

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 25 January 2019** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors Bainbridge, Bennett, Carr, Charlton, Considine, Crathorne, Darkes, Grant, Jewell, McKeon, Makepeace, Potts, Richardson and Smith

Co-Opted Members:

C Baines, M Baister, N Harrison and W Taylor

Substitute Member:

Councillor S Robinson

Also in attendance:

Linda Bailey - Strategic Lead, Progression and Learning (presenting item 6)
Laura Broomfield – Team Manager
Kelsey Clayton - Legal Services Manager
Helen Fergusson - Head of Children's Social Care
Selwyn Morgans - Manager, Aycliffe Secure Services Centre
Steve Percival - Service Manager, NYAS (presenting item 8)
Judith Rayne - Operations Manager, Children with Disabilities Team (presenting item 9)
Karen Robb – Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence
Ellie Seed - Investing in Children
Linda Spence - Team Manager, Children with Disabilities Team (presenting item 9)
Elizabeth Stenton - Strategic Manager, Families First South (presenting item 9)
Christine Stonehouse - Head of the Virtual School
Jayne Watson - Senior Partnership Officer

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Milburn, Reed, Savory, Scott, Simmons and Wilson and from Co-opted Member, Kayleigh Myers.

2. Substitute Members

Councillor S Robinson for Councillor A Reed.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 14 December were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

Item 7 – In response to the Panel’s request for an update on the current position with regard to the recruitment and retention of Social Workers, an update was to be provided under item 12 of the agenda.

Item 8 – The Youth Aspirations event will be held on 29 March at the Leadership Centre.

Item 10 - Dates for Care Day and meetings with the Children in Care Council have been added to Members’ diaries. Members were reminded that if they wish to participate in the event for Care Day, they must book a place in advance.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Weekly Looked After Children Numbers

The Panel considered a report of the Head of Children’s Social Care which provided an update on the number of looked after children (for copy of report see file of minutes). It was reported that the number of looked after children was 828.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

6. Supporting Care Leavers into Education, Employment and Training

The Panel received a report and presentation of Linda Bailey, Strategic Lead for Progression and Learning, which provided an update on the support available to care leavers to enable them to progress into education, employment and training (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

In response to a question from Councillor Darkes, the Strategic Lead responded that contact has been made with town and parish councils and with neighbouring authorities and she will also consider exploring opportunities with town and parish councils. Cllr Considine commented that the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee has also undertaken work with the Progression and Learning team and asked if they were aware of the work of the Skill Mill. The Strategic Lead responded saying that they are aware of the Skill Mill, however, Clean and Green have a slightly different approach.

Councillor Robinson emphasised the importance of targeted recruitment adding that Regeneration and Local Services have been particularly proactive to promote opportunities with the Council’s sub-contractors. The Strategic Lead explained that meetings with the Chief Executive are being held to discuss measures to increase opportunities and it is hoped that the relocation to the new headquarters will generate more leads.

In response to a question about gender of the NEET cohort from N Harrison, the Strategic Lead informed the Panel that there are slightly more males than females.

Councillor Jewell referred to those young people who do not complete the DurhamWorks programme and asked why this occurs. The Strategic Lead responded that the drop-out rate is slightly greater for those young people who are looked after / in care, however, the drop-out rate is not so large that it is considered problematic. The Strategic Lead stressed that contact is made with young people and providers to gather their views on their experience of the placements, which helps to inform future placements.

Councillor Charlton referred to those looked after children / care leavers who are 'not known' and asked the reason for this. The Strategic Lead responded that the reasons are known, as monthly analysis is undertaken with the young people, however, the reasons can be varied and complex. Some young people are simply unwilling or apprehensive to withdraw from the benefit system and move into apprenticeships, especially if they are not yet on universal credit.

The Chair asked whether any progress has been made on the proposal to ring-fence apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers. The Strategic Lead informed the Panel that this matter has been raised with human resources colleagues and a report is being prepared for consideration by the Corporate Management Team.

In response to a question from Councillor Carr, the Strategic Lead informed the Panel that DurhamWorks has established links with housing which have led to employment opportunities.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

7. Durham Virtual School Education Update

The Panel considered a report of Christine Stonehouse, Head of the Virtual School, which provided an update on key priorities and developments to improve educational outcomes for looked after children, based on the outcomes for 2018 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor Charlton referred to Forest Schools and C Baines explained that these offer children a hands-on, learning experience in a natural environment, designed to complement the curriculum.

In response to a question from Councillor Grant, the Head of the Virtual School explained that the inclusion base has 3 members of staff and inclusion support is available at Key Stages 1 / 2 with bridge provision at Key Stage 3.

The Chair expressed concern that the cost to Academies may be a disincentive. The Head of the Virtual School responded that maintained schools pay in advance, so it is unfair to expect Academies to receive the same support as maintained schools, without contributing. Academies are merely being asked to pay in a different way. However, the Academy offer is being developed and consideration is being given to allowing Academies to pay in advance too. The Head of the Virtual School advised that the situation is being very closely monitored.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

8. Advocacy Services in Aycliffe Secure Centre

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Selwyn Morgans, Centre Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre and Steve Percival, Service Manager, NYAS which provided details of the advocacy services and support available at Aycliffe Secure Centre, through Coram Voice and the National Youth Advocacy Service (for copy of report and presentations see file of minutes).

The Centre Manager reminded Members that young people have access to telephones in their rooms, all of which have the advocacy number pre-programmed so that the young people are able to contact them at any time, without needing to inform Centre staff.

In response to a question from Councillor Darkes, the Service Manager for NYAS clarified that advocacy services are offered to young people between the ages of 0-25 which includes a pre-birth service to offer advice to mothers-to-be and their unborn babies.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

9. Looked After Children – Children with disabilities

The Panel considered a report and oral presentation of Elizabeth Stenton, Strategic Manager for Families First South, Linda Spence, Team Manager and Judith Rayne, Operations Manager, which informed the Panel of the remit of the Children with Disabilities Service (for copy of report see file).

Members were informed that there are currently 153 open cases, 11 of whom are looked after children. A number of children suffer from multiple conditions and the service works to identify the right provision to achieve the best outcomes. External providers enable parents and carers to access short breaks from caring.

The Chair asked about those looked after children with disabilities who are not open cases and asked if there is provision for them. The Team Manager explained that families requiring assistance are able to access the service, for example, via referrals through One Point.

The Panel noted that statistically the service performs favourably when compared to neighbouring authorities and Councillor Robinson spoke anecdotally about a meeting he had attended in London where a representative from Ofsted cited Durham County Council's Children with Disabilities Service as an example of good practice. The Team Manager commented that the staff work very hard and representatives from neighbouring authorities have visited Durham to observe the service.

Cllr McKeon referred to a previous meeting at which a care leaver suffering with a mental health issue had encountered difficulties accessing help as there had been a gap in the provision between the Children's and Adult Services. Cllr McKeon asked whether safeguards are in place to ensure that there is no gap in provision for young people with disabilities, during their transitions. The Head of Children's Social Care clarified that the Disabilities team does not generally work with young people with mental health problems, their focus is linked to young people with significant physical health problems. The transition for looked after children with mental health issues remains a priority and work is ongoing with the Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to address this.

The Head of Children's Social Care advised that, for children and young people with additional needs, and their families, the transition from Children's Services to Adult Services can prove to be difficult. She explained that Durham has created a transition service to help support all disabled young people, who come into this team from Children's Services at the age of 13. The transitions team works to ensure that young people with additional needs, and their carers, have access to a planned, positive progression when they approach adulthood and move into Adult Services.

Councillor Smith asked if this includes health services, as there are specific paediatric consultants within children's health services, however there are no similar specialisms within adult health services. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that the transitions service provides for 0-25 year olds, and includes health services in order to deliver the best package of care into adulthood.

Councillor Jewell asked about out-of-county provision. Judith Rayne explained that some educational provision packages are out-of-county, especially 52 week placements. Parental choice is also a big consideration, with many parents wishing to send their children to Percy Hedley school, which is a high cost provision. Work is taking place with the Head of Education and Skills and the SEND Manager to look at further developing the in-county provision.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

10. Update from Investing in Children

The following update was provided by Investing in Children:

- An event is being planned for Care Day on 15 February, to celebrate life in care. Members wishing to attend should complete the 'event brite' booking in the calendar invite.
- Foster Carer training sessions are continuing and there is now a young person on the fostering panel.
- Joint working was undertaken with the Young People's Service, whereby the CiCC provided a drop in session for young people in advance of a Young People's Service session - this was very successful.
- Work on Health Passports is progressing.

- Recent recruits to the CiCC have brought some new ideas and there is an emphasis on bringing new focus to the group.
- Councillor Smith informed the Panel that a working group meeting will be held in the near future, which will be a joint meeting of the Children and Young People and Safer and Stronger Overview and Scrutiny Committees, to investigate private residential children's homes.
- At the meeting on 15 February, the young people are intending to film during their section. Panel Members are asked to note that filming will take place during the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 15 February.

11. Ofsted Updates

None reported.

12. Strategies to Stabilise Social Work Teams

The Panel considered a report of Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence which summarised the strategies which have been put in place with the aim of stabilising Social Work teams (for copy of report see file of minutes).

It was reported that, following the recent recruitment drive, as at the end of December 2018, 19 new Social Workers had been appointed. Additional investment has been agreed, and it is hoped that a further 15 Social Workers will be recruited by the end of this financial year.

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).

The Head of Children's Social Care provided information on two unpublished Ofsted visits which had recently taken place.

Resolved

That the report be noted.