

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

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

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors J Carr, J Charlton, J Considine, P Crathorne, J Grant, I Jewell, C Potts, H Smith and C Wilson

Co-Opted Members:

C Baines and K Watson

Also in attendance:

Helen Fergusson (Head of Children's Social Care)

Robert Johnson (Project Manager, Investing in Children)

Gillian Leckenby (Service Manager, CAMHS)

Tamsin Lovell (Solicitor, Children and Adult Services)

Claire Morris (Strategic Manager, Looked After Children, Resources)

Martyn Stenton (Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children)

Jayne Watson (Senior Partnerships Officer)

Karen Watson (Acting Designated Nurse for Safeguarding and Looked After Children)

The Chair also welcomed young people of the Children in Care Council.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Bainbridge, P Jopling, A Reed, E Scott, and, co-opted member W Taylor, and, officers F Callaghan and K Clayton.

2. Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 25 October 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

The following matters arising were reported by the Senior Partnerships Officer:

- Item 1 – An update on the Full Circle Service will be presented to a future meeting.

- Item 4 – In response to the request at the last meeting for information on the fostering panel vacancy, the Senior Partnerships Officer advised that meetings are held at Spectrum 8, Spectrum Business Park, Seaham, SR7 7TT on the 4th Wednesday of every month, starting at 10 am, and meetings can run into the afternoon, depending on the agenda. An email will be sent to all members requesting a volunteer to fill this vacancy.
- Item 8 – Discussions are progressing with a view to young people from the Children in Care Council becoming involved in Regulation 44 visits.

4. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Number of Looked After Children

The Head of Children's Social Care reported that the number of looked after children had risen to 899. The increase is reflected locally and nationally, with the rate of looked after children in County Durham being higher than the national rate but lower than regional and statistical neighbours. The underlying trends in the number of looked after children will be discussed at January's meeting, as part of the quarterly performance update.

6. Ofsted Updates

The panel noted that the findings of recent Ofsted inspections will be shared at the January meeting.

7. Update from Investing in Children

The following update was provided by the Children in Care Council:

- Work is continuing on the development of an Independent Living Skills pack, with discussions being held with foster carers, staff from the Children and Families teams, and, the SEND service. The Head of Children's Social Care requested that the information gathered be shared with her, to enable the service to progress this project.
- Young people participated in an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) team away day to air their views on meetings and care plans. Young people have expressed that they would like care plans and meetings to have a more positive focus and that they would like their views on matters such as who should be present at meetings, to be given due consideration. The away day was a great success and the IROs commented on how impressive the young people were. As a result, information had been included in the IRO business plan and further meetings are being planned. The Chair welcomed this positive step and the Head of Children's Social Care added that consideration will be given to inviting the young people and IROs to a future panel meeting, to provide an update on service developments as a result of young people's feedback.

- At a recent meeting with the Chief Executive, the young people talked about the Blue Light Card, which offers discounts to those working for the emergency services, and, discounts offered to some 6th form college students. The young people suggested that similar incentives would be useful for looked after children, to help develop their money-management skills and promote independence. The young people reported that the Chief Executive and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People are supportive of the idea. The Head of Children's Social Care agreed to look at the suggestion, adding that it may be that the Freedom Card could be developed further, to extend the offer.
- At a recent meeting with the Full Circle team, the young people discussed the possibility of helping to design therapy session rooms. This would bring additional benefit for the young people as it would provide them with the opportunity to be involved in a real project which could be included on their CVs. Discussions have been held to look at the refurbishment of the Family Time room at Wheatley Hill Family Centre with a design around an interactive space. The Head of Children's Social Care informed members that this is the seventh room undergoing refurbishment using monies donated from the members' small grants funds. The Head of Children's Social Care clarified that Family Time rooms were formerly known as Contact rooms however the name was changed following feedback from the young people who requested that more positive terms be used. In a similar way, Risk Assessment forms are now called Safety Plans, changing the emphasis from negative to positive. The Chair commented on the new terminology being a culture change adding that this is an example of the how important it is that the young people challenge services if they feel that improvements could be made.
- On 8 January, teacher training will be held for designated leads for looked after children in secondary schools.
- The young people have requested that more work is done to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation, so that all services that young people may come into contact with can offer guidance on how to stay safe, as a preventative measure.
- Some liaison work has been done with Durham University, to link the Children in Care Council with student volunteers. The Chair emphasised the importance of linking with the university and it was agreed that a letter would be sent to the Vice Chancellor to initiate conversations to explore how the university could support the Corporate Parenting Panel to achieve the best possible outcomes for our children and young people. The panel noted that the new Head of the Virtual School has been appointed, and, the Corporate Parenting Panel's education representatives are members of the Virtual School Sub-Group.

- The Children in Care Council is aiming to have fifteen young people accredited to deliver training in 2020.
- It was reported that the recent foster carer training went well with foster carers reporting that they were inspired by the young people.
- Some of the young people have discussed developing an emergency comfort pack for those young people who are taken into emergency accommodation without any of their belongings. The Head of Children's Social Care pointed out that the instances of children and young people being taken into emergency care with none of their belongings are very rare as a lot of work has taken place to ensure these situations are well managed.

The Annual Health Report was taken as the next item of business.

8. Annual Health Report 2018-19

Karen Watson, Acting Designated Nurse for Safeguarding and Looked After Children, presented the Annual Health Report 2018 – 2019 which provided information on the health profile of looked after children and young people.

The report focused on service developments and improvements aligned with the key lines of enquiry set out in the Local Government Association's corporate parenting resource packs for looked after children and care leavers (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The panel welcomed Gillian Leckenby, Service Manager of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who explained that the service had experienced a 20% increase in referrals over the year with a 28% increase in November. As this was the third consecutive year that there had been an increase in November, the service is planning to carry out work to investigate this. The Service Manager explained that new Government funding has been made available for a Trailblazer scheme between schools and CAMHS to offer support and treatment within schools, in order that those in need of more specialist services can be identified at an early stage. The Head of Children's Social Care commented that this may be an area that the panel may wish to have more information on in the future.

Panel members and the young people present were given the opportunity to ask health questions and raise specific issues in relation to mental health.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

9. Residential Services Provision Update

Claire Morris, Strategic Manager for Looked After Children Resources, presented the Residential Services Update report which provided an overview of Durham County Council's in-house children's residential care provision including the plans for future development (for copy see file of minutes). In response to a question from Councillor Grant as how blockage can be avoided in respite provision, the Strategic Manager responded that the provision is not available seven days per week and the provision is outcome focused and managed around the needs of the young people for example, respite may only be required for particular days of the week, or, for a short time during school holidays.

It was agreed that the Changing Lives video would be circulated to the panel, by email, following the meeting.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Members discussed the following questions in groups and a note was taken of their discussion.

- What could we as members do to support the tenth home in advance of it opening?
- How could we get our communities to better support our homes and integrate the young people into the local communities?
- How can we help share the positive achievements and stories from the young people who live in our homes?

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. 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). The Chair reported that a meeting had taken place with the Building and Facilities Maintenance Manager.

Resolved:

That the report be received.

12. Any other business

The Chair announced that Children's Services, including the Corporate Parenting Panel, has been shortlisted in the Local Government Chronicle awards.

It was agreed that the next meeting, scheduled for 13 December, the day after the General Election, should be cancelled. Items for information would be circulated by email outside of the meeting and items of business would be carried forward to the January meeting.