

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 29 September 2023** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Simmons (Chair)

Members of the Panel:

Councillors M Walton (Vice-Chair), R Adcock-Forster, S Deinali, J Griffiths, M McGaun, S Quinn, A Reed, I Roberts, K Robson, K Rooney, A Savory, S Townsend, C Varty and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

J Bell, Billie-Leigh, J Gamble, Luke, W Taylor and F Tweddle

Also Present:

Laura Armstrong – Professional Practice Manager
Jasmine Crammond – Lawyer, Children and Adult Services
Sharon Davey – Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence
Rachel Farnham – Head of Children’s Social Care
Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager
Anne Haigh – Aycliffe Secure Services Centre Manager
Rob Johnson – Project Manager, Investing in Children
Deb Loraine – Service Manager, Children & Young Peoples Services
Helen McAloon – Strategy Team Leader
Lee Peacock – Participation and Engagement Officer
Melanie Stubbs – Head of the Virtual School
Bernadette Toomey - Practice Lead, Children & Young Peoples Services

Prior to the commencement of business the Chair welcomed young people from the Children in Care Council (CiCC).

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, T Henderson, C Hunt and L Mavin and from co-opted member Craig Brown. Apologies were also received from J Watson, Senior Partnerships Officer.

2 Substitute Members

Councillors B Coult and J Nicholson attended for Councillors L Mavin and J Charlton respectively.

3 Minutes

With an amendment to include apologies from Councillor A Savory, the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported:

- The presentation slides from the Corporate Parenting refresher training session held in September would be circulated.
- The video that the young people from the Children in Care Council presented at the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) conference would be shown later in the meeting.
- The Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report is now available online.
- Members will be invited to attend the Fostering Service's fancy dress event on 30 October, to celebrate Halloween. Further details will be emailed to Members in due course.
- Members who had made changes to their sub-group membership recently, were asked to inform Jayne Watson, Senior Partnerships Officer.

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Number of Children in our Care and Care Leavers

The Deputy Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services updated the Panel that number of children looked after stood at 1,179, including 30 young people placed for adoption, 293 care leavers and 73 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).

6 Ofsted Updates

The Deputy Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services updated the Panel on Ofsted inspections carried out over the summer. A full inspection had taken place at Aycliffe Secure Centre in July which gained a 'good' overall rating, with an 'outstanding' in respect of children's health. The Manse and Moorside homes had undergone monitoring visits which found the homes to be 'good'. Full inspections had taken place at Hickstead Rise and High Etherley which were 'good', Framwellgate Moor was found to be 'requiring improvement' and an inspection of New Lea judged the home to be 'outstanding'.

7 Proud Moments

The proud moments this month were reported by the Head of the Virtual School who spoke of the achievements of the young people who sat GCSE exams over this summer. One young person in particular had made a great deal of progress despite having to contend with placement change in the months prior to his exams. Not only did he continue to attend school, he also volunteered with the school's recycling programme and committed himself to extra tuition and after-school revision sessions and activities. This resulted in him achieving higher grades than he expected and he is currently studying at college, on the course that he had set his sights on.

The Panel congratulated all the young people who had sat exams during the summer and wished them continued success for the future.

8 Children in Care Council (CiCC) Update

Billie-Leigh and Luke delivered the presentation on CiCC highlighted activity over the summer (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

Information included that feedback is being gathered to develop the 'Know, What, When' lifemap guide which, it is hoped, will be finalised soon. During the summer, CiCC roadshows were facilitated to reach out to as many young people as possible. The young people have now produced their 10th newsletter and plans are in place for the production of a 2023 annual newsletter, to celebrate achievements over the year. A total of 97 Education Fun Fund applications have been approved and the young people were pleased to report that case studies show the fund is making a real difference to young people. The life skills / savings survey remains active and is being publicised through social workers and support staff and a progress update will be brought to the Panel later in the year.

It was reported that as a result of the success of the Artstops Initiative, the CiCC have been given access to Bishop Auckland art gallery from September to December next year to showcase their art in the #ArtsCarers24 exhibition.

Work is continuing with Newcastle University Street Law project to help children and young people of all ages to better understand care proceedings and work has begun on an animation.

The young people have worked with the Full Circle Team on an open event and they have produced artwork to decorate the team's refurbished building.

The Panel heard that discussions have been held with the Supportive Family Time team to develop family time rooms, with the young people's ultimate aim being a 'family time house', which they feel would provide a more natural and dynamic family time experience. A discussion took place as to how the Panel could assist. Officers explained that work is ongoing to ensure dedicated family time facilities are available throughout the county and the views of the young people will be considered, within the wider context and the Panel will be kept informed of progress. The Panel suggested that local Community Centres may have rooms available which could be used for family time activities.

The Panel congratulated the young people on their work and they were pleased to see their ideas coming to fruition, including the upcoming art exhibition and the success of the Education Fun Fund.

9 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) Update

The Panel considered the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children update report presented by Sharon Davey, Strategic Manager for Children and Young People's Services (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager informed the Panel that Durham continues to take a high percentage of UASC compared with regional neighbours and a dedicated UASC team is in place. The team has developed social inclusion opportunities and community links, details of which were provided in the report. In addition, the UASC multi agency group meets regularly to share information on issues including health, education and the voluntary sector, in a partnership approach to support UASC to integrate into the community and promote their physical and mental health.

Members spoke of the assistance provided by the voluntary and community sector and the legal barriers that may be encountered when providing assistance. The Strategic Manager agreed to make enquiries regarding the possibility of providing sign-posting and information on the Local Safeguarding Children's Board website.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

10 Performance Report

The Strategy Team Leader, Helen McAloon, delivered performance information against the key performance indicators, for the first quarter of 2023-24 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Panel noted that whilst the number of children and young people in care continued to increase, Durham was in line with regional and statistical neighbours. In particular, there had been an increase in the number of babies aged under 1 and the number of 10-15 year olds entering care. During the quarter, there had been an increase in the number of social workers with fewer than 25 cases. The number of initial health assessments and review health assessments completed within timescales had reduced and data was being reviewed to identify any underlying issues. In terms of placement stability, it was reported that the number of children undergoing three or more placement moves in any one year had reduced, however longer term placement stability was slightly below the benchmark. The number of missing incidents had increased, however the completion rate for return to home interviews had improved. More detailed information on missing incidents will be brought to a future Panel meeting.

There was a positive picture with regard to the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation and whilst the number of care leavers in education, employment and training was in line with benchmarks, there was room for improvement.

In response to a request from the Panel that data on the number of children placed with friends and family be included in future reports, the Strategy Team Leader agreed to include the data in the next performance update. The Panel noted that the number of children placed within family / friends networks continues to increase.

The Panel queried whether the number of social workers was sufficient to meet the increasing demand. The Deputy Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services acknowledged that the recruitment and retention of social workers is a local and national challenge, therefore work to support staff recruitment and retention is ongoing.

The Panel commented on the number of missing incidents and the impact on the wider community, in particular police resources. Officers assured the Panel that multi-agency work is undertaken and in some cases, the community may play a part in the solution.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

11 Progress Report on Children Looked After in the Virtual School: Update for the Academic Year 2022 / 2023

The Head of the Virtual School presented an update on the work carried out by the Virtual School from September 2022 to July 2023 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

As at 21 July 2023, there were 766 Durham children looked after, of statutory school age and of these 42% were female and 58% were male. 22% were supported by an EHCP and 31% were identified as requiring SEND support. Attendance is improving following the disruption caused by the pandemic and whilst primary attendance is good, secondary attendance requires attention. As a result, PEP caseworkers are focusing on attendance in order to identify barriers. The report included detailed information on GCSE results.

Responding to a question from the Panel as to the number of suspensions, the Head of the Virtual School clarified that all schools have a behavior for learning policy and pupils may be suspended for several reasons including breaking school rules, disruptive behavior and refusing to engage. Alternative provision is considered as an alternative to exclusion.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

12 Annual Health Update

The Designated Nurse for Children in Care, Jo Gamble, presented the annual health update (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Introducing the presentation, the Designated Nurse outlined the new commissioning arrangements for health provision across County Durham.

With regard to health assessment data, the Panel heard of the work taking place to improve connectivity between health and the local authority and whilst there had been a reduction in the number of children coming into care, seeing a paediatrician within 20 days, processes are in place for improvements and there are times when it is not appropriate to conduct a health assessment within the specified timeframe.

The Designated Nurse detailed the priorities for 2023-24 which are aligned to the work of corporate parenting and the children looked after strategic partnership.

The Panel noted the improvements with regard to access to dental care for children, with 95% of young people in care having had an appropriate dental check.

The Panel also noted that every care experienced child is given the opportunity to have a health passport to understand their medical history and the Designated Nurse explained that health passports had been reviewed which found that a summary of the information would be more effective and the passports had been renamed and were now known as 'Health Summaries'.

The young people questioned why the name had been changed and the Designated Nurse explained the name change was considered necessary as the new format was a more condensed version of the former health passport, however a review will be undertaken of the new format to ensure that it provides all the information required and this could include reconsideration of the name.

Members were pleased to note that access to dental care had returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

13 Annual Performance Report 2022/2023: The Full Circle

The Panel received the Annual Performance Report of the Full Circle covering the period from April 2022-March 2023 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Deb Loraine, Service Manager, delivered the presentation, giving an overview of the annual activity and development of the Full Circle service. Information was provided on this specialised children's mental health service for children and young people who have experienced complex trauma through neglect and abuse. The Panel noted the service benefits from good partnership arrangements with the Virtual School and agencies including CAMHS and the NSPCC. The Full Circle also provides consultation and training for parents, carers and professionals where children have not met the criteria for direct therapeutic support.

The significant amount of development activity during the year was detailed, including the implementation of new operating practices and the increased offer to residential homes and the Virtual School. Outcome measures identified that, just over 95% of children who had received support from the Full Circle service had improved outcomes. Information was also provided on developments for the year ahead.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

14 Such other business

Members were invited to the Fostering Service's Halloween fancy dress party on Monday 30 October from 1-3pm at Nettlesworth Community Centre, Chester le Street. An invitation would be circulated, with responses to be emailed to fostering@durham.gov.uk by 10 October.

The Head of Children's Social Care then welcomed the young people and introduced their video 'We are People not Problems' which the young people presented to the Association of Directors of Children's Services which took place in Manchester in July. The video received a standing ovation at the conference and it was equally well received by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Officers who had accompanied the young people to Manchester commented that the young people had made Durham proud and it had been a joy to be in their company on the trip.

The young people then gave a short presentation on the making of the video. They explained that the script was designed to illustrate that care experience should not be regarded as a problem. They explained how the making of the video had been a very positive experience as it brought them together and the friendships they made have blossomed. They spoke of how for some, this had been a new experience and they had been enlightened as to the extent of the difference their voices can make. The experience had provided them with the opportunity to network and those that presented the video at the conference spoke of how much they enjoyed talking to an audience and how they were overwhelmed by the support they received. They highlighted that only a short time ago, when some of the young people were just newcomers to the Children in Care Council, they would not have believed that they would present a video at the Association of Directors of Children's Services. The young people concluded by saying they were honoured to have been chosen to participate in the event and they hope to participate in similar events in the future.

The Panel recognised the powerful impact of the video which they described as humbling, emotional and inspirational and officers commented that the video remains a talking point.

The Panel thanked the young people for bringing their experiences to life, which is helping to challenge negative perceptions of the care experience and they highlighted that the young people's voices will influence the care experience in the future.

The Head of the Virtual School commented on how far the young people had come since their first video 'We are no different' and she requested to show the 'We are People not Problems' video at the spring Designated Teachers meeting.

The Panel requested that enquiries be made with a view to showing the video at a future meeting of the County Council.

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 (May-August 2023) and Regulatory Body Ratings of Aycliffe Secure Centre - Summary Report

The Manager of Aycliffe Secure Centre, Anne Haigh, presented a summary of the Regulation 44 visits to Aycliffe Secure Centre for May-August 2023. Members also received a presentation on the pathways into secure accommodation, information which had been requested following discussions at a previous meeting (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.