

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 1A/1B, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 19 July 2019** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors Brown, Carr, Considine, Crathorne, Grant, Jewell, Jopling, Makepeace, Simmons and Wilson

Co-Opted Members:

M Baister, W Taylor and a young person representative of the Children in Care Council

Also in attendance:

Florence Coulter, Fostering Team Manager (in attendance for items 9 and 10)
Clive Horton (Deputy Head of Virtual School)
Stacey Midcalf (Solicitor, Children and Adult Services)
Karen Robb (Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence)
Ellie Seed (Investing in Children)
Martyn Stenton (Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children)
Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer)
Foster Carers (in attendance for items 9 and 10)

Prior to commencing with the business, the Chair announced that this was Marie Baister's last Panel meeting and Marie was thanked for her valuable contribution to the Panel over the years, and, wished well for the future.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bainbridge, Charlton, McKeon, Milburn, Potts, Reed, Richardson, Scott and Smith, from C Baines and N Harrison, from one of the young people representative of the Children in Care Council, and, from officers Kelsey Clayton, Helen Fergusson and Christine Stonehouse.

2. Substitute Members

Councillor L Brown was in attendance for Councillor E Scott.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 28 June 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

The following matters arising were reported:

- The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children informed the Panel that the coroner's inquest into the death of a young person at Aycliffe Secure Centre had concluded with a verdict of suicide. Recommendations made following the inquest have been accepted and implemented.

- The Panel viewed photographs taken at the 'Celebrate Me' awards ceremony. At the event, members observed the good relationships between the young people, foster carers and the looked after teams. Panel members noted that the young people had been very proactive in the planning for the event and thanked them for the enjoyable and successful event.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Number of Looked After Children

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence explained that the migration to the new liquid logic system had resulted in a delay in acquiring accurate data. The number of looked after children was reported as 870 at 19 July 2019, however, the actual number is likely to be fewer.

6. Ofsted Updates

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence updated the Panel on the recent inspection of Tow Law Children's Home.

7. Update from Investing in Children

Ellie Seed provided the following update from Investing in Children:

- due to the increase in numbers of young people attending Children in Care Council meetings, sub-groups have been set-up to focus on specific areas such as independent living and surveys for children and young people in care;
- at the last meeting the young people discussed the subject of supervised contact which is now known as 'family time'. Whilst it is accepted that the presence of a third party is necessary, this can be inhibitive, especially when the young person is not familiar with the third party. The young people suggested that more fun activities should take place during family time. They added that more openness about what is being written down during the sessions and a comments box for their views would make them feel more involved in the process;
- improvements have been made to Personal Education Plan forms following feedback from the young people. A new scheme is to be piloted in September, with a review scheduled for November;
- Care Leavers' Participation Groups are now being held regularly, at 3 pm, prior to Children in Care Council meetings. At these sessions the young people can access advice on issues such as training, employment and CV writing. One of the young people from the Children in Care Council, co-opted to the Corporate Parenting Panel, is now a member of the Care Leavers' Participation Steering Group;
- young people were involved in the recent interview and appointment process for Independent Reviewing Officers;
- young people have worked with Independent Reviewing Officers on an animation to provide information to children and young people about entering the care system;

- the next meeting will be attended by the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence and the Legal Services Manager for Children and Adults Services to talk to the young people about the courts and legal issues. Independent Reviewing Officers have also been invited to discuss review meetings;
- fun and sports events are taking place during the summer including Sport England events.

Asked about whether examples of good practice are shared, Ellie Seed responded that Durham Children in Care Council often finds itself ahead of the game and good practice is shared, for example the 'Drive' project which has been implemented in other authorities.

8. Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2018-19

The Chair presented the Corporate Parenting Annual Report for 2018-19 for approval and thanked officers for their work in producing the report (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the recommendation in the report be approved.

9. Foster Care Update

The Chair introduced Florence Coulter, Fostering Team Manager and three of Durham's foster carers to the Panel. The foster carers provided information on their role. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence then delivered a presentation which outlined the progress of the fostering service against key priorities for 2019-20 (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

In relation to permanence planning, the Chair asked for information on the 37 children in permanent placements who are awaiting a formal match. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence clarified that, in these particular cases, the young people have not reached a final decision as to whether or not they wish to remain in their placement on a permanent basis.

Panel members referred to national media coverage on the number of young people aged 16 plus who are placed in unregulated supported accommodation. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence informed the Panel that Durham has no young people in unregulated provision and that the type of accommodation made available to care leavers is informed by individual care plans, with some care leavers requiring bespoke packages. The Panel noted that isolation can be a major issue for care leavers, especially those without support from extended family.

The Chair then invited the foster carers to share their views on why people become foster carers. The following comments were made:

- positive experiences of family members who are foster carers can encourage people to go ahead and become foster carers themselves;
- some who have raised children of their own decide to foster as they miss the fun and experiences of having children in their home;

- there are those with no children of their own who feel that they have the time, patience and skills to give care to children and young people who cannot live in their own home.

Asked about the main challenges for foster carers and the support provided, the foster carers made the following comments:

- the support provided by fostering agencies in the initial stages of fostering is vital – one of the foster carers reported being dissatisfied with an independent fostering agency. They transferred to Durham having heard of its good reputation and they found the process a much more positive experience;
- lack of information and myths around foster caring may be off-putting for prospective foster carers.

The Fostering Team Manager informed the Panel that there is a vacancy on the Fostering Panel and requested that any member interested in filling the vacancy should contact Councillor Brookes or Jayne Watson.

10. Foster Care Discussion

The Panel and foster carers discussed the following issues in groups and a note was taken of their comments.

- What do you see as the strengths of Durham County Council Fostering Service and how can the Corporate Parenting Panel share these messages with a wider audience?
- What barriers do foster carers experience in the role and what could the Corporate Parenting Panel do to support or alleviate this?
- In the last year how have you helped to promote fostering?

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

12. Regulation 44 Visits: Summary Report

The Panel considered the monthly update on Regulation 44 visits and outstanding responsive repairs (for copy see file of minutes).

It was noted that the update now includes reports from independent homes, where Durham children are resident. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence informed the Panel that the home shown as 'requiring improvement' had been visited by Durham's commissioners and the issues identified have been addressed.

Regarding responsive repairs, the Panel noted that a capital bid is being put together by Service Direct in respect of bathroom refurbishment.

Resolved:

That the report be received.