

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 10 November 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, B Kellett, L Mavin, A Reed, K Rooney and C Varty

Co-opted Members:

Billie Leigh, J Gamble, Luke, W Taylor

Also Present:

Sharon Davey – Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence

Rob Johnson – Project Manager, Investing in Children

Deb Loraine – Service Manager

Jamie Paddock – Lawyer, Children, Adults and Health

Paul Rudd – Strategic Manager, Children's Homes

Martyn Stenton – Deputy Corporate Director of Children's Services

Jayne Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, T Henderson, S Quinn, A Savory, M Wilson and Co-opted Members J Bell and F Tweddle.

Apologies were received from officers S Davies, M Den Hollander, R Farnham, R Harris, M Stubbs and J Tyler, a number of whom were absent due to preparations for the forthcoming Ofsted visit.

2 Substitute Members

Councillors Nicholson and Heaviside substituted for Councillors Charlton and Savory respectively.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

With regard to matters arising, the Chair remarked that she, the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People and the Head of Children's Social Care attended the Halloween party on 30 October, which was a great success, with everyone thoroughly enjoying themselves.

4 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5 Number of Children in our Care and Care Leavers

Martyn Stenton, Deputy Corporate Director of Children's Services updated the Panel on the current number of children looked after which had increased slightly on the previous month and stood at 1,187, including 32 young people placed for adoption, 306 care leavers and 75 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.

6 Ofsted Updates

The Panel noted the forthcoming Ofsted focused visit on the Care Leaver's Service taking place on 14 and 15 November.

Details of the findings of a recent Ofsted inspection on New Lea children's home which was rated outstanding, would be provided later in the meeting.

7 Proud Moments

Sharon Davey, Strategic Manager, presented a mobile 'Positivitree' for the meeting's proud moment. The branches of the tree contained positive messages from care experienced young people. The Strategic Manager explained that the 'Positivitree' initiative symbolised the commitment to help care experienced young people grow and thrive and the tree was taken to regional events to showcase the young people's achievements. The individual messages will be collated, for a more detailed presentation at a future meeting, at which Panel members will also be asked to make their own pledges.

8 Children in Care Council (CiCC) Update

The Panel welcomed Billie Leigh and Luke to provide the Children in Care Council update (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

Billie Leigh informed the Panel that a meeting had taken place with the Bishop Auckland art exhibition co-ordinator and consents to display artwork were being sought from the young people. Billie Leigh reported how much the young people were looking forward to the exhibition and its related events.

Luke spoke of the plans for Care Day in February 2024. The younger group had discussed that they would like to hold a talent contest and they had asked if it would be possible for Corporate Parenting Panel members to judge the contest. The 'ideas room' had been a great success at the last Care Day event, therefore an ideas room will be included at the next event, and it was hoped this will generate discussions and ideas.

Jayne Watson, Senior Partnerships Officer advised that members wishing to volunteer to be on the judging panel for the Care Day talent contest should contact her.

Billie Leigh informed the Panel that she had attended the regional Children in Care Council conference at which life skills passport work had been a key discussion topic. Billie Leigh had found it useful to speak to representatives from other regions who have this provision in place, to share their experience.

The Senior Partnerships Officer referred to the joint CPP/CiCC meeting held in April at which the priorities for the year ahead (life skills & savings) were identified. She informed the Panel that an update on the work taking place to progress these would be brought to the next meeting.

At a recent CiCC meeting, one of the long-standing CiCC members gave a talk on their University course in media studies and he suggested that he could share his skills to help the CiCC produce short videos and media clips.

Concluding the presentation, Billie Leigh presented a 'thank you' card to the Panel on behalf of the CiCC, for their contributions towards the entry into care packs. The Senior Partnerships Officer agreed to share this with all the Panel members and will ask for it to be shared with other members who also contributed to the project.

Councillor Hunt asked the CiCC representatives if they would be willing to contribute to the Council's response to the government's consultation on the creation of a smokefree generation. The representatives responded that the CiCC would be happy to participate. Councillor Hunt thanked them in advance for their assistance and expressed the value of including young people's voices in the consultation to shape future government policy on smoking and vaping.

9 Protected Characteristics Update

The Deputy Director of Children's Services referred to the discussions at previous meetings regarding the Council adopting care experience as a protected characteristic. The Panel noted that a survey was undertaken to gather the young people's views which was overwhelmingly positive, however, the survey sample was relatively small. The Vice-Chair suggested that a wider reach may be achieved through the Council's consultation mechanism. The Deputy Director agreed that this would be investigated. The next steps, following consultation, would be to prepare a report for the Corporate Parenting Panel which, if agreed, would then be taken forward to full Council for approval. The Panel would be kept informed of progress.

10 Pre-Birth Intervention Update

The Panel received a report and presentation on the Pre-Birth Intervention Service (PBIS), delivered by the Deputy Corporate Director of Children's Services (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Deputy Corporate Director explained the aim of the service was to enable babies to remain with their parents or wider birth family, when it was safe to do so and when that was not possible, to ensure babies were permanently placed with carers, as soon as possible. The criteria for receiving the pre-birth intervention service were outlined and it was made clear that parents must provide meaningful consent to receive the service. A case study illustrated a specific occasion when the service had strived to provide continued support to a mother which resulted in a positive outcome for mother and baby who were able to remain together.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

11 Supporting Solutions and Family Group Conferencing Annual Report

The Panel received a report and presentation delivered by Deb Loraine, Service Manager on activity and developments within the Supporting Solutions, Edge of Care and Family Group Conferencing Service from April 2022 to March 2023 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Service Manager provided details of the various specialist areas within the Supporting Solutions Service. The Panel noted that factors leading young people to be on the edge of care were often cross-cutting issues such as mental health, homelessness and risk of exploitation.

The service recognised the increasing number of young people entering care, with complex needs, who require specialist support. Following a pilot of interventions available to younger children, this offer of support is now available to young people aged 7 to 11. Plans for the future aim to create a multi-agency team to provide accommodation options and outreach support to children, young people and their families.

The Panel noted the good outcomes for young people supported by the service during the year.

Outcomes for young people open to Supporting Solutions were also positive with 83% of young people open to the service being supported to remain at home, either with family or in long-term placements.

The Service Manager explained that Family Group Conferencing supported families to establish a sustainable plan to meet the needs of children and young people within their family unit. Details were also provided of a recent piece of work on a national bid for a lifelong links programme to build positive, lasting support networks for young people. More information on the progress of the bid would be provided in due course.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chair who referred to the table at paragraph 32 of the report and asked what the outcome was for the child shown as 'other', the officer agreed to refer the question to the author of the report for clarification to be provided. Following the meeting, the Service Manager clarified that this related to a review that was held for an unborn baby and at the time, outcome/assessments from the court were awaited, prior to baby being born.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

12 Contextualised Safeguarding Update

The Panel received a report delivered by Deb Loraine, Service Manager on the work carried out by the Erase team during the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 (for copy of report and presentation see file).

Details were provided of the two specialist teams who support children and young people at risk of harm outside their home i.e. the Adolescent Safeguarding and Exploitation Team (ASET) and the ERASE Team. It was noted that the ASET function provided care-planning within statutory safeguarding procedures and delivered interventions to young people who were victims of, or were at risk of harm.

The team also provided specialist advice and guidance to social workers, where a young person was open to the service, reducing the need to change social worker. The ERASE team supported young people, to reduce the risk of exploitation and missing from home and was responsible for providing Return to Home Interviews when children go missing from home/care. The service also provided interventions to those at high risk due to exploitation.

Further to the Panel's request at previous meetings for more in depth data in relation to missing incidents, the report provided a detailed summary of data relating to children missing from care. The Service Manager commented that for children in care, there was an increase in the number of children going missing from 125 to 142 in 2022/23.

The number of missing episodes had increased from 868 to 992. Compared to the same period last year, there had been an increase in the amount of young people looked after being reported missing, and a decrease for those living with family. The Service Manager referred to the close work undertaken with children's residential homes to understand the triggers for the individual young person and to establish the most appropriate support, which may include working with partners such as education and health. Expertise from a therapeutic social worker was also available where trauma support was required.

The Service Manager also provided information on development activity including audit work, to provide a better understanding of any gaps in provision.

In response to a question from the Panel as to the support provided by the police, the Service Manager confirmed that there had been a significant improvement in partnership working since the previous Ofsted inspection and the approach was very much proactive, with improvements in the sharing of information and intelligence. The strengthening of this relationship had helped to avoid incidents of victim blaming.

The Strategic Manager for Children's Homes referred to the recent audit of the service which showed feedback from families and carers on the support provided was extremely positive. He assured the Panel that within his role, he also met with the police on a regular basis to ensure all children's homes were meeting their requirements with regard to managing risk. He also informed the Panel that a mandatory protocol was in place in all children's homes which required that searches be carried out before a young person was reported to the police as missing, to ensure that only actual missing incidents were reported to the police.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

13 Role of the Independent Visitor Service for Children in Care

The Panel received a report and presentation delivered by the Deputy Corporate Director of Children's Services on the role of the Independent Visitor Service (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Deputy Corporate Director summarised the current position of the service and highlighted developments over the past 12 months. It was reported that Since August 2022, 43 new Independent Visitors had been recruited and there had been 73 referrals since October 2022, with 60 matches.

In terms of future developments, the specific target was the Durham County Council target of ensuring 50 referrals of children in care, with 30 matched annually. The aspirational target was to meet the National Independent Visitor Network target to match 10% of children in care.

In conclusion, the Deputy Director of Children's Services asked that if members were aware of anyone who would like to volunteer to be an Independent Visitor, that they should inform either himself or the author of the report, Mark Den Hollander.

Resolved:

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

14 Such other business

Members were reminded that the date of the next meeting coincided with Christmas Jumper Day 2023 and they were encouraged to wear their Christmas jumpers and make a donation to charity. A prize would be given for the best jumper, as judged by the young people of the Children in Care Council.

The Vice-Chair informed members that, should they be approached by their AAP Co-ordinators with regard to the Supply Packs funding commitments, they should inform them that the project should be progressed by November.

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 Strategic Manager for Children's Homes provided an update on residential children's homes, Regulation 44 reports and a recent children's home Ofsted inspection which was rated as outstanding (for copy of presentations see file of minutes).

Regulation 44 alignment was also discussed and members interested in undertaking Regulation 44 visits, or attending the training session scheduled for 15 December before making a decision, were asked to inform the Senior Partnerships Officer.