

## **CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 3 July 2017 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 B Francis	Fulwell Ward
Councillor I Kay	Millfield Ward
Councillor L Lauchlan	Washington Central Ward
Councillor W Turton	Houghton Ward

#### **Young People**

Kirk Hirst  
Billy Hardy

#### **Also in Attendance**

Councillor P Gibson	Silksworth Ward
Councillor M Beck	Fulwell Ward
Councillor D MacKnight	Castle Ward
Councillor B McClennan	Hendon Ward

#### **All Supporting Officers**

Alex Hopkins	Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive, Together for Children
Sharon Willis	Service Manager, Together for Children
Sheila Lough	Service Manager, Together for Children
Jane Wheeler	Participation and Complaints Manager
Loren Nergaard	Participation Support Worker
Trish Stoker	Virtual Headteacher
Maurice Davis	Foster Carer
Kay Dixon	Foster Carer
Anne Brock	Safeguarding Children Lead Nurse and Designated Nurse LAC
Rebecca Campbell	NTW CYPS Service Manager
Gavin Taylor	IRO Service Manager
Kim Roberts	IRO Team Manager

### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Atkinson, Marshall and Smith.

### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **Minutes**

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2017 be agreed as a correct record subject to an amendment to the penultimate paragraph on page 7 to show that Review Health Assessments were sent out three months in advance.

#### *Sunderland Looked After Children's Pledge*

The Chair advised that there was a meeting the following week to discuss the pledges.

#### *Annual Report of the Fostering Panel*

The Chair highlighted that there were now two elected Members sitting on the fostering panels and both Councillor Kay and Councillor Beck were in attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board meeting.

### **Change Council Update**

Billy Hardy presented the report of the Change Council and advised that four members of the Change Council had taken part in a residential at Kielder with young people from every local authority in the North East. Each local authority had circulated ballot papers to all looked after young people and care leavers to find out what their main areas of concern were. The topics raised included: -

- Transport (free or reduced cost)
- Finance (more ways to help care leavers manage their money)
- Employment (more apprenticeships with councils and local businesses)
- Mental health
- Stability and why it's important for young people
- Being in care (younger children).

Young people had chosen the topics which they wanted to work on and were creating work shops around the themes for the conference. The Chair commented that she was greatly looking forward to the conference in December.

The Change Council had been working with the LAC Nurse regarding health passports and had decided on a new design for the document and agreed that it should be A5 size and have a plastic cover. The Chair asked when the health passport was likely to be completed and Jane Wheeler stated that this should be in the next few weeks for a health open event.

Billy advised that Sheila Lough had asked members of the Change Council to be involved in the training of foster carers and six young people had put their names forward. The group had met with Sheila and her team to look at training and what they could bring to this and also worked on how they could get more involved in the recruitment evenings.

The Chair supported young people being involved in foster carer recruitment and suggested that it would be useful to get feedback from couples who attended the training and get their views on whether it was positive to have young people and foster carers at the sessions.

Councillor Farthing and Councillor Kelly had come to the Change Council to discuss leisure activities. Currently Sunderland's looked after children received free swim passes up to the age of 18 but the group had discussed that passes should also be for gym and other activities and for young people leaving care up to the age of 21 if they were in some form of education, employment or training. Jane Wheeler was pulling a paper together for Councillor Kelly on other activities which could be accessed by looked after children and care leavers.

It was planned to review and revamp the current pledges and look at meaningful ways of holding pledge buddies to account to ensure that change and impact continued to be shown for looked after children and care leavers. The Change Council would also be discussing items which it would like the Corporate Parenting Board to look at and the Chair highlighted that this would inform the development of the Board work programme.

Jane Wheeler advised that there were two councillor vacancies for pledges, one was in relation to accommodation and the other around health issues. It was suggested that Councillor Kay be the pledge buddy for accommodation and Councillor Peter Gibson volunteer fulfil the other vacancy.

2. RESOLVED that the information be noted.

## **Health of Looked After Children**

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

Anne Brock directed Board Members to the compliance data for health assessments which had fluctuated during the March to May 2017 period. Compliance for Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) taking place within 20 workings of a child becoming looked after had decreased to 89% in March due to two mothers not signing consent forms. Compliance was 100% in April but dropped to 76% in May as one young person was missing and three children were unable to attend. Review Health Assessments (RHAs) had to take place at least every six months before a child's fifth birthday and at least once every twelve months afterwards. The figures for review health assessments were improving, however compliance in March 2017 was at 80% due to a child placed out of the area not being brought for an assessment despite four appointments being offered. Compliance was 94% in April and had further improved to 95% in May.

The Looked After Children health team had also experienced difficulty in April as the transfer to the new company had meant that notifications of looked after or changes in status were delayed. Similar delays were also caused by the cyber-attack within the NHS and all staff had worked hard to ensure that these difficulties were minimised.

The Board were informed that a new Looked After Children and Young People's nurse had been appointed and taken up her position in April. Having this additional resource would allow for increased flexibility with appointments and she would also be doing some work to set up a young persons' user group to help capture the 'voice of the child'.

Joint training for foster carers about 'Allegations against foster carers' continued between Together for Children Sunderland and the health team. This had been re-vamped in response to an increased number of allegations against carers which had produced some lessons to be learned.

Councillor Kay commented that allegations against foster carers had also been discussed at the Fostering Panel and he felt that this was likely to become an ongoing theme.

Rebecca Campbell from NTW was in attendance to present the information which had been requested about the mental health of looked after children. The Board were informed that NTW passed data to the CCG and this had been formulated into a dashboard which showed that 116 out of 500 looked after children were accessing Children and Young People's Services (CYPS).

Councillor Kay highlighted that, as a member of the governing body of the Pupil Referral Unit, the length of time for referrals to be made was often raised as an issue with this being 12 weeks as a minimum, 18 weeks not being uncommon and one young person waiting 24 weeks. At the present time the average waiting time for CAMHS was six to seven weeks and Councillor Kay suggested that it would be useful to see something on the length of time for CYPS referrals as part of the dashboard.

Rebecca stated that the issues with waiting times were well known and these were a national problem which were being dealt with at that level. The waiting times were

indicative of the number of referrals being received and it was highlighted that there were three types of response: urgent cases were seen within 72 hours based on an assessment of clinical need and risk; priority cases were seen within four weeks; and there could be a wait of up to 18 weeks for other cases. The Board were advised that there were five looked after children waiting to be seen at the end of March but at the current time there was only one young person who had not yet had an appointment with CYPS.

Councillor MacKnight acknowledged that there was a national problem with waiting times but also that these had been as low as 12 weeks in Sunderland in the past and this had to be achieved again.

The Chair added that the Change Council had been concerned about waiting times and she commented that preventing crisis was better than having to respond to urgent referrals. The Chair went on to say that child mental health had been discussed at the Health and Wellbeing Board and just less than 30% of all children with problems actually received treatment and she highlighted that if this was the case with physical health problems then it would be a scandal. With regard to the statistics being presented, she supported the inclusion of data on waiting times.

It was noted that the Director of Children's Social Care had asked about the reasons for some cases not being accepted and Rebecca advised that it had been agreed to meet with Debra Patterson on a monthly basis to review the cases which were not accepted by CYPS. Sessional time was to be identified for where a young person did not necessarily need to be seen but scaffolding was required for the family.

NTW and Together for Children had agreed for CYPS to hold half day weekly sessions to offer scaffolding, support and guidance for Together for Children practitioners working with children and young people who: -

- were on the waiting list to be seen by CYPS
- who did not have a Mental Health Care Coordinator in CYPS
- who were not suitable for tier 3 mental health services but advice and support was required to manage behaviours

Councillor MacKnight commented that someone being referred to the service might find that their problems were considered low priority when to the individual concerned they were extremely significant. Rebecca advised that the duty team, who were clinicians, would discuss the matter on the phone and then make a decision between them what would happen.

Councillor Kay said that, anecdotally, he was aware that teachers and social workers had a dilemma when making a referral as they knew that a child may have a long wait if they said that it was a routine issue. As a collective partners needed to work together to ensure that waiting times were reduced and it needed to be identified what was an acceptable time and how this could be worked towards.

Rebecca stated that 70 to 80 referrals were received each week and there were 3,000 young people on the CYPS caseload at the current time. Priority was given to

each case based on vulnerability and risk and all issues were considered and discussed before a decision was made.

The Chair noted that, from her discussions, it seemed that if a child was in crisis, they could not get good therapy because they could not engage with the therapist. Rebecca agreed that it was always better to get in sooner rather than later with any individual but there were some cases where a young person had undergone recent trauma and it could be a really difficult time to work with them. With complex mental health issues, the earlier these could be managed the better and early work in schools was essential.

Kay Dixon commented that there used to be a surgery for foster carers which gave them tools to help deal with issues whilst waiting for an appointment for a young person. As a carer, sometimes all that was needed was a little bit of support and it was more useful to have that at the beginning of the process.

Rebecca advised that as the service was very busy, it had been decided to concentrate on seeing young people, however it was part of the half day offering to look at scaffolding and what could be done for the family. NTW were working with the CCG on this offer. The Chair stated that her challenge to the Director of Children's Services was what was Together for Children doing to support foster carers in this area.

Maurice Davis noted that, from a carer's point of view, it was reported immediately if children were in a crisis situation but then they were left waiting and it could be difficult for children to have to deal with that process. Rebecca acknowledged that there was a gap between the reporting of the problem and entering into specialist mental health services.

Councillor Kay queried whether it was possible to bring forward any statistics on the range of mental health needs which were being dealt with by CYPS. Rebecca highlighted that it would be expected that any referral had received intervention prior to CYPS, CAMHS was there for issues with anxiety and depression and work would have been done by the GP in relation to conditions such as ADHD. Information was available for six months of referrals and this could be supplied.

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

### **Independent Reviewing Officer – Looked After Children Annual Report**

The Board received the Independent Reviewing Officer's Looked After Children Annual Report for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017.

Gavin Taylor, Independent Reviewing Service Manager, was in attendance to present the report and he advised that this had already been considered by the Change Council and Ofsted. An Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be appointed for every child and young person looked after by a local authority. The IRO's role was to ensure that the plans met the needs of the children and young people and that their wishes and feelings were taken into consideration. The IRO

also ensured that children and young people in care had their reviews completed within statutory timescales and has a duty to monitor the performance of the local authority as a corporate parent.

Gavin highlighted some of the key elements of the report and the Board were informed that 1,660 looked after children reviews had been undertaken during the period, which was an increase of 101 on the previous year. 95% of the reviews had been held within timescales which was an improvement on 90% in 2015/2016. This was one of the service's seven Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and six of these had demonstrated improved performance in 2016/2017 with the exception of the number of looked after children with an up to date PEP which stood at 81% against the previous year's outturn of 86%.

The number of children accommodated under section 20 had reduced to 24% from 38% and this was a healthy indicator. The Ofsted monitoring visit in February 2017 had found that 'the IRO service was more visible, and performance is improved' but the IRO service acknowledged that further work was required to improve outcomes for children and young people who were looked after and to continue to ensure that the child/young person's journey was promoted and strengthened.

There had been some areas of difficulty in relation to systems and the transition to the new Liquid Logic system. The main reason for looked after reviews being out of timescale had been due to human error and miscalculation but this would be managed through Liquid Logic in the future.

Trish Stoker, Virtual School Head, expanded on the performance with regard to Personal Education Plans (PEPs). In the first tranche of the year there had been 90% of looked after children with an update to date PEP but the quality was variable. There were new systems coming in for ePEPs which were expected to deliver higher quality plans and would allow the voice of young people to be heard more clearly.

The Chair noted that she had heard one school saying that they would continue to use their own PEPs and Trish stated that the school would be challenged on that approach.

Councillor Kay commented that many people felt that ePEPs could be a game changer but there was also some anxiety about their introduction. How asked how confident Trish was that everyone would be up to speed when they were fully introduced.

Trish advised that training would be rolled out through the autumn term and that the team would be working with designated teachers and visiting Headteacher groups. Research had been carried out around the country to look at other ePEPs and how these could be adjusted and tweaked for the Sunderland model.

Maurice Davis queried what happened when a child was 18 and did not have a social worker present at a PEP meeting. Trish stated that work was being undertaken to identify how the PEP would translate to the next stage. It was noted that young people at the age of 18 would have a personal advisor and also a pathway review carried out by the IRO.

The Dispute Resolution Process had been revised and reviewed during the year and there had been 81 disputes, the majority of which were dealt with at the informal first stage of the procedure. The main issues raised had been the failure to provide all information, lack of evidence of statutory requirements and care planning.

The IRO had continued to work with a wide range of organisations and was open to being engaging and inclusive to all partners. The report set out how the IRO service had achieved against the priorities which had been set at the beginning of 2015/2016. A number of priorities had been identified for 2017/2018 as follows: -

- Recruitment and Training – ensuring that all IRO posts were in place by June 2017 and business posts were fully recruited to. This involved ensuring that staff were fully trained to carry out their roles.
- Further increase the ‘footprint’ of the IRO on the child’s case file in progressing plans and evidencing formal challenge.
- Continue to strengthen the child’s voice/ participation in looked after reviews and child protection conferences.
- Integrate business support unit into IRO Service
- Continue to build and improve relationships
- Continue to challenge the quality of practice and planning, seeking to improve care plans, PEPs and assessment analysis
- Strengthen the IRO Service Profile in Sunderland with professionals and young people.

The Chair asked if as part of developing IROs, they were encouraged to do any research into their work and Gavin advised that efforts were made to establish the IRO’s area of interest, for example one members of the team had taken a lead on domestic violence and another was particularly interested in the health of looked after children. This would grow as the knowledge and skills base was developed.

Councillor Kay noted that underpinning this report was a story of good, early progress and he was encouraged by the direction of travel. He asked if there were any areas where coverage could be improved. Gavin stated that there was a lot of learning and development work to be done around re-strengthening working relationships in Sunderland. It was planned to move into faith organisations to get the message over about the general spectrum of work. People had been recruited to the IRO service from a wealth of different backgrounds and now was the time to look at the skills mix and how this could be driven forward.

Councillor Francis asked when Liquid Logic would be up and running and Alex Hopkins advised that it was predicted to go live in January 2018. The Chair commented that she had comfort in the fact that the new system was being introduced slowly and all staff would be trained before the go live date.

With regard to the calculation error for looked after reviews, Gavin explained that this was as a result of working in months on occasions rather than days and it not being understood that bank holidays could have an impact on timescales.

Having commended the report, the Board: -



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

### **Regulation 44 Visits**

The Board received a report providing the Board Members with an update on the findings in relation to the Regulation 44 visits to Sunderland Children's Homes conducted from June 2016 – February 2017.

The role of the independent visitor was to carry out the Regulation 44 monthly monitoring visits to Sunderland's five children's homes. The main focus of the visits was to ensure that all children were being appropriately cared for and that their individual needs were being met.

During the period all of the homes had full Ofsted inspections with Monument View being judged to be outstanding, two homes being good with sustained improvement and two which required improvement with the impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers rated as inadequate. The homes all had action plans which were closely monitored and there were a number of elected Members who had provided great support for the Regulation 44 visits.

With regard to Revelstoke Road, Councillor Davison asked if a member of staff had had their contract terminated due to the Ofsted report. Dot McGough advised that the member of staff had experienced a period of ill health and had then retired. When Ofsted had visited the home, a compliance notice had been issued and work was done immediately and the notice was lifted within six weeks.

Councillor Kay asked if there were any staffing issues at Sea View Road West because, as a short breaks unit, managers were not able to build up a relationship with young people. Dot advised that there had been two long term managers at the home so this had not been an issue. Sharon Willis added that the staff team had been in place for a long time and had been on a journey as the regulations and standards were as much for them as an ordinary children's home.

The Chair highlighted that Regulation 44 training was available for any interested elected Member and that there had been some discussion about extending this to foster carers. Social workers visited foster carers in the home setting and there had been some conversations about whether Members could accompany IROs. Dot stated that it had not been thought appropriate for an elected Member to sit in on a review but there would be an opportunity for closer working through the consultative committee.

Kay Dixon commented that, as a foster care worker, she had visited children's homes for 12 weeks before taking children into her own home and this had proved an invaluable grounding in the work. As part of this process carers were assigned a mentor and were prepared for what was being taken on.

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

(Signed) L FARTHING  
Chair