

## Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 30 November 2018** at **9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor P Brookes in the Chair**

### **Panel Members:**

Councillors J Charlton, J Considine, P Crathorne, G Darkes, J Grant, I Jewell, M McKeon, C Potts, E Scott, H Smith and M Simmons

### **Also in attendance:**

Helen Fergusson – Head of Children’s Social Care  
Selwyn Morgans - Manager, Aycliffe Secure Services Centre  
Ellie Seed and Amber – Investing in Children  
Christine Stonehouse – Head of the Virtual School  
Jayne Watson - Senior Partnership Officer  
Julian Wilson – Solicitor, Children and Adults Services  
Lisa Wood – Operations Manager, First Contact, Children and Young People’s Service (presenting item 6)

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bainbridge, Reed, Richardson, Savory and Wilson and from co-opted members C Baines, M Baister and Neville Harrison, and, from officer, Karen Robb.

### **2. Substitute Members**

No substitute members were in attendance.

### **3. Minutes**

With an amendment to paragraph 6 of minute number 8 to change ‘Full Service’ to ‘Full Circle’, the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 19 October 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported by the Senior Partnership Officer:

**Item 3** – It was reported that Councillor Bainbridge had participated in the Care Leavers’ Challenge and an account of her experience was to be shared with the Panel under any other business.

**Item 8** – A certificate from the Corporate Parenting Panel has been sent to the young boy who attended the meeting held on 19 October.

### **4. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **5. Weekly Looked After Children Numbers**

Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care, presented the weekly looked after children numbers (for copy of report see file of minutes). It was reported that the number of looked after children was 826.

### **Resolved**

That the report be noted.

## **6. Child Sexual Exploitation – Children who go Missing**

The Chair introduced Lisa Wood, Operations Manager (First Contact) of the Children and Young People's Service. The Panel briefly discussed the recent media coverage of a victim of child sexual exploitation in Rotherham and her efforts to prevent the man who raped her from playing a role in her son's life. Councillor Grant commented that Panel members may wish to read the victim's full story which is available to buy in a book entitled 'Just a Child' by Sammy Woodhouse. The Operations Manager presented the Child Sexual Exploitation report and delivered a presentation which provided background information on the partnership work taking place to tackle child sexual exploitation (CSE) and children who go missing and provided information on ERASE (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Operations Manager agreed to circulate a link to 'Kayleigh's Love Story' which was referred to in the presentation.

Referring to the number of young people known to be exploited which is approximately 31, the Chair asked whether this figure is a true representation of the size of the problem. The Operations Manager clarified that although there are 31 young people identified as being exploited, there are a further 80-120 young people who are considered to be at risk of exploitation.

Councillor Darkes referred to work being done to promote safety and awareness and asked if the work includes engagement with faith and ethnic groups. The Operations Manager responded that the service has undertaken targeted work with scouts, football clubs and Durham County Cricket Club and more work will be done to engage with faith and minority groups.

Councillor Charlton asked how quickly young people are fast-tracked to the Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The Operations Manager replied that weekly clinics are held and a CAMHS consultant is available as part of the therapeutic social work team.

In a response to a question from Councillor Grant who asked if the ERASE service is available to those in private children's homes, the Operations Manager confirmed this is the case. Councillor Grant then referred to s.25 orders commenting that these orders seem to penalise those being exploited as they are accommodated for their own safety, often miles away from home, whilst the perpetrators remain free.

The Manager of Aycliffe Secure Centre commented that for some young people, the fact that they are accommodated through no wrong-doing of their own is an issue, however, they often acknowledge that this is the first time they have felt safe in a long time and it is only within this safe environment that they are able to open-up about their experiences and receive the help they require.

Councillor McKeon asked for information on what resources are available to assist parents to keep their children safe from exploitation. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that work is carried out with schools, including providing information to primary schools. The Head of the Virtual School added that many schools organise e-safety sessions for parents after school hours, however take-up can be disappointingly low. Councillor McKeon asked if there are any on-line resources that members could refer to. The Operations Manager confirmed that information is available on the ERASE website. The following websites were suggested by the Head of the Virtual School:

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>

<http://www.connectsafely.org/>

<http://www.wolsingham.school.net/online-safety/35876.html>

Councillor McKeon then referred to reports of anti-social behaviour by young people at Durham Bus Station and asked if this is being addressed. Councillor Simmons informed the Panel that Durham City Youth Project has an office behind the Methodist Church on North Road and it is hoped that the project can engage with these young people to help alleviate the problem.

Councillor Jewell asked whether individual perpetrators can be identified. The Operations Manager explained that it is very difficult to identify individuals as organised criminal gangs can be involved and the technology used by perpetrators can be very advanced. Young people who may be accessing safe websites are often taken to the 'dark web' unwittingly through a series of 'doors'.

Councillor Grant referred to the 16 young people who are currently considered high risk and asked where they are located in the county. The Operations Manager clarified that these young people are spread throughout the county rather than in one particular location. The Operations Manager further clarified that although the figure for the number of young people considered to be at risk looks to have decreased over the past year, this is due to new methods of investigation which can now identify those who are genuinely at risk as opposed to those who are merely carrying out normal teenage behaviour.

## **Resolved**

That the report and presentation be noted.

## **7. Aycliffe Secure Centre Sub Group update**

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Selwyn Morgans, Manager of Aycliffe Secure Services Centre on the work of Aycliffe Secure Centre Sub Group (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Councillor Grant referred to her experience as a visiting advocate and commended the young people and staff at the Centre saying how impressed she had been at the interaction between them. Councillor Grant added that staff show a great degree of expertise and professionalism, often working in highly pressurised situations.

The Chair asked about the national picture and the Secure Services Centre Manager responded that young people are referred to Aycliffe from all areas of the country. Some beds are commissioned through a contract with the Youth Custody Service and other young people may be referred to the Centre from the Local Authority, due to concerns regarding their welfare. Recently there has been a greater demand for welfare places than youth justice places. The Centre Manager pointed out that the high number of requests for welfare beds cannot be met. He added that other areas of the country including North Yorkshire, West Bromwich and Barking and Dagenham have bids in the pipeline.

Councillor Jewell referred to the investigation into historic abuse at the former Medomsley Detention Centre and asked what measures are in place to minimise the risk of a similar situation occurring at the Secure Centre. The Centre Manager acknowledged that, sadly, there are a small number of people who enter this field of work for the wrong reasons. He assured the Panel that a rigorous selection process is in place to ensure that only those with the right motives are employed. He added that robust monitoring takes place, with all physical restraints being reviewed within 24 hours and regular checks being carried out on CCTV footage. He referred to the importance of building trust and being open with young people. External agencies provide expertise in areas such as mental health and the Centre Manager also emphasised the importance of safeguarding staff to ensure procedures are followed in order that they do not place themselves in situations which could put them at risk of having false allegations raised against them. The young people have access to telephones in their rooms and they are free to discuss their concerns with agencies such as Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner. A complaints procedure is in place and the young people have access to the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) to assist them. In addition to this, independent persons undertake unannounced visits to all children's homes at least once a month and produce a report under Regulation 44.

## **Resolved**

That the report and presentation be noted.

## **8. Virtual School Annual Report**

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Christine Stonehouse, Durham Virtual School Head which provided a summary of the Virtual School annual report (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Councillor Darkes referred to the gender gap and asked for more information on what action is being taken to close this gap. The Head of the Virtual School outlined that research has shown that white working class males do not perform as well as they should and this group is therefore considered a priority group. The Head of the Virtual School added that there is a dedicated team of staff who support schools to develop practical activities to address this. This work includes looking at areas of best practice to establish a pool of interaction and support.

Councillor Jewell referred to the importance of teaching life skills to help young people to develop into well-rounded individuals.

The Chair commented that it is important that members who are School Governors question how pupil premium monies are being spent in schools.

### **Resolved**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **9. Summary of Looked After Children Strategic Partnership**

The Panel considered a report of the Head of Children's Social Care which updated on the work of the Looked after Children (LAC) Strategic Partnership which was established to fulfil one of the priorities in the Corporate Parenting Strategy



Corporate  
Parenting Strategy -

(for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Head of Children's Social Care referred to the development of services to enable young people to remain at home, with their families, where it is safe to do so, highlighting the Pause project, which is a pilot project working with mothers who have previously had children removed from their care, to provide early intervention and support. Councillor McKeon requested that an update on the Pause project be provided to the Panel in due course.

The Panel were pleased to note that the Service has recently opened a new provision for young people requiring support out of hours. Councillor Jewell referred to the accommodation that had previously been available at Aycliffe to help care leavers with their transition from care to independent living. The Head of Children's Social Care explained that the 'Staying Close' initiative involves working with housing colleagues to place care leavers in close proximity of their former care home, to provide support on leaving care.

The Chair congratulated the Service for their hard work and thanked the Head of Children's Social Care for the comprehensive report.

### **Resolved**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

## **10. Update from Investing in Children**

The following update was provided by Investing in Children:

- The Fun Day held on 26 October was very successful and resulted in the recruitment of many new members.

- Ellie Seed met with Gill Horsfield, Complaints Officer, to discuss how the complaints form could be redesigned to be more child-friendly. Ellie added that most issues are resolved before reaching the formal complaint stage.
- Freedom cards have been a topic for discussion recently and the CiCC are looking into an issue raised by some of the young people who have experienced problems fitting-in with their friends and trying to feel “just like any other young person” when they are unable to attend sleepovers and school trips.
- Amber reported that following a meeting with Florence Coulter, Fostering Team Manager, Amber and Jade are now members of the panel for the recruitment of foster carers. They are also working with fostering to develop a feedback form on foster carers which will be completed after foster carer training sessions. It is hoped that similar work can be done with the Adoption service.
- Work is ongoing with the North East Social Work Alliance to produce a video on what young people need from their social worker.
- Amber recently met with the Chief Executive of the Council.
- The Christmas party is being planned and this is already proving very popular.
- A meeting has been held with the Children and Young People’s Service to develop a drop-in session to be held before CiCC meetings.

## **11. Ofsted Updates**

None reported.

## **12. Any other business**

It was reported that a young person is currently missing from a local authority children’s home and all efforts are being made to locate this young person as quickly as possible, including a social media campaign.

The Senior Partnership Officer read out an account from Councillor Bainbridge of her experience of the Care Leavers’ Challenge. Councillor Bainbridge highlighted how difficult she had found it to live on the care leavers’ allowance of £57.60 per week, in particular how to cook healthy meals on such a limited budget. She stressed the importance of educating care leavers in home economics and basic cooking skills in order that they can cook healthy meals on a limited budget. The Chair thanked Councillor Bainbridge for participating in the challenge and for providing the valuable feedback. Ellie Seed commented that it would be useful to discuss this with Councillor Bainbridge to see if this is something that could be picked up by the Children in Care Council, perhaps, as part of their drop-in sessions.

### **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 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.

### **14. Regulation 44 visits: summary report**

The Panel considered the report of the Head of Children's Social Care which provided a summary of the Regulation 44 visit action plans and responsive repairs for October 2018 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

#### **Resolved**

That the report be noted.