

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 1 July 2019 in Committee Room 2,
Civic Centre, Sunderland at 3.15pm**

Part I

Present:

Members of the Board

Councillor L Farthing (in the Chair)	Washington South Ward
Councillor J McKeith	St Peter's Ward
Councillor P Smith	Silksworth Ward

All Supporting Officers

Jill Colbert	Chief Executive, TfC
Martin Birch	Director of Social Care, TfC
Linda Mason	Head Teacher, Virtual School
Sharon Willis	Strategic Service Manager – Accommodation, TfC
Liz McEvoy	Senior Housing Manager, Neighbourhoods
Gavin Taylor	IRO Service, Together for Children
Vicky Smith	Sunderland CCG
Kelly Haslem	NTW CYPS
Dr Sarah Mills	Designated Doctor for Looked After Health
James Harrison	Sunderland Echo
Gillian Kelly	Governance Services

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Francis, Marshall and O'Brien, together with Maurice Davis, Kay Dixon and Jane Wheeler.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2019 be agreed as a correct record subject to an amendment to the last paragraph of the Virtual School Update Report to show that young people had a personal advisor until they were 25.

The Chair asked if there had been any progress with regard to the Life Story Co-ordinator role and Martin Birch advised that it was still on the agenda but had not been progressed at this time. The young people on the Change Council had been undertaking some life story training but there was no update available currently. Meetings had been taking place with the Software Centre in relation to developing a Care Leavers 'app'.

The Chair referred to Saul's appointment to the post of Regional Children in Care Ambassador and asked if the Board could receive some feedback about how the role was working out.

Councillor Farthing also asked about introducing children and young people to their IRO and Gavin Taylor said that profiles of all IROs had been implemented and photographs had been provided by some staff.

Councillor Smith made reference to the possibility of having some case studies from the Virtual School and Linda Mason explained that the best time for this would be September/October when there had been an opportunity for a full year review.

Change Council Update

The Change Council had submitted their update report to the Board, unfortunately due to the Achievement Awards being held later in the evening, there were no young people able to attend to present the report.

The 10-15 and the 16+ group had been asked by the Together for Children Commissioning Team to review the Return Home Interview questions used by Barnardo's when speaking to a young person after a period of being missing. Both groups had commented on the forms and a response had been fed back from Barnardo's.

The Change Council Care Leavers Group were in the process of creating a cookbook which would be given to young people moving into supported accommodation and beyond in an effort to support those faced with finding the money to eat properly.

It had been estimated that those who leave care without a job would have only £21 a week to spend on food, drink and transport after bills and the new cookbook followed on from the £21 Challenge which had been looked at some years ago. The book included recipes created by young people and would be launched at an event at Sunderland College on 11 and 12 July 2019.

Together for Children had commissioned Innovation Unit as a partner in their transformation work earlier in the year and their role was to help colleagues identify priorities for change. Members of the Change Council had met with the Innovation Unit to share their views and opinions and Innovation Unit had asked that the Change Council be advised “how powerful and crucial their words and thoughts were to [them] in making the investment case”.

The Together for Children support services had moved to the Stanfield Centre in May 2019 and children and young people now had their own dedicated space at the front of the building showing the commitment to ensuring that the choice of children and young people was at the heart of the service’s work.

Kooth, an online counselling and emotional wellbeing platform for children and young people had been commissioned by Together for Children and Sunderland CCG. Representatives from the Change Council were involved in the press release for the launch of the platform which would be accessible through mobile, tablet and desktop and free at the point of use.

The Change Council had been involved in the recruitment and selection processes for recent appointments through Children’s Social Care including Heads of Service, Service Managers and Social Workers. Young people had created their own questions to ask applicants and their feedback had been used when appointing to the posts.

Members of the Change Council who had become part of the Young Commissioners Group had completed a two day training programme to enable them to commission and inspect services used by young people. Young people would become more involved in the commissioning process from the beginning.

The Regional Children in Care Council had visited Alton Towers as a reward to the group for the hard work and dedication which they had put into planning the children in care conference. Planning for the next conference was currently underway and members of the Change Council had met with other regions to discuss the issues they would like to focus on. Two young people from the Change Council had also attended the BYC Youth Voice Leadership Programme in Swindon.

Jamie Scott, Project Manager for Prevention and Early Help had attended the Change Council to talk about a project he was working on about being healthy and communicating this to children and young people. The Council had asked that Jamie attended a group to work through the questions in his survey so that they could give their views.

The Change Council had been working on creating a survey to get feedback in relation to Commitment 2; “if you need to come into care we will make sure that you are safe and properly cared for”. The survey was ready to go and the findings would be put into a report with recommendations and actions. The Change Council had also been invited to a social care team away day on 29 April 2019 to talk about family time.

2. RESOLVED that the Change Council update be noted.

Health of Looked After Children

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

There had been an average of 612 children looked after in this quarter which had increased slightly from the previous quarter. Compliance with Initial Health Assessments (IHA) being carried out within 20 working days of a child being looked after was good with 93% of IHAs taking place within statutory timescales.

122 Review Health Assessments had been carried out and this was 100% compliance, however all of the figures from June were not yet available. Four children did not attend their initial appointment but were rebooked within the timescale. The compliance for out of area health assessments had improved with 11 being completed within timescale during the last quarter. Improved consent and notification processes were in place and this had helped to improve compliance.

Eight Health passports had been issued during the quarter which represented 100% compliance. It was planned to revise the Health passport in line with improved joint working between the next steps and Looked After Health teams.

The Looked After Health team were seeking to recruit an administrator for the team and work to align the services between Sunderland and South Tyneside had commenced. Health profile data collection systems were up and running and an audit identifying information sharing pathways for looked after children with SEN, learning disabilities and EHCP had begun.

The Looked After Health Team had undertaken an audit of external placements and Vicky Smith provided an overview of the work. In 2018 there had been a total of 67 assessments conducted for 63 children and young people with the majority of the cohort being older children and young people.

14 of the children placed out of area required an IHA and 53 an RHA. The initial assessment proved to be the most difficult to complete within the timescale with only 36% being achieved within 28 days, however 85% of review assessments were carried out within timescale.

There were no themes in relation to location and delays but one identified factor was in relation to children who had multiple placement moves with no notification from the local authority to the health team. A sample of records had been assessed for quality and there were a variety of different tools being used. The team believed that the Sunderland health assessment tool was the best and would like it to be used systematically across the area. The main issue was notifications from the system and an action plan had been developed which included rewriting the external placement health assessment letter and emphasising the use of the Sunderland health assessment tool and the importance of notification of placement change to the Looked After Health team.

Councillor Smith asked what might lead to a young person being moved out of the area and then having multiple moves outside of Sunderland. Vicky said that this

could be due to a young person's complex needs or a placement breakdown. It was always the aim to maintain a young person within the local authority area but sometimes it was necessary to look elsewhere for a suitable placement and this could also be related to a need for a secure or mental health placement. This would therefore cause breaks in the young person's journey. Martin Birch added that some children might move into a hospital style placement and then their original placement would no longer be available; some children would be in a number of placements over a relatively short time frame.

Councillor Smith referred to work which she understood was being done regionally to get more accessible placements. Jill Colbert confirmed that this was still happening but this was not a just regional but national issue with under supply of placements. Together for Children worked with the other North East local authorities for fostering and residential placements and there were no obstacles to children being placed anywhere in the country. Officers shared members' concerns about children being placed out of area but were committed to ensuring that all placements were of an appropriate quality.

Having considered the report, it was: -

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

NTW Sunderland Looked After Children Data

The Board received a report from NTW for the period March to May 2019. There had been a spike in referrals during March and May. 18 young people were referred in March with two being discharged unseen, there were five referrals in April and 19 in May.

Of the total referrals during the period, three of these were categorised as Urgent. The Board were advised that the process for urgent referrals had changed as rather than all of these being seen by ICTS within 72 hours, young people were offered a telephone triage appointment within four hours and a face to face assessment within 24 hours.

The average waiting time for all referrals to CYPS from first contact was 18 weeks and three to four weeks for priority treatment, unfortunately there was no specific information for children looked after at this time. Current treatment pathways were under review and would be enhanced to meet the needs of looked after children. Weekly consultant clinical psychology time had been established in residential homes and group based intervention for foster carers was due to begin in September. These different ways of working were aimed at supporting placements and preventing placement breakdown.

The total CYPS caseload as of May 2019 was 2,380 of which 129 were children looked after, representing 5.4% of the total.

The Chair was pleased to hear about the strategies which were being adopted to reduce placement breakdown.

Dr Mills asked if it was felt that some referrals were not appropriate and what the source would usually be of these. She also asked if foster carers would be offered intervention if a young person did not engage. Kelly Haslem said that there were a variety of sources for the referrals and this was something which could be included in future reports. The group sessions for foster carers were intended to address unmet needs for cases which were not open. If young people were open to services then foster carers were able to access the attachment group.

The Chair queried if the referral source required analysis and Jill Colbert stated that as long as the service was aware then this could be worked on. Early work was important to ensure that a young person was referred to the right service.

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

Housing Offer for Young People

The Senior Housing Manager, Neighbourhoods and the Strategic Service Manager, Together for Children, submitted a report which set out the progress which had been made in the housing services offer for young people.

Liz McEvoy was in attendance to present the report and advised that the Housing Options Team were the source of advice and support for young people of 18 and upwards who were leaving care. The team had been working through an action plan developed following the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act and the visit from the Government's Homeless Advice Service Team (HAST).

Robust data was now being gathered on homeless young people aged 18-25 years and this had shaped and informed commissioning needs. The HAST visit had highlighted communications and advice and a leaflet had been produced based on best practice. Joint training from HAST had been undertaken by frontline staff from Housing, Together for Children, providers, the Youth Offending Service and adult social care.

Housing officers now also undertook home visits to prevent homelessness by mediating between parents/carers and young people and a working group had been established between Housing and Together for Children to consider the commissioning of accommodation for young people with complex needs.

There were also a number of actions arising from recommendations made by OFSTED which included firming up the offer for children accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. A bespoke team in the Next Steps service was looking at this and the information disseminated to young people would be reviewed as part of the ongoing work programme.

Housing services and Together for Children had drawn up a joint protocol setting out arrangements to prevent youth homelessness which would be circulated after being signed off by management teams.

A Homelessness Strategy had been developed which addressed the needs of homeless young people and care leavers and the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme had been altered so that care leavers were given priority for social housing. Affordability of housing was still a national issue and there were a few different approaches being taken and work was ongoing with housing providers.

Liz highlighted the importance of the way the teams had worked together during the year and the next steps were summarised as: -

- Finalise and publish the Homelessness Prevention Strategy and develop delivery plans linked to the priorities in relation to homeless young people and care leavers;
- Finalise and publish the Joint Protocol between Housing and Together for Children;
- Work with housing providers to overcome the affordability issues around young people having their own tenancies;
- Jointly commission supported housing for young homeless people and looked after children; and
- Together for Children to use Liquid Logic going forward to collect data for all young homeless people including those whose priority reason for presenting may not be homelessness.

Councillor Smith made reference to the Change Council report which said that some young people had only £21 left each week after payment of bills. It was also noted that it had been observed in health assessments that young people were displaying weight loss when they moved into their own accommodation. Jill Colbert said that it would be useful to engage Public Health on this, looking at living and eating well on a budget. She added that Together for Children were leading some work on apprenticeships and traineeships for care leavers as it did not always stack up to live independently.

The Chair commented that there were some organisations who were providing food cheaply, rather than food banks. For young people who wanted independence and wanted to work, supported accommodation was very expensive and young people often needed that support.

Sharon Willis said that young people in commissioned services were doing quite well but there were concerns about how emotionally resilient they would be once they transitioned out of the services. The older that young people were when they became looked after, the more difficult it was to prepare them for independent living.

5. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the update report on the joint work undertaken by Housing and Together for Children on the housing offer for young people be accepted; and
- (ii) a further report be received in July 2020 on the Homelessness Strategy and Joint Protocol in relation to young people as well as the

recommendations in this report required to improve the housing offer for young people further.

Virtual School Headteacher's Report

Linda Mason, Headteacher of the Virtual School submitted a report providing the Board with an update on some key indicators and developments in the last six months.

The current cohort of children looked after was 621 of which 401 were school age; 187 primary and 214 secondary. There were 147 pre-school age children looked after and 74 were post-16.

The Virtual School had been looking at the team structure and job descriptions and the new data technician had been in post since February 2019. The proposed new structure would focus on providing leadership and ownership over key areas of work and overseeing development and progress.

The Virtual School currently employed a number of agency tutors but was not always able to provide support as quickly as they would like. A key proposal was to employ teachers centrally on casual contracts who could then be deployed flexibly and therefore reduce agency costs.

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body had met with Councillor Farthing to discuss the future role of the Virtual School governing body. A National Leader of Governance had been asked to review current arrangements and make recommendations and the Governing Body had met to determine new procedures in June. Some additional governors would be required and it had been suggested that some of these could be 'corporate parent' governors.

Members were directed towards Table 4.1 which showed a breakdown of the children looked after of school age and highlighted that 12% of the total had an EHCP and 38% were receiving SEND support. The Virtual School was trying to encourage schools to respond immediately to the needs of SEND children.

72% of children looked after were in good or outstanding schools. If a school was placed into a category then the performance of vulnerable children and the support they were offered would be reviewed. A child would not be removed if they were happy and settled in that placement, however there was an ambition to increase the percentage of children in good or outstanding schools.

Up to 21 June 2019, school attendance across the cohort was 92%. Ten children had attendance of below 50%; these were known and tracked with monthly scrutiny. These children often had complex needs and were supported by a variety of services.

Turning to exclusion, it was reported that 60 children looked after had received a total of 270 days of fixed term exclusions and six children had accumulated 88 days between them. There were no permanent exclusions for children looked after.

The level of compliance with Personal Education Plans (PEPs) had been 94.4% when the report was written but had now reached 98%. This was a significant improvement and there was a good methodology now in place which had shown a real impact. From September all schools would be using an electronic PEP (EPEP) and training sessions for all Designated Teachers had recently concluded. This was an exciting phase of development and the feedback on the training had been excellent.

The Virtual School team would shortly move into new accommodation at the old Springwell Dene School and Board members were welcome to visit once the team was established there.

The report set out the key areas of focus for the next six months and Linda stated that one area of growth was increasing engagement with families of children who were no longer looked after. It was also hoped to work with universities with some research on reading outcomes for children looked after and to investigate paired reading with foster carers. The Virtual School was also looking at a summer programme of work opportunities and experience for young people, particularly in years 10 and 11.

The Chair referred to attendance and wondered if there should be some sort of reward or certificate to acknowledge good attendance. Linda stated that there was an expectation that there would be some sort of recognition and the celebration event at Christmas did provide this opportunity.

The Chair referred to recent publicity about exclusions of children with SEND and queried if there was some work to be done with Designated Teachers. Linda explained that the key phrase was 'reasonable adjustments' and sometimes behaviour policies were so precise that children could quickly fall foul of them. It was one issue which you had to keep communicating with schools about.

In relation to EPEPs the Chair commented that she was pleased that these were to be introduced as from what she had seen, these would provide a lot of information. She suggested that something could come back to the Board about the quality of PEPs in the future.

Having thanked Linda for her update, it was: -

6. RESOLVED that the information be noted.

Annual Fostering and Annual Adoption Reports

The Fostering Service Monitoring Report Form and the Together for Children Adoption Sunderland NMS 25 Report 2018/2019 were submitted to the Board for information.

Martin Birch advised that both of the reports were national minimum standard reports and some of the information was quite old, dating back to April 2018. He highlighted that there had been significant changes in the fostering service over the last six

months and the change to foster carer payments would also have an impact on the service. Training for carers had improved and it was planned to train staff to enable them to carry out further training. The service was being restructured and managers were being recruited for two teams, standard fostering and connected carers.

The Chair asked if connected carers were registered as foster carers and Martin said that they were and had to undertake the same assessment processes. On occasions carers were not always successful in meeting the national minimum standards but the courts could overrule that and put a Special Guardianship Order in place.

The Board therefore: -

7. RESOLVED that the Annual Fostering and Adoption Reports be received and noted.

Regulation 44 Visits

The Board received a report setting out the findings of the monthly unannounced visits to children's homes between November 2018 and April 2019.

The four residential homes in the city were all judged as either good or outstanding and all homes continued to have monthly, thematic visits with statements from young people providing positive views about their experience and relationship with staff. Family members had also commended that standard of care received and communication with the home which also evidenced the hard work of the residential staff. It was noted that there were high volumes of missing episodes but in settings such as Grasswell House, these all related to one young person.

Regulation 44 training was taking place during the following week in order to strengthen the knowledge base of staff. A feedback form was being developed for young people to complete.

Councillor Smith asked about councillor visits to homes and Jill Colbert said that she had been made aware that the matter of DBS checks for elected Members was under discussion. Visitors to homes did require a DBS and visits with councillors would not take place until the policy position was clear.

The Chair commented that because these were young people's homes, it had been the intention that councillors would be regular visitors and be connected to the homes within their ward. This arrangement had seemed to work well in the past.

The Chair also commended staff for the good or outstanding ratings of the homes and she added that she had been very pleased to visit Grasswell House and see how hard the staff had worked to turn the home round.

8. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Provisional Work Programme 2019/2020

The Board received a report setting out the proposed work programme for the forthcoming municipal year and were asked to consider any additional topics for discussion at a future meeting.

The Chair commented that across the region, practice was different and some authorities had more frequent corporate parenting meetings but of a less formal nature and she wondered whether this sort of approach could be explored in Sunderland. It was acknowledged that formal reports would still need to be considered but it might be possible to look at things in a different way.

Jill Colbert observed that, in light of the fact that Together for Children was on a positive improvement journey, she felt that a mirror should be held up to Sunderland's corporate parenting arrangements. She suggested that maybe a workshop style session could be held with young people to look at what they wanted from the Corporate Parenting Board and the nature of the partnership between the Board and children and young people. A strong oversight of education and access to health was important and what the Board would want professionals to be accountable for, but it might be useful to look at what other authorities were doing. It was proposed that a workshop be developed with young people to review the work plan and ways of working moving forward.

9. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the work programme be noted; and
- (ii) a workshop be arranged with young people to discuss the work programme and what they would want from the Corporate Parenting Board

(Signed) L FARTHING
Chair

