

Corporate Parenting Panel

30 November 2018



Summary of Looked After Children Strategic Partnership

Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council

Purpose of report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to update the Corporate Parenting Panel with the work of the Looked After Children (LAC) Strategic Partnership. The group meets every two months and has met on six occasions to date.

Background

- 2 The LAC Strategic Partnership is a multi-agency group whose function is to collectively deliver services to children and young people in a way that is joined up and which support young people to make a successful transition to adulthood. The work recognises the unique circumstances of Looked After children and care leavers and strives to work closely with young people and ensure that their views inform the work of the partnership.
- 3 The group has a multi-agency work programme which in the last year has been focused on nine key milestones. This report is focused on the key actions agreed within this work programme.

Update on progress

Improve multi agency working to meet the wide range of needs of our Looked After Children and Care leavers

- 4 The LAC strategic partnership now has a multi-agency performance scorecard to enable progress to be tracked against key indicators. This is shared on a quarterly basis with the CPP.

Develop services which enable children and young people to remain at home with their families where it is safe to do so.

- 5 The Supporting Solutions Service went live in April 2018 and supports children and young people aged between 11-17 who are at risk of coming into the Looked After system. The service has supported 82 children and young people between April –September 2018. The service has seen very positive outcomes for young people and their families and to date 77 young people have remained at home in the care of their parents and only 5 young people have become Looked After. The feedback from young people and their

families is very positive. The service will complete a full evaluation after operating for one year and intends to report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well as the Corporate Parenting Panel.

- 6 Family Group Conferences are a key element of the support offered to families with a focus on supporting them to identify solutions and plans to keep children safe and living with their families. Between April –Sept 2018 the service delivered 80 meetings involving 134 children. Some of the key positive outcomes of this work were that 5 children returned to family from the looked after system; 76 children remained living in the care of their parents with support from extended family; and 15 children remained living with extended family members with additional support.
- 7 Funding has been secured from Adult Services to become part of a regional PAUSE programme and work with 16 mothers in the east of the county over the next eighteen months where the woman has had repeat pregnancies and had her children removed from her care. This pilot will start in November 2018. This follows a larger scoping exercise in 2017 which identified a large number of women who would benefit from this intensive support and intervention.
- 8 The service has opened a new provision for young people who need support out of hours in County Durham. The Supporting Solutions Services and Emergency Duty Team work out of these premises which has an emergency bed for young people as well as facilities to work directly with children and young people who need therapeutic intervention or support with life skills. The new premises opened in October 2018 and is a significant addition to our support services for young people in crisis out of hours.
- 9 There is a whole service implementation of the Signs of Safety approach to our practice with children and families. This model of working is being implemented throughout early help services, social work safeguarding services and Looked After services. It is also being rolled out across the LSCB to all partners. This is a two year project and a large number of social work staff have been trained to date. The work is managed through a project board and associated work streams.

Ensure there are enough high quality placements for our Looked After Children

- 10 The sufficiency strategy has been revised in June 2018 and shared with members of corporate parenting panel. There has been a focus on the recruitment of more foster carers and the recent campaign in September 2018 has generated significant interest. The full impact of this campaign will be reported at the end of the financial year.
- 11 The Local Authority continues to need to recruit more foster carers and this remains a strategic priority. There are children who need a permanent, 'forever family' as well as children with special needs; children who are part of sibling groups and teenagers for whom it can be difficult to find carers who

can meet their needs and the most recent campaign has focused on recruiting carers for these groups of children and young people.

- 12 There has been a recent campaign to attract adopters and again the impact of this will be reported at the end of the financial year. We currently have more children who need adoptive families than we have adoptive carers within Durham and have placed more children in inter agency placements in 2018/19 than has previously been the case.
- 13 We continue to need to develop provision and care arrangements to meet the needs of a small group of young people with very complex needs and who find it difficult to live in family placements or in group living and the service is currently exploring options for some provision for young people who need to live on their own due to their complex needs.
- 14 Proposals have been considered to replace one of the 4 bedded children's homes with a five bedded home in order to increase capacity and these plans are progressing currently.

Children are moved into their permanent placement as quickly as possible once their plan has been agreed

- 15 The permanence strategy has been revised and relaunched along with training and professional development opportunities for social workers to increase their knowledge about this important area of work.
- 16 Durham has worked closely with colleagues in North Yorkshire as our Partner in Practice to improve our practice around 'fostering to adopt' and the strategy has been revised and updated as a result. We currently have 6 of these arrangements with a potential of a further 6.

Durham County Council will develop a 'Local offer' for care leavers and provide them with the opportunity to have advice and support from a personal advisor until they are 25 years old

- 17 The information on the local offer for care leavers will be published by December 2018. Development work has been done with all key partners and all parts of the Local Authority to ensure that the offer to care leavers is as comprehensive as possible.
- 18 A wide range of apprenticeships and work experience opportunities have been offered to care leavers from colleagues, in Direct Services and Highways, for example.
- 19 Colleagues in transport services are working closely with the care leavers service in order to explore subsidised travel costs for care leavers and discussions.
- 20 Colleagues in HR ensure that all relevant job opportunities for care leavers are available to them.

- 21 Winter fuel allowances are now provided for eligible care leavers between the months of November –February.
- 22 An accredited Independent Living programme has been developed in order to prepare Looked After children and care leavers during the transition to adulthood.
- 23 An accommodation project team has been formed with DCC housing solutions to look at further developing accommodation options for young people such as taster flats, ‘staying close’ properties for young people who have lived within residential care and want to continue to access support from the staff within the homes as well as tenancies.

To develop alternative provision for care leavers who need support when moving into independent living arrangements

- 24 Colleagues in children’s social care and housing have developed new provision for 7 young people who are over 16 on a temporary basis with the provider, Changing Lives.
- 25 Plans to develop further provision and ‘crash pads’ for emergencies are under development and will open in early 2019.
- 26 There continue to be gaps in our provision for those young people with high and complex needs and work is ongoing with colleagues in commissioning to develop appropriate support and provision for this small cohort of young people.

Ensure the right services are in place to meet the health needs of our children and young people and complete a piece of work to ensure we understand these better

- 27 The health needs assessment for Looked After Children and care leavers was completed in October 2018 and has made a range of recommendations which are being worked through in the health sub group. The findings of this were reported in detail to the CPP in October 2018.
- 28 Work has been completed between children’s social care and health colleagues to ensure that all care leavers have access to their health histories from the age of 16 years through a ‘health passport’ that young people developed. This work is now embedded into practice.
- 29 Work to develop a holistic, patient centred pathway for children and young people to access mental health services and support has started. The pathway will develop a graded offer to young people based on need. The pathway will focus on key transition points to ensure that support is seamless as well as supporting young people moving into adulthood.
- 30 One of the key findings of the health needs assessment was the impact of social isolation on the emotional wellbeing of our care leavers and this will be

considered within this work. The sub group will review the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire, how this is used and what difference it makes for children and young people to ensure that it has maximum impact.

- 31 There is a review of the sexual health service and their offer to our looked after children and care leavers to ensure that it meets their needs.
- 32 This response to the recommendations in the Health Needs Assessment has just started following the completion of the health needs assessment and progress will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Panel in the next update report.

Ensure our children and young people have access to good education and support them to achieve their potential

- 33 The Virtual School sub group of the Corporate parenting panel reports separately on the work they do to ensure that Looked After Children have opportunities to access good education and achieve their potential. Education colleagues are a key part of the strategic partnership and this ensures that the work of the virtual school is joined up.

Work with children and young people to ensure that they have the opportunity to participate, give their views and be involved in service development and agreeing priorities for the service.

- 34 A new participation and engagement strategy is currently being developed for the council to clearly articulate how we will work with children and young people to ensure that they are central to the design and delivery of services and why this is important. This work will be circulated for consultation in the new year.
- 35 The Children in Care Council (CICC) re launched 'The Promise' of the local authority to looked after children and care leavers in October 2018.
- 36 A group of care leavers continue to meet with the chief executive several times a year and he is focused on supporting them through the offer of apprenticeships and work experience opportunities across the council.
- 37 The CICC developed and designed an information leaflet for all children who come into the looked after system and this has been shared with all foster carers; residential homes staff as well as all children and young people. The service will complete an audit to ensure that all children and young people have seen this and have access to a copy.
- 38 Based on the feedback from CICC and their request to think about ways to make the experience of coming into the Looked After system easier, the service is also working with CICC to develop foster carer profiles which can be shared with children and young people before they move. They include photos of the carers and their house as well as some information about who they are and what they are like to help prepare children and young people.

- 39 Children and young people told children's social care that they often did not understand their care plan and that they were written in a way that they did not understand. The CICC designed a new format which they felt was easier to understand and encouraged everyone to use straightforward language. This has been rolled out across the service and the new care plan has been designed into the new Liquid Logic case management system.
- 40 CICC routinely deliver training to all prospective foster carers.
- 41 CICC delivered a development session to the extended management team in the Local Authority in July 2018 which included the Chief Executive as well as all Directors and Heads of Service. The focus was on the importance of the corporate parenting role and explored the contribution that all parts of the council could make to supporting our children and young people. The feedback was excellent and the CICC have since been invited to meet with other teams within the council.
- 42 CICC delivered a development session with all team managers within children's services in October 2018 with a focus on the importance of listening to children and young people; ensuring they are involved in dialogue about developing service and support and shared their own personal stories about their experiences in the care of the local authority. The session was very powerful and the feedback from managers was excellent.
- 43 CICC told us that they did not like the rooms that they used when they had family time or contact with their relatives. They are working with elected members who have pledged funding and managers in the service to improve these to improve the spaces and ensure they are child and family friendly.

Recommendations

- 44 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to:
- (a) Note the work to date of the Looked After Children's Strategic Partnership and associated progress.
 - (b) Receive a further update in April 2019.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Note – this report is for information, all of the issues detailed below will be considered as part of service developments as necessary.

Finance – N/A

Staffing - N/A

Risk - N/A

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - N/A

Accommodation - N/A

Crime and Disorder - N/A

Human Rights - N/A

Consultation - N/A

Procurement - N/A

Disability Issues - N/A

Legal Implications – N/A