

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 20 July 2018** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Charlton, J Considine, P Crathorne, J Grant, I Jewell, M McKeon, J Makepeace, C Potts, E Scott and H Smith

Co-opted Members:

Marie Baister, Wendy Taylor

Also in attendance:

Kelsey Clayton (Legal Services Manager)

Jenny Haworth (Head of Strategy) – presenting Item 6

Selwyn Morgans (Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre)

Karen Robb (Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Permanence)

Christine Stonehouse (Head of Virtual School)

Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer)

The Chair welcomed Helen Mulhearn (Co-Director, Investing in Children) and a young person from Investing in Children.

1 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr, Darkes, Milburn, Reed, Richardson, Savory, Wilson, co-opted member, Neville Harrison and officer, Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care.

2 Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 29 June 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported:

- The Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of children living with domestic abuse has been completed. It is anticipated that a letter will be received by the end of July, with the report being published on 24 August.

- Neville Harrison, Head Teacher of St Bede's Catholic School and Sixth Form College has been appointed as a co-opted member. A representative for primary education is being identified to replace R Edwards.
- **Item 8** – Following a request at the previous meeting for the numbers of care leavers whose children are also in the care of the Authority, it has been agreed to undertake further analysis on the numbers, as they initially seem high. Further information on this will be reported to the Panel in September.
- **Item 15** – The Chair thanked members for their contributions toward the costs of the refurbishment of the contact centres.

To date, contributions have been received from four members. Further information is awaited from Investing In Children as to the additional centres across the county in need of refurbishment, then funding will be sought for these refurbishment costs.

Any members wishing to contribute were asked to inform the Senior Partnership Officer.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Weekly Looked After Children Numbers

The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence presented the weekly looked after children numbers (for copy of report see file of minutes).

It was reported that, as at 13 July 2018, the number of looked after children was 808. Members were reminded of the importance of analysing the trend information provided in the tables within the report, rather than simply focusing on the weekly numbers as this does not reflect the numbers of young people leaving care.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

6 Proposal for a new Children and Young People's Strategy for County Durham

The Panel considered a report and presentation of the Head of Strategy which outlined the vision, aims and objectives of the proposed new Children and Young People's Strategy (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes). Members were asked for their views.

Cllr Scott asked how other agencies will be engaged to deliver the strategy and how to ensure buy-in. The Head of Strategy informed members that there are some areas where partners are obliged by law to work in partnership, and in addition, there are also common partnership inspection regimes, where partner agencies are often subject to the same areas for improvement as the Council.

The Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services has regular meetings with representatives from health and the police which contributes to collaborative working, and, an Integrated Steering Group for children has recently been established to strengthen working relationships.

Cllr Grant expressed concern as to how the Council engages with families who have entrenched generational issues e.g. criminality, neglect, abuse and deprivation, and are unlikely to engage willingly with services. Cllr Grant stressed the importance of having measures in place to provide support for vulnerable young people. The Head of Strategy explained that support is available to families through programmes such as the Early Help Strategy and the Stronger (Troubled) Families Programme, where work is focused on providing support, as early as possible, to those who have multiple risk factors.

The Head of the Virtual School informed the Panel that herself and the Strategic Manager for Education Support and Development had attended a meeting with NEPACS, which is an organisation that provides support to families of prisoners. At the meeting it was agreed that three free training sessions will be provided for education staff on how to support young people whose parents are in prison. In addition to this, whole school training would be available to buy into.

Referring to the objective to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities Cllr McKeon commented on the number of children entering reception with speech, language and communication difficulties. The Head of Strategy advised that this issue is being addressed in the Early Years Strategy.

The Senior Partnerships Officer also alluded to the county-wide Speech, Language and Communication Needs Strategy (SLCN) which is in development following the success of the County Durham Youth Offending Service's SLCN Strategy.

Resolved

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

7 Fostering Annual Report

The Panel considered a report of the Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence which provided a summary of activity within Durham County Council's fostering service, analysing performance over the past year and setting out priorities for the year ahead. The Fostering Annual Report and the Foster Carers' Training Programme were appended to the report as appendix 2 and 3 respectively (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence highlighted that, despite the pressures on fostering placements due to the increasing number of looked after children, 84% of the looked after population are placed in foster care.

The Strategic Manager further explained that the rate of increase of independent fostering placements has not increased at the same rate as the overall looked after children numbers which demonstrates that the service is meeting needs through in-house placements.

Following the restructure of the service and the development of the new Placements Team, the focus on matching young people to the right placements has increased enabling the service to horizon-plan to ensure the right types of placements are available. Further information will be brought to the September Corporate Parenting Panel meeting with a presentation on the Sufficiency Strategy.

Referring to strategic priorities for the future, the Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence explained that there is a commitment to continue the recruitment and retention of foster carers through initiatives such as the Fostering Digital Roadshow. Placement Stability is another key priority with staff being trained in early permanence and planning, with a specific emphasis on the child's perspective.

The Chair thanked Cllr McKeon for her valuable contribution to the promotion of the Digital Roadshow.

Resolved

That the annual report be received.

8 Children in Care Council Update

The following update was provided by Investing in Children:

- At a recent residential course the young people discussed the five W's of contact, i.e. who, what, where, when, and why. In particular, they discussed whether a more child-friendly term for contact could be used. The young people suggested that 'family time' may be a more appropriate term for the younger children.
- Final touches are being made to 'The Promise' which will be presented to the Panel in September.
- The refurbishment of the contact centres to make them more child-friendly is ongoing.
- An application for funding has been made to the Ragdoll Foundation in respect of an arts project.
- A Fun Day will be held on 1 September at Framwellgate Moor School.

The Chair commended the good work and asked how more looked after children could be encouraged to join the Children in Care Council. IIC Co-Director, Helen Mulhearn, responded that information is being disseminated more effectively and information is now being provided as part of foster carer training, as well as young

people from IIC being part of the foster carer training, and it is hoped this will lead to increased participation.

Helen Mulhearn informed the Panel that she is liaising with a group of pupils from Durham Sixth Form Centre who are interested in starting a Youth Parliament. They have developed a constitution and they are keen to progress this. Members commented on how youth political engagement is to be encouraged. Cllr Scott informed the Panel that the City of Durham Parish Council have discussed holding some of their meetings in schools in order to promote community engagement. Cllr McKeon added that whilst youth political engagement is to be encouraged, it is important to provide guidance to young people to prevent them from being misled by unethical social media campaigns.

9 Exclusion of the public

Resolved

That under Section 100(a)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

10 Regulation 44 Visits: Summary Report (including responsive repairs)

The Panel noted the report of the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers which provided a summary of the Regulation 44 visit action plans and responsive repairs for June 2018 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Manager of Aycliffe Secure Centre commented that the new arrangements for Regulation 44 visits are working well.

Cllr Jewell referred to a recent Ofsted Inspection which judged a Children's Home as inadequate. The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence confirmed that the establishment had been reinspected and system improvements have been put in place.

Resolved

That the Regulation 44 action plans and responsive repairs for June 2018 be noted.