

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 23 February 2018** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, J Carr, J Considine, P Crathorne, G Darkes, J Grant, I Jewell, M McKeon, J Makepeace, O Milburn, A Reed, G Richardson, E Scott, M Simmons, H Smith and C Wilson.

Co-opted Members:

R Edwards, W Taylor and J Wilson

Also in attendance:

Chris Bell (Operations Manager, Fostering and Adoption and the Full Circle)
Bayna Brown (Team Manager, Children and Young People's Services)
Kelsey Clayton (Legal Manager, Children, Adults and Health)
Helen Fergusson (Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers)
Tom Gorman (Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager)
Selwyn Morgans (Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre)
Ellie Seed (Children in Care Council)
Christine Stonehouse (Head of Virtual School)
Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer)

Observer: Karen Davison (Strategic Manager, Children and Young People's Services)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Charlton, Potts and Savory and from Marie Baister and Karen Robb (Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence).

2. Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 26 January 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported:

Item 3 – It was reported that the Children in Care Council mentoring training held on 30 January had been very well received with 10 Corporate Parenting Panel members and 4 non-CPP members in attendance.

Feedback has been provided to the Children in Care Council. Members thanked J Wilson and all of the young people who had been involved in the event, saying how enjoyable and enlightening the event had been.

Item 7 – Further to the presentation at the meeting held on 26 January, Linda Bailey, Strategic Lead for Progression and Learning, has agreed to provide further information to the Panel in relation to the outcomes for young people on completion of their training with DurhamWorks.

At the January meeting, the Panel raised concerns regarding mental health issues. The Senior Partnership Officer reported that Donna Sweet from Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust will attend the meeting in April to address concerns. Members were encouraged to provide the Senior Partnership Officer with any concerns and issues they would like to raise, by 28 March.

Item 8 – The Children in Care Council is involved in the refresh of the Looked After Guide.

Item 10 – It was reported that the Council's Commissioning Team will be taking over the Regulation 44 function from March. The new providers will attend the March meeting to provide an update and take questions from members.

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 779.

6. Corporate Parenting Panel Performance Framework

The Panel considered a report of Tom Gorman, Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager, which presented an overview of performance in relation to Looked After Children and Care Leavers (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager explained the draft performance management framework has been formulated using key lines of enquiry identified for looked after children and care leavers by the Local Government Association.

The Chair referred to one of the key lines of enquiry, which is whether members understand their role as corporate parents, saying this is difficult to quantify. He requested that the Panel consider how this could be measured, and provide feedback to the Senior Partnership Officer. J Wilson suggested that the Children in Care Council may be able to assist with evidencing this.

Cllr Considine commented that it would be useful to have more detail on some of the data, for example, a cost comparison of internal and external placements. Cllr Considine also referred to the number of children reported missing during the year and queried whether the figure stated in the report indicates that several young people have gone missing once, or, whether the figure is skewed by one or two young people who go missing on a regular basis.

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager informed the Panel that costs for external placements can be made available as the Scrutiny Team had undertaken some research on this previously.

Councillor Jewell asked if there is definition of the point at which a young person is officially classed as missing. Bayna Brown, Strategic Manager, responded that this varies according to the characteristics of the young person and every young person is risk assessed.

Councillor Scott referred to the amount of data in the report saying that although the level of detail is appreciated, it would be helpful if more explanation could be provided.

In response to a question from Cllr Makepeace, the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, responded that data on care leavers will be included in the performance framework.

Councillor Darkes commented on the number of Social Workers who have a high caseload and he asked what action is being taken to respond to the increasing demands. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers explained that there are a number of strategies to ensure a recruitment and retention programme is in place. These include the Social Work Academy which supports newly qualified Social Workers, and, Step up to Social Work, and, Frontline which is a nationally recognised programme to attract Social Worker graduates into Durham. The Chair referred to the Council meeting held on 24 January at which the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People provided a detailed response to a question as to the measures being undertaken by the Council to address the upward trend in children requiring support from the Authority.

In response to a question from Councillor Darkes, the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager informed members that copies of the 'strengths and difficulties' questionnaire referred to in the report were available. Councillor McKeon asked if there had been any similar exercise carried out for non-looked after children, in terms of how they see their emotional wellbeing. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers replied that there may be some data available on general trends. Officers suggested that this matter could be discussed with Donna Sweet, when she attends the meeting.

Referring to independent visitors, Cllr Crathorne asked if more information could be provided on their role. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, explained that this service is available to all looked after children, however, as most of these young people have a good support network, only a small number of looked after children currently access the Independent Visitor Service.

In response to a question from Councillor McKeon, the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers responded that authorities have a duty of care to inform other local authorities if they place a child in care within their area, and, whether or not the child is an unaccompanied asylum seeking child can be ascertained.

E Seed and J Wilson of the Children in Care Council referred to the report and observed that there are many other ways that young people in care have opportunities to express their views which are not captured in the report. Officers suggested that these examples could be captured in the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report.

Resolved:

The Panel:

- Noted the latest performance in relation to looked after children and care leavers in County Durham
- Identified any additional performance measures for inclusion in the Performance Management Framework (PMF)
- Consider ways to evidence of the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs), including those not monitored through the Corporate Parenting Panel's Performance Management Framework.

Tom Gorman, Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Manager left the meeting.

It was agreed that the Education Performance Report would be considered as the next item of business.

7. Education Performance Report Durham Virtual School for Looked After Children

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Christine Stonehouse, Head of the Virtual School, which provided an update on current educational performance for Durham Virtual School (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Cllr Darkes requested that future reports include a breakdown on performance, by gender.

Cllr Makepeace asked for information on how the targets are set. The Head of the Virtual School replied that the Fischer Family Trust targets are used, however, the individual young person is assessed and the targets are adjusted accordingly.

Resolved:

- That the report and presentation be noted.
- That any additional information required in relation to the report be requested.

8. Looked After Children Planning for Permanence: Fostering and Adoption

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Chris Bell, Operations Manager, Fostering and Adoption, which provided an update on the current activity and performance in relation to achieving permanence for Looked After Children including plans for service developments over the over the next 12 months (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Cllr Grant referred to the 73 children who are not yet matched with a permanent placement and asked how long they have been waiting to be matched. The Operations Manager replied that the reasons are very dynamic and he added that there is a national shortage of adopters.

Councillor Makepeace referred to the discussions at a previous meeting which sought to identify ways to increase the promotion of adoption and fostering. The Operations Manager responded that the service is currently working on the development of the fostering digital roadshow to be delivered through AAPs and other community settings and it is hoped that this will be launched to coincide with fostering fortnight in May.

Councillor Jewell referred to the office relocation and continuity around service development and the importance of ensuring the service is available throughout the County. The Operations Manager responded that a hub approach will be adopted, and new ways of working will be embraced, including the use of digital facilities when necessary and appropriate.

Resolved:

The Corporate Parenting Panel agreed to:

- The implementation of the Early Permanence Strategy to deliver a consistent service wide approach to Care Planning for children to remain at home with their families whenever possible and where children need to become looked after their plans are progressed in a timely manner to avoid drift and delay.
- To continue the targeted recruitment of both foster carers and adopters, based upon both the profiles of the children to ensure the provision meets the needs of the most difficult children. To improve effective senior management oversight of all cases where children are looked after to reduce drift and delay and that they achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity.
- To ensure a clear performance framework is developed to effectively report progress to CYPST and to Elected Members.

9. Children in Care Council (CiCC) Update

J Wilson provided the following update:

- There had been very positive feedback regarding the mentoring event on 30 January.
- The event for National Care Day on Friday 16 February had gone well with 51 people in attendance, including members of the Panel.
- The Boiler Rooms in Newcastle have agreed to host a display on 'Life in Care' and there are discussions as to whether this could be displayed at County Hall at a future date.

- Take-up of the Care Leaver challenge had been lower than expected, and, as a result, there are plans to repeat the challenge in October and it is hoped there will be more participation then. Details will be added to Members' diaries.

10. Development Item: Performance

The Performance Management report raised the following questions for Members to consider:

- What are the key messages coming from the performance report?
- Is there anything that we need to address / respond to immediately?
- Does the report give members the necessary information to respond to the key lines of enquiry?

The Panel discussed these questions in groups and a note was taken of the discussion. This will be fed back to the performance team.

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.

12. 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 January 2018 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

That the Regulation 44 action plans and responsive repairs for January 2018 be noted.

13. Any other business

Cllr Grant referred to the Care Matters White Paper which aims to improve support for children preparing for adulthood by enabling them to remain with foster carers beyond the age of 18. However, this 'Staying Put' arrangement does not apply to those young people who are in residential care. A campaign has been launched to give young people in residential care the same right as those in foster care. The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers responded that there is a similar initiative 'Staying Close' in Durham for young people in Residential Care which would enable those young people to live near to and retain links with their Children's Home. Bayna Brown, Strategic Manager, added that the Service is looking into the implications of this.