DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 28 June 2019** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:
Councillors J Carr, J Charlton, J Considine, J Grant, I Jewell, P Jopling, M McKeon, L Maddison, J Makepeace, O Milburn, C Potts, A Reed, G Richardson, E Scott, M Simmons and H Smith.

Co-Opted Members:
M Baister and W Taylor

Also in attendance:
Kelsey Clayton – Legal Services Manager
Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager (presenting item 12)
Terry Irvine – Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Resources
Karen Robb – Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence
Ellie Seed – Investing in Children
Martyn Stenton – Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children
Christine Stonehouse – Head of Virtual School
Steven Tracey – Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager (presenting item 9)
Jayne Watson – Senior Partnership Officer

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bainbridge, Crathorne and Wilson, from co-opted member C Baines, and, from officers H Fergusson and S Morgans.

2. Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 26 April 2019 were agreed as a correct record. The following matters arising were reported:

- The Commissioning Team is to recirculate the briefing note to outline members' roles in respect of Regulation 44 visits. Members' profiles will be updated in order to include the information requested by young people.

- Funding has now been allocated for the refurbishment of approximately 7 contact centres. Members wishing to make a contribute to future refurbishments were asked to contact Jayne Watson, Senior Partnership Officer.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Number of Looked After Children

Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence, informed the Panel that data cleansing as a result of the transfer of information to the new system had resulted in difficulties in obtaining accurate figures. The approximate number of looked after children as at 27 June was 870, however, the actual figure was likely to be lower than 870. It is expected that accurate data will be available by the end of July. The Panel noted that the Resource Panel is carrying out some tracking work on the last ten admissions into the looked after system.

6. Ofsted Updates

Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence, updated the Panel on Ofsted visits. Members wishing to view Ofsted reports were asked to contact the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence who will provide links to the reports.

The Panel agreed to consider the Care Leavers update as the next item of business.

7. Care Leavers Update

Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence, introduced a report and delivered a presentation on the local offer for care leavers including information on statutory entitlements and discretionary support provided by the authority (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that meetings are ongoing to discuss the possibility of extending Freedom Cards to over 18s and to improve the subsidised travel offer. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence informed the Panel that 23 care leavers are studying at university and the number of care leavers gaining apprenticeships with the Council continues to rise. Work is being done with colleagues in Human Resources and Durham Works to increase training and employment opportunities. The Chief Executive and Corporate Management team continue to support care leavers and a care leavers strategy report is to be considered by the Corporate Management Team in July.

The Local Offer for Care Leavers is available on the Council’s website and the Children in Care Council website.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

8. Update from Investing in Children

Ellie Seed provided the following update from Investing in Children:

a) work has been done with the Children and Young People's Service to provide a drop-in advice service directly before the CICC meetings;
b) the recent recruitment drive has resulted in an increasing membership of the Children in Care Council and the group has now been split into two, more manageable sized groups, with one group consisting of young people aged 13 and under and the other group aged 14 plus with separate meetings now being held;
c) young people have raised concerns regarding terminology used in literature designed specifically for children and young people which is negative and difficult for them to understand. They have suggested new terms to be used for common phrases, for example, replacing 'contact' and 'risk assessment' with 'family time' and 'safety plan'. The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children informed the Panel that young people's concerns have been shared, however, it will take time for the new terminology to be adopted by all teams. The Panel suggested that this should be shared with schools and multi-agency groups. The Legal Manager emphasised that this terminology should only be used where appropriate adding that legal terminology must be used in court documentation;
d) young people have been involved in producing videos with Independent Reviewing Officers and with the Children in Care Council on the subject of entering into care;
e) a 'Celebrate Me' awards ceremony is to be held with the Looked After Teams
f) Profile templates have been produced for foster carers and work is being done to design a profile template for Independent Reviewing Officers. Panel members were reminded to update their profile information which should be sent to Jayne Watson, Senior Partnership Officer, as soon as possible. Members were asked to supply answers to the following four questions for their profile information:
    - What is your name and who are you? Members are requested to provide a natural picture that captures who you are – not your Council profile picture
    - What area do you work in / which electoral division do you cover?
    - Why did you become a corporate parent / why do you want to support looked after young people?
    - What are your interests and hobbies?

g) Work is ongoing to refurbish contact centres. Panel members requested that officers investigate whether it would be possible for members to make a greater contribution to the project, collectively, through the Neighbourhood Budget.

9. Quarter Four 2018/19 Performance

Stephen Tracey, Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager introduced a report and delivered a presentation which provided an overview of performance for the final quarter of 2018/19 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Panel commented as follows:

a) that it would be useful to have a percentage breakdown to show the number of young people in short-term placements and the number in long-term placements;
b) referring to the charts showing the characteristics of the cohort of children in care, it would be helpful to have figures for the previous two years, in order to identify any emerging trends;
c) panel members commented on the figures for the provision of stable environments noting that some children are placed with foster carers for respite, and, on some occasions young people request temporary placement moves. It was acknowledged that some placement moves result in positive outcomes, for example, to secure permanence through adoption;
d) the Panel noted the figure for the number of foster carers approved and requested that information be provided on the number of carers leaving the service. The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Resources responded that the Fostering Annual Report includes more detailed information on the retention of foster carers;
e) concerns were raised regarding the number of health assessments not completed within 20 working days of the child becoming looked after. The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager responded that it is vital that consent for the health assessment to take place is received by health workers within 4 to 5 days in order for the 20 day deadline to be achieved. M Baister, Designated Nurse for Safeguarding and Looked After Children, added that when consent is received within a week of a child becoming looked after, approximately 90% of health assessments are completed within the deadline. The Panel noted that a large number of health assessments are completed just outside of the deadline, within 25 days;
f) the Panel requested further information with regard to social worker caseloads including whether senior members of staff have fewer cases and whether their cases are more complex;
g) Referring to data for the 2017/18 academic year, the Panel noted the decline in maths at Key Stage 1. The Head of the Virtual School reassured the Panel that work is being undertaken to identify the most effective teaching methods and that the focus for the forthcoming academic year will be maths.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10. Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2018-19

The Chair of the Panel introduced the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report for 2018-19 (for copy see file).

The Panel noted the young people's comment that more work could be done to share positive stories about looked after children. The Chair encouraged the Panel to be proactive in their role as corporate parents and he emphasised the importance of celebrating achievements. The Panel agreed looked after children should be encouraged to strive to achieve success in the same way as all young people.

11. Aycliffe Secure Centre Governance Arrangements

The Panel considered a report of Martyn Stenton, Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children which outlined the Aycliffe Secure Centre Sub Group governance arrangements (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be agreed.

12. Digital Voice Project

Rachel Harris, Service Improvement Manager, introduced the Digital Voice project and explained that the project has produced video profiles of children in care, using media and animation which enables the young people to speak honestly and openly about themselves and their experiences, whilst remaining anonymous. The Panel received four Digital Me videos profiling children in care and the final Digital Voice video provided a summary of key messages for social workers from the young people.

The videos were very well received and the Panel commented on the powerful and moving messages. The Service Improvement Manager stated that further projects are being considered, for example, with adopted children, those with mental health issues and young people who have experienced sexual exploitation. Consideration is also being given as to whether similar media profiles could be produced in-house with mapping work being undertaken with Investing in Children.

Members observed that several of the key messages in the Digital Me videos echoed the messages identified in the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny review into the role of the social worker from a child's perspective, for example, the importance of stability, trust and honesty.

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 monthly update on Regulation 44 visits and outstanding responsive repairs (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Senior Partnerships Officer informed the Panel a request has been made for members to receive the full Regulation 44 reports, on a monthly basis.

Resolved:

That the report be received.