

SUPPORTIVE PARENTING PARTNERSHIP

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 17 July 2023 at 5.00pm in the
Conference Room, Sandhill Centre, Grindon Lane, Sunderland, SR3 4EN**

Present:

Members of the Board

Councillor L Williams (in the Chair)	Washington Central Ward
Councillor Margaret Crosby	Sandhill Ward
Councillor Paul Gibson	Doxford Ward
Councillor Logan Guy	Washington East Ward
Councillor Phil Tye	Silksworth Ward

All Supporting Officers

Majella McCarthy	Director of Children's Social Care, TfC
Tracy Jelfs	Head of Service for Cared for Children, TfC
Anita Swales	Acting Headteacher, Virtual School
Kathryn McCabe	Service Manager, Cared for Children
Daniel Kenny	Fostering Team Manager
Michelle Ash	Adoption Team Manager
Kaye Fox	Foster Carer
Carol Hamilton	Independent Reviewing Officer
Glynis Horner	Reg 44 Officer
Samantha Diston	CNTW
Jo Morgan	Designated Nurse, Cared for Children
Sharon Willis	Strategic Service Manager, TfC
Leanne Hill	Transport Policy, Performance & Project Officer
Gillian Kelly	Governance Services

Welcome

Councillor Williams welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. She advised that she was the new Portfolio Holder for Children, Learning and Skills and invited all present to introduce themselves.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Smith together with Catherine Hearne.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

Health of Cared for Children

The Designated Nurse for Cared for Children submitted an update report on the health of cared for children.

Jo Morgan reported that the Health Partnership for Cared for Children had now held two meetings and had already shared a project to support unaccompanied young people and health outcomes with Together for Children. It was planned to develop a Practitioner Forum later in the year to focus on cared for and care experienced young people and look at connectivity and where gaps may exist.

A mentoring and social prescribing service had been agreed within Sunderland and the Health Passport app was at the point of trial by young people.

Jo advised that 151 Initial Health Assessments had been completed in 2022/2023 and 128 were within timescales, representing 85% of the total. There had been a total of 512 review health assessments during the year and 464 young people were seen within timescale which was 91% of all young people. There were however some concerns as there were vacancies for both Designated Doctor and Named Doctor for cared for children at the current time. There was also limited capacity within the Community Paediatric team with regards to Initial Health Assessments.

All care leavers were offered a leaving care health summary and 80% of young people agreed and had attended their final health assessment before leaving care.

Councillor Tye asked what 80% represented in this case and if there was an understanding of why 20% did not take up the assessment. Jo stated that there were around 50 care leavers each year, a number of these young people would say that they did not have any outstanding health needs and others were managing their own needs or might be too busy to attend an appointment.

The Chair asked which groups were part of the Health Partnership for Cared for Children and it was noted that there were people involved from Together for Children, CNTW, Community CAMHS, social prescribers from primary care and 0-19 workers.

With regard to the vacant posts within the team, the Chair asked if there were any particular barriers to recruitment. Jo said that there was a national shortage of consultant paediatricians, she was aware that South Tyneside had a locum currently covering the Designated Doctor role and it was hoped that an advanced nurse practitioner would be

able to fill some of the gaps. It was hoped to be able to address this on an ICB level and Jo added that from a nursing point of view she felt that young people should be seen by a medical practitioner when they came into care. Currently a young person would be seen by a consultant and it had been suggested that a shorter appointment could be offered with support from a nurse.

The Chair noted that this situation was posing a risk and that the Partnership would like to be kept aware of the discussions within the ICB.

Having thanked Jo for the report, it was: -

2. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

CNTW – Sunderland Cared for Children

The Board received a report covering the period January to June 2023.

In introducing the report, Sam explained that the Sunderland CYPS Cared for Children's Pathway had been reviewed internally in 2022 and it specifically undertook direct therapeutic work with children and young people, along with Foster Carers where appropriate. Dr Liz Christie, Consultant Clinical Psychologist also worked within the team and Louise Harrison had a role in scaffolding for social work colleagues and Foster Carers.

It was highlighted that waiting times had reached 12 weeks for treatment but this had now reduced to eight weeks for cared for children. Over the period covered by the report, there had been 41 referrals into the cared for children pathway; eight of these were declined, one was signposted to the mental health pathway and 32 were accepted into the cared for pathway. There were currently 64 cared for children allocated on caseloads and five were waiting to be allocated to begin treatment.

Sam said that it was hoped that the Change Council could deliver their training to some of the key partners in CYPS so this could be cascaded throughout the service. It was also suggested that a presentation be delivered to the Partnership on the pathway and the work undertaken by the service.

Councillor Gibson commented that a presentation would be useful, particularly for new members.

The Chair asked about the waiting times for children who were not cared for and Sam said that this varied depending on the pathway but could be six to 12 months or even longer. The Chair also enquired about provision for urgent cases and it was noted that these would be referred for intensive treatment.

3. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Regulation 44 Visits

The Board received the Regulation 44 Visitor Annual Overview covering the year April 2022 to March 2023.

Carol Hamilton and Glynis Horner were in attendance to talk to the report and in doing so explained that each home would have received a monthly Regulation 44 visit, in compliance with the Children's Homes (England) Regulation 2015.

Colombo Road had been judged as Outstanding by Ofsted in March 2023 and six young people resided at the home aged between 14 and 17 years. There had been no statutory requirements from Ofsted but there had been three recommendations and there were six recommendations arising from Regulation 44 visits in the reporting period.

It was noted that there were Ofsted recommendations around the home's risk assessment and Glynis Horner explained that this was around the location of the home and required some additional consultation which had now taken place. Sharon Willis added that location risk assessments had always been carried out and there was a good relationship with ward councillors.

The Chair asked about the recommendation about supervision and Sharon said that this was sometimes just about recording and about reflective practice and consistency. All team members received supervision and it was a case of quality assuring that in records.

Grasswell House provided residential care for up to six young people aged 12-17 years and was currently judged by Ofsted to be Good and had three statutory requirements and five recommendations from its last inspection in January 2023. The manager had fulfilled these requirements and recommendations and these would be monitored during Regulation 44 visits.

Councillor Gibson asked about the requirement around providing more evidence of planning for young people who did not have full time education or refused to attend what was provided. Sharon advised that all the young people in the home had a core offer which they had refused and inspectors wanted to have a timetable available of what the young people would then be doing in those circumstances. She added that a number of these young people would have experienced trauma and education could be the last thing on their mind and this had to be managed within a comfortable timeframe for them.

Councillor Tye highlighted that the location of Grasswell House was listed as Sunderland West when it was in fact located in the Coalfields area of the city. Councillor Tye went on to say that he still felt that there should be an opportunity for elected Members to visit the children's homes and that this would give confidence that the details presented in reports were correct.

Carol Hamilton noted that young people could feel overwhelmed with the number of people coming in to their home and it was felt appropriate that this was limited. Glynis stated that there had been a suggestion to have a social event where invited visitors could ask questions. Sharon stated it was hoped that elected Member involvement with consultation risk assessments might help to build some of these relationships.

Majella McCarthy commented that the homes were very regulated; she would visit, as would Sharon, along with Regulation 44 Officers. It had to be emphasised that these visits were part of the work role of these people but for the young people it was their home. Carol explained that part of the Independent Reviewing Officer's role was to ensure that young people had an advocate if required and it had been fed back that young people were tired of seeing a large number of strangers in their home. Jacqui Amos, Regulation 44 Officer, was working to ensure that young people's views were obtained without them feeling that things were being 'done to' them.

Councillor Guy said that he understood the feelings of young people regarding strangers coming in to their home and wondered if there might be some sort of function where young people could invite elected Members in. Tracy Jelfs noted that it could be difficult to find a happy medium on this matter but a balanced approach would be sought.

The Chair asked how often young people in homes tended to move and Sharon said that this could vary considerably depending on a child's age but longevity was generally good.

Councillor Crosby commented that the maximum number of young people in a home seemed to be six, however in one case there was only one child in a home, and asked if this was due to the complex needs of that young person.

Sharon stated that this would not necessarily be the case although it did happen in one home due to instability of the setting at that time.

Councillor Crosby went on to say that there had been consultation in the Doxford ward about a one-person home and asked if there was enough provision across the city. Sharon said that the city was struggling across all categories; there was a crisis in care nationally which had not been helped by the influx of young people from the national transfer scheme. However, there was a lot going on regionally in relation to the housing offer.

Councillor Tye asked if Forever Care properties would be subject to Regulation 44 visits and it was noted that non-Together for Children homes would be inspected independently.

In relation to Revelstoke Road, Members were advised that the home provided care for up to six young people and was currently rated as Good by Ofsted. There were two requirements from the most recent inspection which had been responded to and there were six recommendations arising from Regulation 44 visits.

The Chair asked about the recruitment procedures highlighted by Ofsted and Sharon stated that this was around requirements for posts. All staff were required to have a Level 3 qualification which could be funded through the apprenticeship levy but this was not an option for existing staff.

Nook Lodge was a relatively new children's home which provided care for up to three young people and had received a full Ofsted inspection in March 2023 and had been judged to be Good. Two requirements and two recommendations had been acted on within a timely manner and there were seven recommendations from Regulation 44 visits.

Councillor Gibson referred to the recommendation that advocacy is offered following a restraint and asked who would be providing that advocacy. Sharon stated that a registered manager had to have a conversation with the young person and member of staff within 48 hours of the restraint and offer an independent person to provide advocacy. Sharon confirmed that the advocacy offer had never been taken up and that restraint seldomly occurred.

Monument View provided care for up to six young people and was currently judged to have 'sustained effectiveness' following an Ofsted inspection which found the home to require improvement. There were three requirements and two recommendations along with 13 recommendations from the Regulation 44 Officer.

Carol commented that children in Sunderland were cared for to an exceptional standard and Glynis added that the type of parenting offered in Sunderland homes was great.

Having fully considered the information provided, it was: -

4. RESOLVED that the Annual Overview of the Regulation 44 Visits be received and noted.

Annual Fostering Report

The Partnership received the Annual Fostering Report and Daniel Kenny was in attendance to talk to the report. The Fostering Service was required to complete a quarterly report providing an overview of the performance of the service and responding to the requirements of inspections. The annual template which was presented was used by a large number of agencies to share data, performance and analysis.

Recruitment of foster carers remained an issue in Sunderland but this situation was mirrored regionally and nationally and Together for Children was developing work on this. The service covered kinship carers as well as foster carers and the training offer for both face to face and online courses was excellent.

In a similar way to children's homes, notifiable events had to be reported and such occurrences were set out in the report along with any action taken.

There had been some staffing changes within the period but the team was fully staffed and was stable. The Fostering Panel had continued to function at full capacity and had met 22 times within the reporting period. Annual surveys had been undertaken with children and young people and foster carers.

Councillor Tye asked if the definition of being missing from placement was the same as that for homes and Daniel advised that the missing protocol was broadly the same. Sharon Willis explained that there was a joint protocol with Northumbria Police which said that every effort should be made to find the child before making a missing report. This was variable depending on the child and their individual risk assessment and the carers' knowledge of the child. Daniel added that it was not a notifiable incident for Ofsted if a child went missing from foster care.

Councillor Tye also drew attention to the incidents which had been investigated by the Designated Officer which had totalled 11 in the year. He asked if this was a large number and Kathryn McCabe said that it was relatively low but it might be useful for Members to have some more detail on this and she would look to bring something back on the outcomes of the cases.

The Chair referred to the 12 'unplanned endings' and asked whether that was a lot. Daniel commented that any unplanned ending was more than what the team would want and there was always learning to be gained from any such incident. The Chair also asked about ten serious incidents which involved Police being called to the foster carer's home and Daniel said that he could provide some more context but noted that this also included connected carers.

Regarding connected carers, the Chair asked what would happen if they were not approved and Tracy Jelfs said that usually more than one option would be being looked at for a child so there were always alternatives if a connected carer was not approved. It was highlighted that connected carers had to meet the minimum standards for foster carers and the fostering regulations were very stringent.

5. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Annual Adoption Report

The Partnership received the Annual Adoption Report and Michelle Ash was in attendance to talk to the report.

Michelle explained that Adopt Coast to Coast had been launched on 1 April 2021 as a hub and spoke model with Durham and Cumbria County Councils. The agency had separated from Cumbria in May 2023 when the county council ceased to exist.

The report set out the legislation, regulations and guidance and the key requirements of local authority adoption services and the National Minimum Standards. Adoption Support Services had been provided by ARC Adoption Services, however Michelle highlighted that there was to be a new provider going forward, PAC-UK.

Councillor Crosby asked about post-adoption support being provided for adults and Michelle said that the provision would go up to age 25 but the majority of the older group who approached the agency required support in accessing birth records.

The number of days from a child becoming cared for and the Decision to Place for adoption had reduced to 235 days and the days from the date of Decision to Place and Placement Order had also decreased to 56 days. There had been an increase in the number of days from Placement Order to Date of Matching but it was noted that there had been a large number of older children matched in this period and some had high levels of need. The figures did not give the narrative in terms of the experiences and needs of the children who the agency was seeking to place for adoption.

During 2022/2023 a total of 28 prospective adopters were approved, an increase of two from the previous year. Stage 1 timescales were not met for any of the adopters, however

it was highlighted that the required checks often delayed the process and were out of the control of the Adoption Team. Of the 28 approved, ten prospective adopter Stage 2 assessments were not completed within the four-month timescale. The Somerset Judgement had also had an impact across all adoption agencies as all adoption processes were halted while the regulations were re-assessed by all local authorities.

During the year, almost £197,000 had been claimed from the Adoption Support Fund following 61 successful applications. There were two disruptions in adoptions during the period and disruption meetings had been held and learning outcomes recorded.

Michelle outlined the arrangements for engaging with adopters and children and the Chair commented that it was lovely to see families interacting with social workers at the summer party.

The Adoption team continued to receive a steady flow of interest from stepparents in respect of in-family adoptions and had received 20 referrals and completed ten court reports during the period. The agency was inspected by Ofsted in November 2022 and was judged to be 'Good'.

Councillor Guy asked about the reference to Inter-country adoption and asked how often the agency would be involved in this. Kathryn advised that there was a legal obligation to provide inter-country adoptions and Together for Children had a contract with an agency to provide such services. Michelle said that they had dealt with them in the past but they were very complex and were a very costly process for adopters.

The Chair noted that there had been a number of children placed with adopters approved by other agencies and commented that this may be quite difficult. Kathryn acknowledged that this brought its own complications but was managed well by staff.

6. RESOLVED that the Annual Adoption Report be received and noted.

Travel for Care Experienced Young People

Sharon Willis reported to Members that there had been a pilot scheme running in Newcastle and Gateshead for free travel passes for care experienced young people and Together for Children had expressed an interest in signing up to this scheme for Sunderland's care experienced young people.

Sunderland had 193 care experienced young people in the 18-25 cohort. This was a Tyne and Wear scheme but there were a large number of young people living in the Durham postcode and there was an option to wait for an All Zones pass which it was decided to do. The passes would be issued through the young person's Personal Advisor.

Leanne Hill highlighted that this matter had originally been brought up in a previous meeting and she had flagged this with Transport for the North East. She understood that Gateshead and Newcastle had funded passes through the NHS and Sunderland had also managed to secure funding for this three-year pilot scheme across all seven North East local authorities.

The Chair stated that she looked forward to the new mayoral authority and securing funding to continue this scheme into the future.

Councillor Guy asked what the passes would look like and Sharon said they would be similar to Pop cards and would not cause care experienced young people to be singled out. The passes would be a huge help to young people travelling for college and work.

7. RESOLVED that the update be noted.

Work Programme 2023/2024

The Board were informed of the work programme for the municipal year 2023/2024 and forthcoming agenda items.

8. RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

(Signed) L WILLIAMS
Chair

