

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 29 September 2017** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Charlton, P Crathorne, G Darkes, I Jewell, M McKeon, J Makepeace, O Milburn, A Savory and M Simmons

Also in attendance:

Marie Baister (Looked After Nurse)
Kelsey Clayton (Legal Manager, Children and Adult Services)
Helen Fergusson (Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers)
Clive Horton (Deputy Head, Virtual School)
Selwyn Morgans (Manager, Aycliffe Secure Services)
Karen Robb (Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence)
Ellie Seed (Senior Project Worker, Children in Care Council)
Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer)

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Panel conveyed their best wishes to Councillor H Smith.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Considine, C Potts, G Richardson, H Smith and C Wilson.

2. Substitute Members

There were no substitute members in attendance.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

4. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The following updates were provided:

- The Senior Partnership Officer informed the Panel that the Regulation 44 visits with Panel members will commence in October. A further Regulation 44 training session had been arranged to take place on 31st October from 11.30am to 1.30pm at Aycliffe Secure Centre and members were encouraged to attend the training, if they had not already done so.

Councillor Charlton asked if the long-standing members who had previously completed Regulation 44 training were required to attend a further session and the Chairman responded that it would be good practice to attend the training as a refresher. However, if they are asked to attend a visit before completing a refresher session, they should attend the visit.

- The Senior Partnership Officer reported that work is ongoing to appoint the co-opted members.

5. Number of Looked After Children

Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence, delivered a powerpoint presentation on the number of looked after children in care and their characteristics (for copy see file of minutes).

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence, informed the Panel that the number of looked after children had significantly increased and the current figure stood at 804. Durham has more looked after children than neighbouring authorities and a 'deep dive' analysis is being carried out, the findings of which would be shared with the Panel in due course. The 5-9 and 10-15 year olds represent the majority of looked after children and 10-15 year olds are the group most likely to spend five years or more in the care system. The number of under 1s in care has increased with a number of families having more than one child placed in care.

The Chairman commented that it would be interesting to have further analysis of the age demographics and how these compare with neighbouring authorities. In response to a question from Councillor Darkes as to whether areas of the County have a greater number of looked after children, the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence responded that children living in the east of the County are more likely to enter the care system. The Chairman stated that a mapping exercise would be useful and the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence agreed, saying this would also help to inform the Service as to where resources should be targeted.

Councillor McKeon asked why children enter the care system. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence responded that a large number of new-borns are removed from families where older children have been removed due to safeguarding concerns. Most of the cases are due to parental neglect (often involving alcohol or drugs) and physical abuse. There are several reasons why older children enter the care system including behavioural problems and criminal behaviour.

6. Looked After Children Breakdown

Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence, delivered a powerpoint presentation on the types of care placements (for copy see file of minutes).

It was reported that a large number of looked after children are placed with in-house foster carers or with friends and family, however, the number of independent fostering agencies being used is increasing, due to the level of demand. The Chairman asked if the number of children in private children's homes correlated with the recent closure of some of the in-house provision.

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence replied that when the homes were closed, there were fewer looked after children; the figure at that time was approximately 600. Councillor Jewell asked whether it was possible to predict the direction of travel and the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence said this is difficult to predict, however, the figure had stood at approximately 800 for several months so it may have stabilised at that level.

The Chairman commented that it would be interesting to analyse whether austerity had led to the increase in the number of looked after children. The Legal Manager, Children and Adult Services, responded that the effects of austerity can be seen in the east of the County which has a greater number of looked after children than the more affluent parts of the County. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers added that there is work being undertaken on themes such as the amount of movement in communities and the effects of this on the care system, adding that the findings from this work will be shared with the Panel in the future.

7. Annual Report of the Fostering Service and Fostering Panels

The Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence, presented the Fostering Services and Fostering Panel Annual Report (for copy see file of minutes) and delivered a powerpoint presentation which provided an overview of the report. The Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence, outlined the strengths and challenges of the fostering service together with strategic responses.

Councillor Darkes requested further information on the Edge of Care Service. The Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence, informed the Panel that this is an innovative area of work involving agencies such as the police and therapeutic services, adding that further information will be brought to a future meeting.

Resolved:

That the annual report be received.

8. Annual Report of the Adoption Service and Adoption Panels

The Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence, presented the Adoption Service and Adoption Panel Annual Report (for copy see file of minutes) and delivered a powerpoint presentation which provided an overview of the Annual Report. It was reported that challenges included the increase in the number of looked after children, large sibling groups, and, a reduction in the number of people coming forward to adopt.

Councillor Jewell referred to recent national media coverage which reported some adopters having negative experiences, including a lack of support. The Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence, assured the Panel that the team in Durham comprises of highly experienced professionals who are dedicated to this complex area of social work.

Councillor Milburn asked about the ethnic composition of looked after children and the Strategic Manager replied that this is reflective of the population of County Durham.

Resolved:

That the annual report be received.

9. Children in Care Council update

Ellie Seed, Senior Project Worker, Children in Care Council (CICC), provided the Children in Care Council update. Ellie informed the Panel that the CICC had recently been involved in the following matters:

- Young People had delivered training for foster carers which had involved 19 foster carers and was very successful. Moving forward, the training will be delivered by young people every 2 months.
- The topic of recent Children in Care Council meetings had been independent living with some young people feeling better prepared for independent living than others. Ellie reported that this piece of work is ongoing.
- A small number of young people had recently reported negative experiences of entering the care system; further work will take place to gain young people's views and feedback on their experiences, which would then be discussed with social work teams.
- A successful fostering event was held for the under 10s, and further work will be undertaken to ascertain the views of these younger looked after children.
- A fundraising event was held at the Methodist Church in Durham, organised by young people, which raised £150.
- Links with the Regional CICC continue and young people will run a workshop at their national event on 3rd November.
- Two young people had been involved in refurbishing the Chester le Street contact centre and this had been a very positive experience. The young people would like to roll this work out to refurbish more contact centres, and they are asking for funding towards this, as there is a limited budget available.

Members discussed whether financial assistance could be provided to the CICC from their individual budgets to contribute towards refurbishing contact centres.

Officers agreed to investigate whether corporate funding would be available.

- The CICC host two Corporate Parenting Panel meetings per year and the next meeting is scheduled for Monday 24 October at 5.30 pm at the Methodist Church, North Road, Durham. The Chairman encouraged members to attend this meeting and the Senior Partnership Officer agreed to recirculate information on this to the Panel.

The Chairman agreed to consider the following additional items of business:

10. Any other business

a) MASH Visit

Councillor McKeon referred to a recent visit to the MASH centre (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and commented on how impressed she had been. Cllr McKeon explained that the MASH is made up of a range of professionals from different agencies who deal with various safeguarding issues. The Panel agreed that a visit to the centre would be useful and the Senior Partnership Officer agreed to arrange this visit.

b) Feedback from CPP Training Course – Westminster Briefing

The Chairman and Senior Partnership Officer had attended the Westminster Briefing course in London and agreed that the course materials would be circulated for information.

At the briefing, Durham was highlighted for two areas of good practice which were Council Tax and free bus passes.

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 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.

Marie Baister and Ellie Seed left the meeting.

12. Regulation 44 Visits Summary Report

The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers presented the Regulation 44 Visits action plans for July and August 2017. The report outlined the recommendations and associated actions following each Regulation 44 visit (for copy see file of minutes).

The Senior Partnership Officer advised that members will be paired for Regulation 44 visits and the details will be circulated as soon as possible.

Cllr Crathorne commented that if several members would be interested in attending a visit to Aycliffe Centre, it may be beneficial to arrange a group visit. Cllrs Darkes, Bennett and Makepeace expressed interest and the Senior Partnership Officer agreed to arrange this visit.

Resolved:

That the Regulation 44 action plans for July and August 2017 be received.

13. Update on Regulation 44 Visits Provider

It was reported that an options paper had been considered.

14. Responsive Repairs / Service Direct

The Chairman reported that there are no significant outstanding issues with regard to responsive repairs adding that a meeting is to be arranged at Service Direct.

15. Ofsted Update

The Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence delivered a powerpoint presentation on the findings of a recent Ofsted Inspection (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

16. Recruitment and Marketing of Foster Carers

A discussion took place on the approach to the recruitment and marketing of foster carers. Feedback from the discussion would be used to inform discussions with Communications and Marketing colleagues.