

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 29 March 2019** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor H Smith in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Carr, J Charlton, P Crathorne, J Grant, I Jewell, M McKeon, J Makepeace, C Potts and C Wilson

Co-Opted Members:

Young persons representative of the Children in Care Council

Substitute Members:

Councillors B Coult and A Hopgood

Also in attendance:

Kelsey Clayton – Legal Services Manager
Florence Coulter – Fostering Team Manager (presenting item 9)
Helen Fergusson – Head of Children’s Social Care
Selwyn Morgans – Manager, Aycliffe Secure Services Centre
Karen Robb – Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Permanence
Stephen Tracey - Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager (presenting item 8)
Rebecca Turner – Business Partner (presenting item 9)
Jayne Watson – Senior Partnership Officer

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brookes, Considine, Richardson, Savory, Scott and Simmons and from co-opted members C Baines, K Myers, W Taylor and from E Seed and C Stonehouse.

2. Substitute Members

Councillor B Coult substituted for Councillor M Simmons and Councillor A Hopgood substituted for Councillor E Scott.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 15 February 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. The following matters arising were reported:

Item 8 – Historical data requested at the last meeting, as well as further information on Section 20 Orders, will be provided at a future meeting.

Item 9 – The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence informed the Panel that the possibility of increasing residential provision at New Lea House had previously been considered by the Management Team, and it was not considered to be financially viable at that time.

This may be revisited in the future, however, any change in provision would require the home to be re-registered.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Number of Looked After Children

The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that final checks on the new reporting system are almost complete and it is hoped that the production of the monthly written reports will resume for the Panel meeting in the near future.

It was reported that the number of looked after children was 840.

6. Ofsted Updates

A further Ofsted visit to Tow Law Children's Home is scheduled to take place after 7 April. The Panel will be informed of the outcomes.

The Manager of Aycliffe Secure Services Centre informed the Panel that Aycliffe Centre has been selected by the Anna Freud Institute to participate in some research into the secure state. The Manager thanked the staff for all their work undertaken in preparation for the selection process. It was agreed that the media team should be contacted to request a press release on this good-news story.

The Manager of Aycliffe Secure Services Centre also reported that the manager from a similar establishment on the Isle of Man had visited the Centre and acknowledged the good work taking place and had provided very positive feedback. It was agreed that, moving forward, Aycliffe would continue to work with them to share Aycliffe's best practice.

7. Update from Investing in Children

The young people from the Children in Care Council reported that they had delivered training to the fostering panel which was interactive and demonstrated some of the feelings young people have about going into care, for example, having their phones taken away.

A joint meeting of the Children in Care Council and the Corporate Parenting Panel took place on 20 March with 28 young people in attendance. The discussions included Freedom Cards, education issues and foster carer profiles. It is anticipated that feedback from the meeting will be discussed at a future Panel meeting.

8. Quarter Three 2018/19 Performance

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Stephen Tracey, Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager which provided an overview of performance in relation to looked after children and care leavers during the quarter (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The presentation included information on the characteristics of the cohort of children in care and care leavers, the provision of stable environments and the health and wellbeing of children in care.

Councillor Makepeace referred to the data on stable environments being provided for children in care and commented that although the average number of days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is provided, it is not meaningful without knowing how quickly the adoption process can be completed. Councillor Makepeace requested that additional data be provided on this, to give clarity.

The Legal Services Manager informed the Panel that in order to place a child for adoption, the court must grant a Placement Order which is an order authorising the local authority to place a child for adoption. If the child is easy to match with prospective adoptive parents, the child could be placed within weeks of the care proceedings concluding, but in other cases there will be a longer wait. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that the data provided in the report forms part of the national data set return which enables the data to be comparable with other local authorities. However consideration will be given to providing the data in a more meaningful way for the purposes of Panel meetings.

Panel members expressed concern at the number of children who are not being provided with a health assessment within 20 days and raised a question as to how much longer these children are waiting for health assessments. The Head of Children's Social Care advised that children's services work alongside the health professionals and children's services are required to complete the necessary paperwork and ensure that parental consent is in place within 5 days. If this is not completed within 5 days, there is a risk that the health assessment will not be completed within 20 working days of the child becoming looked after. Targeted work has been undertaken between January and March with the aim of increasing the number of assessments completed within the 20-day target and it is hoped that this will lead to a noticeable improvement after March. The Panel noted that there will be a small number of older young people who will refuse to give consent to a health assessment.

Councillor Charlton asked about those young people who are missing / absent from care and requested clarification on the data which shows an increase in the number of children who are reported missing and a reduction in the number of incidents. The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager clarified that whilst there are more individual young people going missing, the number of times they have gone missing has reduced

Councillor Grant asked how 'suitable accommodation' is defined and the Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence replied that suitable accommodation is defined as accommodation where a child is not at risk. Panel members commented that although being in custody is not defined as suitable accommodation, it may be the most suitable accommodation for that young person at that particular time. The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence commented that a wide variety of suitable accommodation is offered, and it may be beneficial for the Panel to be provided with descriptors to provide context.

One of the young people from the Children in Care Council commented on the outcomes for care leavers and expressed concern at the percentage who are not in education, employment or training.

The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence responded that some of these young people will be young parents caring for babies, others may have learning difficulties and she added that it may be useful for the Panel to be provided with some narrative on case studies at a future meeting.

It was agreed that more narrative would be provided, by way of context behind the headlines, for future performance reports.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

9. Foster Carer Recruitment and Marketing Activity

The Panel considered a report and presentation of the Placement Efficiency Manager presented by Rebecca Turner, Business Partner, which provided an overview of marketing activity to support the recruitment of foster carers, and, highlighted challenges facing the service (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Councillor Grant commented that whilst the marketing material provides a very positive picture of foster care, marketing could be considered to appeal to those who would welcome a more challenging foster care role, depending on their own background/experience etc.

Councillor Grant also requested further information regarding placement break-down, in particular whether foster carers are offered another placement soon after the breakdown of a placement. The Fostering Team Manager replied that a decision to move a child from a placement is not taken lightly and a 'disruption meeting' is held before a placement move takes place. There can be a range of factors which lead to the break-down of placements and every case is different. In some instances, where a placement has broken down, it may not be appropriate to place another child into that placement. The Fostering Team Manager advised that additional training and support is considered before the placement is ended.

Councillor Hopgood commented on the lack of representation of older teenagers in the marketing materials adding that older teenagers and other hard to place groups should be given more representation in the marketing campaign. The Business Partner responded that this has been considered and she highlighted that the next edition of County Durham News includes an article by two teenagers about how positive their experiences of fostering have been. The Business Partner added that the marketing experience shows that a general marketing campaign which captures interest and brings people 'through the door' is more effective than targeted marketing for specific groups.

In response to a question as to whether there is an upper-age limit for foster carers, the Fostering Team Manager replied that there is no upper-age limit and the ability to be a good foster carer has a very broad remit with older foster carers often bringing valuable experience.

Councillor McKeon asked whether marketing includes information about the support package offered to foster carers through the Full Circle service, as this may be beneficial and provide potential foster carers with reassurance that support is available throughout the process.

The Fostering Team Manager replied that information on the Full Circle service and the support available is promoted to initial enquirers. The Business Partner added that more advice on the availability of the wrap-around care may be beneficial at the marketing stage and this suggestion will be given consideration.

In response to a question from Councillor Charlton as to whether independent fostering agencies offer foster carers more financial incentives, the Fostering Team Manager replied that it is difficult to know what IFAs actually pay their foster carers. Durham offers a tier system which provides career progression as they become more experienced foster carers. The Head of Children's Social Care added that one of Durham's marketing strengths lies in the amount of support available and suggested that members could promote this aspect when talking about fostering in Durham. Councillor Charlton commented that Corporate Parenting Panel members are in a privileged position to be advocates for Durham's fostering service.

Councillor Jewell commented on the professionalism of the marketing strategy, however, he suggested that it may be that a softer marketing strategy may appeal to community groups. The Business Partner agreed that there is a balance to be achieved, and, advised that they are currently trailing a geographical marketing campaign, and are also working with business partners to encourage staff who are at risk of redundancy, or who are near retirement age to consider the benefits of fostering.

One of the young people from the Children in Care Council enquired whether there had been input from the young people into the marketing campaign. The Head of Children's Social Care responded that representatives from Investing in Children have been involved in the training of foster carers but advised that consideration will be giving to involving them in the marketing campaign work to ensure their voices are reflected from the outset.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

10. Any other business

At a recent meeting of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a member of that committee commented that she had received Signs of Safety awareness training which had been very useful. The Scrutiny Committee agreed that this training should be provided for all members of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee and suggested that the training should also be offered to Corporate Parenting Panel members. It was agreed that a joint awareness training session would be arranged for members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Parenting Panel. Details will be shared in due course.

The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that moving forward, the remit of the Looked After Children and Permanence Strategic Manager post will be split into two posts. The current postholder will retain responsibility for social work and care planning for looked after children and care leavers. A new Senior Manager Looked After Children Resources post has been created to focus on residential care and fostering. This post has been advertised and recruitment is underway to appoint to the new post.

11. 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 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

12. Update on Regionalisation of Adoption Services

The Panel considered a presentation of the Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence which provided an update on the regionalisation of adoption services (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

The Panel was informed that a Regional Adoption Agency has been established named 'Coast to Coast' which enables the local authorities of Sunderland, Durham and Cumbria to work together to widen the pool of prospective adopters. One of the authorities will become the host authority, and details will be shared in due course. Administration and finance functions will remain with the respective authorities. Consultations have been held with trade unions and human resources with regard to the transfer of staff into the new organisation.

Resolved

That the recommendations contained in the report be approved.

13. Regulation 44 Visits: Summary Report

The Panel considered the monthly update on Regulation 44 visits and outstanding responsive repairs (for copy of report see file of minutes). It was agreed that the in-house Commissioning model seems to be working well. Continuous reviews will take place to ensure there remains independence. The Senior Commissioning Manager will present an update on the Regulation 44 process to the next meeting, as the new regime has been in place for a year.

Members suggested that it would be useful for managers' comments to include reference to the actions identified by the inspectors.

The Panel requested further information with regard to the regulation framework required by the Scottish providers. The Commissioning team have agreed to provide an update at the next meeting to coincide with the annual Regulation 44 update.

With regard to repairs, members requested that, where repairs are outstanding for more than one month, that these be highlighted in the report.

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence agreed to pick up an issue with regard to wheelchair finger guards.

Resolved

That the report be received.

14. Regulation 44 Representation

It was agreed that further conversations would take place, outside of the meeting, to discuss the Regulation 44 representative for West Rainton Children's Home.

15. Any other business

Members reported that not all have received their visit dates for the forthcoming year. This matter will be followed up with the Commissioning Team.

The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence responded to a question from Cllr Crathorne about the premises at Cedar Drive.

The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that the conclusions of the Ofsted inspections at Framwellgate and Tow Law Children's Homes will be available after 7 April.

The refurbishment of Ferryhill contact centre has now been completed and the Panel Member who contributed towards this was thanked for their contribution.