

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 25 May 2018** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, J Carr, P Crathorne, G Darkes, J Grant, M McKeon, C Potts, G Richardson, E Scott, M Simmons, H Smith and C Wilson

Co-opted Members:

M Baister, W Taylor

Also in attendance:

Helen Fergusson (Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers)

Kelsey Clayton (Legal Services Manager)

Clive Horton (Deputy Head, Virtual School)

Rob Johnson (Investing in Children - Children in Care Council)

Selwyn Morgans (Manager of Aycliffe Secure Centre)

Karen Robb (Strategic Manager, Looked After and Permanence)

Jayne Watson (Senior Partnership Officer)

Lisa Wood (Operations Manager)

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chair welcomed back co-opted member, M Baister. It was reported that co-opted member R Edwards has tendered her resignation owing to other commitments. A letter of thanks has been sent and a replacement school representative will be sought.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Charlton, Considine, Jewell, Makepeace, Reed and Savory, and, from officer Christine Stonehouse, Head of the Virtual School.

2. Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Friday 27 April 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Senior Partnership Officer advised that although most members have provided their profile details for the children's homes there are three members whose details are still outstanding and a further reminder will be sent.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Weekly Looked After Children Numbers

The Panel noted the report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, which provided the weekly looked after children figures by age group and length of time in care (for copy of report see file of minutes).

It was reported that the number of looked after children was 780.

Prior to the next item of business, the Chair explained that the theme for the meeting was accommodation and the Panel were asked to consider the relevant key lines of enquiry outlined in the Local Government Association (LGA) resource packs, which were presented to the Panel meeting in December. The work will link in with that undertaken by the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6. Placement of Looked After Children Out of Area

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence which provided details of looked after children placed out of the Local Authority boundary (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

In response to a question from the Chair, the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence replied that the decision to make a Special Guardianship Order is taken when it is recommended in the young person's Care Plan. The Cabinet has recently reviewed the Special Guardianship Policy to ensure that young people subject to Special Guardianship Orders have appropriate access to a wide range of services and support.

Cllr Darkes referred to the sixteen children who are placed out of county and he asked about the support they are provided with. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence replied that those young people are provided with the same level of service as those living within the county.

In response to a query from Cllr Grant, the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence clarified that the ten registered children's homes include Aycliffe Secure Unit as one home. Cllr Grant observed that, as over a quarter of looked after children are placed outside of the county, it would be useful to have more information on the costs of these placements. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence responded that, recently, there had been an increase in the use of private sector provision and this has led to consideration being given to increasing the in-house provision in the future. It was confirmed that all of this information will be included in the Sufficiency Strategy which will be presented to the Panel at a future meeting. The Chair added it is important to note that some young people are based outside of the county in order to cater for their specialist needs.

Cllr Richardson referred to a care leaver who had attended a previous meeting and he enquired as to whether the service is still in contact with the young person who at the time was planning to move out of the county. The Strategic Manager for Looked After

and Permanence confirmed that the relationship with the young person is ongoing and this will continue until the care leaver reaches the age of 25, if that is the wish of the young person.

In response to a query from Cllr McKeon as to how pupil premium plus applies to out of county placements, the Deputy Head of the Virtual School advised that the funding and level of support is the same, and is allocated in the same way.

7. Supporting Solutions – Edge of Care

The Panel considered a report and presentation of Lisa Wood, Operations Manager Supporting Solutions, which provided the Panel with information on activity and developments of the Supporting Solutions Service (SSS) (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes). The Operations Manager explained the service, which was launched in February 2018, is a new multi-disciplinary service working with young people aged 11-17 years to prevent them from entering the care of the local authority.

The Chair asked for clarification on the difference between family therapy and family group conferencing. The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence replied that these are very different methods of intervention with family group conferencing being a more formal meeting process whereas family therapy is a therapeutic response.

Cllr McKeon asked about the next steps for the Supporting Solutions Service which include forging links with the voluntary and community sector and referred to the remoteness of some of the villages within the county. Cllr McKeon pointed out that these families often have limited funds and a lack of transport which may prevent access to community services. The Operations Manager replied that this has been considered and co-ordinators link with the voluntary and community sectors within localities in order to provide individual support and remove these barriers.

Cllr Potts commended the work of the service which has assisted 61 young people of whom only 4 had entered the care system.

8. Accommodation Options for Care Leavers

The panel considered the report of Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence which outlined the current provision for emergency placements (for copy see file of minutes).

In response to a question from Cllr McKeon, the Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence informed the Panel that care leavers living independently are provided with a 100% Council Tax exemption and they are provided with assistance with housing costs, in addition to receiving housing benefit.

9. Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2017-2018

The Panel considered a report of the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers which presented the Annual Report for 2017-18 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Chair thanked the Senior Partnership Officer for the work undertaken to compile the report. The Senior Partnership Officer explained that in order to ensure the voice of the child was reflected in the report, young people from the Children in Care Council, with support from officers from Investing in Children, helped to develop the report in an easy to read, young person friendly format. Comments made at the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Children in Care Council held on 17 April fed into the areas for future work which were detailed in the report.

Resolved:

That the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2017-18 be agreed.

10. Fostering Digital Roadshow

The Panel viewed a short film produced for the fostering digital roadshow. The film was well received however members suggested that some improvements could be made to formatting issues such as the sound quality in places and the images of children where their faces have been obscured in order to protect their identity.

In response to a question from Rob Johnson of Investing in Children, the Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers replied that children of foster carers are given support to prepare for additional young people coming into their families, and are encouraged to be involved in the recruitment and training of foster carers.

Panel members suggested the film should be delivered to a Council meeting and that some of the foster carers that had attended the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting should be invited to present the film to Council.

The Panel suggested various different methods of delivery including through GP surgeries, Area Action Partnerships, a press release, and an advertising campaign through local media.

The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers said that a monitoring system would be put in place so that a record is retained of where the film has been shown and this information could be included in the next annual report.

The Senior Partnership Officer agreed to feedback the information regarding the formatting issues and to send the link to Panel members, when the film had been updated.

11. Children in Care Council Update

Rob Johnson from Investing in Children provided the following update:

- The CiCC has worked closely with the Corporate Parenting Panel to complete the Annual Report
- Work is being done with young people on their experience with foster carers
- 'The Promise' has been redesigned to take account of suggestions from young people
- Meetings have taken with place with Linda Bailey, Strategic Manager for Progression and Learning, to discuss apprenticeship opportunities.

- Discussion have been held on the methods and processes in place when children go missing from foster care to ascertain if any improvements could be made to reduce the time it takes to locate missing young persons.

The Strategic Manager for Looked After and Permanence added that officers have met with the Chief Executive to discuss apprenticeship opportunities. In particular, the Neighbourhoods Team, headed by Oliver Sherratt has been very helpful and proactive, offering young people a range of taster sessions.

The Head of Looked After Children and Care Leavers confirmed that figures for children who go missing from care are available, and, the Chair suggested that this is an issue that the Panel may wish to consider in more detail at a future meeting.

In response to a question from Cllr Carr, the Strategic Manger for Looked After and Permanence replied that there is a duty on Local Authorities to inform each other when locating a young person within the boundary of another Authority.

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 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 April 2018 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved:

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

14. Any other business

The Chair informed the Panel of a recent Ofsted Inspection which had been received in respect of a Children's Home. Officers were confident that the areas of concern can be addressed within a short timeframe.