

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 17 January 2022 at 5.30pm in the
Main Hall, Bunny Hill Centre, Hylton Lane, SR5 4BW**

Present:

Members of the Board

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| Councillor L Farthing (in the Chair) | Washington South Ward |
| Councillor C Burnicle | St Chad's Ward |
| Councillor M Crosby | Sandhill Ward |
| Councillor J McKeith | St Peter's Ward |
| Councillor P Smith | Silksworth Ward |
| Catherine Hearne | Non-Exec Director, Together for Children |

All Supporting Officers

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| Jill Colbert | Chief Executive, TfC |
| Linda Mason | Headteacher, Virtual School |
| Tracy Jelfs | Head of Service for Cared for Children, TfC |
| Kathryn McCabe | Service Manager, Cared for Children, TfC |
| Nikki Donaldson | Participation and Engagement Officer |
| Ian | Change Council |
| Jessica | Change Council |
| Jo Morgan | Designated Nurse Looked After Children |
| Gillian Kelly | Governance Services |

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Blackburn and Tye.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

16. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

Change Council Update

The Change Council report had been submitted to the Board and was presented to Members by Chantelle and Ian and Jessica.

The Change Council had continued to meet face to face in a secure venue and both the 10-15 and 16+ group were meeting fortnightly.

Unfortunately the Christmas Cared for and Care Experienced event had been cancelled, however children and young people had been able to collect a present, goody bag and food. Thank you cards were being sent to all organisations who had supported the Christmas event.

A Christmas quiz session had been held with both Change Council groups and senior leaders from Children's Social Care, Early Help and Commercial and Corporate Services. The young people had also had a meal at Luciano's followed by a trip to the pantomime at the Empire Theatre.

The Change Council had now moved into their own dedicated space at the Sandhill Centre and had held their first meeting of the new year on 5 January 2022 and had developed their plan of work for the next six months.

The planned work for January to June 2022 was as follows: -

- Drive forward the Change the Language campaign, including working groups and workshops
- Corporate Parenting induction training and support the development of the corporate parenting strategy
- Care Day 18 February 2022 – Plan to celebrate Care Day
- Foster Care Fortnight – Key project, plans to celebrate
- Children's Home Fortnight – Key project, plans to celebrate
- Recruitment and selection training for young people
- Engage young people in enriching activities to celebrate their hard work and increase engagement
- Aim to involve more cared for and care experienced children and young people.

The Chair asked how many young people were involved in the Change Council groups and Nikki said that there were 15 in the 16+ group and five in the younger group. New members were always being sought but there were different ways for young people to be involved if they did not want to be formal members of the Change Council.

The Chair thanked Ian and Jessica for presenting the report and accordingly it was: -

17. RESOLVED that the Change Council update be noted.

Health of Cared for Children

The Designated Nurse for Looked After Children submitted a report providing an update on health activity for cared for children.

The purpose of the report was to: -

- Demonstrate the duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of cared for children
- Assure the Corporate Parenting Board that support and health services to cared for children were provided without undue delay or geographical prejudice
- Demonstrate the aim of the Looked After Health team for sustained improvement in the health and wellbeing of cared for and cared experienced children
- Assure that the child's voice around health was included wherever possible
- Report on compliance with statutory targets from the Looked After Health Team for South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

The Board were advised that the health team had continued to offer face to face clinic appointments.

39 Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) had been carried out and there had been 90% compliance in the quarter. Three appointments were cancelled by carers and rearranged and one was cancelled as there was not consent and these accounted for the 10% seen outside the timeframe. Members were reminded that these health assessments had to be completed within 20 working days of a young person becoming cared for and this could be a very tight timeframe.

91% of Review Health Assessments had been completed within timescales and Jo advised that there was some ongoing work on raising the importance of attending appointments through training and carers drop-ins. The wording on appointment letters was also being amended.

In relation to Out of Area Health Assessments, 100% of IHAs had been completed in timescale, however there was no data available as yet for RHAs.

The Health Passport app was in development and would be shared with young people for their views. The health team had attended both Change Councils to seek young people's views on health assessments and telephone feedback was being gathered from young people following their assessments.

Catherine Hearne asked about the timescale for the development of the app and Jo stated that this was to be a regional app with a vast amount of information to be embedded into it. It was hoped that it would be ready in the next few months and once young people had something to look at, this would inform further development before the app went live.

Young people had been asked about dental appointments and it was found that 62% had been seen at the time of their health assessment, 18% were not due a check up and 20% were due but had not yet been seen.

The Chair queried how this issue could be resolved as it was important for corporate parents to do all they could to ensure young people were attending dental appointments. Jo advised that she had been meeting with Kathryn McCabe on this and dates were being entered on records so that the health team could follow up on dental matters. Scoping was also taking place regionally to look at dental pathways and potentially dentists who would prioritise cared for young people.

Kathryn added that texts had been sent to carers to share the message on the importance of dental appointments and asking that they got in touch with social workers if they experienced problems accessing dental care.

Jo reported that a grant had been received from the CCG for £30,000 and this had been passed over to help support the Christmas celebrations and boxes for independent living. She also shared an information leaflet which had been produced for carers to promote healthy eating habits in cared for young people.

Councillor Crosby asked if the Covid vaccine for 12-15 year olds was being promoted by the health team and Jo confirmed that they were providing an information leaflet for carers.

Having considered the report, it was: -

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

CNTW Cared For Children Report

This item was deferred until the next meeting. The Chair asked the Chief Executive to contact CNTW to ensure a representative could attend future meetings.

Virtual School – Headteacher’s Annual Report

Linda Mason, Headteacher of the Virtual School submitted the annual report of the Headteacher which provided an overview of the outcomes for cared for children during 2020/2021. The report utilised national, statistical neighbours and North East local authority comparable data and included rankings, trend arrows and RAG ratings.

The number of cared for children was slightly higher than the previous year, however the report set out the fluctuation in these numbers over the last ten years.

Achievement at Key Stages 2 and 4 were Key Performance Indicators and it was highlighted that at Key Stage 2, Sunderland generally performed better than the North East, its statistical neighbours and England in Reading, Writing and Maths and overall the trends were positive.

The Chair asked whether carers were supported with guided reading for cared for young people and Linda commented that this was usually picked up through the school process, however a paired reading programme had taken place in 2019 as

part of a research project with the University of Belfast. The results of this project were just coming through now and this would be fed into the work of the Virtual School.

The Chair felt that this was something which could be looked at, especially if a child had not had that support in their home environment.

Trends were positive in Key Stage 4 and an individual analysis had been carried out for each child so that there was a picture of their educational journey. Linda highlighted that Sunderland was in the third quartile for Progress 8 and the team would be looking at how PEPs could impact on this.

The Chair commented that a lot was heard about coaching in the light of the pandemic and asked if the children in the Virtual School received anything. Linda advised that catch up and intervention was picked up in PEPs and Jill Colbert stated that some schools had additional activity and the Covid recovery support was rolled out on a school by school basis. Catch up funding would be available for cared for children as well as the rest of the school population and Linda noted that schools were asked to identify which funding was being used for specific targets as part of the PEP.

There had been no permanent exclusions in the last academic year and the number of suspensions were declining. Attendance had been difficult to measure during the pandemic but had been closely monitored. Young people in Sunderland had attended well during the lockdown periods when compared to national figures.

The levels of special educational needs amongst the cared for population in Sunderland were higher than the national average but the numbers of Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) were much lower. Linda highlighted that she worked with schools so that young people could move through levels of the SEMH ranges towards an EHCP. She emphasised that heads of year, pastoral staff and SENCos should work with designated teachers and that some issues which were designated as behavioural were in fact social, emotional and mental health needs. She added that there were many requests for EHCPs at the end of year 6.

Turning to the performance in relation to EET and NEET, in the context of Covid many training providers had closed their doors and momentum had ceased and was difficult for young people to get re-engaged. Interim PEPs had been drawn up for young people who were not in education, employment or training and options had been kept available. Linda referred to the national apprenticeship scheme operated by Howden's and that care experienced young people had benefitted from this.

There was a good story in relation to higher education with 13 young people engaging in post 19 courses.

It was expected that PEPs would be completed for each young person once a term and compliance was at 97%. The average number of days to complete a PEP had stood at 17.6, down from around 40. 87% of PEPs had received a quality assurance rating of Green and the aspiration was for this to be above 90%.

The Ofsted category of schools being attended by cared for young people was improving year on year and the Governing Board of the Virtual School now had representation across all levels. It was hoped to get a young person from the Change Council on the Governing Board and discussions were ongoing to identify a carer representative for the Board. The Governing Board met six times a year, three full governor meetings and three support and challenge meetings for the Headteacher.

Having thanked Linda for the detailed report, it was: -

19. RESOLVED that the Virtual School – Headteacher’s Annual Report be noted.

Together for Children Adoption Service – 6 Monthly Report April – September 2021

The Board received a copy of the Together for Children Adoption Service Six Monthly Report covering 1 April to 30 September 2021.

Kathryn McCabe explained that the Adoption Service was producing six-monthly reports in order to mirror the timing of Ofsted reports and the report covered the first six months of the year and the regional adoption agency going live. Kathryn advised that from April to the end of December 2021, 23 adopters were approved and 25 children were matched, 18 of these with Together for Children adopters.

Targeted recruitment had been undertaken over the period and there had been 273 enquiries from April to September, compared to 155 during the same period in the previous year. The pandemic had meant that technology had come to the fore and Teams was being used for adoption information evenings.

The Adoption Team were now looking at conversion rates and widening audit activity. Work was also being undertaken to ensure consistency across the spokes of the regional adoption agency.

Councillor Crosby commented that she had found the true life stories on the website very moving. She asked if the location of the enquiries had been mapped and whether distance was an issue when considering a forever home.

Kathryn advised that Sunderland children did move all over the country but the team worked to ensure as smooth a journey as possible. Part of the matching process was around identity and normally the North East region would be looked at initially and then the search broadened out. Ultimately, it was about finding the family that was best placed to meet a child’s needs.

Councillor Burnicle queried if adopters who could take a sibling group would be prioritised so that children could be kept together. Kathryn said that the child’s social worker would specify their plan, including for siblings to be kept together, and it was about the best possible match. Transition was an interesting subject and the more preparation which could be done, the more enabled children would be. Jill added that

it was also important for children to live in communities where they saw themselves reflected.

The Chair noted that, if children were placed out of the Sunderland area, they may utilise technology to keep in touch with friends. Kathryn noted that the Adoption Team facilitated approximately 500 post box contacts at any one time.

20. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Corporate Parenting Strategy

Tracy Jelfs reported that the strategy was in the process of being re-drafted and the Board terms of reference were being reviewed. The training programme was being further developed and an update would be brought to the next meeting of the Board.

21. RESOLVED that the information be noted.

(Signed) L FARTHING
Chair

