

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 29 April 2022** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors M Walton (Vice-Chair), R Adcock-Forster, B Bainbridge, J Charlton, B Coult, S Deinali, C Fletcher, T Henderson, C Hunt, B Kellett (substitute for Cllr J Griffiths), J Miller, I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, S Townsend and C Varty

Co-opted Members:

Heather McFarlane, Wendy Taylor

Also Present:

Laura Counce – Service Manager

Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager

Jodie Henderson – Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence

Robert Johnson - Project Manager, Investing in Children with Caitlyn Gray and Luke Joseph representing the Children in Care Council

Martyn Stenton – Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children

Melanie Stubbs – Head of the Virtual School

Jayne Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer

Julian Wilson – Senior Lawyer, Children and Adult Services

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Bell, J Griffiths, O Gunn, C Hood and Co-opted Member, Julie Bell. Apologies were also noted from officer Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor B Kellett was in attendance for Councillor J Griffiths.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported.

Item 7 – The piece of descriptive writing had been shared with the Panel. The Virtual School Head informed the Panel that she had met with Laura Armstrong, Professional Practice Manager and Robert Johnson, Project Manager for Investing in Children to progress plans to develop the work in collaboration with the young people, to link in with next year's book festival.

Item 8 – The film being produced by the young people to raise awareness of sibling groups had been delayed as difficulties had been encountered gaining consent from some of the parties involved. It is hoped that some parts of the film will be available to be shared with the Panel in the near future.

Item 9 - A briefing note had been circulated to the Panel providing an update on children looked after placed in secure accommodation.

Item 10 – The fostering t.v. advert had been shared with the Panel members to promote on their social media channels.

Item 12 – The Panel noted that travel costs to and from the Young People's Hub are being subsidised. Initial feedback on the use of the Hub is very positive and an evaluation will take place in August to gather young people's views on the Hub, which will be used for future developments.

Item 13 - The Virtual School Head reported that representatives for the Virtual School Sub-Group will be identified at forthcoming Primary, Secondary and Special Heads meetings.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Number of Looked After Children

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children reported a slight increase in the number of looked after children, with the figure being 989. The Panel noted this included 30 young people for whom the court process had been delayed, however, progress is being made and the young people are expected to leave care within the near future.

6 Ofsted Updates

The Service Manager for Children and Young People reported that a full Ofsted inspection had taken place at one of the Children's Residential Homes and the findings would be shared with the Panel on publication of the report.

7 Proud Moments

The Service Manager for Children and Young People spoke of the good progress made by a looked after young person who had recently moved back into the county. The Panel heard that the young person, who requires a different approach, had settled well and was engaging in education and growing in confidence in their new environment. She spoke of how pleased she was to see the young person thriving and she also paid tribute to the staff who had gone to great lengths to work as a team to understand and respond to the needs of the young person.

Another proud moment was reported by the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence who referred to a group of asylum seeking young people who had formed a football team. The team comprises of young people of various nationalities and despite their language barriers, they were communicating with each other through their shared passion for football. The Strategic Manager observed how heart-warming it was to see the young people enjoying themselves and she described how the group had encouraged other looked after young people and care leavers to develop football teams, in the hope that this will lead to the establishment of a football league in the future. An agreement was made to circulate the UASC flyer for drop-in and football sessions.

Rachel Harris, Service Improvement Manager, was delighted to inform the Panel that Caitlyn had gained a place at University to study social work and the Panel agreed Caitlyn will be a great asset to the profession. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence added that Luke is also destined for a great future as he is studying for a business degree at University. The Panel congratulated Caitlyn and Luke for their hard work and wished them continued success.

8 Investing in Children / Children in Care Council Update

Robert Johnson from Investing in Children and Caitlyn and Luke of the Children in Care Council provided an update on the CiCC's recent activities (for copy of presentation see file).

Caitlyn explained that the CiCC had delivered training to Sunderland University social work students and future foster carers. The training for foster carers included input from two new CiCC members aged 8 and 13, whose participation made a significant impact on the attendees. Luke informed the Panel that feedback from the session was very positive and attendees remarked on how the openness and honesty of the young people had proved very informative. The young people were proud to hear feedback that their training is as good as that delivered by the professionals.

The young people spoke of how much they are looking forward to welcoming Corporate Parenting Panel Members to the next joint CiCC / Corporate Parenting Panel meeting being held on 12 May. Caitlyn emphasised the value of the attendance of the Corporate Parenting Panel members, saying the young people have many exciting ideas which they would like to share.

The Panel heard a poem written by a young person resident in a Children's Home which expressed feelings of loneliness. Councillor Robson commented on how the young person's use of language and vivid detail captured the imagination. The Project Manager for Investing in Children informed the Panel that the staff at the young person's home are supporting the individual, together with their school, in order to encourage their talent. Councillor Roberts referred to the discussion at the previous meeting on the importance of curating these pieces of work for future reference, saying they may benefit other young people in years to come, who may seek comfort from knowing that others have experienced the same feelings. An agreement was made to circulate a copy of the poem, with the young person's consent.

Councillor Walton said it was pleasing to see that the young people's training sessions are attracting such glowing reviews from foster carers, which echoes the sentiments of Corporate Parenting Panel members. The Project Manager for Investing in Children spoke of how proud he is of the young people involved in the training adding that they too, are gaining a great deal from participating, which is empowering them and boosting their confidence.

Councillor Townsend informed the Panel that she and Councillor Deinali had attended the recent National Education Union conference at which a motion was passed to campaign for increased inclusion of looked after young people in the curriculum and more consultation with care experienced young people on messages and language. Updates on progress will be provided.

In response to a request from Councillor Miller for ArtStops artwork to be displayed in bus-stops in his division, the Senior Partnerships Officer agreed to check this with the Professional Practice Manager, as it was understood that this had already been progressed.

The Chair thanked Rob, Caitlyn and Luke for the informative update and she encouraged members to attend the joint CiCC / Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 12 May at the Sjoval Centre.

9 Update from joint Children in Care Council / Corporate Parenting Panel meeting on 19 October 2021

The Panel received a presentation from the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence on actions taken in response to issues raised by young people at the joint CICC/ CPP meeting held on 19 October (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

During the presentation, the Strategic Manager explained that the three main issues raised were support for care leavers, family time and stigma and discrimination. In addition, the Service Improvement Manager updated the Panel that the service is working on an additional feedback system for young people looked after and their families. Work with the Children in Care Council had found that an increasing number of young people are requesting access to their own records and more work will be undertaken to assist young people to gain a better understanding of accessing their own records and to ensure they have the right support in place with regard to this.

Referring to the steps taken in respect of improvements to family time arrangements, Councillor Miller commented that he was pleased to see the Service had taken steps to explain the COVID rules and he acknowledged the added pressure this would have placed on looked after young people and their families and carers. With regard to the transport offer, Councillor Miller expressed disappointment that Bishop Auckland college is the only college not to offer a bus pass and he asked if more could be done to encourage the college to participate in the scheme. Councillor Miller added his view that bus passes should be available to young people at all times, not only term-times, and he asked that this issue be reviewed.

Councillor Miller updated the Panel that he had visited the family time centre at Bishop Auckland and he complimented the staff and expressed the opinion that the facilities could be improved. Councillor Miller spoke in support of the establishment of a Care Experienced Scrutiny Committee, however, he emphasised the importance that issues raised there should also be reported to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Councillor Coult referred to the 'all time' top-up bus pass and asked how long the offer was expected to last. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence explained this was likely to continue until the summer term and was subject to review.

Commenting on the waiting time for driving lessons, Councillor Coult asked whether the Service could link with companies to request block bookings. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence responded that the procurement team are involved, however, there is a general lack of availability of driving lessons and tests nationally, following COVID-19.

In relation to school governors being asked to raise the profile of care experienced young people, the Head of the Virtual School explained that each school's designated governor for children looked after meets with designated teachers to ensure children looked after receive the best education. In addition, the Children Looked After Policy outlines the role of the designated governor for children looked after.

Councillor Charlton expressed concern at the lack of representation on the Panel and its sub-groups from Academies. The Head of the Virtual School responded that, under the Government's plans for Academisation, it was likely that representation from Academies will increase in the future.

Heather McFarlane, Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children, referred to the meetings held with community midwives and asked whether the discussions centred around their community or hospital experience. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence replied that the young people discussed their community experience and concerns were raised that simply being a care experienced young person was the reason for referral as a 'vulnerable parent'. The Designated Nurse responded that knowledge of the young person's care experience helps to inform the support required, however, she expressed concern at the young people's perceptions, adding that it would be useful to hold further meetings in order to improve understanding. In response to a question from Councillor Hunt as to the support in place for young parents, the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence explained that support is very much tailored to the individual young person.

Councillor Walton thanked officers for the comprehensive report adding that it addressed many of the issues that had been discussed at recent Corporate Parenting Panel meetings. She commented that she had received very positive feedback from PCSOs on the impact of the training delivered by the young people of the Children in Care Council.

Referring to the review of family time locations, Councillor Walton asked if there was a timeframe for the changes to be implemented. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence replied that there was no specific timeframe, however, there would be no detriment to the family time experience as the review included a move towards using additional, less formal, locations where appropriate, as well as virtual family time, using a range of platforms.

Councillor Bainbridge asked Caitlyn and Luke if they were satisfied with the 'You Said, We Did' actions. The young people responded that they were pleased to see that a great deal of positive changes were underway, that they were looking forward to future progress and they thanked the Panel for their engagement. They added that, at the Children in Care Council meetings, the young people talked about how well the Panel had listen and responded to their concerns.

10 Number of Foster Care Households in 2022/23

The item was deferred to the next meeting for an update to be provided by the Head of Children's Social Care.

11 Care Leavers Strategy and Action Plan January 2022 - December 2024

The Panel received a report and presentation from the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence on the new Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager explained the Local Offer and how the Service is committed to co-production of developments through engagement with looked after young people and care leavers, with a group of care leavers meeting to evaluate Durham's Local Offer, compared with those nationally. Key priorities for the future include establishing a young person's Scrutiny Committee to drive the priorities and progress of work. This will enable the continued co-production of services.

Councillor Miller asked whether the information provided to young people visiting the Young People's Hub with regard to education, employment and training includes information on vocational qualifications and apprenticeships as well as information relating to further and higher education. The Head of the Virtual School explained that all young people looked after have an allocated DurhamWorks worker to assist that young person to follow the avenue of their choice, whether that is to develop practical skills, train for new skills or to continue with their education.

Councillor Walton spoke of how useful the 'You Said, We Did' approach had been and said she hoped to see this continue in the future. Referring to the Care Leavers Action Plan she pointed out that the document included references to 'risk assessments' and requested that all documents use the agreed 'young person friendly' terminology.

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence informed the Panel that no location had been identified for the next Young People's Hub and it is hoped that this will be informed by the young people, through their evaluation of the current Hub. In addition, Corporate Parenting Panel Members will be involved, as well as local Members.

In response to a question from the Panel on the role of Young Person's Advisers, the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence explained their role is to work with the individual to develop all aspects of their plan, including helping the young person to understand their care experience, if they wish to do so, and providing practical support such as help with finance, benefits, relationships, education and employment. Councillor Deinali asked whether the Strategy included information on the introduction of the new technical qualification, 'T' Levels. The Head of the Virtual School replied that no information was included specifically on 'T' Levels, however, the Service works with each young person to develop a bespoke package, with consideration given to all options.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

12 Any other business

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children informed the Panel that two dates will be arranged over the summer for Panel members to visit the MASH Centre. The dates will be circulated in due course.

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 and Regulatory Body ratings of Children's Residential Homes

The Panel received the Regulation 44 Visits and Regulatory Body ratings of Children's Residential Homes report, presented by the Strategic Manager (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.