

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 15 February 2019** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors Bainbridge, Carr, Charlton, Considine, Crathorne, Darkes, Jewell, McKeon, Milburn, Richardson, Scott, Simmons and Wilson

Co-Opted Members:

M Baister and W Taylor

Substitute Member:

Councillor S Robinson

Also in attendance:

Chris Bell – Operations Manager

Kelsey Clayton - Legal Services Manager

Kevin Lough – Occupational Health and Safety Manager

Darren Lowe – Homes Manager, High Etherley Children's Home

Helen McAloon – Strategy Officer (Observer)

Selwyn Morgans - Manager, Aycliffe Secure Services Centre

Bernadette Olney – Homes Manager, Coxhoe Satellite Children's Home

Mark Profitt – Homes Manager, Framwellgate Moor Children's Home

Ellie Seed - Investing in Children

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

Christine Stonehouse - Head of the Virtual School

Jayne Watson - Senior Partnership Officer

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Grant, Potts, Reed, Smith, Co-opted Members, C Baines, N Harrison and K Myers, and, from officers H Fergusson and K Robb.

2. Substitute Members

Councillor S Robinson substituted for Councillor A Reed.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 15 January 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

In respect of item 10 of the minutes, the Senior Partnership Officer advised that the filming by the Children in Care Council will take place at a future meeting.

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, presented by C Bell, Operations Manager which provided an update on the number of looked after children (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Operations Manager explained that a new reporting system has recently been migrated and, owing to the lag due to the deadline for the circulation of papers, the latest information at the time of report writing was, as at 22 January there were 819 looked after children.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

6. Ofsted Update

No updates were reported.

7. Update from Investing in Children

Ellie Seed provided the following update from Investing in Children:

- Final preparations are underway for Care Day which will be held on Tuesday 19 February at the Sjøvoll Centre between 2-4 pm. A rap music artist, who himself is a care leaver, has been invited to the event.
- Young people have expressed frustration that where agreements are in place to have contact with adopted siblings, this does not always take place as agreed. The young people therefore intend to produce a video to use in the training of adoptive parents to encourage them to maintain contact with siblings, where this is in the children's best interests.

8. Analysis of the rise in Looked After Children

The Panel considered a presentation of Stephen Tracey, Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

Referring to the looked after figures for 2001/02, the Chair pointed out that, at that time, the Durham rate was comparatively low and he asked whether the reasons for this were known. The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager replied that he would make enquires to obtain historical information.

Councillor Jewell asked how the data is recorded and whether this is like for like across the country. The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager assured the Panel that data is comparative with strict parameters in place. He added that all local authorities are required to return their figures at the same time.

The Chair referred to the number of children accommodated under Section 20 Children Act 1989 and asked the Legal Services Manager to provide further information on this. The Legal Services Manager confirmed that parents can voluntarily allow the local authority to accommodate their child under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. This allows the local authority to work with families under the Public Law Outline whilst assessments are completed, without issuing care proceedings, however, case law has been critical of local authorities who rely on Section 20, leading to delays for the child. The Chair requested that the Corporate Equalities and Strategy Manager gather data on the length of time children have been subject to Section 20.

Councillor Darkes referred to the percentage change in the looked after rate from 2014 to 2018 with the figure for Durham indicating a 33% increase, whilst the figure for Newcastle has decreased and he asked whether examples of good practice are shared. C Bell, Operations Manager, confirmed that good practice is shared through Partners in Practice and through formal arrangements with South Tyneside and North Yorkshire.

Councillor McKeon referred to the national and local policy drivers, observing the significant spikes in 2012 and 2017 following serious case reviews and asked about lessons learned as a result of these reviews. Members were informed that the serious case reviews are public documents and they will therefore be available to view. Members wishing to have copies of the documents were requested to contact the Senior Partnership Officer. Councillor McKeon referred to the London effect and the decrease in the number of looked after children and asked if London has suffered from the same problems as the north east in relation to the recruitment and retention of social workers. The Operations Manager responded that the recruitment and retention of social workers is a challenge throughout the country. The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children advised that Durham is now actively recruiting social workers.

Councillor Jewell referred to management best practice in relation to controlling entry and encouraging exit. C Bell confirmed that the process for entering care is robust with decisions taken to place a child in care being agreed by senior managers. Similarly, with regard to exiting the care system, a number of panels are in place to scrutinise and monitor the process.

Councillor Robinson referred to the decrease in the London figures and asked whether the wide geographical area for dispersal of asylum seekers has had an impact on the figures. The Corporate Equality and Scrutiny Manager said this is not the case as the London authorities would remain the responsible authority with the figures showing as their looked after children. The Corporate Equality and Scrutiny Manager informed the Panel that a detailed report on the London effect is available on request.

Councillor Scott commented that figures only provide part of the picture adding that although Durham has a comparatively high number of looked after children, that is not necessarily an indication that Durham is performing any worse than other areas. The Panel commented that other factors should be taken into consideration including that Durham has a higher population than neighbouring authorities and the recent restructure of Durham Children's Services may indicate that we are indeed looking after the right young people, at the right time, in the right way to ensure they are able to achieve the best possible outcomes.

The Head of Early Help, Assessment and Safeguarding pointed out that the number of looked after children has stabilised over the last year and this will continue to be monitored.

9. Plans to Increase Residential Provision for Children and Young People in County Durham

The Panel considered a report of the Head of Children's Services presented by C Bell, Operations Manager. The report set out plans for the future development of in-house residential provision including the redevelopment of the children's home in Newton Aycliffe as well as the development of solo provision and transitional supported living arrangements (for copy of report see file).

Members expressed their support for the plans and requested that the Chair contact Asset Services to request that this matter be progressed as a priority. Councillor Charlton queried whether there was scope to increase provision at New Lea House and the Operations Manager responded that he would look into this matter.

Councillor McKeon expressed the importance of considering transport links when planning new provision. Chris Bell confirmed that this is taken into consideration.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

10. 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.

11. Summary of Ofsted Inspection of Children's Homes

The Panel considered a report presented by C Bell, Operations Manager and S Morgans, Manager of Aycliffe Secure Services Centre which provided an update on the most recent Ofsted Inspections of children's homes and highlighted key strengths, and areas for improvement (for copy of report see file).

It was reported that the most recent full inspection results for the 9 Children's Homes and Aycliffe Secure Centre are all graded as overall 'good'. The Aycliffe Secure Centre Manager commented that Ofsted had made only two recommendations at the recent inspection of the Secure Centre and this is testament to the hard work of the staff who are striving to achieve an 'outstanding' in the future.

The Panel were pleased at the positive news contained in the report. They expressed congratulations to the Residential Homes Managers and asked them to pass on their thanks to the staff for their hard work.

Resolved

That the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

12. Health and Safety Update

The Panel considered a report of Kevin Lough, Occupational Health and Safety Manager which provided an update on health and safety in Durham County Council Children's Homes (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved

That the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

13. Development Discussion

In groups, Members discussed the following, in relation to the Health and Safety update report and a note was taken of the discussion:

- Pressures
- Challenges
- Emerging Issues
- Role of the Corporate Parenting Panel

14. Regulation 44 Visits: Summary Report

The Panel considered the monthly update report of the Head of Children's Social Care and Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children which provided a summary of the Regulation 44 visit action plans and responsive repairs (for copy of report see file of minutes).

It was reported that a meeting will be arranged with Cllr Brookes, Cllr Bennett and Direct Services to discuss any emerging issues.

Resolved

That the recommendations contained in the report be approved.