

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 30 June 2017** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor H Smith (in the Chair)

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Carr, J Charlton, G Darkes, E Huntington, I Jewell, J Makepeace, O Milburn, A Reed, A Savory, E Scott, M Simmons and C Wilson

Other Members:

Councillor M Wilson

Also in attendance:

Kelsey Clayton (Legal Manager, Children and Adult Services), Carole Gill (Operations Manager, Looked After and Permanence), Ann Haigh (Deputy Centre Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre), Irene Lavelle (Strategic Lead for SEND, Standards, Improvements and Virtual School Head), Helen Mulhearn (Operations Director, Investing in Children), Carole Payne (Head of Children's Services), Andrea Petty (Strategic Manager), Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer, Partnerships and Community Engagement)

Prior to the commencement of the meeting attendees introduced themselves.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P Brookes, J Considine, P Crathorne and M McKeon.

Apologies for absence were received from officers, Karen Robb and Selwyn Morgans.

2. Substitute Members

Councillor M Wilson attended as substitute member for Councillor M McKeon.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

4. Corporate Parenting Panel Terms of Reference

The Senior Partnership Officer presented the Corporate Parenting Panel Terms of Reference (for copy see file). The terms of reference were agreed at the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting held on 24 April, therefore, the report was for information.

Members were informed that the terms of reference comprises of five functions which form part of Durham County Council's constitution. Details of how the functions will be delivered is provided under the responsibilities. The terms of reference have informed the Corporate Parenting Panel work programme.

Membership of the panel had been reduced to twenty-one members of the Council to align with scrutiny committees.

The terms of reference will be published on the Council's website.

The Head of Children's Services advised members that induction training was to be held on Friday 21st July, at 9.30 am, prior to the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting. All Corporate Parenting Panel members were requested to attend the training. The Head of Children's Services added that it was necessary to develop a number of sub-groups, a list of which would be circulated in due course. Members were asked to give some thought as to which of the sub-groups they would like to participate in.

In response to a question from a member as to whether the sub-groups would be covered at the training on 21st July, the Head of Children's Services replied that, the sub-groups would be covered in broad terms at the training, however, more detailed briefings would be arranged.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

5. Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme

The Senior Partnership Officer presented the Corporate Parenting Panel Work Programme (for copy see file).

At the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting held on 24 April 2017 members agreed areas for action for 2017/18. These were mapped into a work programme which was presented to members to consider whether any additional items should be included, and for agreement. The Senior Partnership Officer explained that the work programme will remain fluid in order to respond to feedback from members and to reflect changes in legislation.

Members were informed that the Children in Care Council facilitate and chair two Corporate Parenting Panel meetings per year and the first of these meetings will be held on 24 October. Members were encouraged to attend the meetings and notify the Senior Partnership Officer of their intentions.

Feedback from members suggested that the previous format of meetings which had been a balance of business and development items, had been successful and it was therefore intended to continue with this format in future.

A request was made by Irene Lavelle, Virtual School Head that some amendments be made to the work programme. It was suggested that the Virtual School Annual Report should be removed from the programme for the July meeting and placed on the programme for the September meeting, in order to capture exam result data.

An update on pupil premium could be presented to the July meeting. It was agreed that these amendments to the work programme would be made.

Resolved:

- a) That, subject to the amendments being made, the Corporate Parenting Panel work programme be agreed and that the Senior Partnership Officer would be notified of amendments or additional items to be considered for inclusion.
- b) That the work programme will remain flexible to accommodate any emerging issues.

6. Children in Care Council Updates

Update from the Children in Care Council

Helen Mulhearn, Operations Director, Investing in Children, provided an update on activities being carried out by the Children in Care Council including involvement in a key fund bid for which a fundraising event had been organised by young people, to be held at the Methodist Church, Durham in September. A group of young people had met with staff from the office of the Children's Commissioner for England, to share their views. Helen advised that a full report was available and it was agreed that the report would be circulated with the minutes.

Councillor C Wilson referred to a business in Peterlee which was very proactive in encouraging disadvantaged and autistic young people to gain work experience across a diverse range of employment. The young people had been taught skills such as upholstery and they were assisted and encouraged to attend work placements, with a view to gaining employment. Employers are encouraged to consider the young people's skills and abilities rather than solely how they perform at interview. Councillor Wilson agreed to pass the details to Helen Mulhearn.

Update on Care Leavers Challenge Action Plan

Carole Gill, Operations Manager, Looked After and Permanence, provided an update on progress against the issues identified by care leavers as part of the Care Leavers Challenge, which was presented to members at the meeting on 24 April 2017.

It was reported that a review of the provision of suitable housing had been carried out and care leavers had participated in this. Contracts with housing providers are being reviewed to provide more suitable, affordable housing for young people.

A great deal of work had been done in relation to mental health issues and actions included a mapping exercise to identify and localise services. There is strategic commitment to undertake work around the transition to adulthood and to share concerns with mental health services.

Work is taking place to extend the local offer, to make care leavers aware of what is available in their area, for example, leisure providers are being requested to improve access for care leavers, possibly through reduced gym membership fees. Work is also taking place to establish more job opportunities / apprenticeships for care leavers.

Transport costs have traditionally been a barrier for care leavers and transport providers were approached to see if a reduction in bus passes was available, however, this does not appear feasible due to the number of providers across the county.

To help address this, young people are being encouraged to access DurhamWorks which provides valuable support to vulnerable young people to enable them to access training and employment.

It was reported that there had been a 10% increase in the number of care leavers in employment, education and training (EET) aged under 18, and, an 11% increase in the number of young people in employment, education and training aged over 18.

The Operations Manager added that the achievements of care leavers are celebrated through the Epic Award which is held in October during Care Leavers' Week. In conclusion, the Operations Manager advised that the current Ofsted rating for care leavers is 'Good', however, the aim was to achieve an 'Outstanding' rating.

Councillor Milburn asked whether social housing providers continued to be involved in housing provision and the Head of Children's Services replied that the current contract is being reviewed and she added that work was ongoing with colleagues in the housing team and with the Family Intervention Project.

Councillor Milburn then asked how the apprenticeship offer by the Authority was progressing. The Head of Children's Services informed members that the Chief Executive had encouraged all services to offer apprenticeships to care leavers. There is currently one apprenticeship in Children's Services, three in Workforce Development and three within the Virtual School, one in administration and two learning support assistants.

Councillor Reed referred to Freedom Cards, saying how beneficial these had been and she expressed disappointment that the cards had only been available for a limited period. Helen Mulhearn of Investing in Children informed members that the restrictions on the Freedom Card have now been lifted and that all services were available. It was agreed that information on the Freedom Card should be recirculated to Local Authority foster carers.

Councillor Jewell commented that the overall objective is not only to provide assistance to care leavers but to ensure that care leavers have equal opportunities and to equip them with the skills which are essential to become independent young adults. Helen Mulhearn commented that the Drive project was a good example of such an initiative. The project provides one free driving lesson and the young person has to pay for the next lesson. This encourages money management and financial commitment from the young person.

Letter to Children and Families Minister

The Panel considered Cllr Brookes' letter to the Children and Families Minister dated 24 April regarding disadvantages for care leavers highlighted by the 'Care Leavers' Challenge'.

The letter was forwarded to Damian Hinds, Minister for Employment and the Panel was presented with a copy of his response dated 5 June 2017 (for copy of letters see file).

The response provided details of the financial support for care leavers through the benefits system. Members noted that one of the benefits, the exemption from Shared Accommodation Rate, gives care leavers claiming housing benefit exemption until 22 years of age, however, this did not go far enough as the Local Authority is required to provide support to care leavers up to the age of 25, when in education. A response to the ministers highlighting this is to be considered.

The Head of Children's Services informed the Panel that the Council offered a 100% exemption from Council Tax for care leavers living independently and a 50% exemption for a care leaver's family member with a care leaver living within their household.

7. 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 items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

8. Minutes

With amendments to the minutes to add Cllr Smith to the list of attendees, and to add Cllr Simmons to the list of apologies, the minutes of the meeting held on 24 April were confirmed as a correct record.

In response to Councillor Charlton referring to item 7, the Head of Children's Services agreed to check if that had been actioned.

9. Summary Report of Regulation 44 Visits

The Head of Children's Services presented the Summary Report of Regulation 44 Visits for April 2017 (for copy see file).

Resolved:

That the Regulation 44 Action Plans for 2017 be received.

At the request of the Chairman, the item on responsive repairs was considered as the next item of business.

10. Responsive Repairs

The Chairman informed the Panel that only one responsive repair was outstanding.

11. Young Person's Case Study

Carole Gill, Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence, displayed images of some outstanding artwork which had been produced by one of the Authority's looked after children.

Members were impressed at the high standard of work and commented that talent such as this should be encouraged through exhibitions and prize-giving. It was suggested that the young person's permission could be sought to display the art in one of the Council's buildings in the future. The panel agreed that a letter of congratulations should be sent to the young person.

Following on from this and a question from Councillor Reed, members were informed on the types of activities offered to young people in secure accommodation.

The Chairman agreed that, in order to keep members informed, the next item of business should be considered.

12. Any other business

Irene Lavelle, Strategic Lead for SEND, Standards, Improvements and Virtual School Head, presented the Looked After Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) report (for copy see file). The report provided details of the national legislation and inspection frameworks, the role of the virtual school in supporting looked after children with special educational needs and key areas for development.

In response to a question from Councillor Darkes members were advised as to how the number of looked after children in County Durham with special educational needs compared with the national figure.

Resolved:

That the report be received.