

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 4 July 2016 in Committee Room 2,
Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30pm**

Part I

Present:

Members of the Board

Councillor L Farthing (in the Chair)	Washington South Ward
Councillor R Davison	Redhill Ward
Councillor B Francis	Fulwell Ward
Councillor L Lauchlan	Washington Central Ward
Councillor Marshall	Doxford Ward
Councillor L Scanlan	Millfield Ward
Councillor P Smith	Silksworth Ward
Councillor W Turton	Houghton Ward

Young People

Hannah Dixon
Loren Nergaard
Leighton Conlon
Billy Hardy
Kirk Hirst
Dylan Breeze
Blaine Richardson

Also in Attendance

Councillor P Gibson	Silksworth Ward
Councillor A Lawson	Shiney Row Ward
Councillor R Oliver	St Michael's Ward
Councillor MacKnight	Castle Ward
Councillor P Stewart	Redhill Ward
Councillor M Turton	Copt Hill Ward

All Supporting Officers

Alex Hopkins	Director of Children's Services
Debra Patterson	Director of Children's Social Care
Martin Birch	Head of Looked After Children
Dawn Shearsmith	Sunderland Virtual School
Jane Wheeler	Participation and Engagement Lead, People

Sheila Lough	Services
Sharon Willis	Strategic Service Manager
Jo Robinson	Acting Strategic Service Manager
Tracy Hassan	IRO Services Manager
Dave Laverick	Commissioning Lead, Children
	Senior Organisational Development
	Consultant
Louise Darby	Senior Communications Officer
Bryn Littleton	CREO Communications
Anne Brock	Safeguarding Children Lead Nurse and
	Designated Nurse LAC
Jen Younger	YMCA
Jennifer Bradshaw	Local Vicar
Gillian Kelly	Governance Services

Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Lawson declared an interest in item 7 'Update on Semi-Independent Homes and Supported Lodgings' as she was a Board member of Sunderland YMCA.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2016 be agreed as a correct record.

The Chair welcomed Alex Hopkins to the meeting. Alex had just taken up the post of Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive of Together for Children Sunderland and stated that he was looking forward to getting on with the job and felt that the future was looking positive for Children's Services in Sunderland.

Change Council Update

Hannah Dixon presented the report of the Change Council and drew the Board's attention to the changes which had been made in relation to pledges over recent months.

The £3 Challenge had been extended to the end of August and would also be discussed with the regional children in care council. The Chair noted that this challenge was proving difficult for elected Members who were perhaps not used to cooking for one but she encouraged all corporate parents to make a contribution to the challenge.

The Change Council had discussed re-instating a celebration event for looked after children in December as it had been a number of years since an event was held. Dawn Shearsmith highlighted that the Virtual School celebration event had been held on 30 July and social workers and schools had been asked to nominate young people who had done well and she was concerned that this message had not got through.

There were currently 12 members of the Change Council and letters had been sent to all young people in care or leaving care who were over 11 years old with the aim of creating two forums, one for young people in care and another for care leavers.

Blaine Richardson advised the Board that the Change Council continued to be involved with foster care recruitment and had been given the opportunity to look at some of the draft fostering campaign materials being developed by CREO.

Members of the Change Council had also been involved in the recruitment of the new Director of Children's Services and had enjoyed being part of this process. Three of the young people had been lucky enough to represent looked after children in Sunderland as young ambassadors for the Tall Ships Race and some other young people would be taking part in a tall ship voyage during July.

The group had created an A-Z guide for young people who came into care and these pocket-sized guides were circulated to the Board at the meeting. The Change Council had been working with other authorities in the North East to plan a conference which was to be known as 'When We're Ready' and would take place in September.

Councillor MacKnight congratulated the young people who were to be ambassadors for the Tall Ships Race and having thanked Hannah and Blaine for presenting the update, the Board: -

2. RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Pledge Update

- If you need to come into care, we will make sure that you are safe and properly cared for

This pledge was now owned by Kate Service, Leighton Conlon and Blaine Richardson, with Martin Birch and Councillor Paul Stewart acting as buddies for the pledge.

Councillor Stewart reported that he, Martin Birch and two young people from Colombo Road had initially concentrated on looking at leaving care provision. The initial impressions of the provision at the YMCA at Toward Road were not positive but changed once inside the accommodation and the group were impressed with the size of the rooms, the kitchen facilities and the courses available.

A visit had also been made to Centrepont and Councillor Stewart said that he was appalled that the provision would even be considered appropriate for care leavers; however Bell House, another Centrepont provision, was more positively received.

A care leavers consultation exercise had recently been undertaken and the results of this would be presented to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board. Councillor Stewart highlighted that the pledge owners had now changed and he would be meeting with the relevant young people in the near future.

The Chair of the Board advised that the Chief Executive of the YMCA had been in touch to issue an invitation to members of the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee to visit the provision for care leavers offered by the YMCA. Arrangements would be made for any interested members to visit the accommodation.

Following the presentation of the report, the Board had the opportunity to watch a DVD presentation on accommodation which had been made by some of the members of the Change Council.

3. RESOLVED that the Pledge Update be noted.

Recruitment Strategy – Adoption and Fostering

Bryn Littleton from CREO Communications delivered a presentation on the work which had been taking place to develop a creative identity for Fostering and Adoption.

Bryn outlined the starting point for the work and the need to increase the number of enquiries and the conversion rate from enquiries to successful applications to become foster carers or adopters. Generally it was found that open evenings were very popular and people felt reassured by seeing positive examples of fostering and adoption.

The Board were shown a number of potential images to be used for Fostering and Adoption creative campaigns. Members of the Board commented that they liked the action shots on the posters but were not as keen on the images of children holding placards. The Director of Children's Social Care highlighted that the number of non-white British children awaiting adoption or fostering was quite low and it was important not to over-represent these groups.

Reference was made to the statement that 'over 500 children' were living in care in Sunderland and Councillor Gibson asked how this compared to other local authorities. The Head of Looked After Children stated that 100 out of every 10,000 children in the city were looked after and this was at the upper end of the scale.

Board Members were asked to provide feedback to the Head of Looked After Children on the concept presentation for Fostering and Adoption recruitment.

4. RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

Update on Semi-Independent Homes and Supported Lodgings

The Acting Strategic Service Manager submitted a report providing Members with a service update on semi-independent homes and supported lodgings.

Sharon Willis, Acting Strategic Service Manager – Accommodation, advised that one of the recommendations of the Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services had been to 'ensure there was sufficient breadth and quality of placements to meet the need of children looked after and care leavers'. As part of working towards this recommendation, the Support 2 Independence Team had been expanded and restructured and a new provision at Elwin Terrace had opened on 21 June 2016 and would provide accommodation for up to four care leavers. Two young people were already living at Elwin Terrace and would be joined by a further young person later in the week and another would arrive the following week. The provision was being staffed by a combination of workers from existing provision for care leavers at Chester Road and Burlington Close and some from children's homes.

The Supported Lodgings scheme provided an opportunity for young people to become a lodger within someone's home and efforts were being made to expand the scheme, with the numbers of providers increasing from four in January 2016 to seven providers offering up to ten placements at the current time.

CREO Communications were preparing an advertisement for the scheme and it was important that Supported Lodgings was considered as an option, what it would mean for the provider and the young person and what it might look like.

Sharon advised that she chaired a weekly Allocations and Pathways Panel meeting for all providers of semi-independent provision within the city and this considered all referrals for accommodation through the Sunderland 'gateway', determined who would be the best provider and managed any potential disruption. This approach was working well and quick decisions were able to be made for young people.

Work was taking place with the Children's Commissioning Team to establish the service specification for Harbour View, a new semi-independent accommodation provided by Centrepont for up to nine young people.

Councillor MacKnight welcomed Sharon's report and commented that it was pleasing to see a more positive picture emerging.

Councillor Gibson asked about the contact with partners and Sharon stated that a new post had been established which would focus on access to housing and would work with partners to develop a trainer flats scheme. There were also a number of other potential providers to be considered moving forward.

Councillor Francis asked about the number of young people who may require semi-independent accommodation and also the skills which they would have on leaving care and moving into such provision. Sharon advised that there were a number of young people who were on a waiting list for 'staying put' with a foster carer and there were between four and five weekly gateway referrals.

Sharon went on to say that there was an agreed format for preparation for independence and there was a standard level to decide if young people were tenancy ready. Semi-independent provision was about preparing for full independence and this began in subtle ways from age 14. The Head of Looked After Children added that the preparation for independence work programme had been developed because it was discovered that young people were leaving care without the basic skills needed to start out on their own.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Strategy for Improving the Attainment of Looked After Children

The Virtual Headteacher submitted a report outlining the strategy for improving the attainment of looked after children.

Sunderland Virtual School aimed to promote the educational attainment, progression, achievement and welfare of looked after children and was committed to providing quality education for all looked after pupils based on equality of access, opportunity and outcomes.

Dawn Shearsmith advised that finding good and outstanding schools was prioritised for all looked after children and it was a challenge to maintain standards. The Virtual School also worked to maintain placements in order to prevent permanent exclusions and alternative learning provision was supported. Young people were always talked to about what they wanted and efforts were made to raise aspirations through visits to universities and open days for further and higher education.

The Head of Looked After Children highlighted that 56% of care leavers were classed by the Department for Education (DfE) as being in education, employment or training and although this had improved significantly from around 20% in the last 12 months, the figure needed to be nearer 80%. He advised that it had been agreed to work across services as a team to address this and services involved would include Next Steps, Connexions and the Virtual School.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Post 16 Care Leavers NEET Figures

The Virtual Headteacher submitted a report setting out the current position with regard to looked after young people over the age of 16 who were not in employment, education or training (NEET).

There were 62 eligible young people in Years 12 and 13 active in the Virtual School and of these, 13 were classified as NEET, representing 20% of the total figure. Of this number: -

- Four were or were about to become young mothers and did not wish to engage in education or training currently;

- One young person was awaiting a full psychological and cognitive assessment;
- Two young people were temporarily NEET and were enrolled on courses which did not start until September 2016;
- Two were about to become young fathers and wished to concentrate on this;
- One was about to return to the care of birth parents;
- Two were heavily involved with the Youth Offending Service and being encouraged to engage with wider professional support; and
- One had recently moved placement due to alleged abuse.

Dawn Shearsmith advised that the Post-16 Education Coordinator would meet young people of concern in Year 11 and would also meet their teachers and social workers and accompany them on visits to education and training providers. There was a variety of work done for young people both pre and post 16 and the Virtual School worked jointly with the Youth Offending Service, Next Steps and Connexions to provide practical support and information on opportunities including apprenticeships, training and education placements and Princes Trust opportunities with a range of providers. Work was also carried out with residential care home staff and foster carers to provide tailored education and support and with partners to develop a range of work experience and work opportunities for NEET looked after children.

Councillor Stewart commented that the breakdown of the young people classed as NEET was helpful but stated that this could give the impression that these young people were not receiving any input from the Virtual School. Dawn Shearsmith assured the Board that these young people still received a lot of support and were talked through their options. These young people remained a priority and every effort would be made to provide appropriate options for them.

The Director of Children's Services noted that the onus was on officers to be as creative as possible in the educational opportunities which were provided for young people to get them closer to being in education, employment or training.

7. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Regulation 44 Visits

The Quality Assurance Officer submitted a report detailing the outcomes of Regulation 44 visits which had taken place between October 2015 and May 2016.

From October 2015, the Quality Assurance Officer had taken on the role of the independent visitor carrying out the Regulation 44 monthly monitoring visits to the five children's homes in the city and elected Members were also involved in the visits. The visits looked at the nine Quality Standards: -

- Quality and Purpose of Care
- Children's Wishes and Views
- Education
- Enjoyment and Achievement
- Health and Wellbeing

- Positive Relationships
- Protection of Children
- Leadership and Management
- Care Planning

The report set out the key observations made under each of the standards and any recommendations which had been made as a result and Sharon Willis highlighted the update under the Enjoyment and Achievement Standards which showed how far things had come in this regard.

In relation to the Protection of Children Standards and the 'Missing from Care' records, all incidents were reported, even if this was a young person being half an hour late coming home. Workers erred on the side of caution with reporting but overall this showed a downward trend.

The number of Critical Incident Records was quite high and the service was working on a joint protocol with the Youth Offending Service and the Police and trying to find restorative ways of dealing with these incidents in-house. These were reported so there was a record but the majority of incidents were managed in-house.

Councillor Davison referred to the 175 recorded 'missing from care' episodes and queried how many individuals these related to. Sharon stated that she did not have the figures to hand but it was only a small cohort and some individuals may have ten recorded missing episodes each month. She said that the independent return interviews were now being dealt with more effectively and a more joined up approach was being taken.

Elected Members had been asked to support Regulation 44 visits in January 2016 and following this, two training sessions had been carried out and ten elected Members were now able to accompany the Quality Assurance Officer on the visits. In April, all of the homes had visits from elected Members and this was scheduled to take place twice a year.

The Chair requested that the Quality Assurance Officer send another email to all councillors inviting them to be involved as there were a number of new Members of the Council following the recent local elections. She also reminded Board members that they would need an up to date DBS in order to take part in the Regulation 44 visits.

Having considered the report, the Board: -

8. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the report be received and noted; and
- (ii) it be noted that Regulation 44 visit reports would be presented to the Board on a six monthly basis.

Annual Performance Report of the Adoption Service

The Head of Looked After Children submitted a report presenting an overview of the recently published adoption scorecard.

The adoption scorecard was based on three years of data and enabled the local authorities and adoption agencies to compare their performance. For Sunderland, the scorecard evidenced an improving picture but Members were cautioned that the data was not current due to a three year average being used.

The Head of Looked After Children indicated that the authority had identified some cases which had experienced delay and were prioritising care plans for these children. He stressed that the service did not want to give up on any children and would not focus on those who were seen as easier to adopt. Within the region, Sunderland's adoption service was seen as good and Ofsted had also found it to be good, but this had not been included within the outcome of the inspection of Children's safeguarding services.

Councillor Lawson commented that although it was important for children to be adopted as soon as possible, it was also vital that the right families were available. She noted that detail of unsuccessful adoptions was not usually provided but was pleased to see that after adoption support was available.

The Head of Looked After Children stated that he could provide information and unsuccessful adoptions but believed that there was possibly only one of these within the last 12 months and this was due to the thorough assessment process and support provided for adopters. Councillor Lawson said that she was encouraged to hear this. It was highlighted that an independent adoption agency would chair a disruption meeting following a placement breakdown and the lessons learned fed back to the service.

Councillor MacKnight referred to the 22 children who were considered 'hard to place' and were currently placed with adopters but not subject to an Order and asked if it was their age which made them hard to place. The Head of Looked After Children stated that the issue might not just be a child's age but in general there was a much longer time frame associated with adoption of children over the age of six.

Councillor MacKnight welcomed that the numbers of children waiting to be adopted had been reduced and asked if care plans were still being twin tracked. The Head of Looked After Children said that this was still the case and there had been success with the fostering to adopt process but this required a lot of planning ahead.

Following consideration of the report, it was: -

9. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

IRO Annual Report and Performance Update

Due to issues regarding the circulation of this report, it was agreed that it would be taken to the next meeting of the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee.

Update on Corporate Parenting Training

Dave Laverick, Senior Organisational Development Consultant, submitted a report setting out the proposed course content for an 'Introduction to Corporate Parenting' training course.

Dave advised that it was intended to young people's views on specific areas of the training and he had not been able to get this input as yet. It was proposed that the Introduction to Corporate Parenting training be arranged as a two hour session which would be very accessible to elected Members.

The Board were also made aware of 'In Your Shoes' training which was available as a three day course covering many aspects in which looked after children could be empowered and have their voices heard in decisions that affect them. There was also a two day course on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which provided an introduction to the history of Children's rights, legal rights and differences around the world.

It was noted that a three day course was a large commitment which many councillors would not be able fulfil but the Board welcomed the opportunity to attend bespoke, bite size training on the role of corporate parent.

10. RESOLVED that the information contained within the report be noted.

Commissioning Placements for Outcomes – Update on the Commissioning Strategy

The Commissioning Lead for Children submitted a report providing an update on the Commissioning Strategy and commissioning placements for outcomes.

Tracy Hassan advised that the responsibility for commissioning placements had been transferred to her service approximately a year ago and it had been found that there were not processes in place to ensure that the correct placements were available. In order to achieve better outcomes for young people in commissioning quality accommodation, the following had been produced: -

- A placements process with supporting documentation
- A sufficiency strategy
- An accommodation strategy
- An 'Other Arrangements and Suitable Accommodation' framework for un-regulated accommodation (working in partnership with the service area).

In the past, a lot of requests had been received as emergencies but the new processes enabled paperwork to be provided to social workers in advance which meant that better, lower cost placements could be achieved which were also closer to home. Monitoring arrangements were also in place and case studies showing the operation of the process could be provided for the Board if required.

Tracy also stated that the team was working closely with the Head of Looked After Children and Sharon Willis with regard to the development of Harbour View in order to provide a much better offer for young people.

With regard to the Sufficiency Strategy, the Head of Looked After Children advised that this should be finalised for the next Board meeting and the Director of Children's Services noted that this would answer questions about such matters as the flow of placements. In relation to costs, the Head of Looked After Children commented that best value was considered in identifying placements which best met the needs of young people at a reasonable cost and adopting this approach had led to external charges had being reduced by £2.2m.

11. RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted.

Health of Looked After Children

The Safeguarding Children Lead Nurse and the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children submitted a report providing an update on health activity for looked after children.

Anne Brock advised that the MALAP Health Sub-Group met on a bi-monthly basis to review and take forward health activity for looked after children. The Board were advised that local authorities were responsible for making sure that a health assessment of physical, emotional and mental health needs was carried out for every looked after child. Initial health assessments had to take place within 20 days of the child starting to be looked after and a review health assessment had to be carried out at least every six months before a child's fifth birthday and every 12 months after the age of five.

The compliance data showed that 66% of initial health assessments had been carried out within timescales and 68% of review health assessments. There were a number of reasons for this including late notifications from the local authority, some errors from the health team, some young people failing to attend appointments and some young people being placed out of the area and not seen by an outside trust within timescales.

A dedicated Looked After Children nurse was due to come into post in October and it was anticipated that they would visit young people in placement, which would result in improved out of area compliance, and it was also hoped that they would be able to offer evening and weekend appointments.

An audit of health assessments was undertaken in March 2016 and this had highlighted the need to monitor the quality and usefulness of the assessments for looked after children.

Councillor Davison commented that there was not a lot of information about the mental health side of the assessment and she would welcome a report about that area specifically. Anne stated that she would be meeting with the CCG commissioner to discuss this area and would look at pulling together this information. The Chair welcomed the appointment of a nurse for looked after children and felt that the offer of appointments at evenings and weekends would be more appropriate for some children, especially if it avoided the embarrassment of being taken out of school for health appointments.

Having thanked Anne for her report, it was: -

12. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the content of the report be noted; and
- (ii) it be noted that the LAC Health Team would continue to support the local authority with the improvement plan in respect of looked after children.

(Signed) L FARTHING
Chair