

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 14 December 2018** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors Bainbridge, Bennett, Carr, Charlton, Considine, Darkes, Grant, Jewell, Makepeace, Milburn, Reed, Richardson, Savory, Scott, Simmons and Smith.

Also in attendance:

Kelsey Clayton – Legal Services Manager
Andrea Houlahan – Strategic Manager, Families First North (presenting item 6)
Selwyn Morgans - Manager, Aycliffe Secure Services Centre
Karen Robb – Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence
Ellie Seed and Amber – Investing in Children
Christine Stonehouse – Head of the Virtual School
Jac Tyler – Operations Manager, Children and Young People’s Services (presenting item 9)
Jayne Watson - Senior Partnership Officer

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Crathorne and Wilson and from co-opted members Chris Baines, Marie Baister, Neville Harrison, Kayleigh Myers, and, from officer, Helen Fergusson.

2. Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3. Minutes

With an amendment to include apologies from Wendy Taylor, the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

Item 6 – The link to ‘Kayleigh’s Love Story’ has been circulated to members.

Item 9 – An update on the Pause Project requested by Councillor McKeon was to be provided under agenda item 6.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Weekly Looked After Children Numbers

Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence, 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 as at Friday 7 December was 826.

Councillor Grant referred to national statistics which indicate that the north east has a significantly higher number of looked after children than similar socio-economic areas of the country and she queried why this is the case. Stephen Tracey, Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager responded that the national trend has seen an increase in the number of looked after children, however, the figure for London has decreased. He explained that London boroughs have worked collaboratively, restructuring services and using alternative methods of working in an effort to reduce the number of looked after children. Councillor Grant suggested that authorities in the north east should investigate whether similar methods could be adopted here.

It was agreed that further analysis would be undertaken on this, and an update presented to a future meeting.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

6. Pre-Birth Service

Andrea Houlahan, Strategic Manager for Families First North presented the Pre-Birth Service report which provided an overview of the Pre-Birth Service which was implemented following the Children's Social Care restructure in February 2018 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Chair referred to the success of the pilot which has resulted in 50% of children being returned to the care of parents and he asked whether this level of success is sustainable. The Strategic Manager for Families First responded that the service is in its early stages, having been implemented in May, and a measure of success will be identified in due course. She added that the model actively encourages working with extended families when it is not possible to return children to their parents' care.

Councillor Makepeace asked how successful the caseload cap is and the Strategic Manager for Families First responded that workloads are rigorously reviewed to avoid this.

Councillor Smith referred to the Pause project and asked if the project continued to be commissioned from an external provider. The Strategic Manager for Families First confirmed this is the case, adding that the Pre-Birth Service works alongside Pause practitioners to share learning and provide support, and, valuable lessons are being learnt from this exercise. Consideration may be given to adopting this model in house, moving forward.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

It was agreed that the Independent Reviewing Officer report (item 9 on the agenda) would be taken as the next item of business.

7. Independent Reviewing Officer: Looked After Children & Child Protection Annual Reports 2017/18

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Jac Tyler, Operations Manager, Children and Young People's Services which provided an overview of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service's Looked After Children Annual Report for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Chair referred to the increasing numbers of looked after children and the impact this has had on workloads and the Operations Manager informed the Panel that two additional members of staff have been recruited to address this.

In response to a question about the increase in the number of disputes raised this year and whether any themes were emerging, the Operations Manager responded that issues are varied, however, a number are in relation to placement stability and assessment delays. Councillor Darkes referred to the 139 disputes, amounting to 12% of the looked after population and he asked what work is being done to improve the situation. The Operations Manager replied that the service intervenes to ensure that assessments are dealt with on time and the service works closely with Children's Services regarding the quality of care plans. She added that emerging themes are investigated to identify any potential underlying problems.

Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence referred to issues regarding delays saying that problems with the recruitment and retention of social workers has placed teams under increased pressure, however the situation has improved during the year following a successful marketing campaign. Councillor Jewell commented that it would be useful to have an update on the current situation with regard to the recruitment and retention of social workers, to ensure all members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are sighted on this. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence emphasised that the recruitment and retention of social workers is a national problem, which is leading to increased competition in the field.

In response to a question as to how many children are actively involved in their reviews, the Operations Manager replied that children are encouraged to participate in their reviews with approximately 98% of children, over the age of 4, being involved in their reviews with reviews being tailored to the wishes of the child. A new system is due to be implemented from January 2019, which will provide more definitive information around young people's active engagement.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

8. Quarter Two 2018/19 Performance

The Panel considered the Quarter Two performance report and presentation of Stephen Tracey, Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Councillor Bainbridge referred to the figures quoted in the presentation, for outcomes for care leavers, observing that the figures showed that 93% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation and she asked how many care leavers this referred to. The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager clarified that out of 85 care leavers, 79 are in suitable accommodation. The Panel commented that it would be useful for future presentations to include figures, not only percentages.

Councillor Grant observed that the graph showing the number of looked after children indicated the figure for Durham has doubled over the past 10 years and expressed concern as to whether enough research is being carried out to investigate why so many children are entering the care system.

Councillor Jewell referred to the aspirations of young people in the care system and asked if looked after children are being encouraged to reach their full potential. The Head of the Virtual School advised that a great deal of work is done to encourage looked after children to be aspirational, including work with foster carers. However, there is more work to be done to encourage Academies to admit looked after children. The Senior Partnership Officer referred to a youth aspirations event which is being held in the New Year which care leavers will be invited to.

In response to a request from Councillor Reed who asked for more details on the number of children who are returned to their families, the Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager agreed to look into this matter for a future Panel meeting.

Councillor Milburn asked how many looked after children are excluded from school. The Head of the Virtual School reported that no looked after children have been permanently excluded from school since 2015.

Councillor Darkes pointed out that the number of initial health assessments completed within 20 working days has fallen by 21% and he asked the reason for this. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence replied that work is being done with the Families First teams to improve this and she added that delays can be caused by parents failing to give their consent for health assessments to be carried out.

The Chair requested more information on the number of children who are entering the system through Section 20 orders as opposed to Care Orders and the Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager agreed to gather information on this. The Panel briefly discussed what can be done to reduce the number of looked after children. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence informed the Panel that work is being done through the Supporting Solutions team, Full Circle, the Pre-Birth Team and also Signs of Safety which is a strength based model which is in the process of being implemented. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence referred to concerns raised by the President of the Family Division about the national trends in relation to looked after children and she added that if members wished to have further information on this, links could be circulated by the Senior Partnership Officer.

The Chair welcomed Terry Collins, Chief Executive, who joined the meeting as an observer.

Resolved

That the report and presentation be noted.

9. Aycliffe Secure Centre Film

The Manager of Aycliffe Secure Services Centre introduced a short film about the Centre which is shown to young people on their entry to the centre. It is hoped that the film dispels some of the myths and provides the young people with a better understanding of what life is really like at the centre.

10. Update from Investing in Children

The following update was provided by Investing in Children.

- Plans are well underway for the Christmas party which is being held on 18 December, and, as the recruitment drive for new members of the CiCC has been so successful, there are 55 young people attending, aged between 2 and 20 years.
- The Panel congratulated Amber and Jade who are now members of the Fostering Panel and will be involved in the foster carer assessments.
- The dates have now been set for CiCC meetings for 2019.
- Events are being planned to celebrate Care Day in February.
- Members of the CiCC have visited foster carer events.
- The CiCC is working with the Young People's Service to provide drop-in advice sessions to be held prior to CiCC meetings, from 3 pm to 5 pm.

11. Ofsted Updates

None reported.

12. Corporate Parenting Panel Terms of Reference

The Head of Children's Social Care presented a report which detailed the revised Corporate Parenting Panel Terms of Reference (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Senior Partnership Officer informed the Panel that the revised terms of reference makes provision to increase the number of co-opted members, to a maximum of 10.

Resolved

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

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 November 2018 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved

That the report be noted.