

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 13 September 2024** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor M Walton (Vice-Chair in the Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors R Adcock-Forster, J Clark, S Deinali, J Griffiths, C Hunt, L Mavin, D Oliver, S Quinn, A Reed, K Rooney, C Varty and M Wilson

Co-opted Members:

Billie Leigh, Luke, J Bell, M Johnson, W Taylor and K Watson

Also Present:

Jasmine Aikin – Lawyer, Children, Adults and Health
Anne Haigh – Centre Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre
Rachel Harris – Service Improvement Manager
Rebecca Harrison – Project Worker, Investing in Children
Nathan Head – Team Manager, Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children
Deb Loraine – Service Manager, Countywide Services
Lee Mullaney – Deputy Head Teacher, Aycliffe Secure Centre
Lee Peacock – Participation and Engagement Officer
Rachael Riley – Operations Manager, Children Looked After and Care Leavers
Martyn Stenton – Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children
Jayne Watson – Senior Partnerships Officer

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Simmons, C Bell, B Kellett and A Savory, Co-opted Members J McCarthy and Rebecca Woods and Officers R Farnham, R Johnson and M Stubbs.

2 Substitute Members

K Watson substituted for J McCarthy.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held Friday, 19 July 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

5 Corporate Parenting Panel Terms of Reference

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Early Help, Vulnerable Children, and Inclusion, and Head of Children's Social Care in respect of the Corporate Parenting Panel Terms of Reference (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Head of Early Help, Vulnerable Children, and Inclusion, Martyn Stenton reminded the Panel that the Terms of Reference for the Panel were reviewed regularly, to ensure they were fit for purpose. He noted the Terms of Reference are in line with the Local Government Association Key Lines of Enquiry. He explained that the Panel were asked for their comments on the Terms of Reference in respect of being fit for purpose, and for delegated authority for the Head of Early Help, Vulnerable Children, and Inclusion and Head of Children's Social Care, to manage the work programme.

Resolved:

- (i) That the Panel agree that the Terms of Reference remain fit for purpose and continue to raise the profile of the panel's work.
- (ii) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Children's Social Care and the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children to manage the Corporate Parenting Panel's work programme.

6 Care Experience - Protected Characteristic

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Children's Social Care in respect of Care Experience being adopted by DCC as a Protected Characteristic (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Panel heard from Luke and Billie Leigh as regards the work they had undertaken in looking at adopting Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic across DCC, including an overview of the consultation responses from surveys conducted by DCC and IIC.

Councillor S Quinn entered the meeting at 9.41am

Luke noted some young people had not understood what a protected characteristic was, and some had said they did not want 'another label' given to them as care experienced young people. Billie Leigh noted that while care experienced young people faced a number of barriers, they did not want their care experience to define them, with Luke adding that many were resilient and would simply answer 'I am fine'. Luke noted that a number of the young people that had responded explained that they did not wish to retell their personal story repeatedly. The Panel noted that care experienced young people could often think about what other people thought about them. Luke and Billie Leigh explained that it was hoped the work could help change the narrative for care experienced young people. They added that the majority of those who had responded supported adopting care experience as a protected characteristic.

Luke and Billie Leigh referred the Panel to a number of slides with quotes from the young people and noted the next steps, including a motion to be put to Full Council.

The Chair thanked Luke and Billie Leigh, with Councillor C Hunt adding her thanks for an excellent piece of work. The Chair added the work was very professional and had taken on board the points made by the Panel previously.

The Senior Partnerships Officer noted it was hoped that it would be considered at the October meeting of Council, with those involved to be invited to the meeting accordingly.

Resolved:

- (i) That the report be noted.
- (ii) That the Corporate Parenting Panel present the motion to Council proposing the adoption of the principles of protected characteristics for care experienced young people be agreed.

7 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Annual Update

The Committee considered an update report and presentation of the Head of Children's Social Care in respect of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC), presented by UASC Team Manager, Nathan Head (for copy of report see file of minutes).

The Team Manager explained the formation of the Team, and the numbers of referrals from the Home Office's Nation Transfer Scheme (NTS) with currently 84 UASC in the care of the Team, within a threshold capacity of 98 for that scheme, along with 54 care leavers being supported by the service.

He explained this was a rolling threshold, and that Durham was accommodating the majority of the North East transfers, noting the next nearest in numbers within the region being Sunderland with approximately 50 UASC. He explained the different issues that could be faced by UASC and gave examples of how young people were progressing, with a number studying at University, and one who had graduated and was pursuing a career in the NHS. He noted the range of activities to help with social inclusion, with Community and celebration events including for Eid, cricket days, and weekly football sessions. He noted there was UASC representation on the Children in Care Council, and explained the toolbox and welcome packs that were made available. He added there was a strong multi-agency approach taken locally, as well as a consideration of the wider regional approach being taken.

The Team Manager explained that there were a number of challenges, including the delays at the Home Office in processing asylum claims, as well as uncertainty with any changes the new Government may make to the Illegal Migration Act, which states that people who had entered the country “illegally” will forgo the right to claim asylum. He added other challenges included the difficulty in securing foster homes for young people under 16 years old in the North East, and the support given to those UASC who had suffered trauma. He concluded by giving examples of events and activities that had been arranged for UASC and the positive feedback that had been received.

The Chair thanked the Team Manager and noted the fantastic work of the Team, adding she was disappointed with the time taken to process asylum claims by the Home Office. She added she was pleased to hear about the UASC that had taken the opportunity to study at university, and securing employment after graduating, contributing positively to our economy and society.

The Chair asked what happened to those who reached 25 years old, without having asylum granted by the Home Office. The Team Leader noted that Local Authorities supported care experienced young people / care leavers up to the age of 25, so this support would continue. He noted that if the Home Office decision was to deny asylum, there was an appeals process. He added that it would be hoped that a UASC would not get to the age of 25 before an asylum decision had been made, and noted the processes, including looking to engage Human Rights experts.

Councillor J Clark noted the point raised under the previous item, where care experienced young people often had to repeat their stories, noting that must be especially difficult for those UASC who may have experienced trauma, especially if there were language barriers. She asked what was in place to assist UASC in terms of lessening the need for them to repeat their story, so

that professionals already had the information to hand. The Team Manager noted UASC were allocated a social worker, and they were advocates for those young people. He added they were highly skilled and had a number of tools alongside a multi-agency approach. Councillor J Clark applauded the range of activities that had been provided for the UASC and noted the fabulous work of the Team.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

8 Annual Health Update

The Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children and Children in Care NENC ICB, Karen Watson, presented the Annual Health Update (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children and Children in Care updated the Panel on issues relating to services the NENC ICB commissioning, with County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust providing medical services for care experience young people and those with a plan for adoption, with Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust providing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). She explained as regards the services that were commissioned by the Council's Public Health Team, with Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust 0-25 Service providing Review Health Assessments for Durham children living within the Local Authority boundary.

The Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children and Children in Care provided update information as regards the six local priority areas in relation to:

1. Improving access to a local dentist to increase compliance for dental health assessments for Children in Care in Durham.
2. Ensuring the needs of children from Durham who are living out of area and improving compliance of Out of Area (OOA) health assessments within statutory timeframes.
3. To understand the number of Children in Care accessing CAMHS services and to have assurance that their needs are fully met.
4. To increase the compliance of primary care GP information to inform Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) and Review Health Assessments (RHAs) - a digital solution to improve the quality of GP information is being redeveloped.
5. Every care experienced young person should be offered a health passport to understand their health history.
6. To ensure that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have access to services and support to meet their needs.

The Panel were informed of the 2024/25 priorities from the national perspective, in relation to work being undertaken around new NHS numbers for children who are adopted, and with the national group working with NHS England looking at NHS numbers for UASC, to help prevent duplicate NHS numbers. The Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children and Children in Care noted Durham priorities including CLASP development day; continued Health Partnership meeting; and focus on the Young Peoples priority 'Physical and Emotional Health – right person, right service, right time'. She noted that first steps would include: to consider any mapping of emotional wellbeing services; and to strengthening the notification process to health when young people come into care.

The Panel learned of the work of the ICB Children in Care Priority Group, noting the Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children and Children in Care was the lead for that workstream. Members noted areas of work included: benchmarking tools; dental recovery pathway; development of a Children in Care Dashboard; Care Leavers' Pathway for GPs; Digital Health Passport; Early Deaths of Care Experienced; and Children in Care Week.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

9 The Full Circle Annual Performance Report

The Panel received the Annual Performance Report of the Full Circle Service covering the period from April 2023 to March 2024 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Service Manager, Deb Loraine and Team Manager, Louise Woolfe explained that the Full Circle Service provided therapeutic input and supported trauma informed approaches to practice throughout Children's Services, as well as offering both post-adoption support utilising the Adoption and Special Guardianship Fund (ASGF), and traded services to other Local Authorities to become more financially sustainable longer term.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their presentation, noting the issues identified and the changes that were being made accordingly.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be noted.

10 Award Nominations

The Service Improvement Manager, R Harris noted that the Council had been nominated in two categories for the Children and Young People Now awards 2024. She noted that one was for “The Leaving Care Award” for the work in relation to the Next Venture Fund, the other nomination being for Luke specifically, in respect of the “The Children's Achievement Award”. She added the awards ceremony was to be held in London on 28 November. The Chair led the Panel in congratulating all involved as regards the nominations and wished them the best of luck for the day.

11 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 involved the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

12 Aycliffe Secure Centre Quarterly Update Report (including Regulation 44 Visits and School Update)

The Panel received a report and presentation of the Head of Early Help, Inclusion and Vulnerable Children presented by the Centre Manager, Ann Haigh and Deputy Head Teacher, Lee Mullaney from the Aycliffe Secure Centre.

They provided the quarterly update which included an update in relation to the school and an overview of Regulation 44 visits and regulatory body ratings of the Independent Children’s Residential Homes in which Durham children / young people are placed (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be noted.