

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 7 July 2023** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)

Members of the Panel:

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, S Deinali, J Griffiths, B Kellett, E Peeke, A Reed, I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, A Sterling, S Townsend, C Varty and M Walton.

Co-opted Members:

Billie-Leigh, J Gamble, Luke, S Neale and W Taylor

Also Present:

Sharon Davey – Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence

Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager

Jodie Henderson – Practice Lead, Children and Young People

Rob Johnson – Project Manager, Investing in Children

Anne Middleton - Operations Manager, Fostering and Resources

Jayne Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer

Dawn Wilson – Senior Commissioning Officer

Julian Wilson – Lawyer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Henderson, Hunt, McGaun, Quinn, Wilson and co-opted member, Julie Bell. Apologies were also received from officers R Farnham, M Stenton and M Stubbs.

2 Substitute Members

Councillors E Peeke and A Sterling were in attendance for Councillors McGaun and Hunt respectively.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

With regard to matters arising, it was reported that the Children in Care Council will be writing to Panel members to thank them for their contributions towards the entry into and exit from care project.

Members were reminded that Corporate Parenting refresher training will be held in September and any members having a particular topic that they would like to focus on, should inform the Senior Partnerships Officer.

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Number of Children Looked After and Care Leavers

The Practice Lead for Children and Young People updated the Panel on the number of children looked after which stood at 1,120 including 35 young people placed for adoption, 284 care leavers, 60 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) under the age of 18 and 30 UASC over 18.

6 Ofsted Updates

No new Ofsted inspections had taken place during the period.

7 Proud Moments

The Practice Lead for Children and Young People spoke of a young person who, during his time in care, was very well informed about entitlements and he was tenacious in his pursuit to have his views heard and acted upon. His Young Person's Adviser reassured the young person to have patience and trust in the processes. On leaving care, the young person sent a heartfelt 'thank you' card to the Young Person's Adviser and Team Manager thanking them for the steadfast dedication and faith they had placed in him through challenging times.

The Service Improvement Manager spoke of how proud Durham had been of the delegation of young people from the Children in Care Council (CiCC) who attended the recent Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) conference in Manchester. The Service Improvement Manager spoke of how caring, respectful and helpful the young people were and how heart-warming it was to see the more experienced members of the group encouraging the younger members. The Panel praised the young people for being such excellent ambassadors for Durham.

8 Children in Care Council Update

Billie-Leigh and Luke delivered the presentation on CiCC activity since the last Panel meeting (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

During the period, the young people had participated in the interviews for social work trainees which had received very positive feedback from the candidates and the young people reported that the experience had helped them to understand the motivation for a career in social work.

The young people had also led foster carer training, supported the plans for the second Mockingbird fostering initiative and they have also started to plan for the 'Celebrate Me' awards.

As previously reported, on 6 July, a group of young people attended and presented at the ADCS conference in Manchester and it is hoped that a film from the day will be available to share with the Panel at a future meeting.

The Panel heard the results of the survey carried out to capture young people's views on savings and life-skills. A total of 40 responses were received, with the average age of respondents being 16 years of age. The survey highlighted that the majority of respondents felt that children and young people should be supported to save money and almost 75% of respondents had been supported to save money whilst in care. Almost a third of those surveyed felt that young people should be responsible for their finances. A high proportion of young people were of the opinion that young people should be supported with life skills, including financial management, employment, cookery skills, mental and personal health and resilience building. In summary, the survey demonstrated that young people value savings and life skills and they would like to see different approaches, to encourage all young people to manage their finances and provide support with life-skills.

The Chair remarked that the response rate was relatively low, compared with the total number of children and young people looked after and she asked how widely the survey was circulated. The young people explained that the survey was shared with foster carers and children's homes and included those young people looked after outside County Durham, however the survey may not have been relevant for younger age groups. Members pointed out that, as the average age of respondents was 16 years, it was likely that the responses will have been a true reflection of their views, as opposed to being influenced by their carers / social workers.

Designated Nurse for Children in Care, Sarah Neale, spoke of a piece of work with young people and Young Person's Advisers to gather information on levels of satisfaction with regard to primary care services.

Councillor Deinali congratulated the work, pointed out that the overall percentage of responses was good and asked regarding the next steps. Luke replied that the plans include arranging a meeting with foster carers and social workers to share learning and discuss different approaches on how to support young people with savings and life skills, in structured and measured ways. Councillor Deinali suggested that links could be made with the Fun and Food initiative.

Referring to the discussion at the last meeting, the Practice Lead agreed to follow up the request from the Panel to see the artwork produced by the young person who featured in the 'Proud Moments' item.

9 Update on Supply Packs

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence thanked members for their support with the Supply Packs project and informed the Panel that plans are now in place to access the funding. News of the project had spread and this had led to offers of assistance from local businesses. The young people had also discussed the Supply Packs project at the ADCS conference which showed that Durham is leading the way.

10 'Know, What, When' Presentation

The Panel received a presentation from the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence on the 'Know What When' initiative (for copy of report and presentation see file). The aim is to produce a one-page document providing information on key points in the care journey. Discussions had taken place regarding the production of an animation, similar to that previously viewed by the Panel on the IRO service, which could then be hosted on the CiCC website.

11 Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report

The Senior Partnerships Officer presented the draft Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report April 2022-March 2023 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Panel noted the report had been approved by the Children in Care Council and it had been presented to relevant senior management teams and the corporate management team. The final version of the report will be presented to full Council for endorsement on 19 July. It is hoped that following the success of last year's presentation which was very well received, representatives from the Children in Care Council will present the report to full Council.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Parenting Annual Report for 2022-23 be agreed.

12 Children Looked After Strategic Partnership (CLASP) Update

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence presented the update on the Children Looked After Strategic Partnership (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that the multi-agency work includes representation from health, youth offending, education and housing and it aims to improve strategies to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers. The Strategic Manager provided an update as to the progress on priority areas and areas of focus including young people who go missing and placement stability. Sarah Neale, Co-opted Member and Designated Nurse for Children in Care explained a health perspective can help to understand and address the underlying issues relating to missing incidents and placement stability. A piece of work focused on the mental health of children looked after and care experienced young people will include a review of the range of services offered, including the offer for young people placed outside the county.

The Panel agreed to receive six-monthly progress updates in the future.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

13 Fostering Service Annual Report

The Operations Manager presented the Fostering Service Annual Report for 2022-23 which provided an update on progress against the key priority areas (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Panel noted a decrease in the number of foster families during the year and that the challenges with regard to the recruitment of foster carers is a national issue. It was reported that Durham is part of the Pathfinder pilot scheme in which 12 north east local authorities have partnered, to provide a co-ordinated, regional fostering approach for a six-month pilot period. It was agreed that an update on the Pathfinder pilot would be brought to a future meeting.

During the year, work had continued to focus on marketing and there had also been a focus on reducing unnecessary placement moves. Notably during the year, the number of connected foster carers had increased.

Members noted the importance of the collaborative work with the Children in Care Council and that consultation sessions are held regularly to gather young people's views.

The launch of the Mockingbird Hub which took place in September 2022, and not 2023 as stated in the report, had been a resounding success and it had attracted a visit by members of the Scottish government. Consideration is being given to the promotion of Mockingbird across Children's Services in Scotland.

Updating the Panel on discussions at previous meetings regarding the financial support available to foster carers, the Panel noted the increase in the Payment for Skills model and age-related fostering allowances, in line with government recommendations.

The Operations Manager concluded by outlining the key priorities for the forthcoming year which include the continuation of the work to increase the number of foster carers, to reduce unnecessary placement moves and ensure the voice of children and young people is at the core of the work. It is hoped that the second Mockingbird Hub will be launched during the summer.

Responding to a question from Councillor Walton as to how marketing campaigns are monitored and whether the recent t.v. adverts had led to an increase in enquiries, the Practice Lead for Children and Young People confirmed that regular marketing monitoring is undertaken to identify which marketing methods elicit the best response. Monitoring of the response to the recent t.v. adverts had shown no sharp increase in enquiries following the broadcasts. The Operations Manager emphasised the effectiveness of soft marketing methods including visibility, drip-marketing and 'word of mouth'. She added that targeting specific locations through the hosting of events and initiatives such as 'Artstops' contribute to increase visibility.

Councillor Adcock-Foster raised concern at reports of a lack of support available for kinship / connected carers after the making of Special Guardianship Orders and the Operations Manager replied that the service recognised the recent increase in the number of kinship / connected carers and will ensure support is provided both before and after the making of court orders.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

14 Foster Care Awards Ceremony

The Operations Manager presented slides from the Foster Care Awards Ceremony held on 13 June which was a great success (for copy of presentation, see file of minutes). Members commented that they had been privileged to be part of the evening and they thanked all those involved in the ceremony, which had been both emotional and enjoyable.

The Operations Manager invited all members to the next event, the annual dog walk and activities, which will be held on 17 August at Wharton Park.

15 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.

16 Regulation 44 Visits

The Panel received a report on Regulation 44 visits and regulatory body ratings in respect of independent children's residential homes where Durham have children/young people placed in their homes, presented by the Senior Commissioning Officer (for copy of report, see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

17 Corporate Parenting Panel Sub-Group Vacancies and Regulation 44 Member Alignment

The Senior Partnerships Officer provided an update on the Corporate Parenting Panel sub-groups and Regulation 44 vacancies following the recent changes to the Panel membership (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.