

## **CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 27 September 2021 at 5.30pm in the  
Council Chamber, Sunderland Civic Centre**

### **Present:**

#### **Members of the Board**

|                                      |                                          |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Councillor L Farthing (in the Chair) | Washington South Ward                    |
| Councillor J Blackburn               | Hetton Ward                              |
| Councillor C Burnicle                | St Chad's Ward                           |
| Councillor M Crosby                  | Sandhill Ward                            |
| Councillor J McKeith                 | St Peter's Ward                          |
| Councillor P Smith                   | Silksworth Ward                          |
| Catherine Hearne                     | Non-Exec Director, Together for Children |

#### **All Supporting Officers**

|                 |                                         |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Martin Birch    | Director of Children's Social Care, TfC |
| Linda Mason     | Headteacher, Virtual School             |
| Jane Wheeler    | Service Manager, Early Help, TfC        |
| Nikki Donaldson | Participation and Engagement Officer    |
| Ellie           | Change Council                          |
| Ian             | Change Council                          |
| Paula Gibbons   | Head of Service, Adopt Coast to Coast   |
| Jo Morgan       | Designated Nurse Looked After Children  |
| Lauren Nesbitt  | IRO Team Manager                        |
| Gavin Taylor    | IRO Manager                             |
| Gillian Kelly   | Governance Services                     |

#### **In Attendance**

|           |                                   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| Nic Marko | Local Democracy Reporting Service |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|

#### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tye

#### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## Minutes

7. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2021 be agreed as a correct record subject to an amendment to the final line of the Change Council item to read that the Chair *congratulated* Michael for presenting the report.

### *Children's Independent Reviewing Service – Annual Report*

Gavin Taylor responded to the matters which had been raised at the last meeting. Liaison with Liquid Logic Operational Group had been highlighted and Gavin advised that the group had resumed and met every three weeks to review and amendments and processes.

With regard to an increase in the number of Child Protection Plans for 'Emotional Abuse', Gavin stated that there had been a real shift in the sense of awareness around emotional abuse and this trend reflected national indicators.

In relation to Regulation 44 visits, relationships between the area committees and homes had been raised and the Chair commented that as Members within wards did change, they may not always be aware of the homes and any events which may take place there. Martin Birch stated that he would pass this to Sharon Willis to look at the relationships between the homes and local councillors.

Martin confirmed that Regulation 44 reports were shared with home managers and lessons learned would be put into action. He also explained that 'critical incidents' related to anything which involved damage, a verbal or physical altercation. Details of a critical incident would be forwarded to a child's social worker, the IRO and Martin as Director of Children's Social Care. Incidents were reported to Ofsted if there was Police involvement or if there had been an injury, serious illness or use of restraint.

Gavin advised that he would provide the guidance for notifying Ofsted of incidents for the information of Members. He went on to say that the IRO service also visited the homes on a monthly basis and received a report from the home manager. The IRO would assess against this report and send their report to Ofsted.

## Change Council Update

The Change Council report had been submitted to the Board and was presented to Members by Ian and Ellie.

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

The first 'Change the Language' working group had taken place and there was a provisional date to re-launch the campaign of 27 October 2021. The Chair recommended to Members the YouTube videos produced by the Change Council about their work.

The Cookbook had been launched successfully and good feedback had been received from the care experienced young people who had been provided with a copy of the cookbook.

Sunderland had hosted a first face to face regional meeting to discuss foster care for the Independent Fostering Service Contract. A survey had been created for cared for and care experienced young people to vote on their top two issues which would then become priorities for the regional group.

A key application had been submitted to create a young person friendly environment where meetings were held. Young people were comfortable and happy in their meeting space and would also like to create a small sensory space to provide somewhere to take time out during meetings.

The Change Council had been creating an anti-bullying workshop to be delivered in schools with the aim of challenging stereotypes about being cared for. The holiday activities had gone very well and enabled young people to get to know each other outside of Change Council meetings; the group would like to do more things together in the future.

The planned work for October to December was as follows: -

- Re-launch the Change the Language campaign
- Workshop created by young people to be delivered during Anti-Bullying Conferences week about being Cared for with the aim to educate others to reduce stereotypes and assumptions
- Plan and hold the Cared for and Care experienced Christmas Event
- Engage young people in enriching holiday activities to celebrate their hard work and increase engagement.
- Corporate Parenting introduction training
- Support the development of the corporate parenting strategy
- Support with update of the Bramble Centre
- Attend regional meetings
- Create packs for Afghanistan refugees.

Councillor Burnicle asked what methods were being used to sell the cookbook and Ian stated that it was being promoted through the Sunderland Youth Voice social media pages. Councillor Smith suggested that it might be useful to take the cookbooks to the next full Council meeting and make Members aware that they were available.

Councillor Blackburn asked if there were any videos of the summer activities and Ian said that again these were shared on social media.

Jane Wheeler provided an update on the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Work was being undertaken with the Change Council to identify what makes a good corporate parent and young people were creating a model for this. There had been six distinct areas identified: Education, Health, Listening, Aspiration, Support and Young People being at the centre of everything. It was intended to build on the 'Commitments' which had previously been agreed as a platform and for the

Corporate Parenting Board to look at the difference it could make to children and young people. It was intended to have a draft strategy to bring to the next Board meeting.

The Change Council had been asked about Member visits to children's homes and Ellie commented that it was important for young people to be asked if they were okay with visits being made. Councillor Smith said that, as an elected Member, they wanted to ensure that young people were getting the best deal possible and visiting the homes enabled learning on both sides.

Nikki Donaldson highlighted that young people had asked if visits were made to foster care placements and potentially relationships could be linked to events taking place in the homes.

Martin Birch commented that he used to go on visits himself, pre-pandemic and they could be useful for Members to see things first hand, however young people were voicing questions about this and consideration needed to be given to doing this in a different way. The Chair suggested that this could be incorporated into a forthcoming training session.

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

8. RESOLVED that the Change Council update be noted.

## **Health of Cared for Children**

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

The purpose of the report was to: -

- Demonstrate the duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children looked after
- Assure the Corporate Parenting Board that support and health services to children looked after were provided without undue delay or geographical prejudice
- Demonstrate the aim of the Looked After Health team for sustained improvement in the health and wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers
- Assure that the child's voice around health was included wherever possible
- Report on compliance with statutory targets from the Looked After Health Team for South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

The data being presented was for Quarter 1 of 2021/2022, April, May and June 2021 and the Board were advised that the health team had continued to offer face to face health assessments but had continued to be challenged due to isolating carers and young people and this had led to a number of cancelled and rebooked appointments.

There had been an average of 591 children cared for in quarter 1 which was a slight decrease from the previous quarter. 41 initial Health Assessments (IHAs) had been

carried out and there had been 93% compliance in the quarter. Five young people had either not been brought or refused to attend their appointment; three had been offered further appointments and the refusal pathway had been followed by two young people.

144 Review Health Assessments had been carried out in the quarter and this was 98% compliance with timescales. 18 young people were not brought for their appointments and three had refused.

There had been no out of area IHAs and 14 RHAs required during the period, with one RHA being completed outside of the timescale.

16 Health Passports had been issued during the quarter which represented 71% compliance; four passports had not been completed at the point of the young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday but would be completed afterwards and shared.

The medical team were completing an in-house audit of health assessments to identify areas of good practice and improvement. It was hoped that a summary of this audit would be available for the next Board meeting.

The obesity project had been completed and a healthy eating advice leaflet had been co-produced with carers for carers. A funding application had been successful for NHS England for the development of a Health Passport App for cared for and care experienced young people. This would be a regional project across the ICS footprint and Members were directed to a YouTube video demonstrating how the App would work.

Councillor Crosby asked about dental care and Jo Morgan reported that over 86% of young people had been seen over the last year which was felt to be a positive outcome. Some dental practices had chosen to go private but they should still see cared for young people.

Councillor McKeith queried what the process would be for those who had refused Initial Health Assessments. Jo said that the offer was always there but the Health Team would try to contact a young person three times before following the refusal pathway which would take the form of a questionnaire for the young person and their carer. The health needs of the young person would still be followed up even without an IHA.

Catherine Hearne enquired if there was a timescale for completion of the Health Passport and Jo advised that this was within a month of the young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Having considered the report, it was: -

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

## **CNTW Cared For Children Report**

This item was deferred until the next meeting.

### **Update on the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt Coast to Coast**

The Board received a report providing an update on the progress of the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt Coast to Coast since its virtual launch on 1 April 2021. Paula Gibbons, Head of Service, Adopt Coast to Coast was in attendance to present the report.

Regional adoption agencies were a Government initiative aimed at aligning practice so that adopters would have a set journey to follow. Together for Children were working in partnership with Cumbria and Durham County Councils to provide adoption services through a hub and spoke model. Adopt Coast to Coast was the 31<sup>st</sup> regional adoption agency to go live in England and had the benefit of learning from the experience of partners in other parts of the country who had launched their agencies at an earlier stage.

Paula stated that it had been a very successful first six months for the agency. Performance would be measured against that achieved by the three spokes in 2020/2021 and the agency was on target to approve more adopters this year.

The three spokes continued to provide their current adoption services from first contact and Together for Children Sunderland had statutory responsibility for their adoption service. The Head of Service was accountable for the performance, service improvements and delivery of the agreed outcomes across the spokes as detailed in the partnership arrangements.

A range of activity had been undertaken to raise awareness of Adopt Coast to Coast and there had been a significant increase in the number of followers for the Facebook and Instagram accounts. 200 enquiries had been received by the end of August with 167 being phone enquiries. It was recognised that prospective adopters engaged much more when there was a story of real families and adopters and there would be a focus on social media going forward.

Activity in Together for Children was showing early signs of a reduction in children waiting over six months for placements and also a reduction in inter agency fees. The key priority areas for 2021/2022 were: -

- To establish Adopt Coast to Coast as the 'go to' agency for those interested in adopting
- To continue to monitor brand recognition to ensure it is recognisable alongside and separately to LA partners
- To continually review the outcome of marketing activity to ensure best value and best return on investment
- To ensure the prospective adopters' journey is reviewed and streamlined through review and sharing of best practice
- To establish a regional adopter engagement group

- To establish early linking and matching
- To work across the partnership to develop the after adoption support offer.

Councillor McKeith asked if it would be possible to see a breakdown of the Together for Children performance only, as well as the Adopt Coast to Coast performance. Paula said that this would be possible but might be more useful once the agency had been in operation for a year.

The Chair commented that there had been some concern about telephone calls as there was now one number hosted by Durham County Council. Paula noted that the agency was very happy with the number of calls, staff in the call centre had received appropriate training and were enjoying dealing with the enquiries.

10. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

### **Virtual School – Headteacher’s Report**

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

At the current time there were 586 cared for children in the city, a reduction since June; it was highlighted that 50 new children had come into the cohort in the period and 66 had ceased to be cared for. When children first came into care, they required an EPEP to be generated within 20 days. Over the summer holidays when schools were closed, an interim EPEP was created and then a PEP meeting held with the school as soon as they reopened. This enabled the Virtual School to maintain 99% compliance with statutory expectations for EPEPs. Compliance had slightly dipped in the last year and now stood at 99.37%.

Linda highlighted the Key Stage 4 outcomes for 2021. There were 36 students in the cohort, 65% of which had SEND, 31% had an EHCP and 41% were in specialist provision. For GCSEs at grade 4 and above, three students had achieved six, one student gained seven, three students obtained eight and one young person achieved nine GCSEs. Progress and achievement at an individual level was monitored termly through the EPEP.

School attendance since the return from the holiday was 94% and 75% of the current cohort had 100% attendance. There had been no expulsions of cared for children from school in the last three years and there had been 24 suspensions in the Summer term, totalling 65 days and involving 20 children.

The Chair commented that it might be useful to know which Key Stage the suspensions took place in and potentially to have some anonymised case studies in the future. Linda agreed that some context might be beneficial for the Board as the young person involved quite often would be accessing services from CYPS and CAMHS.

Quality assurance had been a key area of focus for EPEPs this year and it was a termly expectation that these would be completed. The Virtual School worked closely with Designated Teachers to ensure consistency of quality.

The Board were advised that from September 2021, Virtual School Heads had been asked to lead on the strategy for good educational outcomes for children who had been assessed as being in need and currently had a social worker or had previously had a social worker. This included children aged from 0 to 18 in all educational settings and would be a partnership approach where Virtual Headteachers would use their knowledge and expertise to champion the educational attendance, attainment and progress of children with a social worker.

The Chair noted that the Government had alluded to setting up 'Family Hubs', which felt to be in a similar vein to Troubled Families and wondered whether this might link with this initiative.

The Ofsted inspection which had taken place between 28 June and 9 July 2021 had found Sunderland to have moved from 'inadequate' to 'outstanding'. The inspection had scrutinised the effectiveness of the Virtual School and had resulted in many positive comments. These had included commending the tenacity and ambition of the Virtual School Head and staff and the clear guidance and expectations for all of those working with the children. Linda said that the team had been delighted to receive this outcome.

Linda advised that there was an upcoming conference on 9 November which would be focused on trauma, recovery and resilience and would be open to cross agency partners. Training would also be available for all Chairs of Governors and Governors with responsibility for cared for children throughout 2021/2022.

Councillor Smith thanked Linda and her team for their excellent work, noting that outcomes had improved significantly under her leadership. Councillor McKeith echoed her comments and asked if it would be possible to see results for Maths and English as part of a future report.

The Chair also expressed her thanks to the Virtual School and emphasised that difference that it had made to educational outcomes for cared for children.

Upon consideration of the report, it was: -

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

## **Other Business**

Martin Birch informed Members that a new urgent care team 'We Are Together' had begun operating on 9 August 2021 with the aim to support children and families to stay together. The team comprised staff with varied and widespread skills and was currently working with 21 families. It was early days but it was hoped that the team would have a huge impact and it was suggested that a full report be brought back to the Board in around six months.



The Chair commented that this was an exciting initiative and the service had done well to recruit such skilled staff. The team built on the strengths of family group conferencing and she noted that this might also be the subject of a future report to the Board.

(Signed) L FARTHING  
Chair

