

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 27 September 2019** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, L Brown, J Carr, J Considine, J Grant, I Jewell, P Jopling,
M McKeon, C Potts, A Reed, E Scott and H Smith

Co-Opted Members:

C Baines, W Taylor and a young person representative of the Children in Care Council

Also in attendance:

Kelsey Clayton (Legal Services Manager)
Helen Fergusson (Head of Children's Social Care)
Lindsey Herring (Children's Commissioner)
Robert Johnson (Project Manager, Investing in Children)
Laura Malone (Strategy Team Leader)
Claire Morris (Strategic Manager, Looked After Children Resources)
John Pearce (Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services)
Martyn Stenton (Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children)
Christine Stonehouse (Virtual School Head)
Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Charlton, Crathorne, Richardson, Simmons and Wilson, from co-optee Neville Harrison, and, from officer Selwyn Morgans.

2. Substitute Members

Councillor L Brown was present as substitute for Councillor M Simmons.

Prior to the formal business, the Chair welcomed attendees including the newly appointed Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services, John Pearce, and, Strategic Manager for Looked After Children Resources, Claire Morris. It was announced that the meeting was to be the Virtual School Head, Christine Stonehouse's last meeting and the Chair placed on record his thanks to Christine for all her hard work and support and the Panel wished her well in her new role.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 19 July 2019 were agreed as a correct record. With reference to minute number 9, the Panel noted that Councillor P Jopling had been appointed to the fostering panel.

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, as at 27 September, the number of looked after children stood at an all-time high of 874. The Panel noted that this increase is reflected regionally.

6. Ofsted Updates

The Head of Children's Social Care referred to the recent Ofsted inspection at Aycliffe Secure Unit and the ILACS inspection (Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services). A report is due to be published on 21 October and further details will be provided at the next Panel meeting on 25 October.

7. Update from Investing in Children

The following update was provided by Investing in Children:

- Work is being carried out with partners to develop an Independent Skills and Living Portfolio as young people in care often need extra support when moving to independent living, particularly with the practical skills and responsibilities associated with living in their own accommodation.
- There has been investigation into a London-based national charity for children in care and young care leavers to identify whether there could be scope to link-up with this organisation.
- A charity has developed a virtual reality experience in relation to leaving care and the team is looking into this.
- Three young people have been appointed to the kinship carer panels.

The Panel took time to view a display created by the young people of the Children in Care Council at the joint CICC/ CPP meeting which took place on 19 September 2019. The display illustrated how young people feel about their experiences of being in care. In addition, the young people had also created a robot, 'Charlie', made from boxes which represents a carer.

The young people used Charlie to display the personal attributes that they would like their carers, including corporate parents, to have.

8. Feedback from the Investing in Children from the CICC / CPP meeting on 19 September 2019

The Project Manager for Investing in Children thanked the Members who attended the joint meeting adding that it would have been appreciated if more Panel members had attended. The Chair reminded Members of the importance of attending the joint meetings, adding that the next Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 25 October will include a 'take-over' session by the Children in Care Council, with a Care Leavers training session being held at the conclusion of the meeting.

One of the issues raised at the joint meeting was the issue of access to mobile phones and social media, with some young people in care and some foster carer's own children being allowed more access than others. The Head of Children's Social Care acknowledged that whilst standard guidelines are required, there is a need for some flexibility. It was agreed that this issue should be taken forward.

The Head of Children's Social Care referred to very favourable comments from the Ofsted inspectors about the positive impact the young people of the Children in Care Council are having and the difference their views and ideas are making.

9. Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children and Young People aged 0-25 years, 2019-20

The Panel received a report and presentation from Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care which outlined the Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2019-20 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

10. Quarter One 2019/20 Performance

The Panel received a report and presentation from Laura Malone, Strategy Team Leader, on performance management for the first quarter of 2019-20 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that the report included the information requested at a previous meeting in relation to caseloads by worker-type and the number of foster carers deregistered.

The Strategy Team Leader responded to questions and comments as follows:

- Referring to the placement chart, Members requested that the costings for each placement type be included in future reports, observing that although only 0.2% of young people are placed in secure accommodation, this is likely to represent a significant cost. The Strategy Team Leader undertook to include costing information in future reports.

- In response to a question on the number of young people missing from care, the Strategy Team Leader clarified that between April and June 2019, 24 children went missing from care. Members requested that the number of children be included in future reports, together with the percentage of looked after children with a missing incident. Members also requested more details as to the definition of 'missing' ie whether there is a time-frame used to define when a young person is officially declared missing. The Head of Children's Social Care commented that more detailed information will be provided to a future meeting on the duration of time of missing incidents, and, how incidents are followed-up and the after-care and support provided.
- Members referred to the data on the health and wellbeing of children in care and observed that it would be interesting to have comparative data for young people within the general population regarding health assessments, immunisation rates, substance misuse etc. The Strategy Team Leader explained that some of this information, for example data relating to health assessments, is not easy to access.
- The Chair referred to 7% of looked after children who are placed over 20 miles from the child's home and asked for more information on this. Members commented that for some young people it can be difficult to define exactly where home is and that, in some circumstances, it may be of benefit to the child to be placed away from home. Members also referred to the risks that being placed a long distance from home may pose. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that a map showing the location of Children's Homes throughout the county had been produced for the scrutiny review into residential children's homes and that this map will be shared with the Panel.
- Members asked about the circumstances which would lead to children being placed with their parents on a Care Order. The Legal Services Manager explained that, in some cases, the local authority considers it necessary to share parental responsibility with parents when a child is being returned to parent's care, for example where parents have only recently ended a violent relationship, or, have only recently managed to cease using drugs or alcohol.

11. Updated Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers

The Panel received a report and presentation from Lindsey Herring, Children's Commissioner for Adult and Health Services, on the Sufficiency Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers published in June 2019 (for report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Children's Commissioner responded to comments and questions as follows:

- At the present time Durham has no care leavers in unregulated placements.
- In relation to the matching process for adoption, risk assessments are undertaken.
- Private residential care homes are profit-making organisations. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that the findings from the Overview and Scrutiny review into Children's Residential Care provision will inform the future strategy.

The Panel then considered the following questions in groups and a note was taken of their comments:

1. How can elected members promote and encourage members of the public to consider becoming foster carers for Durham County Council?
2. How can elected members work with communities to alleviate any concerns and positively promote the development of new DCC children's homes for vulnerable children and young people?
3. How can elected members, who are actively involved in regulation 44 visits further support and promote the development of DCC children's homes in local communities?

12. 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.

13. 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).

Resolved:

That the report be received.

14. Any other business

The Head of Children's Services updated the Panel on the recent Ofsted inspections, with further details to be provided at the next meeting, following the publication of the report. Members were reminded that the next meeting, on Friday 25 October, will take place from 9.30 to 10.30 am and this will be followed by a Care Leavers training session.