource, Care and Legal Gateway, Emergency Care and Legal Gateway)
- Edge of Care team implemented, providing multi-agency support to those most at risk of coming into care
- Voice of children evident and influential
- Robust process for the assurance of performance by senior management: strengthening outcomes, external accommodation, legal proceedings



Education

We are passionate about our vision to improve the lives of children and families and to ensure children in Sunderland have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. We support schools and academies across the region in relation to curriculum development and school leadership, as well as providing support and challenge for school improvement and effectiveness.

We offer a variety of statutory and professional services and training programmes. We also ensure effective services are delivered for children with additional needs and children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. As well as our wide range of professional services available through our Traded Services offer, we are proud of how our service has developed and in the support being provided:

- Strong leadership – ‘right people, in the right place, doing the right things’
- Cultural shift and defining engagement with parents/carers
- Strong Virtual School with evident outcomes
- Co-production and partnerships in place
- Effective, solution-focused multidisciplinary working
- Strong and sufficient provision for all vulnerable children
- Good quality EHCPs with visible footprint of SWs
- High-quality training offer to schools



Early Help

The services delivered and supported by our Early Help directorate are wide-ranging and go far beyond what would traditionally be described as early help. The service has grown several programmes which have flourished, including Family Group Conferencing at the edge of care, which can be seen to evidence impact on the number of children progressing to statutory intervention. The core Early Help offer has continued to develop with an increasing amount of work taking place with families. This is evidenced through a year-on-year increase in plans opening across a range of needs, up tenfold on 2017 when the service was established.

We are proud of our strong 'family focused' early help offer which is providing significant benefit in the support given to children, young people, and their families:

- Wide-ranging offer of interventions – universal (Children's Centres) through to statutory (Children Missing Education, Youth Offending Service)
- Integral part of the safeguarding 'Front Door' (Integrated Contact and Referral Team, ICRT) to ensure the most appropriate response to contacts
- Step-up and step-down processes well embedded with robust management oversight
- Family Group Conferencing implemented and proven to have positive and long-lasting impact.
- Significant and multi-agency work done to support Domestic Violence and Abuse interventions, including IDVAs working into early help across the City
- Voice of child is strong and robust supported through the successful implementation and use of the Mind of My Own app



Governance

Clarifying how children's services are carefully governed, with a view to more than just ensuring legal compliance, but also empowering tiers of management to take decisions at the right level without the perennial need for upward delegation with the associated delays.

Support services

Supporting our front-line services in their day-to-day operation, monitoring and undertaking is a robust and effective set of support services, including Financial Management; Legal Services; Commissioning; Communications; People Management; and Transformation, Programme and Project Management.



Case studies

Pre-Birth team

Our Pre-Birth team was launched in June 2020 and works with parents of unborn babies where there are safeguarding concerns. During our recent ILACS inspection, where TFC received an Outstanding overall judgment, inspectors commented on the exemplary practice they saw by the Pre-birth team. The team has also been highlighted as 'good practice' by the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory in their recent 'born into care' research, and has been instrumental in the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA) developing best practice guidance for Social Workers when completing pre-birth work.

ADCS Regional Initiative

Our Transformation Management Office (TMO) was engaged to carry out a mapping exercise across the region to identify and log the full range of innovation, 'trailblazer', pilot and research projects and activities the 12 North East local authorities were engaged in across children's services. This included gathering information about innovative practice in early help, children's social care, the children's workforce, and inclusive practice in education. Our TMO produced an innovative interactive database enabling activity to be stored and then shared across the region.

Senior Leadership Coaching and Mentoring

Together for Children, including our Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive, have recently worked alongside and supported new Trusts or Alternative Delivery Models (ADMs) to support their development, performance reporting and assurance processes through undertaking coaching and mentoring over a specific time period enabling leadership teams to have call on advice and guidance on issues and challenges being faced.



Cost structure

We have developed an appropriate cost structure, mirroring the current Department for Education (DfE) SLIP rates, which would be used in any one-off or ongoing supportive activity.

Day Rates

Practice Level (Manager)

£550

Management Level (Head of Service)

£600

Executive Level (DCSC/Director)

£800

Where applicable, VAT and travel costs will be added. For more information, please contact our Transformation Management Office at transformationoffice@togetherforchildren.org.uk.