

## **SUPPORTIVE PARENTING PARTNERSHIP**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 15 April 2024 at 5.00pm in the  
Conference Room, Sandhill Centre, Grindon Lane, Sunderland, SR3 4EN**

### **Present:**

#### **Members of the Board**

Councillor Linda Williams (Chair)	Cabinet Member, Children, Learning and Skills
Councillor Margaret Crosby	Sandhill Ward
Councillor Pat Smith	Silksworth Ward
Councillor Phil Tye	Silksworth Ward

#### **All Supporting Officers**

Jill Colbert	Chief Executive, Together for Children
Kathyn McCabe	Head of Service, Cared for Children and Provider Services
Kevin Brown	Strategic Programme Manager, TfC
Kim Richardson	Strategic Education Lead
Anita Swales	Headteacher, Virtual School
Alex Bowey	Participation and Engagement Manager
Caitlin	Change Council
Chantelle	Change Council
Gillian Kelly	Democratic Services

#### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Helen Monks and Jo McCarthy.

#### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **Minutes**

23. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2024 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 now had three groups; 16+, 12 – 15 and the Change Council Mini which was for young people aged 7 – 11.

The 12-15 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. Alex Bowey had met with Blue Cabin to discuss the project and they had quoted £10,000 for the work so a focus would be identifying the funds.

Subject to understanding the project specification from Blue Cabin, Anita Swales commented that the Virtual School may be able to offer some support. Alex highlighted that Blue Cabin did have some funding options but needed to know what this could be matched against. Councillor Tye suggested that Community Chest funding was also an option, or the VCS Alliance.

The Change Game workshop had been delivered at a Sunderland University staff event and also at the Regional Children in Care Council at their Let's Talk Change event in November. This was also being delivered for student teachers and there were two sessions arranged for Together for Children staff.

Two members of the Change Council had taken part in the Let's Talk Change event and it was highlighted that all professionals there had made a 'Pinky Promise' of something which they were going to do between the event and the main conference in April.

The 12-15 group had been looking at the creation of some easy guides around different aspects of being cared for and care experienced and had also been working on a proposal to increase the toiletry allowance in line with the cost of living.

Councillor Crosby asked how long the toiletry budget had been set at £10 a month and Jill Colbert said that some allowances were nationally advised and a review had been undertaken some time ago and Sunderland had come out quite well against other authorities. Kathryn McCabe added that there were some wider conversations taking place in homes in relation to pocket money.

Change Council 16+ had been involved in recruitment and selection for social workers, the Next Steps deputy head of service and children's home management teams. Efforts were made to involve as many young people as possible in recruitment processes.

Kathryn noted that there had been some discussions about how the processes worked and feedback was being gathered from HR. It could be very difficult to get times of day which worked for all involved and this was being picked up. Jill advised that a broader piece of work was being undertaken on the voice of children and young people and how they could have more involvement in issues which affected them.

The Chair asked if the young people involved in recruitment received the same information as everyone else and Chantelle confirmed that they would write their own interview questions, score the candidates and hand this in at the end of the process.

£500 had been awarded from the Key Fund to support Children's Home Fortnight and it was hoped to hold this event annually.

Change the Language was being expanded alongside Cozmic 3piphany and STARS to extend the campaign to cover SEND and LGBTQ+.

As mentioned earlier in the report, the Change Council Mini was up and running but there were only a small number of members. The Chair queried how the young people might be supported to engage with this and Anita Swales noted that there were some Virtual School pupils who were on school councils and she could ask the primary leads to promote the Change Council to these young people.

The Change Council had supported the planning for the Cared for Christmas Party and representatives had taken part in the Healthier Together consultation for a new NHS app for young people.

The North East Regional Children in Care Council had been nominated for a Coram Voice Amplify Collaboration Award and two Change Council members had represented Sunderland at the award ceremony in London.

Staff and young people were involved in the social media takeover to raise awareness of Care Day and representatives from all of the region's Children in Care Councils attended the regional Let's Talk Change Conference.

The planned work for the Spring/Summer was as follows: -

- Change Market event for National Care Experienced History Month April – Key Fund to apply for
- Change Game sessions – welcome to attend
- Invite Supportive Parenting Partnership to attend some sessions and meet other young people.
- Regional Let's Talk Change Conference 2024
- Children's Home Fortnight May – Key Fund to apply for and hopefully TfC match
- Continue to 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.
- Graffiti artwork
- Regional representatives to present at the Corporate Parenting Panel Chairs/Vice-Chairs conference

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

24. RESOLVED that the Change Council update be noted.

### **Virtual School Annual Report 2022/2023**

The Headteacher submitted the annual report of the Virtual School.

Anita Swales introduced the report and in doing so highlighted that the remit of the Virtual School had changed over the last three years to include the additional strategic

responsibility to 'Promote the Education of Children with a Social Worker' and would expand further in September 2024 to include children and young people in kinship care.

The vast majority of children within the remit of the Virtual School had experienced significant barriers to education as a result of adverse childhood experiences, trauma, most commonly abuse and neglect, and often had attachment disorders.

The Virtual School had been restructured in May 2022 to provide capacity to carry out additional and extended duties and Anita highlighted that each caseworker would look after approximately 60 children and young people. The Governing Board of the school met three times a year to support and challenge on areas of the school development plan.

A summary of the support provided to children and young people, colleagues and carers was included in the report and it was noted that this was constantly developing. This year, a grant of £1,000 had been disseminated to each school to raise awareness of adverse childhood experiences and with the extension of duties the Virtual School was trying to raise awareness and advocate for children with a social worker.

The Chair commented that relationships were very key and there could be some tension here, especially with the remit getting wider and wider. She was pleased to hear that the Governing Board did challenge the data and Jill added that the information went to the Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis.

Overall, there had been a total of 577 children and young people in the care of the Virtual School for some or all of the academic year 2022/2023 and the reportable cohort was 375, 41.6% of which was female and 58.4% male. 52% of the cohort either had an EHCP or were identified on the Special Educational Needs Register.

84% of the Virtual School cohort were in Good or Outstanding schools and compliance with Personal Educational Plans (PEPs) was above 97%. A total of 1,447 had been completed in the academic year and 94% were quality assured as good.

A new system had been introduced which had enabled an improved range of data requested including:

- Emotional health and wellbeing
- Progress since the last PEP
- Attitude to learning
- Conduct and engagement.

The data had been quite positive in terms of how young people were presenting; attitude to learning and overall progress was generally good.

In terms of attendance, the overall figure was above the national average for cared for children and Sunderland children had lower rates of suspension than the same regional and national cohorts, although the total numbers had risen. The Virtual School provided a considerable amount of support to avoid suspension and exclusions.

Outcomes in early years and for phonics in year 1 were good but results at the end of Key Stage 1 were down. Anita advised that staff had been recruited for early year tuition but also noted that these children had been 'Covid' babies and that mitigation was important.

Results at Key Stage 2 were similar to the national average and were quite positive at Key Stage 4.

Councillor Tye noted that 31.9% of children were taught outside of Sunderland and queried if there was data available for the Ofsted rating of those schools. Kim Richardson confirmed that it could be provided. He also asked whether the 0.8% of children in an inadequate rated school were outside of Sunderland and Anita explained that this represented two children in a specific school in the city.

Councillor went on to refer to suspensions which seemed to be increasing in all schools and Anita commented that this was a similar picture nationally, particularly as a result of persistent disruptive behaviour. The Virtual School was not complacent but would challenge where suspensions were given.

Anita advised that there had been a new structure for post-16 pathways since 2022 and the Transition Mentor focused on Year 11 pathway plans, particularly for those at risk of not accessing education, employment or training. This approach had paid dividends and at the end of the academic year, the number of 16–17-year-olds in education, employment or training was 80% of the cohort.

The Chair thanked Anita for the detailed report and accordingly it was: -

25. RESOLVED that the Virtual School Annual Report 2022/2023 be noted.

### **The DfE Reform Programme and Current and Future TfC Transformative Work**

Kevin Brown, Strategic Programme Manager, delivered a presentation to the Partnership and in doing so detailed the recent publications which had provided a catalyst and vision to transform children's social care. In February 2023, the DfE published 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' strategy and consultation which included a £45m commitment to establish the Families First for Children (FFCP) pathfinder programme which would design and test major reforms to children's services.

There would be four key reform strands to this pathfinder: -

- Overarching system reform and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASA)
- Family help
- Family networks
- Child protection.

Together for Children was involved in this transformative activity through programmes such as the Family Network pilot, Family Hubs, My Best Life and foster care recruitment and retention through 'Foster with the North East'.

Jill Colbert referred to the My Best Life single online location for families to access high quality up to date information, advice and guidance and noted that TfC had worked with the digital provider of Mind of My Own and had been able to develop My Best Life for a fraction of the price.

She highlighted that Family Hubs were designed to help to reach families before social care involvement and Kathryn McCabe added that the hubs were also being used to engage kinship carers.

Councillor Tye noted that Together for Children had already been on that transformation journey with early help and children's centres and the DfE was being slightly misleading to suggest that all of this work was new.

Jill advised Members that if the proposed reforms to the child protection system were to go ahead, then these would require significant changes to primary legislation. The current Government remained highly committed to these reforms. She agreed that what was being asked for nationally, was already happening locally. There were some good, small projects being developed and it was intended to bring relevant updates through to Members where possible.

26. RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

### **Work Programme 2024/2025**

The Board were informed of the work programme for the municipal year 2024/2025 and forthcoming agenda items.

27. RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

### **Councillor Pat Smith**

Prior to the close of the meeting, the Chair paid tribute to Councillor Pat Smith who was stepping down from the Council at the local elections in May. She thanked Councillor Smith for being a fabulous advocate for children and young people during her 25 years as a councillor and expressed her appreciation for the time and commitment which Councillor Smith had given to improving the lives of children and young people in Sunderland.

(Signed) L WILLIAMS  
Chair