

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 28 June 2021 at 4.00pm in the Council Chamber, Sunderland Civic Centre

Present:

Members of the Board

Councillor L Farthing (in the Chair)	Washington South Ward
Councillor J Blackburn	Hetton 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
Councillor P Tye	Silksworth Ward
Catherine Hearne	Non-Exec Director, Together for Children

All Supporting Officers

Linda Mason	Headteacher, Virtual School
Wendy Coghlan	Participation and Engagement and Anti-Bullying Team Manager
Nikki Donaldson	Participation and Engagement Officer
Michael O'Brien	Change Council
Jo Morgan	Designated Nurse Looked After Children
Gillian Kelly	Governance Services

In Attendance

Chris Binding	Sunderland Echo
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Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Jill Colbert, Gavin Taylor and Keith Munro.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held remotely on 19 April 2021 be agreed as a correct record.

The Chair referred to the six themes which had been identified by the Regional Children in Care Council and suggested that the Corporate Parenting Board might like to consider one or two of the themes as discussion topics at future Board meetings.

In relation to a question which had been asked about oral health, Jo Morgan advised that 86% of young people known to the looked after health team had been seen by a dentist. If young people were being refused registration then this would be looked at on a case by case basis.

Linda Mason responded to a query raised in the Minutes about the young people accessing early years provision and stated that 57 out of 63 children looked after attended Early Years and the ones who did not tended to be two years old.

Councillor Smith referred to her enquiry about Regulation 44 visits and the Chair commented that it was unlikely that any progress would be made until after Covid regulations were lifted.

Change Council Update

The new format of the Change Council report was tabled for the Board and was presented to Members by Michael. The revised format was based on the Signs of Safety model.

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

Together for Children staff had begun to 'change their language' in line with the Change Council's campaign and work continued with partners and staff to embed this.

It had not been possible to have a big launch for the Cookbook due to Government restrictions and two mini celebrations had been held instead. The Next Steps Co-ordinator was using the cookbook when delivering a cooking session to care experienced young people. Unfortunately there were not many kitchen facilities available and the Change Council would like to extend this provision.

The Change Council had started to develop an introductory training workshop to be delivered to the Corporate Parenting Board alongside Tracy Jelfs. These sessions were to be delivered from July onwards and the training offer for Members and corporate parents would continue to be developed.

A meeting had been held with Gentoo to discuss issues raised by care experienced young people. The Change Council had yet to receive feedback on this, however

Gentoo were now meeting regularly with Next Steps to discuss issues and requirements for the young people living independently.

Change Council members had been taking part in a research project looking at the impact of Covid-19 on cared for children and information would be collated from different areas and shared with local authorities.

Members of the Change Council had continued to attend regional meetings virtually and a survey had been circulated for cared for and care experienced young people to vote on their top two issues. 59 young people from Sunderland had completed the survey and the results would provide the top two issues for the regional group to focus on. The Change Council had also been involved in the Culture House consultation and had commissioned thank you packs for foster carers for Foster Care Fortnight.

The planned work for July to September was as follows: -

- Launch the Change the Language campaign
- Create a training package to be rolled out to education about what it is like to be a cared for young person as it was felt that schools make presumptions and they want to break these barriers down.
- Engage young people in enriching holiday activities to celebrate their hard work and increase engagement.
- Corporate Parenting introduction training
- Young people to support the development of the corporate parenting strategy.

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

2. 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 looked after children.

The purpose of the report was to: -

- Demonstrate the duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children looked after
- Assure the Corporate Parenting Board that support and health services to children looked after 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 children looked after and care leavers
- 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 data being presented was for Quarter 4, January, February and March 2021 and the Board were advised that the health team had recommenced face to face health assessments in April 2021. The team had had a number of cancelled appointments due to young people isolating but this was being managed well. 55% of young people were seen face to face over the pandemic period April 2020 to March 2021.

There had been an average of 625 children cared for in quarter 4 which was a slight decrease from the previous quarter and represented 106 children per 10,000. This remained higher than the national average.

73 Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) had been carried out and there had been 86% compliance in the quarter and an average of 93% compliance over the year. No young people had refused IHAs throughout the year and there had been a steady rise in requests for assessments as the year progressed.

185 Review Health Assessments had been carried out in the quarter and this was 99% compliance with timescales; the yearly average was also 99%. Only four young people had their health assessment out of timescales during the year and 11 young people had refused.

There had been three out of area IHAs and ten RHAs required during the period, however performance had dipped in this area and only one of the IHAs and five RHAs had been completed within timescale. The main reason for the drop in compliance was lack of capacity in out of area health teams.

There was a quality assurance pathway in place for out of area health assessments and an audit had been completed to provide assurance that the health needs of young people placed out of area were being met. Nursing staff now shared a 'Medical Summary' when a child or young person moved out of the area to ensure that all health needs would be met without delay.

Nine Health Passports had been issued during the quarter which represented 100% compliance. The passport was a summary of all health records during the period when a young person was cared for and all young people were offered a health passport at their last health assessment. Jo Morgan advised that the team had applied for funding through the Integrated Care System to create an app for the passport and also to include health promotion information. This was in the early stages of development but it would sit within the NHS app so would be secure.

Dr Mills would shortly be going on maternity leave and Dr Emma Cadamy would be taking on some of her role during this period. The medical team were conducting an in-house audit of health assessments to identify areas of good practice and improvement.

The priorities for 2021/2022 were: -

- The Looked After Team would review the evidence and implement an agreed screening tool to assess children and young people's emotional wellbeing/mental health at each health assessment;

- The co-production and engagement of young people in service delivery and transformation and consider other alternative modes of communication with children and young people in completing health assessments;
- The Looked After Team would review regional and national best practice in completing health passports in an aligned approach; and
- The ACP trainee would be supported through the second year. A framework of supervised practice and governance would be developed to enable transition and independent practice once qualified.

Councillor Tye asked if there were statutory compliance targets in relation to health assessments and who would be responsible for corrective actions if the targets were not met.

Jo advised that the Looked After Health team reported to the Compliance Board at the CCG and issues around non-compliance had not really been related to the team's performance but more about Covid isolation for young people and their families.

Councillor Crosby noted that no young person had refused an Initial Health Assessment but there was reference to a refusal pathway if they did. Jo explained that a questionnaire was sent to the young person and carer to ask if they could complete a Health Care Plan if they refused an IHA. If an RHA was refused then the team would make sure that the young person's needs were being met and that their social worker and carer were aware of the position.

Having considered the report, it was: -

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

Update on the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt Coast to Coast

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

Children's Independent Reviewing Service – Annual Report

The Board received the Annual Report of the Children's Reviewing Service for April 2020 to March 2021.

Unfortunately no one from the Children's Independent Review Service was able to attend the meeting and the Chair directed Members to the highlight summary of the report beginning on page 18 of the agenda pack. She advised that she regularly met with the IRO Manager in her role as lead member for Children, Learning and Skills.

The annual report provided an overview of the work undertaken by the service in relation to child protection and cared for children, highlighted what was working well, what there were concerns about and what the priorities were for the next 12 months.

The report outlined the role of the IRO and that their primary responsibilities were: -

- Review and scrutinise care plans to ensure they are legally compliant and in the best interests of the children.
- Chair children cared for reviews.
- Ensure that the voice of the child is heard and given appropriate weight within care planning.
- Promote corporate parenting to enable positive outcomes for children in the cared for system.
- Chair placement order and adoptive placements, ensuring they are appropriate to the child's needs.
- Provide a quality assurance and scrutiny function, and where appropriate challenge to Children's Social Care in relation to practice.

The report provided further detail about the role of Conference Chairs and case studies which demonstrated the impact of the work of the IRO service. The voices of children played a key role in influencing the work and provided a vital grounding and reality check as to how things were working in practice. In 2021/2022 it was planned to: -

- Extend invitations to Regional Children in Care Councils so that the child voice will be heard at the proposed IRO conference in 2022 and influence regional practice.
- Look to develop practice so that the voice of the child is captured during our tracking discussions by them being contacted by their IRO following the tracking discussion with their social worker.
- Explore more clear options for children in how their cared for reviews can be held with the aim of seeking to improve the number of children chairing their own reviews.
- Think creatively of ways to influence Care Plans and Pathway Plans so they are clear, accessible, and understood by children and adults.
- Review child participation in child protection conferences with the aim of seeking to improve children's engagement when considered appropriate.

Full details of the performance of the team were set out in the report and the Chair noted that the service should be congratulated on their figures with regard to the timeliness of child protection conferences.

The Dispute Resolution Procedure had been reviewed in 2020/2021 and there had been 112 raised within the year, a reduction from 159 in the previous year. The numbers had reduced due to the positive impact of a more stable Social Care workforce.

The report concluded with the service's priorities for 2021/2022 as follows: -

- Move towards having two teams; 'Cared for' and 'Child Protection' to further strengthen skills and practice for children.
- In line with the government 'roadmap out of lockdown', engage in more face to face meetings with children and their families to ensure the child is at the centre of practice and to support each other in our shared understanding of the needs of individual children.

- Embed newly developed engagement tools to encourage children to contribute their views, wishes and feelings in their reviews.
- Establish meaningful options for children to help chair their care reviews.
- Evolve practice to support and empower survivors of domestic abuse through the delivery of child protection conferences and reviews.
- Strengthen how plans were recorded so that they were SMART to help parents, carers and professionals understand clearly what is required to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child.
- Continue to embed signs of safety/ success into our day to day practice.
- Continue to work with Social Care and partners to explore different ways of working with teenagers.
- Use performance data more intelligently to produce greater insight and evidence regarding the impact that our work is having on children.
- Further improve the quality of recording so that the impact of work was fully demonstrated from the child's perspective.
- Continue to work with agencies and social care to improve the timeliness of child protection conference reports.
- Use the position as conference chairs/IROs within the wider Together for Children agenda to help to improve practice and outcomes for children.
- Seek to strengthen how the service could impact upon more timely decisions regarding permanence at the second review.

Councillor Smith referred to the service liaising with local partners and asked how this was going with the Liquid Logic Operational Group. She also noted that the number of children subject to a plan under the category of emotional abuse had increased. The Chair commented that 'Neglect' was a catch all category and could be changed to 'Emotional Abuse' when more information was obtained and this was part of the more therapeutic approach which was being adopted.

4. RESOLVED that the Annual Report be noted.

Regulation 44 Visits – November 2020 – April 2021

The Board received a report summarising the Regulation 44 visits to homes during the period November 2020 to April 2021. As no officers had been able to attend the meeting, it was agreed that any questions raised would be noted and passed on to the relevant members of staff.

Colombo Road provided care for up to six young people and had an Ofsted judgement of Outstanding. The home had received three recommendations in the reporting period. There had been seven missing incidents in the period compared to one in the previous but none of these had been for over 24 hours. There had been two critical incidents compared to three in the previous period.

Grasswell House cared for up to six young people and was judged to be Good with improved effectiveness. There had been three recommendations made as result of Regulation 44 visits and 16 missing episodes compared to 21 in the previous period. There had been 11 critical incidents which had been appropriately documented and

responded to in accordance with procedures; four notifications had been made to Ofsted.

Revelstoke Road also provided care for up to six young people and was judged to be Good. There had been a significant increase in missing episodes in the home during the period and two young people had been discharged from the home due to concerns regarding their behaviour and the impact this was having on other young people. The home was now more settled and the young people in the home had developed positive relationships with team members.

Nook Lodge was a newly registered home for up to three young people; the home had not yet had an Ofsted inspection but had received a positive monitoring visit. All three young people currently in the home presented as settled and happy and were developing a relationship with each other and the staff. There had been four recommendations within the reporting period.

Monument View provided care for up to six young people and was judged to be Good. There had been 14 missing incidents reported to the Police in the period, two of which were over 24 hours. A large majority of the episodes related to one young person with significant learning difficulties and staff had been provided with information on how to ensure that this young person received clear boundaries and support.

The Chair asked about notifications made to Ofsted where a young person had made threats to staff and damaged the home and whether restorative justice was employed when such incidents had taken place.

Councillor Blackburn noted earlier comments about area committees being involved with children's homes in their area and asked if Area Officers could be kept informed of any developments regarding homes in their locality,

The Chair commented on the reference made by a young person about his concerns regarding moving on from the home and felt that this was something which should be looked at; it was important that everything possible was done to prevent young people having these concerns.

Councillor McKeith asked if all of the missing incidents at Revelstoke Road were in relation to one young person and Councillor Crosby asked what would be classed as a 'critical incident'.

The Chair queried if all of the Regulation 44 reports were shared with all home managers for their information.

5. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Virtual School – Headteacher's Report

Linda Mason, Headteacher of the Virtual School submitted a report providing information about cared for children since the last report to the Board in April 2021.

At the current time there were 593 cared for children in the city, a reduction since April and the report highlighted that the cared for population was dynamic. Within the cared for school age population, 223 (43%) had an identified SEND, with 138 receiving SEND support in school, and 16% of the total had an EHCP. Of those children, 78% attended a specialist education provision. The report set out the primary need for those who had been identified as having SEND with the majority (32%) having primary need in relation to Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH), followed by mild learning disabilities (MLD) and Communication and Interaction.

It was highlighted that there were a lot more boys who had an EHCP than girls and it needed to be considered if girls were having their needs fully met. Work was also being done on how the identification of need correlated with children becoming cared for and the period leading up to that decision.

The Virtual School had been looking very closely at these young people and planning for their needs with designated teachers and SENCos talking to each other about the plans for individual young people. A number of Early Years practitioners were pushing for identification of need at the early education stage and professionals were working collectively to identify SEND as soon as was possible. The cared for population in Sunderland with SEND generally did very well but outcomes in Maths was worthy of further exploration.

Progress and attainment was reported annually and the Key Stage 4 data would be collated when published. The Virtual School had been working on the Year 6 to Year 7 transition and summer school activity along with nursery to Reception and Year 11s.

School attendance in the Autumn term had been 94.9% and during the Spring term 60.9% of cared for children were actually in school with 38.4% accessing remote learning. Since the return to school on 8 March 2021, 99% of primary children had returned to school and 96% of secondary children. Overall attendance was 77.1% for the Spring Term but this took into account lockdown three attendance and authorised absence in this period.

There had been no expulsions of cared for children from school in the last three years and there had been 27 suspensions in the Spring term, totalling 51.5 days. The report showed a breakdown analysis of cared for children who had received multiple suspensions and it was highlighted that some young people may receive an EHCP as a result of challenging behaviour. Linda reassured the Board that the school would contact her directly if they were contemplating suspension and certainly if an expulsion was being considered. The Virtual School worked closely with schools to reduce exclusions and this figure should continue to lower.

Compliance with production of EPEPs within six months stood at 99% and these were currently produced termly and within 20 days of coming into care. EPEPs for early years had begun to be produced in January 2021 and it was hoped to increase compliance with this over the next term.

Quality assurance had been a key focus through the year and where EPEPs were rated 'amber', schools were asked to consider the Virtual School's comments. There was a lot of training available for designated teachers, IROs and social workers.

80.3% of cared for young people were in good or outstanding schools. The Board had previously been advised that children would not automatically be removed from a school if it was judged to Require Improvement or was Inadequate, there were many factors which would be considered in relation to whether it would be in the young person's best interests to remove them from the school.

Partnership working was very important to the Virtual School and the support of the National Association had been critical during the pandemic.

The Pupil Premium Grant would be fully utilised in support of improving educational outcomes as expected by the DfE Grant conditions. The local authority received £2,345 per cared for child and schools received £1,900 annually with the Virtual School retaining £445 per child. Centrally retained funding was used for services such as tutors, alternative provision, 1-2-1 tuition, Welfare Call and Education Psychology reports.

Linda advised that there was an upcoming CPD event on 9 November which would be focused on trauma, recovery and resilience and would be open to cross agency partners.

Councillor Tye asked about the young people who were in alternative provision and Linda advised that this could be somewhere like The Springboard Trust. Councillor Tye commented that the attendance data was very impressive and this should be recognised widely.

In relation to Ofsted categories, Councillor Tye enquired if the high numbers at Good or Outstanding schools could be because Ofsted had not carried out inspections for some time. Linda said that would have to be analysed but highlighted that the Inadequate schools were predominantly secondary and the young people had probably been in attendance there since Year 7.

Councillor Burnicle asked for further information about the Pupil Premium Grant and Linda advised that this came into the Virtual School annually as a specific grant as the Government had felt that there would be more accountability if it passed through the Virtual School. The grant was paid from the day a child came into care and would be used to make sure that a child was making good educational progress over the school year. The grant was paid to nurseries in a different way and had to be applied for by each setting.

Upon consideration of the report, it was: -

6. RESOLVED that the Virtual School – Headteacher's Report be noted.

(Signed) L FARTHING
Chair