

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 19 May 2023** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors M Walton (Vice-Chair), R Adcock-Forster, S Deinali, J Griffiths, T Henderson, B Kellett, J Miller, A Reed, I Roberts, K Rooney, A Sterling, S Townsend, C Varty and L Mavin (substitute for B Coult)

Co-opted Members:

J Gamble, Luke and W Taylor

Also Present:

Laura Armstrong	– Professional Practice Manager
Sharon Davey	– Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence
Rachel Farnham	– Head of Children’s Social Care
Paula Gibbons	– Head of Service, Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt Coast to Coast
Anne Haigh	– Aycliffe Secure Services Centre Manager
Rachel Harris	– Service Improvement Manager
Jodie Henderson	– Practice Lead, Children and Young People’s Services
Rob Johnson	– Project Manager, Investing in Children
Melanie King	– Lawyer Children, Adults and Health
Alex Latham-Reynolds	– Head of Partnerships, Care Leaver Covenant
Lee Peacock	– Participation and Engagement Officer
Paul Rudd	– Strategic Manager, Children’s Homes
Martyn Stenton	– Deputy Corporate Director, Children and Young People’s Services
Jac Taylor	– Strategic Manager, Children and Families, East
Jayne Watson	– Senior Partnerships Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, I Cochrane, B Coult, O Gunn, C Hunt and from Co-opted Members J Bell, C Brown, S Neale and B Leigh.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor L Mavin substituted for Councillor B Coult.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported:

The Chair presented a picture she had been given by a young person to the Deputy Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services for display in his office. He was extremely pleased and explained it would be proudly displayed for all those visiting to see.

- The Chair noted that in respect of the Entry into Care Packs, the original amount being sought was £7,600. She explained that Members had provided contributions from their budgets and approx. £18,500 had been raised. It was suggested that a letter of thanks from the CICC be e-mailed to Councillors in respect of their kind donations. The Senior Partnerships Officer noted that Luke had referred to packs for those exiting care and suggested that any surplus could be used for those packs. The Panel agreed. The Chair asked if Luke could provide an update for the Panel in July, Luke agreed.

Councillor T Henderson entered the meeting at 9.40am

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

5 Number of Children Looked After and Care Leavers

The Deputy Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services informed the Panel that the total number of children looked after stood at 1,081, including 33 young people placed for adoption, 64 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people (UASC) and 290 care leavers.

6 Ofsted Updates

The Deputy Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services advised there had been no recent Ofsted visits.

7 Proud Moments

This month's proud moment was reported by the Practice Lead, Children and Young People and was a statement from a young person who had experience with the care system in County Durham and had applied to join the Armed Forces. She explained the challenges the young person had faced and gave the Panel an extract from their military application statement. The Practice Lead, Children and Young People advised that the young person was not successful this time but were not deterred and noted the excellent journey that the individual had taken, having come from a background with neglect and many challenges.

8 Children in Care Council Update

Luke explained that the younger CICC members were developing a survey relating to savings and life skills. It was noted that a suggestion to help raise engagement had been for a prize draw. He noted the previously mentioned Entry into Care Packs and the positive response from Elected Members. Luke updated on the work taking place with Full Circle and noted the views relating to the building move of Full Circle and in understanding the benefits of this. Luke asked the Panel to note a "Celebrate Me Award" and Fostering Event at Ramside Hall on 15 May 2023. Rob noted a work of art by a young person relating to the Art Stop, a 'Spiderboy' design for their bedroom that the excellent artwork was huge and had taken over the entire bedroom.

9 Language Update

Following from language discussions at the previous meeting, The Head of Children's Social Care asked the Panel to consider a video where Luke Rodgers BEM, Director of Strategy for The Care Leaders shared his experience as a young person in the care system and the language that had been used to describe him as a young person in his referral to his foster carers.

The Head of Children's Social Care noted that it was a powerful message and helped to demonstrate the importance of stepping back and thinking about the language being used in recording and describing young people.

10 Adopt Coast to Coast

The Panel received an update report on the second year of operation and marketing activity of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt Coast to Coast presented by the Head of Service, Adopt Coast to Coast, Paula Gibbons (for copy of report and presentation see file).

The Head of Service referred to the performance of the three Local Authorities: former Cumbria County Council, Durham County Council, Sunderland City Council and noted significant challenges in terms of recruitment, impacted by the recent criminal case in Cumbria the period following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and the cost of living crisis, with a massive reduction in the number of enquiries. She noted that it was important be upfront regarding the financial implications.

It was explained that Durham County Council had a good percentage of enquiries leading to approvals.

The Head of Service referred to marketing activities and explained as regards the strong commitment to keeping our children within the North East, given the strong cultural identity within the region. She explained the total percentage of conversions from enquiries to approvals for the RAA for 2022/23 had been 19 percent, however, it was noted that the 32 Regional Agencies differed in how figures were counted and that the important point was that it was felt that the marketing messages were right and resonating with those people who would then go on to make enquiries. The Panel were asked to note that the figures for Durham in terms of enquiries and approvals had been fairly consistent, noting the highly experienced Team led by the Team Manager, Barbara Arbon.

The Panel were referred to marketing activity priorities for 2023/24 and noted that Cumbria having undergone reorganisation to become two Unitary Authorities had withdrawn from the RAA, leaving Durham County Council and Sunderland City Council. She noted that this did not mean there was a decrease in the numbers of children, with marketing still emphasising there were lots of children for potential adoptions. She explained that money was not the motivating factor for prospective parents and reiterated that it was important to help support those prospective parents and reassure them that they would not struggle. She concluded by noting that there would be groups that waited longer for adoption and that targeted marketing needed to be ran alongside general recruitment, focussing on prospective adopters for those children.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

11 The Pause Programme Durham

The Panel received an update report on the Pause Programme Durham presented by the Strategic Manager, Children and Families, East (for copy of report and presentation see file).

The Strategic Manager explained the background to the Pause Programme Durham, having been established in 2021 in order to reduce the number of children being taken into care and improve the lives of women who have had one or more children permanently removed from their care

The Strategic Manager explained that Pause was unique in targeting adults who have had engagement with Children's Social Care as mothers but were no longer eligible for support due to their children being permanently removed from their care.

It was explained that the programme was delivered with each woman over a period of 18 months is flexible and delivered at the correct pace for each woman.

The Panel noted the original Pause Programme in the east of the county, operated by Barnardo's, with the programme moving in-house following award of match funding from the Department for Education (DfE).

Councillor B Kellett left the meeting at 10.14am

The Strategic Manager explained that of the previous cohort of 22 women worked with by Pause Durham, there had been a total of 83 children removed from their care, with the woman being aged between 22 to 40 years old. It was noted that 38 percent of the women were care experienced. Feedback from the women had highlighted a number of positives including that they had grown in their confidence and now had access to sexual health services, domestic abuse services, housing and education. The Strategic Manager explained that none of the women had had any further pregnancies during, or following intervention, and one woman had had her two children returned to her care.

The Strategic Manager noted that for the current cohort, Pause Durham were working with 21 women in total, 11 who were fully on the programme. She explained that 11 women had a total of 33 children removed from their care, with 73 percent of the women being care experienced. It was noted that the main areas of need for those women were mental health, domestic abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, learning needs and homelessness. The Panel were shown a graduation video with women providing their experience of the Pause Programme.

Councillor A Reed noted that positive impact of the programme was a fantastic thing for those women and their children and thanked all involved for their work.

The Vice-Chair noted that the positive impact was great and asked as regards any changes in the numbers within cohorts between when the programme was operated by Barnardo's and when it was brought in-house. The Strategic Manager said this would be difficult as it was now operating as a rolling programme, with intake being based upon need.

Councillor S Townsend gave an example of a women who had been successful in keeping her child, which had been transformative for her and her child, however, that had been the beginning of another set of challenges, including the stigma unfortunately still attached to those women, issues with childcare providers, ex-partners, and she asked what the Council could do in the longer-term in such cases. The Head of Children's Social Care noted that it would be different for each individual case, however, if an assessment had deemed that it was safe for a child to return to a parent, support would continue to ensure this was sustainable.

Resolved:

That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

12 Care Leavers' Covenant

The Panel received an updated report on the Care Leavers' Covenant from the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence, and welcomed Alex Latham-Reynolds, Head of Partnerships, Care Leaver Covenant (CLC) who gave an overview of the report (for copy of report and presentation see file).

The Head of Partnerships, CLC explained that regional work was DfE funded and noted the phrase 'it takes a village to raise a child', adding that the aim was to build a village of opportunity to give care leavers a choice for their future. He added that it was important to work in co-production with young people and added that in the North East their needs were often underserved and that it was important for organisations in both the public and private sector to look to the CLC. He noted that there were five core outcomes for the CLC: Independent Living; Employment, Education and Training; Safety and Security; Health; and Finance.

The Head of Partnerships, CLC noted there had been over 500 signatories to the CLC and ranged from large companies down to small family run firms.

He noted other Local Authorities that had signed up, including Gateshead Council who had worked with Sky to offer free broadband for 18 months, a free laptop and an employment and life skills training day for care leavers. He noted another example was Merlin Entertainment, offering free tickets to those applying for jobs, and work with Universities in the region with the North East Raising Aspirations Partnership. The Panel noted work with the NHS, with examples given including accommodation being provided for apprentices in Birmingham. It was noted around a third of young people wanted to work in the health and social care sector and the Head of Partnerships, CLC explained that all the Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) had signed up to the CLC, with over 1,000 ringfenced jobs over three years. He noted that in building up a regional care leaver offer, it was important to work with Local Authorities in terms of internal opportunities and also with the Civil Service.

In terms of accessing information and offer, the Head of Partnerships, CLC explained there was the 'Connects' a system that young people could access. He noted that there was the Regional Care Leavers Board and explained that it was important to ensure that care leavers did not lose out when they moved across borders between different Local Authority areas and therefore work with areas/organisations with devolved powers.

The Head of Partnerships, CLC noted that it was also important to embed work with care leavers into economic development, and that could be through the work of Councillors in their work with businesses and gave an example of working with regional water companies to offer discounts to care leavers and noted that it was not Local Authorities working on their own.

The Chair thanked the Head of Partnerships, CLC and asked the Panel for their questions and comments.

Councillor A Sterling noted the work with ENGIE and asked if there were any plans for similar work in the North East. The Head of Partnerships, CLC noted he could look into the matter.

The Vice-Chair noted a recent television programme titled 'Kids' following the experience of two care leavers and suggested it would be useful to watch.

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence explained that the recommendation within the report was asking that Durham sign up to the CLC and Connects system. Luke explained he was aware of the system from discussion at an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Bill Kellett entered the meeting at 10.46am

Resolved:

- (a) That the content of the report and presentation be noted.
- (b) Agree that Durham County Council become a signatory to the Care Leavers' Covenant.

13 Routes into Social Work

The Panel received a report for information on Routes into Social Work, with comments from the Head of Children's Social Care and Practice Lead, Children and Young People in terms of Government requirements, the support offered in Durham in terms of getting into social work, numbers in terms of interest in opportunities, and support to help those choosing to work in Durham thrive and stay in Durham.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

14 Any Other Business

The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel of the 'Mind of My Own' award received by the Participation and Engagement Officer and noted it was for all the children and young people in the county.

The Deputy Corporate Director, Children and Young People's Services noted the language updates and asked if the Panel felt it was important to keep the topic on the agenda for the Panel and that it may be useful to have input from partners, such as the health service, Police and the Virtual School and their use of language in their interactions with young people.

Members agreed to this approach and the following themes were suggested to come to future meetings:

- Health
- Police
- SEND
- Language used by social workers in their reports e.g. reports to prospective foster cares and adopters

The Practice Lead, Children and Young People suggested that the Care Experience Group could 'audit' and provide feedback on language. Luke noted he would ask the group.

Councillor C Varty shared her personal adoption experience and underlined the importance to support foster carers for all the hard work that they do for our young people, and prospective adopters.

Councillor B Kellett left the meeting at 11.04am

15 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.

16 Regulation 44 visits and Regulatory Body ratings of Aycliffe Secure Centre

The Panel considered a report of the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children which provided an overview of the Regulation 44 visits and regulatory body ratings of independent children's residential homes in which Durham children and young people are placed (for copy of report see file of minutes). The Panel also received a presentation by Aycliffe Secure Services Centre Manager.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.