

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 26 January 2018** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, H Bennett, J Carr, J Charlton, J Considine, G Darkes, J Grant, I Jewell, M McKeon, J Makepeace, C Potts, A Reed, G Richardson, A Savory, E Scott, M Simmons and H Smith

Co-opted Members:

W Taylor and J Wilson

Also in attendance:

Linda Bailey (Strategic Lead, Progression and Learning)
Kelsey Clayton (Legal Manager, Children, Adults and Health)
Helen Fergusson (Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers)
Ann Haigh (Deputy Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre)
Karen Robb (Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence)
Christine Stonehouse (Head of Virtual School)
Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer)

New Corporate Parenting Panel member Cllr Jude Grant was welcomed to the meeting. Cllr Grant has taken over from Cllr Huntington on the Panel.

The Chair explained the theme of the meeting was care leavers and he welcomed Trish Lambert, Senior Practitioner, Children and Young People's Services, and two care leavers who were in attendance to speak about their experience.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Crathorne, Milburn and Wilson and from M Baister and R Edwards.

2. Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 15 December 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported:

Item 3 - The Senior Partnership Officer encouraged members to attend the Investing in Children / CiCC mentoring training which was being held on Tuesday 30 January at County Hall at 5.00 pm.

Item 6 - Cllr Potts informed the Panel that the presentation delivered at the meeting on 15 December, analysing the rise in the number of looked after children, was presented to the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and this had been very well received.

Item 10 - The Senior Partnership Officer requested that members inform her if they require any additional information with regard to the key lines of enquiry contained in the Local Government Resource packs discussed at the meeting on 15 December.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Number of Looked After Children

The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers reported that the current number of looked after children was 771.

6. Care Leavers Update

The Panel considered a report of the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence which provided an update on care leavers. The Strategic Manager also delivered a presentation on the Local Offer for Care Leavers (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

A discussion took place on some of the issues highlighted in the report. Cllr McKeon asked if care leavers were provided with financial assistance in respect of the cost of driving lessons. Members were informed that the 'Drive' project contributes half the cost of driving lessons and young people are required to fund the remainder of the cost themselves. The fund also pays for a theory and a practical test. No assistance is available for the cost of car insurance. J Wilson commented that many care leavers struggle to find part time work and he added that more assistance would be welcomed, perhaps using incentive schemes.

Members asked what support is available to care leavers with regard to housing and transport. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence replied that the service has very good links with housing providers. Members suggested that taxi companies which are used regularly by the authority could be requested to offer reduced rates to care leavers. Members commented that there should be more consideration of care leavers with regard to housing development with smaller properties being provided. Councillor Darkes suggested that parish and town councils may be able to provide assistance to care leavers.

In response to a question from Councillor Scott, the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence informed members that the service currently supports 180 care leavers.

Councillor Makepeace requested clarification on the statutory duty for care leavers aged 18-25. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence replied that the authority has a statutory duty for care leavers up to the age of 25. The Panel noted that, to address the financial challenges faced by care leavers, Durham County Council offers 100% Council Tax exemption for care leavers living independently and 50% exemption for a care leaver's family member with a care leaver living within their household.

Resolved:

The Panel:

- i. Noted the content of the report and presentation;
- ii. Requested additional information required in relation to care leavers.

7. Education, Employment and Training Opportunities for Care Leavers

The Panel considered a report and presentation of the Strategic Manager for Progression and Learning which updated the Panel on the support available to care leavers to enable them to progress into education, employment and training (EET) (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Chair asked the care leavers if they would like to give their views on the EET opportunities available to them. The care leavers commented that some young people in the care system are hampered by barriers such as a lack of confidence and anxiety issues. They added that it would be useful if there were more opportunities to work on-line, from home, in order to ease themselves into working life. The Strategic Manager for Progression and Learning responded that DurhamWorks is aware of these issues and provision for this type of work is available.

Referring to the number of young people being supported, Cllr Charlton asked what the outcomes are for the 71 young people who are not being progressed through the DurhamWorks project. The Strategic Manager for Progression and Learning responded that assistance continues to be offered to those young people, however, a small number of young people choose not to engage.

The Chair asked what targets are being achieved with regard to EET. The Strategic Manager for Progression and Learning responded that the Cabinet endorsed the Opportunities for Every Care Leaver report which included targets to encourage more employment and apprenticeship opportunities.

Cllr McKeon asked about the long-term outcomes and whether there is evidence to show that young people are gaining employment after their training. The Strategic Manager for Progression and Learning replied that 95% of those young people supported through the scheme have gained employment.

The care leavers then spoke about their experience of the care system. The young people were complimentary about the support they had received from their Young Person's Adviser and their foster placement. They reported that they would have benefitted from more support with mental health issues.

The Head of Looked After Services and Care Leavers informed members that the Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services is establishing a group of senior officers and health service representatives to identify specific groups that are in need of mental health support and to ensure that the support is made available. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence informed the panel that the Full Circle Service provides emotional and psychological support. The Chair requested that regular updates be given to the Panel regarding the progress of the group.

The Chair then referred the Panel to the questions posed at the conclusion of the presentation on the Local Offer for Care Leavers and the Panel discussed these questions in small groups. A note was taken of the discussion.

Having heard the issues raised directly by the care leavers, the Panel requested the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers to write to the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board to raise the Corporate Parenting Panel's concerns regarding mental health issues.

Resolved:

- i. Noted the content of the report and presentation;
- ii. Requested any additional information required in relation to education, employment and training opportunities for Care Leavers.

Linda Bailey, Trish Lambert and the care leavers left the meeting.

8. Children in Care Council (CiCC) Update

J Wilson provided the following update:

- Training for foster carers had recently taken place.
- With reference to the 'promise' to support looked after children, this had been amended to make it more child-friendly.
- The CiCC is doing some work on updating the Looked After Guide.
- February 16 is National Care Day and to link in with this the CiCC is launching their Care Leavers Challenge. Members were invited to participate and those wishing to take part were asked to sign up by 5 February. The challenge takes place between 12 and 25 February and the challenge is to live like a care leaver with only £57.90 per week to live on. Information packs were made available at the end of the meeting.
- The CiCC is to planning to apply for Key Funding for £500 in respect of an activities budget.
- All members were invited to attend the mentoring training on 30 January at 5 pm at County Hall.

9. 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.

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

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

The Panel noted that all Regulation 44 visit actions had been completed and the Chair congratulated the residential services. Cllr Charlton pointed out that some of the action plans do not show the names of those members who attend the visits and the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers agreed to request that this information is included in the future.

With regard to the Regulation 44 inspectors and visitors, J Wilson commented that young people often find it difficult to speak openly to them as they are unfamiliar faces and he suggested that alternative communication methods are made available for the young people, for example, anonymous comments cards which are given to the inspectors. It was agreed that from April 2018, the new Regulation 44 visitors would produce a poster about themselves for display in the homes in order to familiarise themselves with the young people.

In relation to responsive repairs, the Chair informed the Panel that the next visit to Service Direct will take place in April.

Resolved:

That the Regulation 44 action plans and responsive repairs for December 2017 be noted.