

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 15 December 2017** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, J Charlton, J Considine, G Darkes, E Huntington, M McKeon, O Milburn, A Reed, G Richardson, E Scott, M Simmons and H Smith

Co-opted Members:

R Edwards, W Taylor, J Wilson

Also in attendance:

Kelsey Clayton (Legal Manager, Children, Adults and Health)
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)
Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer)

Prior to the commencement of the formal business, the Panel welcomed new co-opted members, Rhiannon Edwards, Head Teacher of Woodham Burn Community School, and, Jak Wilson, representing young people.

The Chair congratulated Cath Heron, Team Manager, winner of the unsung hero category in the Great Staff Great Stuff Awards and the team at Aycliffe Secure Centre who were highly commended in the Team of the Year category.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from M Baister, Councillors P Crathorne, I Jewell, J Makepeace, A Savory and C Wilson.

2. Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 24 November 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported:

- Cllr Scott has been appointed as the Regulation 44 member aligned to the new home at Aycliffe Secure Centre.

- A link has been placed on the CiCC website which provides details of local Councillors.
- Consideration will be given to sending a message to all young people in the looked after system, notifying them of the local councillors in their area, and outlining their responsibilities as corporate parents.
- Members were asked to note that Investing in Children and the CiCC will deliver mentoring training on 30 January at 5 pm at County Hall. This has been added to the members' weekly diary sheet. The training will support members to understand how best to support any young people who may make contact.
- Jak Wilson has now joined the panel as a co-opted member, representing young people.
- Meetings of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the CiCC have been arranged for 17 April 2018 and 23 October 2018. Outlook invites have been sent to members and these events have been added to the members' weekly diary sheet.
- Members were asked to let Cllr McKeon know of any rotary and community groups that may be interested in participating in the fostering digital roadshow. Cllr Simmons commented that she will mention it to the groups she is involved with and J Wilson suggested that the Pact House at Stanley may be interested in the project.
- Cllrs Scott and Makepeace, and J Watson visited Aycliffe Centre on 1 December and the visit had been very informative.
- Meetings with Service Direct have been scheduled for the forthcoming year.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Number of Looked After Children

Helen Fergusson, Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, reported that the current number of looked after children was 783.

6. Analysis of the Rise in Looked After Children Numbers

The Chair welcomed Tom Gorman, Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager and Stephen Tracey, Research and Equalities Manager, who delivered a presentation which appraised members of analytical work into the increase in the number of looked after children in Durham. The presentation included information on the potential causes, comparison rates, national and local policy drivers and looked after children rates by deprivation decile (for copy of presentation see file of minutes).

In response to a question from Cllr Bainbridge, it was clarified that the figures in the presentation related to Durham children up to 18 years of age.

Cllr McKeon referred to the decrease in the number of looked after children in London and commented that it would be useful to have more information on why this is the case, and, it would be interesting to know whether young people in the deprived areas of London are more likely to access further education than those in the deprived areas of this region.

The Deputy Head of the Virtual School responded that there has been an increase in the funding in London and this has improved the situation there considerably. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers commented that figures only provide part of the picture and it is important to understand the primary needs at the point of care.

Councillor Darkes expressed concern that the ratio of looked after children is as high as 1 in 12 in some of the more deprived areas of the county adding that it would be useful to have more analysis as to the impact of mental health.

J Willson referred to the challenges facing young people who are preparing to leave care and he commented on how advantageous it is to have initiatives such as 'Stepping Stones' to assist young people with the transition.

The Chair asked if there is more data available as to how much of an impact the formalising of Regulation 24 placements and Ofsted results had on the figures. The Legal Manager for Children, Adults and Health, responded that other factors may have contributed, such as new guidance issued following a significant court case which requires local authorities intending to initiate care proceedings, to do so within within six weeks of a child being accommodated.

Councillor Smith suggested that it may be useful to link with the University in order to do some further analysis and the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers agreed to follow this up.

The Chair thanked the officers for their detailed presentation saying he would recommend to Cllr Potts that the presentation be delivered to the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved:

The Panel:

- i. Noted the content of the presentation.
- ii. Commented accordingly on the presentation.
- iii. Indicated if any further information or analysis was required.

7. Overview of Care Proceedings

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Kelsey Clayton, Legal Manager for Children, Adults and Health which explained the process followed when a decision to issue care proceedings is taken (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Chair thanked the Legal Manager for the presentation adding that the complex process inevitably leads to a great deal of work for the team. In the presentation, the Legal Manager referred to the lack of a family court in Durham, with staff being required to travel to family courts in Newcastle and Middlesbrough, adding time pressures to already busy workloads.

The Chair asked if there would be merit in the Panel assisting to lobby for a family court in Durham. The Legal Manager agreed to discuss this with the Head of Legal Services, but explained that the Ministry of Justice is subject to budget constraints which is leading to courts being closed.

Resolved:

The Panel noted the content of the presentation.

The Chair informed the Panel that the Children in Care Council update would be considered as the next item of business and the LGA packs would be discussed as the development item.

8. Children in Care Council (CiCC) Update

J Wilson provided the following update on recent activity by the Children in Care Council.

- Good feedback had been received following the AGM.
- Interview guidance is being prepared to assist young people with interviews.
- A survey is being developed for all children in care to gain their views on the Children in Care Council. A draft has been submitted to the Operations Manager for Looked After and Permanence, for approval, before going live.
- The younger members of the CiCC are being encouraged to become involved in the foster carer training in January.
- An informal meeting was held for the under 11's to gather their views, and the plan is to hold similar meetings every 3 to 4 months.
- With reference to the 'promise' to support looked after children, the feedback from the young people at the CiCC is that they are happy with the content, however they have requested that the wording is changed to be more child-friendly. Consideration is being given to developing a child-friendly/easy read version incorporating the young people's comments and feedback.
- Investing in Children and the Children in Care Council will deliver mentoring training on the subject of being a good corporate parent on 30 January 2018 between 5 and 7 pm at County Hall.

J Wilson concluded by thanking the Panel, saying how much he appreciated the opportunity to attend and participate in the meetings.

9. Local Government Resource Packs for Councillors

The Head of Looked after Children and Care Leavers presented the resource packs for Councillors in respect of Corporate Parenting and Support for Care Leavers (for copy see file of minutes). These resources provide guidance and outline members' responsibilities as Councillors of Durham County Council in supporting young people in the looked after system.

10. Development Item: Local Government Resource Packs

The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers delivered a presentation (for copy see file of minutes) and the Panel discussed the key lines of enquiry outlined in the corporate parenting resource pack.

Members were asked to reflect on the key lines of enquiry, and consider if there is any additional information they need to receive to be confident in knowing they are equipped to answer these questions.

A note was made of members' comments.

11. Any other business

J Wilson expressed disappointment that the DurhamWorks initiative is to cease. The Deputy Head of the Virtual School explained that European funding, used to set up the scheme will end in 2018. DurhamWorks is a partnership project between Durham County Council and organisations working together to support young people who are not in education, employment or training. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence informed the Panel that there is separate provision for care leavers, however, J Wilson was concerned that young people, who are not care leavers, would lose this valuable resource.

12. 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.

13. Regulation 44 visits: summary report (including responsive repairs)

The Panel noted a report of the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers which provided a summary of the latest Regulation 44 visit action plans and responsive repairs for November 2017 attached as Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 of the report (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the report be received.