

## **DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

At a Meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Tuesday 19 July 2022** at **9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor M Walton (Chair)**

**Members of the Panel:**

Councillors Adcock-Forster, C Bell, J Charlton, B Coult, S Deinali, J Griffiths, C Hunt, B Kellett, I Roberts and A Sterling

**Co-opted Members:**

Caitlyn Gray, Luke Joseph, Sarah Neale and Wendy Taylor

**Also Present:**

Laura Armstrong – Professional Practice Manager  
Laura Counce – Service Manager, Children and Young People  
Helen Fergusson – Head of Children’s Social Care  
Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager  
Jodie Henderson – Practice Lead, Children and Young People  
Robert Johnson - Project Manager, Investing in Children  
Rachel Riley – Service Manager, Care Leavers and Adoption  
Martyn Stenton – Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children  
Jayne Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer  
Julian Wilson – Senior Lawyer, Children, Adults and Health

### **1 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cochrane, Henderson, Hood, Miller, Rooney, Simmons and Townsend and from Julie Bell, co-opted member.

Apologies were also noted from officer Melanie Stubbs, Head of the Virtual School.

### **2 Substitute Members**

No substitute members were in attendance.

### **3 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair reported the following matters arising;

- Members had received an invitation to the induction session on Friday 16 September at 1.00 pm and they were asked to contact Jayne Watson, Senior Partnerships Officer, with any questions or specific topics they would like to cover at the session.
- An update on language has been included on the agenda of alternate Corporate Parenting Panel meetings, to ensure the issue is regularly reviewed.

### **4 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **5 Number of Children Looked After**

The Head of Children's Social Care reported an increase in the number of children looked after which stood at 1,006. The Panel heard that the recently reported backlog caused by delays to adoption proceedings had been addressed. Data from the first quarter of the year will be gathered to obtain a clearer picture of the reasons for the increase and further information will be provided at the next Panel meeting.

### **6 Ofsted Updates**

The Head of Children's Social Care advised she was to provide an update on the recent Ofsted visit to Framwellgate Moor children's home, in the private part of the meeting.

### **7 ILACS Update**

The Head of Children's Social Care delivered a presentation on the recent Ofsted inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), outlining key headlines and themes and providing details of areas identified for improvement (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

The report included a graded judgement against three areas: children in need of help and protection; children in care and care leavers and the impact of leaders.

The Head of Children's Social Care was pleased to report that overall, services were rated good and the outcome was outstanding in respect of the impact of leaders. Ofsted acknowledged the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the ambitious corporate parenting strategy.

The Panel noted the three areas for improvement were the response to children who go missing from care; sufficiency of short break placements for disabled children and pathway planning for care leavers. A comprehensive action plan is underway to ensure a robust response to the areas identified for improvement.

The Panel viewed a video giving headline messages from the Ofsted report which included images of artwork produced by the young people involved in the Artstops project.

In response to comments from Councillor Hunt on the standards and support offered to connected carers with regard to training, unannounced visits, lifestory work and completion of paperwork, the Head of Children's Social Care replied that standards and commitments are the same for all foster carers, with all foster carers being subject to the same expectations in terms of unannounced visits and the completion of paperwork and lifestory work. A comprehensive review of the training programme had recently been undertaken to ensure the training offer is consistent for all fosters carers and a dedicated connected carers team is in place to offer support to those who may require assistance to access training and support available. With regard to unannounced visits the Head of Children's Social Care informed the Panel that robust management oversight is in place to ensure the monitoring of unannounced visits.

An update will be included in the fostering update report which is scheduled for the Panel's consideration at the September 2022 meeting.

The Chair congratulated staff on achieving the good Ofsted outcome.

## **8 IIC / Children in Care Council Update**

The Panel received a presentation from Caitlyn of the Children in Care Council on CiCC activity during June (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

Caitlyn explained that a sub-group had been set up to work with NHS nurses to incorporate young people's views about how they feel when discussing health issues, into training for health practitioners and foster carers.

The Panel noted that practitioner profiles are being developed through the 'All About Me' project and a CiCC member had designed the template for the profile. The Chair requested that all Panel members complete their personal profile as soon as possible.

The Chair updated the Panel that, further to requests made from members that the Artstops artwork be displayed in as many locations as possible, it had been found that some bus-stops are unsuitable to accommodate the artwork. Members who would like to nominate a bus-stop were asked to contact the Senior Partnerships Officer who will coordinate an approach to the Neighbourhood Services team, to identify suitable bus-stops.

## **9 Annual Report on the Adoption Service 2021/22**

The Panel considered the Adoption Annual Report which reviewed the service during 2021-22 and highlighted priorities for 2022-23 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Practice Lead for Children and Young People highlighted the continued strong performance with 42 adoptive families on their adoption journey as at 31 March 2022 and, during the year 2021-22, 65 children had been matched with adoptive families.

The Panel noted two significant issues in respect of adoption nationally which had a significant impact on workloads. The first was an Ombudsman finding against a local authority which led to an increase in work for adoption agencies nationally. Secondly, the resolution of the Somerset Judgement caused delays for children waiting to be matched with prospective adopters.

The Practice Lead responded to questions and comments from the Panel as follows:

- The Panel questioned why, out of 217 enquiries only 62 had led to initial visits. The Practice Lead clarified that some enquiries were not suitable to be progressed and a number of enquiries were requests for information only. A breakdown of the figures and further details will be incorporated into future adoption updates.
- The Practice Lead clarified that the young people placed with families in Cumbria were placed there as those families were the best adoptive matches and reiterated that Cumbria forms part of the Regional Adoption Agency.
- Referring to the map showing the number of enquiries per postcode, the Panel observed fewer enquiries from the west of the county and the Practice Lead pointed out that the relatively low population density in the rural west may be a factor. This will be looked at and reported on in future updates, if necessary.

- The Practice Lead informed the Panel that the recruitment drive for new panel members seeks to be reflective of the community, therefore members are recruited from all backgrounds, including experts from social work and medical fields, elected members and people with personal experience of fostering and adoption.

**Resolved:**

That the priorities contained within the report be agreed.

## **10 Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2021-22**

The Panel considered the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report for April 2021 – March 2022 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Senior Partnerships officer explained the Annual Report had been produced in collaboration with the young people of the Children in Care Council who had worked with officers on its design to ensure it was easy to read and in a young person friendly format. The report had been designed to enable it to be viewed digitally and included details of key achievements during the year and priorities for the forthcoming year.

**Resolved:**

That the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2021-22 be agreed.

## **11 Proud Moments**

The Service Manager for Children and Young People spoke of the pride expressed by staff caring for a young person, approaching the age of 18, who, despite some very challenging times, is flourishing in their transition and wholeheartedly embracing the changes to come, with positivity.

**Resolved:**

That the report and presentation be noted.

## **12 Any other business**

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children announced that the Head of Children's Social Care, Helen Fergusson, is leaving the authority. The Panel thanked Helen for all her hard work and wished her well in her new role. The Panel also bid farewell to Caitlyn who will soon be leaving to study social work at Manchester. The Head of Children's Social Care responded by thanking the Panel for their support and she also thanked Caitlyn for being such a fantastic advocate for young people in care.

The Panel echoed the comments and thanked Caitlyn for her invaluable contribution, with many achievements being testament to the work of Caitlyn, Luke and representatives of the Children in Care Council.

It is anticipated that a new CICC rep will take over from Caitlyn from September 2022.

### **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 considered the monthly report on Regulation 44 visits and regulatory body ratings of children's residential homes (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Children's Social Care reported on the findings from the inspection of Framwellgate Moor Children's Home and the actions taken in light of the findings.

The Panel acknowledged the impact of the pandemic and thanked staff for their hard work and resilience. Referring to the use of language, the Panel, whilst accepting the word 'discharge' is used as part of the regulatory framework, requested that an alternative, more sensitive word be used.

#### **Resolved:**

That the report be received.

### **15 Any other business**

A Panel member referred to correspondence received from a foster carer relating to the reimbursement of mileage in which the foster carer asked how decisions are made regarding which journeys qualify for reimbursement. The foster carer explained that whilst educational, medical and family time journeys qualify, day trips and activities such as Brownies and sports activities do not. Members commented on the importance of these activities for health and wellbeing and the development of social skills. Members also raised concerns regarding the additional financial pressures faced by foster carers during the school holidays.

The Head of Children's Social Care responded that specific issues are discussed on an individual, case by case basis with foster carers and she informed the Panel that work is underway to review foster carer payments, with a new process to be launched in April 2023.

It was agreed that the current policy should be emailed to the Panel, for information, in advance of the September meeting, for the matter to be considered in further detail.