

## **Corporate Parenting Board**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday, 13 October, 2014 in Committee Room  
6, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30 p.m.**

### **Present:**

Councillor P. Smith  
Councillor Lawson  
Councillor Macknight  
Councillor Williams

### **Members of the Board**

Silksworth Ward  
Shiney Row Ward  
Castle Ward  
Washington Central Ward

### **Young People**

Daniel Bensley  
Kieran Boyce

### **Also in Attendance**

Councillor Allan  
Councillor Farthing  
Councillor H. Trueman  
Councillor D. Trueman  
Councillor Davison

Sandhill Ward  
Washington South Ward  
Washington West Ward  
Washington West Ward  
Redhill Ward

### **All Supporting Officers**

Neil Revely  
Fiona Brown  
Fran Arnold  
Rosemary Pickering  
Lynne Goldsmith  
Lucy Pierson  
Dawn Shearsmith  
Sharon Willis

Executive Director of People Services  
Chief Operating Officer  
Head of Safeguarding  
Adoption Team  
Senior Safeguarding Manager  
Change Council  
Sunderland Virtual School  
Operational Manager for Children's Homes

### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Shattock and Emerson.

## **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **Minutes**

9. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July, 2014 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

## **Work Plan for the Corporate Parenting Board**

The Board was referred to the Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan. Members would recall that in July 2014 they were invited to suggest issues that they would like the Board to discuss and include on the Work Plan.

No further discussion items were suggested for the Work Plan.

## **The Pledges**

Lucy Pierson from the Change Council advised the Board at the last two meetings of the Change Council they had been reviewing the Pledge.

The Board was advised that the young people had identified various issues that they felt required updating. They also considered that the current Pledge was too 'wordy'. This feedback had been passed to Fran Arnold, Head of Safeguarding who was scheduled to attend the next Change Council meeting.

Kieran Boyce from the Change Council stated that in their view some of the factual information contained within the Pledge was inaccurate.

Councillor Williams reported that a designated teacher and a governor was in place at the school where she was a governor and that it was a shame that this was not Kieran's experience.

Dawn Shearsmith reported that it was a statutory requirement for a young person in care to have a designated teacher and stated that she would share the message that this does not always happen.

The Executive Director of People Services stated that the purpose of the Pledge was to hold Members to account and support young people. The Pledge must be continuously monitored and young people ought to be encouraged to speak up about

issues that they feel strongly about in order that steps could be taken to rectify them and make things happen.

The Head of Safeguarding suggested that 'Gorilla', a new graphics company that the Council was dealing with could present the Pledge to the young people in a different way which Daniel Bensley and Kieran Boyce felt would be useful.

10. RESOLVED to note the update.

## **Accommodation Issues**

Alan Caddick, Head of Housing Support and Community Living delivered a presentation describing the Council's current position in relation to looked after children accommodation and the position going forward.

The LAC Strategy 2013-2016 set out the objective which was to "promote the well-being of looked after children by providing them with stable homes where they feel safe and secure and can form healthy attachments with adults".

The Board was advised that the current looked after children accommodation provision comprised 4 Children's Homes, namely Grasswell House, Colombia Road, Revelstoke Road and Monument View. All of which housed six young people.

Accommodation for 'Into Independence' comprised Burlington Close which housed 6 young people, Chester Road which housed 4 young people and Trainer Flats which could house up to 15 young people.

The Board was advised that the Council's intentions for future included:

- Reviewing the needs of LAC and existing provision
- Reduce external placements by considering accommodation options in the city
- Scope the number of young people who will be 'Staying Put' beyond 18 in order to determine demand for supported accommodation;
- Review the Council's two in-house supported accommodation units;
- Work with providers to raise the quality and improve the choice of appropriate accommodation for care leavers

A series of service user and carers' views was included within the presentation. An update was also provided in relation to supported living.

There were different ways of obtaining investment to get what the Council required. The Board was advised that there was a Gateway of assessment that would assist

the Council to place young people in the most suitable accommodation. Moving to independence was important and the Council were also required to consider the LAC Strategy and the wider contextual issues discussed at the this Board.

Councillor Lawson stated that the last time the Corporate Parenting Board discussed accommodation issues, the Members raised whether young people would have contacts nearby and be close to family. Councillor Lawson then enquired if Homewood was still in use. In response, the Head of Housing Support and Community Living stated that the Council's aspiration was to look across the entire City. It was confirmed that the Trainer Flats were all located within the City, however the Council did try to place young people where they required support. Homewood was a Gentoo property.

Councillor McClennan stated that based on the feedback she had received CentrePoint, the Salvation Army and the YMCA were not ideal places for young people to go.

Councillor McClennan also commented that there were a number of atrocious flats in the Redhill Ward which housed young people leaving care. It was Councillor McClennan's view that the Council did not do young people justice putting them in such places.

The Head of Housing Support and Community Living concurred with Councillor McClennan and stated that it was essential that officers engage with Members at a local level to seek views such as this.

Councillor Williams stated that it was also important not to house a disproportionate number of people who had been through the care system un one place, so as not to attach any sort of stigma with a area. Councillor Williams considered that care leavers should be placed within a mixed and balanced area, one which anyone would want for their own child.

The Head of Housing Support and Community Living agreed to take Councillor Williams' views into consideration. He stated that Glebe and Home Housing was improving and had reasonably strong managers. He stated that linkages also needed to be made with other areas.

Councillor Farthing enquired where care leavers tended to want to live. The Head of Housing Support and Community Living stated that the feedback he had received was that young people did not want to live Washington and would prefer to live in the City Centre. Young people wanted to live in properties where they would be close together.

Kieran Boyce from the Change Council commented that six children in each children's home was a very low number considering the high volume of young people in Sunderland.

Daniel Bensley enquired if support was provided to young people moving into independent care, such as budgeting. The Head of Housing Support and Community Living responded advising that support was indeed part of the overall approach and that it should be included in young person's Pathway Plan that was agreed for the young person by their social worker.

Lynne Goldsmith confirmed that Pathway Plans should be in place to support young people with issues such as budgeting and that if it wasn't, young people were able to influence what goes into their Pathway Plan and should raise this.

Lucy Pierson commented that the Change Council was in the process of changing the Pathway Plan and developing a practical tasks list.

Sharon Willis commented that children's homes did start a Pathway Plan, however it was often difficult to describe to young people how to budget and how emotionally isolating living alone could be. Children's homes were working on ideas to try to teach young people how to manage these issues.

The Chair stated that she had recently visited Chester Road and complimented how good the home was.

The Executive Director of People Services commented that the Council was aware of the needs of young people and that they each have different requirements. He agreed that Chester Road was good and that it was hopefully the start of something that the Council was aware it needed to accelerate. The Council also acknowledged that it needed a range of options for young people and provision for university/army.

Alan Caddick was thanked for his presentation.

## **CSE and Missing**

Fran Arnold, Head of Safeguarding provided a verbal update to the Board in relation to how child exploitation issues were dealt with in Sunderland. In doing so she explained that there was a regulatory board in place to focus on the issue, a Northeast Strategic Board was also in place, chaired by Northumbria Police. Beneath that, there was a CSE/Missing Group that worked on a more local level. An operational board was also in place to deliver an action plan. Furthermore, there was regular scrutiny and oversight to monitor issues affecting vulnerable people.

The Board was reassured that the Council had revisited its processes to ensure that they were fit for purpose. The Head of Safeguarding advised that 32 vulnerable people were identified as part of the review, 8 of which were classed as high risk whilst 20 were classed as medium risk. The remainder were categorised as being vulnerable to risk.

Councillor Farthing enquired how the Council determined whether a person was 'vulnerable'. The Head of Safeguarding responded advising that a risk assessment and screening tool was used, as well as the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). All of which helped to identify if someone was vulnerable.

Councillor Farthing reported that Northumbria Police had recently indicated their rape allegations, and enquired whether they would influence the Council's data. In response, the Executive Director of People Service advised that the police held a lot of intelligence in relation to rape and statistics in Sunderland. A variety of agencies had provided assurances that 32 vulnerable people was a reasonable reflection of the risk of the number of vulnerable people in Sunderland.

Councillor Williams enquired in relation to the 32 vulnerable people if there was a gender or geographic split. The Head of Safeguarding responded advising that the gender was mixed and that ages ranged between 15-17 years old. Those classed as high risk were aged between 14-17. All were from mixed backgrounds.

11. RESOLVED to note the update.

## **IRO Annual Report**

The Chief Operating Officer tabled the following report: -

Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report April 2013 – March 2014

The report provided information about the performance of the Children's Independent Reviewing Team in Sunderland and their assessment of the services offered to looked after children in Sunderland from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014. The Board was advised that Sunderland was committed to delivering the best possible outcomes for its looked after children and the IRO Team had a key role in achieving this.

The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) had developed since the Adoption and Children Act 2002. The IRO Handbook (2010) provided statutory guidance on the role and responsibilities of the IRO.

The Board was advised that in the summer of 2013, the Children's Safeguarding Service became part of the People Directorate which brought together a range of services including Adult social care and Housing. The Executive Director of People Services commissioned an independent consultancy, Core Assets, to undertake a review of the Children's Safeguarding Service in March 2014. Members were informed that the IRO Team made a significant contribution to the quality assurance of practice and would respond as necessary to the recommendations and action plan arising from the Core Asset review.

At 31 March 2014 the number of looked after children in Sunderland had risen to 491 which was an increase of 54 children or 9.3% over the year.

The Chief Operating Officer advised that 42% of the children looked after in Sunderland were voluntarily accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. As this figure was deemed to be high it was to be the subject to further investigation.

The Board was advised that 177 children (36%) were the subject of either an interim or full care order, whilst 20% of looked after children were made subject to placement orders. It was confirmed that there were no children subject to freeing orders in Sunderland.

The data contained within the report was highlighted for Members. In particular statistics relating to placements for looked after children.

The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer was described within the report. Members were advised that there were 8.1 whole time equivalent IRO posts in Sunderland at 31 March 2014 and that the team of IROs in Sunderland was very experienced in terms of social work and management experience and undertaking the role of IRO.

The Board was advised that the Council recognised that looked after children in Sunderland received a good service from Viewpoint. A Viewpoint Co-ordinator visited children to help them to complete an online form to express their views and wishes and feelings about their care before their looked after reviews.

In terms of the timeliness of looked after children reviews, the Board was advised that 93.7% were conducted within the statutory timescales, which was an improvement on performance the previous year.

Priority areas for further development in 2014/2015 were highlighted within the report.

Councillor Lawson in referring to looked after children aged 18 and over stated that she would be interested to receive more information regarding how young people are prepared for independence. The Chair requested that something be submitted to a future Corporate Parenting Board to explain how young people are prepared for independence.

The Executive Director of People Services stated that an interactive session on this particular topic with participation from the young people themselves would be useful for a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board. He suggested that the Corporate Parenting Board may also be interested to receive some positive real life case studies.

Daniel Bensley commented that he felt young people should not need to leave care at age 18 and that it was too young.

Councillor McClennan agreed and suggested that the Corporate Parenting Board discuss this.

12. RESOLVED to note the update.

### **Performance Report for Quarter 1 and Adoption Scorecard**

The Executive Director of People Services submitted a report showing the current position of the Council as 'Corporate Parent'. The report also updated the Board on the current performance of the Council in meeting this responsibility.

The report included a position statement for Looked After Performance and the Looked After Children Performance Scorecard.

The Board was advised that the number of Looked After Children (LAC) had increased from 491 at 31 March 2014 to 523 at the end of June 2014, which was an increase of 6.5%.

The LAC short term stability indicator had slightly declined in 2013/14 for April to June 2014, although the indicator remained in the 'Very Good' band.

The long term stability indicator had also declined in performance from 68% in 2013/14 to 56% for April to June 2014, therefore it had not achieved the target of 73%. Current performance was also worse than the 2012/13 national average of 67%. The Board was advised that the Council's sustainable foster carers needed to be reviewed.



Sadly the timeliness of looked after reviews had declined significantly from 93% in 2013/14 to 61% for quarter 1 in 2014/15. The Council were aware that the target needed to be 100% which it was busy working towards.

11.3% of LAC were reported to have been placed outside the LA boundary and more than 20 miles away from where they used to live as at 30 June 2014. This had declined in performance compared to 9.2% as at 31 March 2014. It was noted that the Council needed to develop and grow more choice in terms of accommodation in Sunderland.

There was a good representation of children and young people who gave their opinions to the Viewpoint project. The percentages needed unpicking and the Council needed to become sharper with technology.

The percentage of adopted children who were placed for adoption within a year of agency decision had improved in April to June 2014.

The average number of days in the adoption family finding process had also improved in quarter 1 2014/2015 to 197 days compared to 215 days in 2013/2014. This was a positive result for Sunderland and was beyond the national average.

The Board considered it worrying that 27.9% of 19, 20 and 21 year old care leavers were in suitable accommodation during quarter 1 2014/2015 as this had reduced from 65.3% in 2013/2014.

The Head of Safeguarding explained that the Council needed to ensure that data gathering was correct and that validation exercises were accurate.

Rosemary, in drawing attention to The Looked After Children Scorecard position at quarter 1, 2014/2015 explained that Government required the Council to report nationally. The Board was advised that Sunderland placed more older children nationally than anywhere else in the Country. Sunderland also consciously tried to place sibling groups keeping them together.

Councillor Farthing commented that it would be useful to receive statistics regarding the stability of placements within the performance report.

The Head of Safeguarding took the opportunity to thank Rosemary and her team for their excellent work.

13. RESOLVED to note the report.

## **Sunderland Virtual School**

The Executive Director of People Services submitted a report advising the Board of the provisional results from schools during the year 2013/2014.

Dawn Shearsmith tabled a revised copy of the report at the meeting. In doing so she advised that for the purposes of data analysis, only those pupils who were continuously looked after for 12 months, or more, had been included.

Key Stage 1 outcomes in relation to reading, writing and maths were outlined for children who had been continuously looked after for at least 12 months. Outcomes in writing had increased and the gap was closing. Outcomes in maths were also reported to be on the increase and schools had been commended for their efforts.

Trends in the data over the last five years were outlined on page 3 of the report. It was confirmed that children that had made less than expected progress had a special educational need.

Statistics regarding school moves were outlined and it was reported that there was a general concern regarding school moves as it set children back 6 months in their attainment each time they moved. The Board was advised that Sunderland Virtual School had undertaken some work with social care to try to limit the number of school moves.

In relation to Key Stage 2 outcomes, the Board was advised that children generally performed better at reading than writing. In maths there was one looked after child that achieved a level 6 which was secondary level attainment.

The Board was advised that at the time of writing the report there were no 2014 national averages available to compare outcomes.

Positive outcomes were reported to the Board in relation to achievements in English and maths and trends at Key Stage 2.

The Virtual School was grateful to schools for their hard work.

Dawn advised that it would be useful if the Virtual School could receive copies of looked after childrens' Pathway Plans to allow it to track progress of 16-19 year olds that continue in education.

Councillor Farthing commented that it was pleasing to see improvements at all key stages and enquired what effect pupil premium had on the education of looked after children. In response Dawn advised that information regarding how pupil premium

was spent was contained in individual PEPs and that the Virtual School was looking to secure a more sophisticated database to record how pupil premium was spent.

The Chair commended the Headteacher of Sunderland Virtual School for the excellent support that she provided to schools and congratulated her on obtaining all of the statistics contained within her informative report.

14. RESOLVED to note the report.

### **Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006**

At the instance of the Chair, it was:-

15. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered to involve a likely disclosure of information relating to an individual, or information which was likely to reveal the identity of an individual (including the Authority holding that information) (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1 and 2).

(Signed) P. SMITH  
Chairman

### **Note:-**

The above minutes relate only to items considered during the time which the meeting was open to the public.

