

Durham County Council

At a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Panel** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Friday 28 September 2018** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor P Brookes in the Chair

Panel Members:

Councillors B Bainbridge, J Carr, J Considine, G Darkes, I Jewell, M McKeon, J Makepeace, O Milburn, C Potts, A Reed, E Scott, M Simmons and C Wilson

Co-opted Members:

N Harrison and W Taylor

Also in attendance:

Kelsey Clayton - Legal Services Manager

Lindsey Herring – Commissioning Policy and Planning Officer (presenting item 7)

Clive Horton – Deputy Head, Virtual School

Trish Lambert – Senior Practitioner

Laura Malone – Strategy Team Leader (presenting item 8)

Selwyn Morgans - Manager, Aycliffe Secure Centre

Karen Robb - Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence

Ellie Seed – Senior Project Worker, Investing in Children

Jayne Watson - Senior Partnership Officer

Observer:

Chris Baines, Head Teacher, Howden le Wear Primary School

The Chair welcomed care leavers and young people from the Children in Care Council who were in attendance to participate in the discussion on the care leavers' key lines of enquiry.

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, P Crathorne, J Grant, G Richardson, H Smith and from co-opted member M Baister. Officers Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care and Christine Stonehouse, Head of the Virtual School also submitted their apologies.

2. Substitute Members

No substitute members were in attendance.

3. Minutes

With the addition of Councillor M Simmons' name to the list of apologies received, the minutes of the meeting held on Friday 20 July 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The following matters arising were reported by the Senior Partnership Officer:

- **Item 3** – It was reported that the JTAI Inspection report into children living with domestic abuse was published on 24 August. The JTAI outcome letter can be found at the following link: <https://files.api.beta.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50015171>

Chris Baines, Head Teacher of Howden le Wear Primary School was welcomed to the meeting as an observer, with a view to joining the Panel as a co-opted member for primary education, replacing R.Edwards.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Weekly Looked After Children Numbers

Karen Robb, Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence presented the weekly looked after children numbers (for copy of report see file of minutes). It was reported that the number of looked after children at week ended 21 September was 824.

The Chair advised that the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report was presented to the full Council meeting on 19 September, and, during his presentation at that meeting, the Chair commented on the challenge posed by the increasing number of looked after children.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

6. Care Leavers Annual Report 2017-2018

The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence presented the Care Leavers' Annual Report and delivered a presentation (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

The Chair commented that it was pleasing to note that, following intervention from the Director of Children and Young People's Services, there is now a regional agreement that care leavers residing in the North East are exempt from Council Tax.

Councillor Jewell referred to the number of children in the care system with learning difficulties and asked what support is available to them when leaving care. The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence, replied that pathway planning begins at 15 years of age to ensure that levels of support are identified well in advance. The Deputy Head of the Virtual School, Clive Horton, informed the Panel that approximately one quarter of looked after children have education health plans and the same percentage have special education support plans, which is just below the national average.

A restructure of the Virtual School team means that there will be access to a wider team, with a new casework team linking the Virtual School with the special educational needs teams.

Councillor Makepeace asked for more information as to how care leavers are treated as a priority group. Trish Lambert, Senior Practitioner, replied that this is a similar process to when people identify as having a disability, therefore when care leavers meet the criteria for posts within the Council they are guaranteed an interview. As a result, a number of young people are currently employed by Service Direct.

Ellie Seed of Investing in Children added that one of the issues raised by the young people within the Children in Care Council (CiCC) is that young people in conventional families often benefit from being offered opportunities within family businesses and this opportunity is not available to children in care. The Chair responded that this has been considered by the Council, and, as a result the Council, as a corporate parent, is now actively assisting young people within the care system to gain employment and training with the Council, thus providing them with an opportunity to 'join the family business'.

Councillor Bainbridge asked how many of these young people have been employed by the Council over the past 12 months. Trish Lambert, Senior Practitioner, replied that 5 young people have secured a 12 months' contract and 2 young people have a 3 months' contract with Service Direct, and, approximately 8 young people have been provided with work experience through the 'Teenagers 2 Work' programme.

Councillor McKeon referred to problems of low paid, low quality apprenticeships and asked whether guidance is provided to young people in the care system about their choices. Ellie Seed of Investing in Children responded that the Children in Care Council is aware that this is an issue and guidance is provided to the young people on this and on the financial support available to them.

In response to a question in relation to the downward trend in the percentage of care leavers aged 17-21 years in education and employment and training, the Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence replied that in recent months there had been a lack of resources and an increase in the number of young people with complex needs. However, there is confidence that this will improve in the near future with new resources available at the Old Manse and Headley Court.

Councillor Scott advised that the Council is able to influence the planning process in an effort to increase the number of apprentices by including a clause in contracts which requires developers to employ apprentices.

The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence added that the Chief Executive, Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service are committed to providing opportunities for every care leaver in the 'family firm'. In addition to this, the Corporate Management Team have discussed the possibility of including a section in the implications appendix of all committee reports relating to care leavers which would ensure that implications for care leavers are considered. It was agreed that Cllr McKeon would raise this with Cllr Gunn, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

7. Quarter 1 2018/19 Performance

The Panel considered a report of the Corporate Equality and Strategy Manager and a presentation delivered by Laura Malone, Strategy Team Leader which provided an overview of performance for Quarter 1 (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Councillor Considine referred to the dip in performance on placement stability for the first quarter of the year and asked for an explanation. The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence explained that there had been several emergency placements, and when a young person comes into care in this way, rather than a planned way they automatically have two placements. A number of young people in long term care also have very complex specialist needs, particularly in relation to mental health. The Edge of Care provision is being introduced which should help with placement stability, and good progress has been made in the recruitment of foster carers, however, there is more work to be done.

Councillor McKeon asked if tracking information was available on the number of care leavers who become fathers. The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence replied that this issue has been discussed in the Care Leavers' Steering Group, however, tracking this type of information proves difficult. The Panel agreed that this is a matter that they would like to look at, in more detail, moving forward.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

8. Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2018-21 Objectives

The Panel considered a report and presentation delivered by Lindsey Herring, Commissioning, Planning and Policy Officer which provided a summary of the key findings and objectives outlined in the Sufficiency Strategy (for copy of report and presentation see file of minutes).

Councillor Potts confirmed that the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee plan to undertake a review of the accommodation available for looked after children in County Durham and it was agreed that it would be useful to involve the Commissioning team in this piece of work.

Cllr Jewell asked if budget constraints had impacted on the training provided for foster carers, and asked if some foster carers or adopters would be approved with additional training. The Strategic Manager for Looked After Children and Permanence advised that all foster carers including those from independent fostering agencies receive significant training, and have input into training sessions from young people from the CICC. She added that in January 2019 an update will be provided to the Corporate Parenting Panel on the establishment of a Regional Adoption Agency, which will work with the voluntary sector to increase capacity.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

9. Update from Investing in Children

The following update was provided by Investing in Children:

- Young people from the CiCC have provided the Virtual School with their views on personal education plans.
- Work is taking place with the voluntary sector on an arts project.
- A Fun Day will be held on 26 October at the Sjovoll Centre and members of the Corporate Parenting Panel have been invited to attend (members must sign up through the Eventbrite link). The day will include a recruitment drive for new members of the CiCC.
- Young people regularly assist in the training of foster carers and, at the most recent session, a group of young people facilitated the training, without any assistance from the adults. The session went very well and received excellent feedback.
- Young people have provided training for students at Newcastle University on the social work course.
- Young people attended a foster care consultation event.
- Care Leavers' Week takes place from 22 October. Corporate Parenting Panel members were encouraged to attend the joint meeting with the Children in Care Council which will be held on 23 October.
- To coincide with Care Leavers' Week, the Children in Care Council is hoping to install a display in the Durham Room about children in care.
- Members were encouraged to take part in the Care Leavers' Challenge during Care Leavers' Week. This requires participants to live on a budget of £57.90 a week, to raise awareness of the difficulties care leavers face on a daily basis.
- A big lottery application has been lodged for funding for a care leaver traineeship.

10. Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report 2017/18 and Young People's Annual Report 2017/18

The Panel noted the Durham Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Annual Report 2017/18 and the Young People's Annual Report 2017/18, for information (for copy of reports see file of minutes).

11. Any other business

The Chair reported that Framwellgate Moor Children's home was awarded a 'good' grading at a recent Ofsted inspection.

Selwyn Morgans, Manager of Aycliffe Secure Centre referred to the recent triennial inspection at the centre which focused on licensing regulations. He reported that the inspection was very positive with 'good' in all areas and an 'outstanding' in management and leadership. The Manager commented that this was testament to the hard work and dedication of the staff. Part of the inspection included political oversight and the Manager thanked the Corporate Parenting Panel for their role.

The Panel congratulated all those involved and it was agreed that letters of congratulations will be sent in due course.

The Panel then held a short discussion session with care leavers and young people from the Children in Care Council on the following key lines of enquiry for care leavers:

- How do we show children in our care that we have high aspirations for them?
- What do we know about our care leavers, both existing and coming up?
- What are care leavers telling us?
- How are we preparing care leavers to live independently?
- Are we being good corporate parents to care leavers?

A note was taken of the discussion.

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

The Panel noted the report of the Head of Children's Social Care which provided a summary of the Regulation 44 visit action plans and responsive repairs for July and August 2018 (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Resolved

That the report be noted.