

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 28 February 2020** at **9.30 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor I Jewell (Chair)**

### **Panel Members:**

Councillors H Smith (Vice-Chair), B Bainbridge, J Charlton, J Considine, P Jopling, M McKeon, L Maddison, J Makepeace, C Potts, S Quinn, G Richardson, E Scott, M Simmons, T Tucker and C Wilson and C Wilson

### **Co-opted Member:**

W Taylor

### **Also Present:**

Karen Davison - Strategic Manager, Think Family Services (Item 13)

Helen Fergusson - Head of Children's Social Care

Robert Johnson - Project Manager, Investing in Children, and, young people from the Children in Care Council

Selwyn Morgans – Centre Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre

Claire Morris - Strategic Manager, Looked After Children Resources (Item 12)

Jamie Paddock - Legal Assistant

Melanie Stubbs - Head of the Virtual School

Jayne Watson - Senior Partnerships Officer

## **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bennett and Milburn and from co-opted members Chris Baines, Karen Watson, and, from officer Kelsey Clayton.

## **2 Substitute Members**

No substitute members were in attendance.

### **3 Minutes**

With the inclusion, at minute number 15, of Councillor Smith's name to the list of those participating in the Care Leavers challenge, the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 30 January 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **5 Number of Looked After Children**

The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that the number of looked after children stood at 894, a slight reduction on the figure reported in January.

### **6 Ofsted Updates**

The Panel noted that an overall 'good' rating, with 'outstanding' in leadership and management had been awarded to 9 Cedar Drive Residential Home.

### **7 Confirmation of Member Appointments on Corporate Parenting Panel Groups**

The Senior Partnership Officer outlined current vacancies on Corporate Parenting Panel sub-groups and requested Members to consider whether they could fill the positions. Representation was identified as follows:

#### **Care Leavers Steering Group**

Cllr Patricia Jopling

#### **Aycliffe Secure Centre Sub Group**

Cllr Anne Reed and Cllr Ivan Jewell (Chair)

#### **Supported Lodgings Panel**

(vacancy)

#### **Fostering Panel**

Cllr Tanya Tucker and, (tbc) Wendy Taylor

#### **Responsive Repairs**

The Panel noted that it was agreed that Member representation on this Panel was not as important as the Head of Children's Social Care and the Strategic Manager for Looked After Children Resources attend regular meetings with Service Direct.

## **Regulation 44 Members Visits**

### **Tow Law**

Cllr Anne Reed

### **Lumley (ASC)**

(vacancy)

### **Durham (ASC)**

(vacancy)

Members were informed that the Aycliffe Secure Centre sub-groups for Lumley and Durham require Regulation 44 representation as soon as possible.

It was agreed that an updated list of vacancies, including information on the frequency of visits and meeting venues, would be circulated to Members for consideration. Members considering vacancies were encouraged to speak to the Chair for further information, and, they were offered the opportunity to observe the roles, if they wished to do so.

## **8 Update from Investing in Children**

The Head of Children's Social Care circulated a poem and illustration by two young people in care which had been entered into a national competition. Members were impressed at the high standard of their work.

The young people of the Children in Care Council provided the following update:

- A celebration event for Care Day took place on 21 February at the Sjovoll Centre, and the young people were instrumental in organising the event. Approximately 40 young people attended the event. Care experienced rapper RicFlo, attended the event and worked with the young people on a music project which the young people are hoping to develop further. The young people commented on how much they enjoyed the event which received very positive feedback and they thanked Members for their attendance. Councillor Tucker, applauded the young people saying it had been a good venue and a very well organised event, and, in encouraging Members to attend the event in the future, she expressed how inspired she had been.
- A project, 'Dream Tree' is being developed, to encourage young people to explore and share their dreams, aspirations and successes.
- The young people met with the senior leadership team to discuss how contact sessions can be made more comfortable for young people,

including tailoring the use of language and the sessions, to meet the needs of the individual young person.

- Work is taking place with senior leaders in Durham County Council to develop a Young Inspectors project, based on a similar theme to Regulation 44 Inspections. It is proposed that the young people will visit residential homes and meet staff and young people to share their own thoughts and experiences around any changes and improvements. The Young Inspectors will develop a range of transferrable skills including:
  - Interview skills and techniques
  - Training other young people
  - Report writing
  - Undertaking inspections

The young people will also receive references from their involvement in the project. Regular progress updates will be shared with the Panel.

- Representatives from Investing in Children were interviewed on BBC Radio Newcastle where they talked about hopes, dreams and aspirations. The interview went very well and it was agreed that a link to the interview would be circulated to Members, if possible to do so.
- The young people met with colleagues from Durham County Council's legal team to look at legal forms and orders to see how these could be made more young people friendly. This is a difficult process as there needs to be a balance between the literature being user friendly and retaining the necessary use of legal terminology, whilst enabling children and young people to understand what it means.

Councillor H Smith, Councillor T Tucker, and, the Senior Partnership Officer Jayne Watson took up the Care Leavers' Challenge which required living on a budget of £57.90 for a week. The participants shared their experiences with the Panel.

Councillor Smith commented on how difficult the challenge was, especially during winter, which resulted in having to make choices between eating or heating her home. Councillor Smith observed that those young people lacking the skills to cook on a low budget would find the challenge particularly difficult. Councillor Smith identified that there is more work to be done to improve transport issues especially in rural parts of the county, and she calculated that by the end of the week, most of her budget would have been spent on travel costs.

Councillor Tucker said the challenge had been one of the most difficult things she had done, adding that she felt her health suffered during the week. Observing the high cost of toiletries, Councillor Tucker commented that those with allergies / medical conditions that may need to use specialist products, are at a particular disadvantage as these products were expensive. The challenge had led her to make enquiries with British Gas with regard to assistance with heating costs and she found that, as most young people have no credit history, this makes it difficult for them to set up direct debits. Councillor Tucker suggested that more work should be done to lobby utility companies with a view to providing assistance to care leavers.

The Senior Partnership Officer reported finding the experience much more of a challenge than she expected and that the demands of constantly having to make financial choices was both physically and emotionally draining. The Senior Partnership Officer suggested that there may be more work that could be done within communities and with the voluntary sector to improve the local offer.

In thanking the participants and acknowledging that living on a low budget is a problem that is not exclusive to care leavers, the young people encouraged more Members to take-up the challenge in the future. The young people thanked Durham County Council for the assistance provided to care leavers and the valuable support provided by their Young People's Advisers. They echoed the comments that transport is a particular issue, saying this can prevent them from living their lives in the same way as young people in the general population.

The Chairman thanked all those who had attended the Care Day event, participated in the challenge, and, shared their experiences. He referred to the important role these activities play in raising awareness and identifying areas for action. Members commented that this is a clear example of how important it is that young people in care are made aware of how to contact their local members for assistance. The Head of Children's Social Care advised that Members' details are available on both the Investing in Children and Durham County Council's websites.

Members suggested that these issues link with partnership working already in place to support those on low incomes such as that the Child Poverty Working Group, and, advice and support is also accessible through the early help programme.

## **9 What is a Corporate Parent?**

Councillor I Jewell, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, delivered a presentation on the responsibilities of being a corporate parent (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

The Chair explained that all elected members are corporate parents and he outlined the role and responsibilities. Members noted that good corporate parents offer at least the same standard of care as a reasonable parent. The Chair commented on the importance that corporate parents endeavour to attend events on evenings and during holiday times, in the same way that parents do for their children. The Chair concluded by saying how rewarding the role is, adding that, as a corporate parent he gains a lot of pleasure and has many positive experiences.

## **10 A Child's Journey Through Our Services**

Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care, delivered an overview of the Children's Social Care Service and the circle of support in place for looked after children (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that a high number of those accessing the service do so through mainstream, early help services and statutory services are provided to those who have more complex needs. The Head of Children's Social Care responded to questions and comments as follows:

- Children and Young People who are in the care of the local authority for a short period of time are supported by the Families First Teams whose primary responsibility is to provide support to families, to assist them to care for children at home, when it is safe to do so.
- In response to a question as to whether young people who have resided in a care home maintain links with that home on leaving care, the Head of Children's Social Care explained that initiatives such as 'Staying Close' aim to develop the local offer, to provide accommodation for care leavers, in close proximity of children's homes.
- In response to a question from a Member requesting information on the number of children who return to their family home following a stay in a children's residential care home, the Head of Children's Social Care responded that detailed information on this will be included in the next quarterly performance report.
- Responding to a question on the types of support in place for care leavers during their transition from care, the Head of Children's Social Care explained that the supported lodgings scheme works with foster carers to provide a stepping-stone for care leavers who are not quite ready to live on their own. These young people live with another person or a family, whilst being helped to develop their independent living skills. With every care leaver having different requirements, a

range of options is available and this continues to be developed. Work is being undertaken to develop a Young People's Independent Living Skills Programme, and, it is hoped that there will be scope for the programme to gain accreditation in the future.

- The young people of the Children in Care Council said the Circle of Support chart was a useful visual display to show how wide the circle of support is and the many people / agencies which may be involved. The young people requested that they take the chart back to the Children in Care Council, to encourage the young people to think about their own circle of support and to identify who is in their circle, if there is anyone missing, or, there is anyone who they do not wish to be in their circle, with a view to bringing some anonymous case studies back to the Panel. The Head of Children's Social Care agreed, saying that would be a very useful exercise and the Panel would look forward to hearing their views.

## **11 Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme**

Jayne Watson, Senior Partnership Officer presented a report which outlined the Corporate Parenting Work Programme for 2020/21 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Panel noted the programme was mapped against the key lines of enquiry as identified in the Local Government Association resource packs which were appended to the report. The Panel noted that regular updates would be reported to the Panel, and, Members were encouraged to suggest additional items for inclusion in the work programme, at any time.

### **Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **12 Aycliffe Secure Centre Annual Update**

Selwyn Morgans, Manager of Aycliffe Secure Centre, presented the Aycliffe Secure Centre Annual Update (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Members were provided with information on the facilities, the additional services at the centre, the main events of 2019 and the challenges for 2020. One of which is to continue the high level of performance during 2019 to maintain the 'outstanding' Ofsted rating.

The Chair thanked the Centre Manager for the presentation.

Members praised the fantastic facilities at the centre which continues to go from strength to strength, adding that this work should be supported as much as possible and commended the Centre Manager on his commitment and enthusiasm.

The Centre Manager thanked Members for their kind words and support and gave credit to the staff. He responded to comments and questions as follows:

- In response to a question as to the average length of time that a young person spends at the centre, the Centre Manager advised that this varies on the type of referral. Youth justice referrals can be between 2 months to 4 years, whereas welfare referrals average between 3 to 6 months.
- Members acknowledged that entering the centre for the first time may be a daunting experience for a young person and asked about the induction process. The Centre Manager informed Members that the induction process is designed to help the young people settle-in as soon as possible. This includes a film prepared by young people who live or have lived at Aycliffe which is shown to the young people before they arrive at the Centre, as well as a multi-media welcome pack which is available for the young people to access in their rooms. All the young people have a comprehensive health assessment to identify their individual needs.
- The young people of the Children in Care Council asked whether there are art facilities at the Centre. The Centre Manager confirmed that there is an art room, adding that art is very important, with many of the young people being talented artists. He commented that every young person has a talent, and that arts, sports, recreational and practical activities play a very important role at the centre. He added that there is a fully equipped music studio and he offered to look into whether the studio could be made available to assist the young people of the Children in Care Council with the music project they worked on during the Care Day event.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

### **13 Place-Based Approach to Early Help for Children, Young People and Families in County Durham**

Karen Davison, Strategic Manager, delivered a report and presentation on the development and implementation of a 'place-based approach' in three early adopter localities across County Durham (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager explained the aim of the project was to promote collaborative working and increase community involvement to promote family resilience. The Panel heard that early adopter localities have a community based, multi-agency arrangement for discussions to take place to provide early help and make the best use of resources. This included developing an arrangement with schools in order that they can discuss issues with practitioners and facilitate early help conversations. Initial feedback had been very positive and the scheme was due to be rolled out to all localities from 2 March.

The Strategic Manager responded to questions as follows:

- It was clarified that parental consent must be provided for discussions to take place and the Strategic Manager explained that the approach is crucial to the success of gaining that consent. In some cases, where a person is reluctant to give consent, the approach is made by a trusted person to the family, for example a health visitor. The Virtual School Head confirmed that the feedback on the project at Head Teacher's briefings was very positive and it suggested that when parents are approached at an early stage with an offer of help, they are more receptive to it than they would be if the issue was left until a later stage, when the problem may have escalated.
- In response to whether help is available with housing issues, the Strategic Manager confirmed that there is engagement with housing associations.
- With regard to the age range of those assisted, the Panel noted that this is pre-birth, up to the age of 25 and includes work with schools, nurseries and day care providers.

#### **Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

### **14 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 item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

## **15 Regulation 44 Visits - Summary Report**

The Panel considered the update on Regulation 44 visits and outstanding responsive repairs (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Members referred to LiquidLogic case management and asked whether the records at the residential homes could be linked into the system. It was agreed that enquiries would be made as to whether this was possible.

Councillor Richardson expressed concern that meetings, that had taken place monthly, were now quarterly and were too infrequent making it difficult for Members to build relationships with young people. It was noted that it was previously agreed by the Panel, following benchmarking and feedback from young people, that visits should take place quarterly, however, Councillor Richardson's comments would be noted.

### **Resolved:**

That the report be received.