

SUPPORTIVE PARENTING PARTNERSHIP

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 16 October 2023 at 5.00pm in the
Conference Room, Sandhill Centre, Grindon Lane, Sunderland, SR3 4EN**

Present:

Members of the Board

Councillor Linda Williams (in the Chair)	Washington Central Ward
Councillor Margaret Crosby	Sandhill Ward
Councillor Logan Guy	Washington East Ward
Councillor Pat Smith	Silksworth Ward
Councillor Phil Tye	Silksworth Ward
Catherine Hearne	Non-Executive Director, Together for Children

All Supporting Officers

Tracy Jelfs	Head of Service for Cared for Children, TfC
Anita Swales	Acting Headteacher, Virtual School
Kimberley Richardson	Strategic Service Manager, TfC
Kathryn McCabe	Service Manager, Cared for Children
Carol Hamilton	Independent Reviewing Officer
Gillian Hammell-Purvis	Independent Reviewing Officer
Samantha Diston	CNTW
Dr Liz Christie	Sunderland and South Tyneside CYPS
Alexandra Bowey	Participation and Engagement Officer
Nikki Donaldson	Assistant Team Manager, Prevention Bus & HAF
Chantelle	Change Council
Caitlin	Change Council
Gillian Kelly	Democratic Services

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Jill Colbert and Jo Morgan.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

9. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

Change Council Update

The Change Council report had been submitted to the Partnership and was presented to Members by Chantelle and Caitlin.

The Change Council had continued to meet in their designated space and both the 10-15 and 16+ group were meeting fortnightly with a break for the summer period.

The Change Council continued to move forward regarding the production of short films to raise awareness and challenge the stigma in education for cared for young people. Unfortunately the project with Sunderland University had not worked out as hoped but it was hoped that the work could be developed with support from Blue Cabin.

Training workshops for Corporate Parents had been delivered to local councillors and three workshops would be taking place with Sunderland University staff. The group would like to extend this training to other organisations and were keen to have further opportunities to do this.

Two members of the Change Council had attended a regional residential trip in April with young people from other children in care councils. This was planned to be an annual event and it enabled young people from different areas to get to know each other better and to plan for the conference taking place later in the year. This event would take place in November and would be scaled back from the original plan which was disappointing but a full conference was to go ahead in the new year.

The Change Council had supported the press release on the Notice of Motion around making being care experienced a protected characteristic. The Change Council were unsure how this work was progressing and were keen to get involved in the process.

Change the Language training continued to be delivered to groups in the city and the Change Council would like to expand the reach of this training. It was also planned to work with Cozmic 3piphany and STARS to extend the campaign to cover SEND and LGBTQ+.

The Change Council had supported Foster Care Fortnight and had raised awareness for Mental Health with a video on Together for Children Youth Voice social media. The group had also looked at the creation of easy guides to different aspects of being cared for/care experienced to support other young people.

All of the Youth Voice groups were brought together for a Big Day Out at Moor House Adventure Centre; this was a great success and it was hoped to make this an annual event. Both groups had also attended summer trips at Go Ape and Kirkley Hall farm.

Change Council 16+ had been involved in recruitment and selection for the IRO team manager and IRO social workers and three members had also made their first Key Fund application for a BBQ for both groups.

A member of Change Council was lucky enough to be randomly drawn to receive tickets for the recent England match at the Stadium of Light and it was hoped that there would be more opportunities for this sort of thing in the future.

Coming up there was Children's Home Fortnight, the first meeting of the Change Council Mini and the Christmas Party on 15 December.

The planned work for November 2023 to January 2024 was as follows: -

- Drive forward the Change the Language campaign, including other groups.
- Corporate Parenting introduction training and support the development of the corporate parenting strategy
- Engage young people in enriching activities to celebrate their hard work and increase engagement
- Consult and involve more cared for and care experienced children and young people.
- Alex was to regularly drop in to Children's Homes and Support 2 Independence.

Catherine Hearne asked about the age range for the Change Council Mini and Alexandra Bowey explained that this was for 7- to 11-year-olds. It had been found that ten-year-olds were a bit young for the age group going up to 15 years so it was hoped that this would work better.

The Chair commented that a number of regional groups seemed to be making videos at the moment and queried if there had been any thought given to confidentiality in relation to these. Alexandra explained that the idea was for the video to be animated and a project to be taken on by the younger group.

The Chair went on to confirm that care experience was now a consideration in all Council policies.

Kathryn McCabe noted that due to the reduction in scale of the regional Children in Care Conference she was unable to attend but asked if there was anything which Together for Children officers could do to help. Nikki Donaldson said that unfortunately Sunderland did not lead on the regional conference and although the venue had been gifted for free by the University, it was still in session so the conference had to be scaled back. A full conference would take place at Easter.

The Chair thanked Chantelle and Caitlin for presenting the report and accordingly it was: -

10. RESOLVED that the Change Council update be noted.

CNTW Children and Young People's Cared for Pathway

Sam Diston and Dr Liz McManus were in attendance to talk about the cared for pathway in CNTW for children and young people.

There were designated staff for the pathway to ensure that cared for children were seen as quickly as possible and referrals were initially screened by a clinical lead when received. The social worker for a young person would then be approached to ensure that the CNTW had all of the correct information in relation to that young person and then would move to a clinician assessment which could also involve foster carers, social workers and children's home staff.

A programme of intervention with regular reviews would be established which would culminate in an aim being achieved or not being possible. It was quite often the case that a young person would not be able to undertake therapy at the time of referral and therefore the ultimate aim could not be achieved.

Dr Christie highlighted that following the initial assessment, intervention was based on the issues which were troubling the young person and there were a range of therapies available. The majority of work was face to face but there were increasing options for work which did not involve this.

Referrals were not required for therapeutic work in homes and Dr Christie noted that this enabled the team to keep an eye on waiting lists and undertake liaison with homes. She added that Louise Harrison supported social workers in permanence teams across all services looking after cared for children. Kathryn McCabe said that Louise was based at Sandhill and was accessible to social workers on the site and available for foster carers and kinship carers.

The Chair asked about the referral to intervention timescales and what happened when the pathway ended with 'aim not possible'.

Sam stated that wait for treatment for cared for young people was eight to nine weeks and Dr Christie explained that assessments could take some time. She went on to say that sometimes what a young person wanted or what professionals thought would be most helpful were not able to be achieved at the current time. Dr Christie felt that the process in itself should be therapeutic and mean that it was possible for someone to pick up the process in the future.

Councillor Crosby asked about young people transitioning out of CYPS to adult services and Dr Christie said that she would support a young person through a formal transition period between the age of 17 and a half and 18. Sam noted that the Trust had a transition policy in place and they did try to join up as it could be a bit of a cliff edge for a young person.

Catherine Hearne commented that Sam and Dr Christie had presented a positive view which was different to what was often heard; she asked what would make a difference to the service and Sam summarised this as more money, more resources and more qualified staff.

11. RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Update from the Virtual School – 2022/2023 Academic Year

Anita Swales delivered a presentation on the Virtual School for the 2022/2023 academic year.

The Virtual School cohort included young people from nursery age up to age 18 accessing 165 education and training providers over 30 local authority areas. 30% of cared for young people were educated outside of Sunderland.

Anita highlighted that the national average for attendance of cared for children was 92.5% and Sunderland's average was 91%, however primary attendance was above the national average at 96.5%.

The number of suspensions of cared for children in secondary education had increased, however this was in line with national patterns. The outcomes were good for Year 1 and Year 2 Phonics and attainment at Key Stage 2 was above where it had been the previous year; a lot of support was provided around Phonics and SATS in primary school.

GCSEs results were similar to the previous year and the national trend was back towards pre-Covid levels. A Pupil Premium grant had been received for post-16 for the first time and the funding had been used to increase staffing and provide a transition mentor and at the end of 2022/2023, 80% of post-16s were in education, employment or training.

There was a lot going on in the post-16 team, there were some concerns around a small number of young people who were unable or unwilling to engage and there was a lack of Social, Emotional and Mental Health provision in post-16. There were also a lack of opportunities for care experienced young people to undertake training and apprenticeships and there had been some discussions around 'Together for Children and Sunderland City Council being classed as a 'family business'.

Anita explained that most of the Virtual School's work including target setting and intelligence came through the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) and the team would strive for a quality document with robust targets. PEPs were all quality assured and were worked on all of the time to ensure that they made a difference for young people.

The Virtual School carried out a lot of training and networking activities and the whole school approach was supported which looked at adverse childhood experiences and the impact on learning. The Annual Conference would have a focus on inclusive practice in schools and promoting a culture of high aspirations.

Catherine Hearne asked about the thrive targets of 'Pupil Voice' for three members of Virtual School staff and Anita said that those particular members of staff had chosen that to promote, one in primary, one in secondary and one in post-16 provision. Staff had aims and objectives in Thrive Performance Management and would provide evidence of how they had done this which would be assessed by their line manager.

Councillor Tye asked who set the KPIs and how Sunderland compared with its statistical neighbours. He also queried what it would cost to extend the Virtual School to Early Help and Children in Need.

Anita commented that the Virtual School was challenged just over a year ago nationally with regard to this and had been asked to provide a strategic overview of children with a social worker and had been developing this work over the year. Work has been undertaken on raising awareness within schools and that adverse childhood experiences were not just about cared for children. The Virtual School cohort was currently 323 statutory school age children and the equivalent number with a social worker was in the thousands.

Tracy Jelfs noted that early intervention was bringing issues to the Virtual School's attention and has started to have an impact. Councillor Tye said that it was up to corporate parents to advocate for this.

Councillor Smith asked what was the Virtual School's biggest problem at the current time and Anita said that the challenge was in relation to young people where mainstream education was not the right environment. There were difficulties with special school places and alternative provisions such as the PRU were all full; the difficulty was in finding solutions for very complex young people.

Councillor Smith went on to say that it did not seem that this was something which the region had a handle on and Anita stated that it was a national issue which authorities were working together to resolve. Sunderland actually had a larger number of alternative places than other areas.

Councillor Guy advised that he was a Virtual School Governor and there had been some productive meetings on changes to the citywide skills agenda and also the nature of the 'family business'. Anita noted that the team were linking with other Virtual Schools who had that policy and the Chair highlighted that the Cabinet had also discussed this but it had to be well thought out and done properly.

The Chair added that funding was key and it was correct that there was a major crisis in relation to special school places and she asked how permanent exclusions were avoided. Anita stated that the Virtual School would work with other providers to look for appropriate provision for a young person and may support primary age children with a temporary Teaching Assistant. There were a raft of strategies which would be worked through to avoid permanent exclusions.

The Chair noted that 16 young people had very low attendance and was concerned about these children. Anita advised that these children were all in secondary provision, predominantly Key Stage 4 and refused to attend or engage.

12. RESOLVED that the update be noted.

Children's Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report

The Board received the Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Service for the period April 2022 and March 2023.

Carol Hamilton and Gillian Hammell-Purvis were in attendance to present the report and in doing so explained that there were 14 IROs in the team who had carried out 695 conferences in total which included 271 initial conferences and 412 review conferences. The team was passionate in ensuring the voice of the child was heard throughout all proceedings and utilised Mind of My Own for participation and views. Staff had undertaken a large amount of training and had strengthened practice with the Signs of Safety Model

Councillor Smith asked about the national review which had recommended the removal of the IRO role and Gillian explained that the review author had not felt that there was a lot of value in the role, however the Government had not supported the recommendation and felt that there was more value in strengthening the role instead.

Councillor Smith also noted that neglect was an ever-present Child Protection issue. She referred to the PREVENT training undertaken by IROs and queried if this was a significant problem. Tracy Jelfs said that there had been some issues and she could provide more information outside of the meeting.

In regard to unaccompanied asylum seekers, Anita reported that there were currently 29 and six were of statutory school age. Tracy added that there were more young people coming through the national transfer scheme.

Councillor Smith asked about the Liquid Logic system and how effective it was. Tracy acknowledged that it had not always been great but a lot more information had now gone into the system and it continued to be developed. It was an improvement on any other system which had been used in the past.

Councillor Crosby queried if delays in the legal service had impacted on any care proceedings and Gillian commented that workers have frontloaded the work done before court so that there was not a rush to get something listed at court. Tracy said that there had been no real problems but there had been some issues around workloads and availability of judges.

The Chair noted the positive comments in the report and asked about the issues with timeliness of reports. Gillian said that Children's Services had found that they were giving themselves shorter deadlines than other partners so it had been very difficult to meet targets.

13. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Work Programme 2023/2024

The Board were informed of the work programme for the municipal year 2023/2024 and forthcoming agenda items.

Councillor Tye asked if there could be something on a future agenda about the condition of children's homes and potentially supported accommodation. Kathryn suggested that registered managers could attend to provide an overview.

14. RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order) 2006

15. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it contained information relating to any individual or information which was likely to reveal the identity of an individual. (Local Government Act 1972, Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1 and 2).

Fostering Service Update

Members received an update report providing responses to questions raised at the previous meeting.

16. RESOLVED that the update be noted.

Foster with North East Project Overview

Members received an update on the pathfinder project which Together for Children was leading on behalf of 12 local authorities and was a campaign alongside a support hub to encourage foster carer recruitment.

17. RESOLVED that the update was noted.

(Signed) L WILLIAMS
Chair