

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a **Meeting** of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 30 September 2022** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Simmons in the Chair

Members of the Panel:

Councillors M Walton (Vice-Chair), R Adcock-Forster, J Charlton, B Coult, S Deinali, J Griffiths, T Henderson, P Jopling (substitute), J Miller, I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, A Sterling, S Townsend and C Varty

Co-opted Members:

J Bell, S Neale and W Taylor

Also Present:

Laura Armstrong – Professional Practice Manager
Billie - Representing the Children in Care Council
Sharon Davey – Strategic Manager (Looked After and Permanence)
Jodie Henderson – Practice Lead, Children and Young People's Service
Robert Johnson – Project Manager, Investing in Children
Gillian McNulty – Lawyer, Children, Adults and Health
Lee Peacock – Participation and Engagement Officer
Martyn Stenton – Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children
Bernadette Toomey – Practice Lead, Safeguarding
Jayne Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors C Bell, I Cochrane and C Hunt and from Luke and officer, Laura Counce.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor P Jopling substituted for Councillor C Hunt.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. The following matters arising were reported.

- The Corporate Parenting induction refresher training was held virtually on 16 September 2022 and the presentation slides had been circulated to the Panel.

- The annual foster care update and the reasons for the increase in the number of young people entering care would be considered later in the meeting.
- A briefing note had been circulated on foster carer payments and an update on the relevant policies will be provided at the December meeting.
- The template for member profiles will be shared with the Panel in due course.
- Adoption marketing analysis relating to rurality will be incorporated into the adoption update report which will be presented to the Panel in December.
- The Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report was presented to full Council on 21 September by Councillor Simmons accompanied by Luke, representing the Children in Care Council. The presentation was very well received.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Number of Children Looked After

Martyn Stenton, Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children informed the Panel that the current number of children looked after stood at 1,026, including 25 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, 49 young people placed for adoption and 286 care leavers.

6 Ofsted Updates

The Panel noted that six inspections of children's homes had taken place during the period, with all but one being rated 'good' and one outcome was awaited. It was reported that the full inspection of Aycliffe Centre had started but due to the inspector taking ill, it had been halted temporarily. It is anticipated this will be completed soon, and feedback will be provided in due course.

7 Children in Care Council (CiCC) Update

Billie, representing the Children in Care Council delivered a presentation on activities during the summer (for copy of presentation see file of minutes). Highlights included the completion of the new edition of the CiCC newsletter and work with Independent Reviewing Officers on the Care Plan journey. The success of the Artstops project continues to attract an increasing number of participants and steps are being taken to expand the project's reach.

Billie spoke of a young person who is working with Durham Constabulary to build relationships with young people in children's homes. Robert Johnson, IIC Project Manager, informed the Panel that the hope is to extend the project and he spoke of how the work is proving beneficial for both the Constabulary and the young person involved. The Vice-Chair spoke anecdotally of very positive feedback on the impact of the young person.

Billie explained that the education fun fund is continuing to support young people to use pupil premium funding in creative ways to help with school work, learn new skills and achieve their goals.

Councillor Miller remarked on how much he had enjoyed the recent Children in Care Council meeting and he added that he would like Corporate Parenting Panel agendas to mirror the issues raised by the young people at the joint Children in Care Council / Corporate Parenting Panel meetings. Jodie Henderson, Practice Lead for Children and Young People's Services, agreed that Corporate Parenting Panel agendas should include items of business led by the young people themselves and also include items of business which provide assurance that the Panel is fulfilling its duties towards children looked after and care leavers. The Practice Lead advised that work is taking place to increase involvement in Children in Care Council meetings to ensure that they are representative of all children looked after in Durham.

8 Proud Moments

The Practice Lead for Children and Young People's Services spoke of how immensely proud she was to see a positive change in a young person who had previously struggled to engage. The Panel heard that the young person was making a real effort to work with the Virtual School and participate in education and focus on a positive future.

The Practice Lead also praised a care leaver who showed great maturity and strength of character to achieve the housing accommodation outcome that she believed she deserved for herself and her child.

9 Performance Update

The Panel considered a report and presentation of the Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager which provided information on performance during the first quarter of 22-23 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The following additional information was provided in response to questions and comments from the Panel.

- All children looked after are provided with the full range of health screening available.
- Placements referred to as 'other' in the report included friends and family placements, NHS placements and a small number of unregulated placements.
- Whilst the number of young people in secure placements had increased, a number of those were welfare placements as opposed to criminal justice placements.
- Checks are carried out to ensure placements and accommodation meet the required standard to be deemed 'suitable accommodation'.
- A great deal of work had been carried out to reduce the amount of babies and younger children entering care. With reference to the increasing number of young people looked after in the 14-15 age cohort, the Panel noted that the pandemic had led to unprecedented challenges, with many young people struggling to cope with the pressures of lockdown.
- Whilst the data relating to placement stability showed an increase in placement moves, within that, there were positive outcomes as some young people had been supported to return to their families.
- Information is gathered on entry to care which is collated to inform emerging trends. Recent years had seen an increase in the number of children and young people with complex needs entering care.
- A total of 77 children accounted for 266 missing from home incidents, therefore some young people had multiple missing episodes.
- Referring to the high percentage of children aged 3 and 8 within the looked after cohort, health checks carried out at these developmental stages may account for this, when concerns are highlighted by professionals.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

10 Language Update

The Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children spoke of the commitment to children, young people and their families to use straightforward and family friendly language as outlined in the 'Language That Cares' document. The Panel formed groups to discuss words and phrases that may have negative connotations and considered the impact the words may have on a child or young person. The Panel discussed the use of 'victim-blaming' language which wrongly implies that a child or young person is responsible for abuse or crime they are subjected to.

The Panel felt strongly that this terminology should never be used. The Panel also discussed the challenges of negative perceptions of young people who find themselves involved in sexual / criminal activity, noting that they are often the victims of trauma and abuse.

Officers remarked on the improvements that had been observed since the introduction of the 'Language That Cares' document and reported that young people feel very passionate about the issue and have expressed that they would like to see their lived experiences recorded kindly, accurately and with compassion. When young people are accessing their records, they are supported by workers and offered help and support to understand what can often be difficult reading.

11 Supporting Solutions Update

The Panel received the Supporting Solutions Update presented by Bernadette Toomey, Practice Lead for Safeguarding (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Practice Lead referred to the intensive support offered to families and carers to prevent children and young people from entering care. An increase in younger children presenting on the edge of care had led to the establishment of a pilot scheme 'Edge of Care Minis', working with children aged 7-11. The service had also extended work with 16-17 year olds on the edge of homelessness. The Panel received details of the profiles of young people supported and the outcomes from 2021-22.

In response to a question from the Panel regarding the gender of victims of child exploitation, the Practice Lead acknowledged that there is work to be done locally and nationally to recognise that exploitation happens to males as well as females and that methods of exploitation were developing at a fast pace, alongside technological advances. The Panel heard that work is taking place with an expert from Durham University in order to understand the demographics of the county and a pilot scheme is being developed in the north of the county to look at work within communities to share intelligence.

In response to a question from the Panel as to the success of family group conferencing, the Practice Lead responded that it can be very successful as families, assisted by skilled facilitators, are empowered to develop their own plans and are encouraged to be open and honest with each other.

Referring to the 7% of young people who suffer adoption break down, the Practice Lead pointed out that this may happen when children become teenagers and the Panel heard that a great deal of work is done with adoptive families to prepare them for future challenges.

The Panel commended the work of the service.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

12 Contextualised Safeguarding

The Panel received a presentation on Contextualised Safeguarding presented by the Practice Lead for Safeguarding (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

The Practice Lead explained that the Adolescent Safeguarding and Exploitation Team had been in operation since February 2022 and is currently working with 68 young people aged 14-18 who are victims of, or are at risk of exploitation. The Panel noted that work takes place with partners across communities in order to increase protection from harm. Targeted work is undertaken with children who go missing from care to ensure a timely response is provided.

The Panel noted the work to develop a safeguarding pilot in Stanley, working with the community to share information to enable the wider community to become a guardian. It is hoped that learning will be shared across other areas of the county in the future. Councillor Charlton, Member for Tanfield division expressed a wish to be involved in the pilot and asked how many referrals the service receives from the police and neighbourhood wardens. The Practice Lead responded that the highest number of referrals are from the Police. Councillor Sterling suggested that School Crossing Patrol staff could play an important role in the pilot as they are a useful resource in safeguarding work.

Co-opted Member Sarah Neale, Designated Nurse for Children in Care commented that she and her health colleagues would continue to link in with this piece of work. The Practice Lead advised that the work of the ERASE team enables information to be shared through their multiagency protocols, which is available for Police Community Support Officers to access.

13 Annual Report of Durham County Council's Fostering Service

The Practice Lead for Children and Young People's Services presented Durham County Council's Fostering Service Annual Report (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Practice Lead referred to the increasing difficulties, locally and nationally, of recruiting and retaining foster carers and spoke of the work being done to provide an even distribution of foster carers throughout the county with targeted campaigns underway for foster carers for teenagers, children with disabilities and family groups.

The Practice Lead explained the service had developed a Mockingbird fostering hub, to build a fostering family, with an experienced foster carer providing support to the other foster carers within the fostering hub family. This benefits placement stability through providing peer support, respite time and regular social activities. A Mockingbird event was to take place on Saturday 1 October, at which the young people would share their initial experiences.

In response to a question as to how the hub foster carer was selected, the Practice Lead clarified that the role was advertised and is salaried. The successful candidate is trained to perform additional duties and responsibilities and to provide support to other foster carers and young people. In response to a further question as to whether the model is available to independent foster carers, the Practice Lead responded that the model is in its early stages and therefore is focusing on Durham County Council foster carers initially, however, should independent fostering agencies wish to set-up their own model, they are able to do so. Members praised the model commenting that it recognised foster parents face the same challenges as all parents and that it has the potential to have a positive impact on attracting and retaining foster carers.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

14 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.

15 Regulation 44 Visits and Regulatory Body Ratings of Children's Residential Homes

The Panel considered the monthly update on Regulation 44 visits and regulatory body ratings (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.