

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 7 October 2019 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 C Marshall	Doxford Ward
Councillor J McKeith	St Peter's Ward

Other Councillors

Councillor D MacKnight	Castle Ward
Councillor L Williams	Washington Central Ward

All Supporting Officers

Jill Colbert	Chief Executive, TfC
Linda Mason	Head Teacher, Virtual School
Nikki Donaldson	Senior Youth Worker, TfC
Dylan Ritson	Change Council
Maurice Davis	Foster Carer
Stacy Hodgkinson	IRO Service, Together for Children
Gavin Taylor	IRO Service, Together for Children
Janet Thomson	NTW CYPS
Kelly Haslem	NTW CYPS
Dr Sarah Mills	Designated Doctor for Looked After Health
Gillian Kelly	Governance Services

In Attendance

James Harrison	Sunderland Echo
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Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Smith, Francis and N MacKnight, together with Kay Dixon and Martin Birch.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

10. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2019 be agreed as a correct record.

Change Council Update

Dylan presented the report of the Change Council and advised that the Young Achiever awards evening had been held on 1 July 2019 and ten young people had received an award.

A number of professionals from TfC, Gentoo, Health, Education and the Council had been invited to the Care Leavers lunch and cook book launch on 11 July 2019. All of the young people involved in the lunch had received a slow cooker and starter pack to recognise their hard work. The CCG had funded the packs and these would now be given to all young people who were moving into independent or semi-independent living from August 2019. Following the success of the lunch, two young people were interviewed for BBC Radio Newcastle to raise awareness of the limited budget which care leavers had for food and necessities.

A member of the Change Council had recently completed work experience with the Participation and Engagement Team and two members of the Council had been part of an arts exhibition, 'sixteen', which had travelled to different venues across the country. One member of the Change Council had also attended Washington Youth Council's open event which was raising awareness around the issues that children and young people faced in Washington.

The Participation and Engagement Team had started drop-in sessions at Next Steps, Grasswell House and Monument View children's homes for children looked after and young people to have more of a say. These sessions were informal and provided young people with a chance to raise any issues and have a say on the topics which the Change Council are currently working on. Drop-ins would soon be established at Revelstoke Road and Colombo Road children's homes.

Young people from Sunderland were working as part of the Regional Children in Care Council to plan the next regional conference. The event would be held at the Beacon of Light on 30 January 2020 with themes being Mental Health and post-18 support for care leavers.

Young people had suggested holding a 'get to know each other better' event following changes within the management of children's social care and this had become a 'speed networking' event with the opportunity for professionals to get to know the Change Council group better. The event was a huge success and feedback from young people and professional was extremely positive.

The older and younger members of the Change Council had decided that they would like to visit Alton Towers as a reward for all of their hard work and the away day had taken place on Sunday 15 September 2019.

The Change Council groups had been reviewing the 'Commitments' throughout the year to ensure that young people had the best possible outcomes. The younger group had been working on 'if you come into care, we will make sure that you are safe and properly cared for'. A survey had been developed for young people but unfortunately the response had not been great. Work had been undertaken with children's social care with a view to improving the response rate and results would be reviewed and fed back to the Senior Leadership Team and Corporate Parenting Board.

The involvement of children and young people in recruitment and selection was now embedded within children's social care and in the last few months young people had interviewed social workers and held their own panel for the recruitment of the last permanent service manager. Their observations were then fed back to the adult panel.

The Chair commented that she and Councillor Williams had attended the Regional Lead Members' event and Saul had been there to present the scorecard for Sunderland. There had been an area flagged as 'Red' and this was in relation to appropriate apprenticeships being achieved for children in care. It was the view that all young people leaving care should have access to apprenticeships and employment at the living wage. The other 'Red' item was the cost of transport and the Chair stated that she and Councillor Williams would work on that.

11. RESOLVED that the Change Council update be noted.

Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report 2018/2019

The Board received the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Service and Stacy Hodgkinson and Gavin Taylor were in attendance to highlight the main elements of the report.

The Independent Reviewing Service had a number of functions including the chairing of child protection conferences, reviewing and scrutinising care plans, undertaking foster carer reviews, carrying out regulation 44 visits to registered Children's Homes and undertaking the Designated Officer role.

The service was also committed to ensuring that the voice of the child was heard and given appropriate weight within care planning and would invite children and young people in for a pre-meeting prior to a child protection conference and would also undertake pre-looked after visits. The MOMO app was used for young people to be able to communicate about services and the more detailed Viewpoint questionnaire was also used to obtain feedback.

At of 31 March 2019, there were 486 children in the city who were subject to a child protection plan which was a reduction of 2.6% from March 2018. A total of 1,062 conference had taken place during the reporting year; 79% of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs) were held within timescale (15 days from the date of a strategy) and 94% of Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPCs) were within timescale.

The reasons for Conferences being held out of timescale were usually related to insufficient notice, non-attendance of a significant person or professional and incorrectly migrated data. Mid-way reviews were a contact between a Conference Chair and allocated social worker which focused on the progression of the child protection plan. 620 of these had taken place during the year and were an important tool to monitor and review progress. The main area of categorisation for child protection plans was neglect, followed by emotional abuse and 724 plans in total had ended during 2018/2019.

There were 602 children looked after in Sunderland on 31 March 2019 which was a decrease from 2018 of 16 children. 94% of Children Looked After Reviews were held within timescales and the young people had participated in 96% of the reviews. 1,048 Pre-Looked After Review Visits had taken place, an 11% increase on the previous year and 1,107 mid-way reviews had been held during the year.

The Board were advised that in April 2018, the process for raising practice issues was combined with Social Care into one 'Dispute Resolution Procedure' (DRP). There were 140 DRPs raised in relation to Child Protection with 137 in total being closed during the period. 133 of these were closed at Stage 1 and two were elevated to Stage 2 and to Stage 3. The most common themes for DRPs were in relation to lack of progress, lack of information for the conference and late social worker reports.

There were also 140 DRPs raised in relation to children looked after with the main issues raised being a breach or delay in a care plan. 147 DRPs were closed during the period; 126 at Stage 1 and three, 11 and seven at Stages 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

The Independent Reviewing Service had completed 205 Foster Carer Reviews during the period and 97% of these were within timescale.

The Service had received 25 positive practice comments in the last year and it was noted that the views of parents were collected in relation to conferences, with 80% saying that they had a positive experience. Where issues had been raised then the parents had the opportunity to discuss this with the Conference Chair.

Councillor Williams referred to the child protection plans which had ended during the period and asked what the usual timeframe was for a young person to be subject to a Child Protection Plan. Gavin Taylor stated ideally that the plan would be worked through within 12 months and concerns would be raised about any plan which had extended beyond two years. Where this had been the case, it was noted that there were extenuating circumstances which had led to the extension of the Child Protection Plan.

Councillor Williams also asked at what age children were able to speak for themselves at a Conference. Gavin commented that the IRO Service would look at what was the best way to support a child and each case was taken on an individual basis with guidance and procedures from Sunderland Safeguarding Children Board. Generally, children aged from ten onwards would speak for themselves at a Conference.

It was noted that a recent Conference using the Signs of Safety Model had been observed and found to be very effective. Jill Colbert added that a social worker had recently used MOMO for a two year old and there were some very talented staff who could do this and pull the child's voice through to the Conference.

Linda Mason said that some of the city's schools were very competent in getting the child's voice heard through Personal Education Plans (PEPs). Gavin highlighted that the Service's strength lay in the pre-meetings for children looked after reviews and visits were carried out for all children, including babies. The aim was to support everyone's voice and a lot of information was gathered from observation.

Councillor MacKnight acknowledged the positive feedback which had been given, however felt it would have been useful to review any complaints and what had been done about them. She also asked about the management of the Independent Reviewing Service.

Jill Colbert advised that complaints about the IRO Service were presented to the Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee as part of a general complaints report. The Independent Reviewing Service was part of Together for Children but had different directorship and management to Children's Social Care, giving a level of independence.

The Chair referred to the examples of positive practice and expressed the wish that teams used these to demonstrate good practice. She noted that the majority of issues which were raised with her by parents in the child protection system were around getting the agenda and minutes for meetings and she assumed that this was a business support issue.

Gavin explained that in all Child Protection Conferences, the agenda and threshold documents would be laid out with parents and the Conference Chair would meet parents half an hour before the start of the meeting. The move to Signs of Safety conferencing would alter the style of the minutes and would be a 'live' model with actions being agreed during the meeting.

Gavin went on to say that the Service had experienced reduced administration capacity due to sickness absence, which had impacted on the timeliness of minutes. More resources would be allocated to administration as part of the service restructure and it was aimed to reduce delays through this.

Councillor Davison made reference to the 'fluctuation in Social Care staffing arrangements' mentioned in the report and the impact this had on looked after reviews. Gavin said that when there were transitions and changeovers, sometimes

details could be lost but it was now the aim to plan for reviews at least two weeks before they were due to ensure that they were not overlooked.

Having thanked Stacy Hodgkinson and Gavin Taylor for their presentation of the report, it was: -

12. RESOLVED that the Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report be noted.

Health of Looked After Children

The Designated Doctor for Looked After Children submitted a report providing an update on health activity for looked after children.

There had been an average of 595 children looked after in quarter 2 which was a decrease from the previous quarter. Compliance with Initial Health Assessments (IHA) being carried out within 20 working days of a child being looked after was good with 92% of IHAs taking place within statutory timescales.

166 Review Health Assessments had been carried out and this was 97% compliance with timescales. The compliance for out of area health assessments currently stood at 50%, however one young person had had a number of placements and consequentially was not seen within timescale in July. The compliance information for September was not yet available so the figures did not represent the whole quarter.

Five Health passports had been issued during the quarter which represented 100% compliance. The Health Passport would be revised in line with improved joint working between the next steps and Looked After Health teams.

A new administrator had been recruited to the Looked After Health team and work to align the services between Sunderland and South Tyneside had commenced.

The report also referred to the Care Leavers cooking event and the funding from Sunderland CCG to provide necessities boxes of ingredients. A service review identifying the pathways of information sharing for Looked After Children and young people with special educational needs, learning disabilities and Education and Health Care Plans, had been completed.

The annual Quality Assurance audit for Looked After Health Assessments had been completed in July 2019 and analysis had confirmed that the quality of the assessments was good and the voice of the child was consistently captured. The full audit was attached to the report and highlighted areas for development including having birth parents in attendance at health assessments.

Councillor Williams highlighted the subject of immunisation, as it was quite topical at the present time, and asked if a child came into care without having been immunised, what approach would be taken to vaccinations. Dr Mills explained that whilst parental responsibility was retained by birth parents then medical

professionals would not go against parental wishes, however it was found that some education did help with this. Immunisation issues within the looked after population were no greater than those in the general population and although rates might be lower when a child came into care, these did improve over time.

The Chair asked if there were any issues with oral and dental health for children looked after and Dr Mills stated that documentation for registration with a dentist was requested and also information on whether they had attended in the last year. Foster carers were well versed with the procedure and although children were often not registered with a dentist when they came into care, this was soon rectified.

Having considered the report, it was: -

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

NTW Sunderland Looked After Children Data

The Board received a report from NTW for the period May to July 2019. There had been a decreasing number of referrals during the period. 18 young people were referred in May with two being discharged unseen, there were 14 referrals in June and nine in July with one and two being discharged unseen respectively. Of the total referrals during the period, three of these were categorised as Urgent.

The Chair presumed that there was some liaison in relation to referrals to ensure that appropriate information was passed on and asked whether there was a referral template. The Board were advised that there was both an online and paper based referral and Jill Colbert stated that there would be always be some challenges around the information provided and this was being picked up as part of the transformational work.

Janet Thomson said that work was taking place on a single point of access which would be key in making sure that partners were referring matters to the correct place. Kelly Haslem added that referrals were reviewed on a daily basis and that CYPS Intensive Community Treatment Service would respond to urgent referrals.

CYPS continued to focus on waiting times and a range of initiatives were in place with commissioners and providers to offer earlier appointments. The clinical psychology time which had been established in care homes continued to work well and the group based intervention sessions for foster carers had recently begun. The aim of these sessions was to provide foster carers with training on attachment and how to support the children they care for using attachment focused strategies. Foster carers would then move on to a consultation focus aimed at supporting them to put the techniques into practice.

The total CYPS caseload as of July 2019 was 2,389 of which 131 were children looked after, representing 5.5% of the total.

Jill Colbert advised that, with the help of Dr McManus, a therapeutic dog had been procured for Colombo Road care home. Councillor MacKnight highlighted that local councillors had also supported the initiative.

Councillor Williams commented that she had received feedback in relation to CYPS referrals, that no action would be taken on cases if a member of staff was off sick. Janet Thomson stated that cases should be picked up but if there were a number of vacancies in the service then this could be a challenge. Kelly added that if a clinician was off sick then the family would be given the option to have a new worker or to wait until the allocated worker returned. It was protocol to offer alternatives and there was a duty team available to deal with any queries.

With reference to the average waiting time of 18 weeks, Councillor Davison asked if there were any children looked after who had waited longer than this time for treatment. Kelly said that this was possible but it was hoped that moving forward, no child would have to wait that long. Janet confirmed that it was the intention to prioritise any children looked after who had waited over 18 weeks for treatment as part of the waiting time initiative.

Dr Mills commented that the Looked After Health Team were seeing more children and young people who were ready to access therapy and CYPS which was a positive development. Linda Mason said that some work was being carried out with children who had been adopted or were subject to a Special Guardianship Order so had a post-children looked after status. She queried whether these children may also be seen as priority cases and Kelly noted that this was looked at with staff and could be shared as the pathway was developed.

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

Virtual School Headteacher's Report

Linda Mason, Headteacher of the Virtual School submitted a report providing the Board with an update on some key indicators and developments since July 2019.

The current cohort of children looked after was 575 of which 371 were school age; 162 primary and 209 secondary. There were 111 pre-school age children looked after and 93 were post-16.

The staffing for the Virtual School was set out within the report and the Board were advised that the final elements of the proposed restructure would be concluded during the Autumn Term. The post of Deputy Head was to be advertised externally. The governance review had now been concluded and new Terms of Reference and Scheme of Delegation agreed.

Members were directed towards Table 4.1 which showed a breakdown of the children looked after of school age and highlighted that the number of EHCPs recorded for children looked after increased in years 9, 10 and 11 but Linda expressed her wish for earlier recognition of SEND in the Early Years.

67.7% of children looked after were in good or outstanding schools which was a slight decrease from the previous report. It was the ambition of the Virtual School and Together for Children to have all children looked after in nothing less than good or outstanding schools but this needed to be carefully assessed. The Virtual School looked very carefully at the support available in a certain school and would not automatically remove vulnerable children. There were also social and emotional considerations in each case and any changes would be in the best interest of the child. Children looked after would not be moved into provision which was inadequate or required improvement.

The Chair commented that there had been some recent publicity suggesting that the discipline regime of the school came before the needs of the child. Jill Colbert stated that two particular schools had experienced a difficult year for behaviour management and Early Help staff had been appointed and significant changes were already being seen. The School Improvement Service had also been engaged and Linda stated that schools would alert her quite quickly if there were issues.

Attendance so far this term was 92.6% and 74% of the children in the cohort had achieved above 90% attendance. Good attendance would be rewarded with a certificate. Four children had attendance of below 50%; these were known and tracked with monthly scrutiny. These children often had complex needs and were supported by a variety of services.

Dr Mills noted that if complex health needs were involved with the children who had attendance below 50%, then this was potentially something where the Looked After Health Team could join up with the Virtual School.

Turning to exclusion, it was reported that 52 children looked after had received a total of 246.5 days of fixed term exclusions and seven children had accumulated 90 days between them. There were no permanent exclusions for children looked after.

Councillor Davison asked if the exclusions were from any schools which were inadequate or required improvement and Linda undertook to check this.

The Chair referred to an LGA event which she had attended with Councillor Williams and there had been a session on children who had experienced trauma in the womb and how this could result in difficulty regulating behaviour. Linda noted that a good school and a good designated teacher should make staff aware of triggers.

The level of compliance with Personal Education Plans (PEPs) had been 92% but this currently stood at 62%. All schools would be using the electronic PEP this term and these were to be updated on a termly rather than six monthly basis. The EPEPs would be completed during the last two weeks of term and the compliance would increase significantly at this point.

The change in the timing of the EPEPs would fit better with the school processes and social workers were due to be trained on this before Christmas. There would always be a live PEP on Welfare Call and they had to be signed off as being of good quality by the Virtual School.

Initial unvalidated data showed that good progress has been against all key indicators and this would be presented as part of the Annual Report of the Virtual School in January 2020.

The Virtual School team had moved into their new accommodation at the old Springwell Dene School on 22 July 2019 and the staff were delighted with their new surroundings.

The report set out the key areas of focus for the next six months and Linda advised that she was due to present her development plan to the Governing Body the following day.

Having thanked Linda for her update, it was: -

15. RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Fostering Recruitment Update

The Director of Children's Social Care submitted a report updating the Board on recruitment activity within Together for Children Fostering Sunderland.

Following a comprehensive review and consultation period, a new Training, Support and Fee Scheme had been implemented on 1 April 2019 with a view to improving the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

In the year ending March 2019, Together for Children had approved six mainstream foster carers in total, in the current year to September 2019, seven mainstreams foster carers had been approved, showing a considerable increase in recruitment.

In relation to retention of carers, in the year 2018-2019 Together for Children had considered 21 resignations and two de-registrations. Up until the end of September 2019, seven resignations and two de-registrations had been considered which also demonstrated increased retention of carers.

The Chair noted that it was pleasing to see the positive progress being made and Jill stated that specific groups, such as younger people, had been targeted.

Councillor McKeith welcomed the positive recruitment figures and asked what had gone well this year to achieve this progress. Jill stated that this was probably based on the remodelling of fees and an increased level of training and support. Maurice Davis agreed that the changes to fees was a correct assumption as it was expecting a lot for people to give up work in order to take on a fostering role. He said that the training was excellent and carers were much more on board with this.

The Chair highlighted that foster caring was a profession and should be rewarded appropriately and also emphasised that skills needed to be supported by good training.

16. RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Provisional Work Programme 2019/2020

The Board received a report setting out the proposed work programme for the municipal year and were asked to consider any additional topics for discussion at a future meeting.

Linda Mason suggested that the Board might like to see an electronic PEP at a future meeting and possibly visit the new Virtual School premises.

17. RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

(Signed) L FARTHING
Chair

