

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 31 January 2020** at **9.30 am**

### **Present:**

**Councillor I Jewell in the Chair**

### **Panel Members:**

Councillors Bainbridge, Considine, Crathorne, Jopling, Quinn, Richardson, Scott, Simmons, Smith, Tucker and Wilson

### **Co-opted Members:**

W Taylor

### **Also in attendance:**

Linda Bailey (Strategic Lead, Progression and Learning – Item 8)

Kelsey Clayton (Legal Services Manager)

Sharon Davey (Acting Operations Manager – Item 12)

Helen Fergusson (Head of Children's Social Care)

Andrea Houlahan (Strategic Manager, Children and Families)

Robert Johnson (Project Manager, Investing in Children), and, young people from the Children in Care Council

Jonathan Slee (Overview and Scrutiny Officer – Item 9)

Melanie Stubbs (Head of the Virtual School – Item 11)

Stephen Tracey (Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager – Item 10)

Jayne Watson (Senior Partnerships Officer)

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Charlton, Maddison, Makepeace, Milburn, Reed and Chris Baines

### **2. Substitute Members**

No substitute members were in attendance.

### **3. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 29 November 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

### **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 the number of looked after children stood at 901 and explained that there had been a steady increase over the past 12 months which reflected the national trend. The number of looked after children remained less than the north east average and Durham experienced a slower rate of increase than other areas of the north east.

The Head of Children's Social Care read out a letter from looked after children, thanking the Panel for their contributions to the Christmas party.

## **6. Ofsted Updates**

The Panel noted the Ofsted inspection carried out in September rated Aycliffe Secure Centre as outstanding in all areas. Members acknowledged this high accolade was a considerable achievement for the Centre and placed on record their congratulations. The Panel agreed to send a letter of thanks to the staff for all their hard work and dedication.

## **7. Update from Investing in Children**

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

- The Winter Wonderland event was a great success despite the weather which led to a change of venue at short-notice. The Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that this was one of a series of events organised in conjunction with Children's Services, to celebrate foster caring.
- Young people are working on an arts project with the County Durham Community Foundation and Full Circle to refresh therapy rooms across the county, to make them more engaging. Another initiative to encourage the young people to participate in the arts is taking place in February, with a visit to a gallery.
- A meeting was held with the Virtual School in January and a template has been produced by the young people, to provide them with more information on the Designated Teacher role and what pupil premium monies can be used for.
- Panel Members were encouraged to promote Care Day which will be held on 21<sup>st</sup> February, to celebrate children and young people with care experience. RicFlo, a care experienced rapper from London will be attending the event.

- Engagement work is continuing with the Independent Reviewing Officers and a young person has been appointed as the IRO Champion.
- Work is progressing on the discount card for looked after children and young people. The Head of Children's Social Care updated the Panel that the service is exploring ways to develop the Freedom Card to make it more relevant and an update on progress will be provided at a future Panel meeting.

## **8. Supporting Care Leavers into Education, Employment and Training**

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Linda Bailey, Strategic Lead for Progression and Learning which provided an update on the support available to care leavers to enable them to progress into education, employment and training. The Strategic Lead provided details on the new European funded programmes, measures by Durham County Council to support care leavers into apprenticeships, feedback from care leavers, and priorities for the future (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Chair thanked the Strategic Lead for the presentation and asked the Panel for comments and questions. The following responses were provided by the Strategic Lead:

- Providing clarification on accommodation options, the Strategic Lead stated that our Care Leavers reside in various placements including with foster carers, in supported lodgings and some live independently.
- In response to concern from the Panel regarding the risk to the European funding following Brexit, the Strategic Lead assured the Panel that statutory functions would continue to be funded. However, the risk to future European funding had been placed on the Council's risk register. Engagement work takes place with the North East Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure that DurhamWorks remains on the agenda.
- The Strategic Lead explained the term 'self identifying' refers to those young people who are not automatically referred, and, those referred to as 'not known' are those who are known to DurhamWorks, however, their next step with regard to education, employment or training is not known.
- Of 193 young people who had completed the DurhamWorks programme, 65% had progressed into employment, although we need to improve this figure.

- The DurhamWorks programme has been in operation since January 2016.
- Feedback from young people indicated that travel remains a barrier preventing some young people from accessing training and employment.

**Resolved:**

That the report and presentation be noted.

## **9. Overview and Scrutiny Review, Children's Residential Care Homes**

The Panel considered a report of Councillor Heather Smith, Chair of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee which provided information relating to the review of Private Children's Residential Care Homes by the Children and Young People's, and, the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committees. A copy of the review report was attached to the report at appendix 2 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor Smith explained the aim of the review which was to gain a better understanding of concerns associated with private children's residential care homes and summarised the key findings, the response from the service, and, the recommendations. One of the review recommendations related specifically to the Corporate Parenting Panel which was that the Panel receive information from Durham Constabulary, for looked after children, with a focus on reports of missing from home.

In response to comments and questions from the Panel, Councillor Smith explained the following.

At the time of the review, there were 22 private children's homes in County Durham providing approximately 90 beds. Evidence gathered suggested that information sharing between local authorities and residential care homes was inconsistent. 80% of children's residential care homes are run by a variety of private providers including charities and private companies, and all have different procedures and policies in place. The review also found that there is a greater demand on the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) from private children's residential care homes. The working group received information from Durham Constabulary indicating an increase in demand from children's residential care homes and the group felt that this should be monitored.

Councillor Smith informed the Panel that, at present, there is no accreditation process for private children's residential care homes, and, during the review, an accreditation process had been developed which was being piloted by three private children's homes where looked after children from County Durham reside.

The Panel noted that private children's residential care homes are subject to Ofsted inspections and Regulation 44 visits and they receive information on training courses provided by Durham Children's Safeguarding Board, however, not all private homes engage.

**Resolved:**

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That the Corporate Parenting Panel receive regular information relating to reported incidents to Durham Constabulary, for County Durham children looked after, who reside within any residential children's care home within County Durham, with a specific focus on reports of missing from home.

**10. Quarter Two 2019/20 Performance**

The Chair welcomed Stephen Tracey, Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager, who was in attendance to provide an update on performance relating to looked after children and care leavers during the second quarter of 2019/20 (for copy of report and presentation, see file of minutes).

The Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager explained that the information dated from the end of September, and, at that time there were 878 looked after children. That figure had risen to 901 children at the present date. The presentation analysed performance relating to the characteristics of looked after children, the provision of stable environments, and, health and wellbeing.

The Chair thanked the Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager and asked the Panel for their comments and questions.

Members observed the high cost of independent foster care and the Head of Children's Social Care commented on the highly competitive market in which the local authority must compete with the independent sector to recruit from the same pool of potential foster carers.

Members expressed concern that during April to September, the number of foster carers approved was fewer than the number deregistered. The Head of Children's Social Care commented that the reasons for this are varied and include ill health, age, and, family circumstances.

In response to a query from the Chair as to whether this is monitored, the Head of Children's Social Care confirmed that data is contained in the placement sufficiency strategy and work is ongoing with regard to the recruitment and retention of foster carers to ensure the service meets demand.

Members observed that 39 young people are placed outside the north east and requested more information. Members were assured that these young people are in the most suitable placements to meet their needs. The figure includes 18 young people who are placed in adoptive placements, 6 placed with relatives and 3 in supported lodgings, leaving 12 young people who are actually placed out of county. The Head of Children's Social Care advised that those young people living outside of the north east receive regular visits and the commissioning team work closely with providers to ensure that quality and safety standards are maintained.

A young person from the Children in Care Council asked if care leavers are encouraged to consider training to become social workers and consider foster caring in the future. The Head of Children's Social Care commented that young people are encouraged to explore every opportunity with our Durhamworks/EET colleagues adding that some young care leavers have progressed to train as social workers.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **11. Durham Virtual School Annual Report 2018/19**

The Chair welcomed Melanie Stubbs, Head of the Virtual School, who was in attendance to present the Durham Virtual School Annual Report for 2018/19 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Virtual School Head explained the report had been compiled prior to her appointment in January and she thanked the Interim Head of the Virtual School, Fiona Callaghan, and, the former Head, Christine Stonehouse, for all their work on the report and for the support they provided on her appointment to the post.

The Virtual School Head summarised the main headlines of the report which include that performance shows improvement at all measures except reading at KS1. The Panel noted that speech and language assessments are carried out on all looked after children when they enter the school, and, dedicated speech and language support is provided to help support children in care. It was also noted that a Therapeutic Social Worker had been appointed to support emotional wellbeing.

Priorities for 2020 include improving KS1 outcomes, addressing gender gaps across the board i.e. improving reading and English for boys and maths for girls, and, raising awareness in schools of the impact of early trauma.

The Chair thanked the Head of the Virtual School for the report and presentation and asked the Panel for comments and questions.

In response to a question on the target time for an Education Health and Care Plan assessments (EHCP), the Panel noted that the target is 20 weeks. Councillor Smith informed the Panel that this is an area which the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee is considering reviewing, including plans to meet future targets and future demand for EHCP plans. The Head of Children's Social Care clarified that children who are looked after do not typically experience delays.

A young person from the Children in Care Council asked what assurance can be given to looked after children and young people that confidentiality can be guaranteed. The Head of the Virtual School assured the young person that although it is sometimes necessary for information that a young person is looked after to be shared between teaching staff, staff are well aware of the importance of respecting confidentiality and this information is shared only when it is necessary to do so. She added that the Virtual School would raise this in the upcoming Head Teacher Briefing sessions to flag young people's concerns directly with Head Teachers. A Member who is a school governor reassured the young person that, at the governing body meetings she attends, this type of information is not shared.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**12. Independent Reviewing Officer: Looked After Children and Child Protection Annual Reports 2018/19**

The Chair welcomed Sharon Davey, Operations Manager, who presented the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Looked After Children and Child Protection Annual Reports 2018/19 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Operations Manager explained the dual function of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to chair looked after reviews and child protection conferences and the challenges posed by the increase in the number of looked after children. The Panel noted that IROs have a duty to raise concerns with Service Managers, through the Dispute Resolution Process, if it is considered that a child's care plan is not progressing as it should.

IROs participate in the Children in Care Council meetings and they have produced an IRO profile to provide information and enhance the relationship between the young person and their IRO.

The Operations Manager clarified that the second diagram on page 2 of the Looked After Children Annual Report Summary showed the total number of looked after children throughout 2017/18 and 2018/19.

**Resolved:**

That the reports be noted.

**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 item of business on the grounds that it involves 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 update on Regulation 44 visits and outstanding responsive repairs (for copy of report see file of minutes).

**Resolved:**

That the report be received.

**15. Any Other Business**

The Senior Partnerships Officer referred to the dates of the joint meetings with the Children in Care Council with the meetings this year being held on 28 April and 20 October, from 5 pm to 7 pm. Members were reminded that the meetings provide all young people from the Children in Care Council with an important opportunity to have their voices heard and to influence the future work of the Panel.

The Panel noted that there are a number of vacancies on sub-groups and it was agreed that the Senior Partnerships Officer would circulate the list of vacancies to Members, for their consideration. Members to notify the Senior Partnerships Officer of any appointments they are interested in, then appointments will be confirmed at the February meeting.

Members were asked consider taking up the Care Leavers challenge in February which challenges participants to live for a week on a budget of £57.90 to raise awareness of the difficulties care leavers face. Cllr Tanya Tucker and Jayne Watson will undertake the challenge.