

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in Committee Room 1A , County Hall, Durham on **Friday 16 December 2022 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)

Members of the Panel:

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, B Coult, S Deinali, J Griffiths, B Kellett, A Sterling, S Townsend, C Varty and P Sexton (substitute for J Charlton)

Co-opted Members:

Billie-Leigh, J Gamble, Luke, S Neale and W Taylor

Also Present:

Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager

Jodie Henderson – Practice Lead, Children and Young People

Rob Johnson – Project Manager, Investing in Children

Toni Sowerby – Lawyer for Children, Adults & Health

Martyn Stenton – Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children

Melanie Stubbs – Head of the Virtual School

Jayne Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, O Gunn, T Henderson, C Hunt, J Miller, A Reed, K Robson and K Rooney, M Walton and from Co-opted Members J Bell, C Brown and R Woods.

2 Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. Matters arising from the last meeting included the following:

- following on from the discussion at the last meeting, an update on Regulation 44 matters would be given in the private session of the meeting;
- an initial meeting to discuss the 'Ask for Angela' campaign had been set up;
- a meeting had been set up with the AAP team to discuss whether a pooled budget could be created, from the Members' neighbourhood budgets, for children looked after and care leavers.

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Number of Children Looked After and Care Leavers

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children informed the Panel that the total number of children looked after and young people stood at 1,031, with 44 children placed for adoption. The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people continues to increase.

The Panel agreed to consider the quarterly performance update as the next item of business.

6 Performance Update

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager provided an update on performance during the second quarter of the year in relation to children looked after and care leavers (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Panel heard that the long term trajectory continues to see an increase in the number of children and young people looked after. Recently, the number of children entering and leaving care had fluctuated from month to month, partly due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people was at a historic high and the trend is expected to continue.

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager highlighted that the majority of children looked after were fostered, within in-house provision and details were shared on the types of living arrangements. In respect of placement stability, there had been an increase in the number of young people having three or more placements within a year.

Data indicated that the number of young people and children missing from care and missing incidents had increased, however, the Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager pointed out that data recording may be leading to over reporting, therefore closer analysis of the data was being carried out.

There were 285 care leavers in Durham's care at the end of September and there had been an increase in the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation and the number in education, employment and training was in line with national benchmarks.

In response to a question from the Panel, officers explained that 'unsuitable accommodation' is a DfE measure and categories include being held in custody and circumstances when a young person chooses not to share information as to their whereabouts.

The Panel raised concerns at the increase in missing incidents and asked what monitoring was in place. The Practice Lead for Children and Young People responded that the safety of children and young people looked after is paramount therefore after any missing incident a young person is invited to talk about their situation at a return to home discussion, to identify any additional support that may be required. The Practice Lead explained that some of the incidents reported as 'missing' occur when older teenagers stay with friends, following a night-out, without informing their carers and this may be considered normal teenage behaviour. Therefore, deeper analysis of missing data was being carried out into the figures, to clarify actual missing incidents.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

7 Ofsted Updates

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children reported that details of Ofsted's recent visits to children's residential homes would be reported at the next meeting.

8 Proud Moments

The Panel heard details of a young person whose behaviour had tested staff on occasions. The young person had recently been accepted onto a training course which had proved to be a turning-point for the young person who was beginning to look to their future with new-found optimism. The young person was positively engaging with staff, had volunteered to decorate the Christmas tree and had discreetly bought Christmas presents for staff.

The Practice Lead commented on how pleased and proud staff were to see the young person's positive attitude and their kindness had meant a great deal to the staff involved.

The Practice Lead also paid tribute to the young people who contribute to the work of the Fostering Panel and thanked them for all their hard work and the value they bring to the work, through sharing their experiences.

9 Children in Care Council Update

Billie-Leigh and Luke provided an update on Care Day which is an annual event to celebrate and raise the profile of children and young people looked after. This next event will take place on 18 February 2023 and it will provide the opportunity for Members and young people to get to know each other in a fun, positive environment. Planning for the event is in progress, which will include workshops, an ideas zone and relaxed areas in which to discuss achievements and improvements. Further details of the event would be circulated to the Panel in due course.

Billie-Leigh then spoke about another up-coming annual event, the Care Leaver's Challenge, which challenges participants to live life in the footsteps of a care leaver by managing on a budget of approximately £66 per week, to understand the difficulties faced by those living on Universal Credit. Many Members and officers within the Children and Young People's Service had risen to the challenge in previous years and Billie-Leigh and Luke spoke about how the young people of the Children in Care Council would like to see the Council's senior leadership team and personnel from corporate departments becoming involved in this year's challenge. Plans include inviting participants to Care Day, to reflect on their experiences.

The Practice Lead for Children and Young People spoke of her experience of the challenge saying she found it a difficult but worthwhile experience and she commented that young adults in the general population may find the challenge enlightening. Luke agreed and pointed out that the limited budget teaches young people the importance of making sensible financial choices. The Panel commented on how powerful the message is when the request to participate is delivered by the young people themselves and added that when Members and officers are participating in the challenge and finding that making financial choices is difficult, they should bear in mind that, in most cases they will already have their home comforts in place and care leavers, who are just starting their homemaking journey, will face an even greater challenge.

10 Annual Summary Report of the Children Looked After Strategic Partnership (CLASP)

The Practice Lead provided a summary of the work of the Children Looked After Strategic Partnership (CLASP) during the period August 2021-August 2022 (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

The Panel heard that the partnership was developed to improve the partnership working between services at a strategic level and includes personnel from Children's Social Care, health partners, education and Investing in Children. During the year, a data reporting set had been established to improve the effectiveness of the partnership and identify key challenges such as the timeliness of health assessments and access to services for children and young people placed outside the county. The partnership is also helping to shape priorities for the future including addressing the needs of the increasing number of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, improving the stability of placements and supporting young people who are not in education, employment and training.

Officers in attendance informed the Panel that key challenges for the partnership are the increasing number of young people who go missing from care and ensuring that those young people who are placed outside of the county continue to have access to the same level of services for education and health.

Members noted the recommendation for update reports to be provided to the Panel on a quarterly basis.

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

11 Annual Report on the Adoption Service 2021/22

The Practice Lead presented the six-monthly update on the Adoption Service which included details of service priorities for 2022-23 (for copy of report, see file of minutes)

It was reported that adoption performance remains strong with Durham matching children in a timely manner, utilising the wider pool of adopters within the Regional Adoption Agency. Fostering to adopt and concurrency planning will be a key area for development in the future.

The impact of the Somerset judgement had led to discussions with legal colleagues and the review of policies to prepare the service for the impact of future caselaw.

The Panel also received information on work to support birth parents whose children are placed for adoption and the role of the Pause project which supports those who have had children removed from their care. The number of post adoption assessments continues to increase.

The Panel commended the contents of the report and the direction of travel.

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

12 Annual Report of the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP)

The Panel received the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership annual report, for information (for copy of report see file of minutes).

13 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.

14 Regulation 44 Visits and Regulatory Body Ratings of Children's Residential Homes

The Head of Early Help and Vulnerable Children presented the monthly update on Regulation 44 visits and regulatory body ratings (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Further to the discussion at the last meeting, the Panel agreed the alignment of visitors to homes.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.