

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 20 January 2020 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 J McKeith	St Peter's Ward
Councillor S O'Brien	Sandhill Ward
Councillor P Smith	Silksworth Ward

All Supporting Officers

Jill Colbert	Chief Executive, TfC
Linda Mason	Head Teacher, Virtual School
Jane Wheeler	Service Manager, Together for Children
Billy Hardy	Change Council
Gavin Taylor	IRO Service, Together for Children
Keith Munro	IRO Service, Together for Children
Sharon Willis	Service Manager, Together for Children
Dr Sarah Mills	Designated Doctor for Looked After Health
Gillian Kelly	Governance Services

In Attendance

James Harrison	Sunderland Echo
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Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Marshall, D MacKnight, N MacKnight and Williams, together with Martin Birch.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

18. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2019 be agreed as a correct record.

The Chair referred to Councillor Davison's query about the number of fixed term exclusions for Virtual School children which were from schools which were judged to be inadequate or required improvement. Linda Mason would provide this information for the next meeting.

Change Council Update

Billy presented the report of the Change Council and advised that In My Opinion (IMO) had shared replies from teens in care leavers over the country as part of their #dearfutureme campaign. Many children and young people looked after and leaving care wrote a postcard about what the future holds and how they could achieve what they wanted in life.

Involving children and young people in recruitment and selection was embedded in Children's Social Care and in the past few months, children and young people had interviewed social workers as part of an adult panel.

Young people from the Change Council and Regional Children in Care Council had attended the IRO Conference in October. Workshops were held on placement moves and the effect these had, and life story work and raising awareness of the importance of this.

Preparations had been underway for the annual Regional Children in Care Council Conference due to be held on 30 January 2020 at the Beacon of Light. The themes for the conference were mental health and post-16 support and the day would include workshops run by young people, information stands and several young people would be speaking and sharing their stories.

The Participation and Engagement team had been running several drop-in sessions at Next Steps and within Sunderland's Children's Homes on a monthly basis to capture the voice of those young people who did not feel comfortable or could not attend a regular Change Council meeting. Monument View had also invited the team for breakfast on Saturday mornings where young people could sit with the team on an informal basis, allowing them to raise issues or suggestions.

Perrie from the Innovation Unit had attended the Change Council meeting to provide an update on their previous visit in March 2019. A document had been created showing 11 main themes as follows: -

- Mental health
- Better support in school
- Consistent, Relationally-Capable Social Workers
- Honest communication and greater involvement
- Everyone has aspirations

- Simple things can get in the way
- Apprenticeships are valued
- Continued personal support matters
- Stable housing can be hard to achieve
- More support for health and wellbeing and managing money

The document included a brief description of what was discussed and the information had been passed on to Together for Children, who were working to support the improvement of these services.

Following an issue raised by the Change Council's 16+ group, money was raised with the support of Hopespring to provide Christmas hampers to care leavers who did not have family to stay with and often did not receive Christmas presents. Hopespring also provided a Christmas Eve buffet for care leavers and the Manager of TfC Supported Accommodation ensured that there would be a Christmas dinner provided on Christmas Day for any care leaver who had nowhere to go.

The Christmas celebration and awards evening had again been a great success with 31 children and young people receiving awards in categories including education, inspiration to others and sports. The overall Mayor's Award this year went to the Change Council for all the hard work they had done over the past year.

The Chair congratulated the Change Council on the award, noting that the young people involved always worked hard. She added that Members could apply for tickets at the Regional Children in Care Conference through Eventbrite and encouraged those interested to do so.

19. 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 567 children looked after in quarter 3 which was a decrease from the previous quarter, this represented 102 children per 10,000. Compliance with Initial Health Assessments (IHA) being carried out within 20 working days of a child being looked after was good with 98% of IHAs taking place within statutory timescales.

141 Review Health Assessments had been carried out and this was 99% compliance with timescales. Of these children, 42 had not been brought to their booked appointment and it was a credit to the administration team who had managed to change things around and re-organise appointments. The compliance for out of area initial health assessments currently stood at 50% and Dr Mills noted that it was difficult to get these initial assessments done when the placement was out of the area. Three months' notice was given to out of area placements for Review Health Assessments, however it was known that some southern health departments were struggling with capacity.

Ten Health passports had been issued during the quarter which represented 100% compliance. The Health Passport would be revised in line with improved joint working between the next steps, Looked After Health teams and South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Trusts.

Work was ongoing to support and improve health services across South Tyneside and Sunderland and the voice of the child would be sought in relation to all changes.

Dr Mills presented the Health Profile Data which had been generated from the health assessments carried out between August 2018 and July 2019. The largest diagnostic group was for behaviour, mental health and lifestyle; this was a broad category and included specific mental health conditions, attachment issues and behaviour in schools. Meetings had been arranged to look at bolstering support for emotional wellbeing and mental health as this was a great concern to children and young people and corporate parents.

A number of in depth projects had been initiated for Asthma, weight and Epilepsy as these conditions were not typically well managed.

The levels of Special Educational Needs (SEN), Learning Disabilities and Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) identified in the quarter was now able to be reported and would help the ability of the service to meet the needs of young people.

Jill Colbert said that it was incredibly helpful to see the breakdown of conditions and asked where drug and alcohol issues would sit. Dr Mills explained that the medical conditions were based on specific coding but drug and alcohol data was collected separately. The Chair noted that this could be a key area for a Health and Wellbeing Board discussion.

Councillor Smith asked how much of a concern mental health was for children looked after and if there was a particular age group which was more likely to experience difficulties. Dr Mills stated that probably care leavers were of most concern as they could be isolated when transitioning to adult services, however mental health was becoming a worry early on and there was not an age group where there were not concerns.

The Board also received a copy of the review of Sunderland looked after health practice for children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities. Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) were reviewing local authority areas to understand how agencies connected to meet the needs and improve the life chances of children with SEN/D in accordance with legislation.

There was no inspection date as yet but the review aimed to enable partners to be as prepared as they could be. A benchmarking exercise was carried out on neighbouring localities who had received an inspection and the identified areas of improvement for Newcastle, Middlesbrough and Cleveland were examined so that Sunderland could consider what might be improved. Dr Mills noted that as a Looked After Health team, they had felt that closer working with the Virtual School was something which could be developed further.

The Chair expressed some concern that the numbers of children looked after with SEN/D and or EHCP were disproportionately low in Sunderland and Dr Mills agreed that children with EHCPs seemed to be underrepresented and it was difficult to get that information.

Linda Mason commented that EHCPs often focused on learning need but the Virtual School was working with schools on social and emotional needs. Trying to describe behaviours had always been a difficult task and SEN ranges were supportive for this.

Councillor O'Brien asked about the timescales for EHCPs and Linda advised that schools were expected to gather evidence over a couple of terms and there was a gestation of about 26 weeks for the plan. The whole process could take a year with evidence being gathered from education, health and social care. Jill Colbert highlighted that this was guided by national expectations set out in the SEN Code of Practice.

Councillor O'Brien was concerned that the system did not seem to have changed for a number of years and the Chair highlighted that professionals did look at other ways of supporting a young person and they would have a personal plan developed, depending on their issues. Jill Colbert noted that the report was concerned with whether the right things were being done for the children in the care of Together for Children and they were committed to doing more work to ensure that they were getting the right support.

Linda Mason added that there were graduated responses to a level of concern under the SEN Code of Practice and Sunderland had introduced ranges in relation to cognition and learning, which schools could use as criteria for measuring progress. This would then enable a decision to be made about moving forward to the EHCP process.

Dr Mills commented that the Looked After Health team now had a good understanding of the Code of Practice and were liaising with education to make sure that this was reflected in health plans.

Having considered the report, it was: -

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

NTW Sunderland Looked After Children Data

There was no one available from NTW to attend the meeting and therefore the item was deferred to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher

Linda Mason, Headteacher of the Virtual School submitted the statutory annual report of the Virtual School Head and the Virtual School for Together for Children and Sunderland City Council. The report highlighted the work of the Virtual School in

improving educational outcomes for Children Looked After from the early years up to targeted care leavers aged 25. The data was for children who had been in the care of Together for Children for a year or more as at 31 March 2019.

The report set out the context and characteristics of the cohort of children looked after in Sunderland and it was highlighted that the structure of the Virtual School had been reviewed and a consultation was due to take place on proposals to increase the staff numbers in the school. The structure in November 2018 and January 2020 had been illustrated within the report and showed that ten associate teachers had been employed on variable hours contracts to provide support in school, home tuition and tuition on site.

The total number of children looked after aged 0 -18 years on 31 March was 595 and 373 of these had been in care for at least a year and this number was used for statistical purposes in the report. Table 4.4 showed a breakdown of all of the children looked after on the school roll and Members were advised that 62 of the total had EHCPs and a further 120 received school based SEND support. This represented 32% of the total cohort.

98 of children looked after by Together for Children were placed in schools outside of Sunderland and there were 37 children in the care of other local authorities who were educated in Sunderland. 64% of all children looked after were in schools rated good or better by Ofsted. Linda stated that when a school was judged to 'Require Improvement', she would look at the report immediately to ascertain if there was a positive statement in relation to behaviour and welfare and would not automatically remove a child if they were settled. The curriculum match, welfare support and guidance in some schools requiring improvement would mean that a child looked after actually did better than they might in a higher rated school.

Linda advised that improvements had been seen across all indicators for educational outcomes and the gap between children looked after and all children in Sunderland was narrowing. The number of children achieving a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage had increased and was above the regional and national average for children looked after. At Key Stage 2, children achieved mainly at expected level but there were not so many achieving at the higher level.

Turning to Progress 8 scores for Key Stage 4 children, Linda advised that good progress would be shown by 0 or a + figure and explained that each 0.5 represented half a grade. The Virtual School was showing as -1.55 in relation to Progress 8, therefore a grade and a half below the majority of children. Ofsted were developing a new framework which was looking at the school curriculum matching the needs of the cohort.

The Chair commented that outcomes at Key Stage 4 in particular could very much depend on the individual concerned and what had happened in their life. Having stability in school was helpful and it was important that children looked after stayed within their own cohort.

The figures for post-16/Key Stage 5 were not dissimilar to the national picture and there was work taking place currently to reduce the number of vulnerable children who were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Attendance levels had gone back up to 95.14% and absence levels were scrutinised by the Virtual School on a termly basis, with intervention and support provided where appropriate. The data from 2018/2019 showed that there had been 54 children looked after who had received fixed term exclusions equating to 253 days of exclusion across 31 schools. The Virtual School was developing an improvement plan in relation to exclusions and had an ambitious target of 0% exclusions from primary schools. It was intended to use the SEN ranges to identify issues rather than fixed term exclusions.

The Chair noted that some secondary schools had a zero tolerance policy and used the sanction of fixed term exclusions more frequently. Linda stated that the Virtual School had worked closely with schools which had the majority of exclusions and had actually put a Teaching Assistant into one school which had had a significant impact.

The Chair went on to ask who would advocate on a young person's behalf if it was felt that a school had behaved inappropriately and Linda said that would be her, alongside the young person's carer and social worker. The Chair commented that this was a very important role and that she would like to know more about this. Linda suggested that she could provide a summary of the sorts of things which the Virtual School had been involved in with regard to advocacy.

The Virtual School self-assessment had judged the school to require improvement and some external scrutiny had been requested. The school improvement plan identified the key actions to improve the outcomes of children looked after and the key priorities would be: -

- Developing the effectiveness of leadership and management
- Raising attainment and progress for children looked after
- To engage partners in improvement of educational outcomes for children looked after
- To raise the profile of Sunderland Virtual School
- EPEP development and improvement of quality and timelines on completion
- Improving attendance
- Reducing exclusions
- Education placement for all children looked after
- No drift on admissions to new schools
- New structure including the development of Associate Tutors
- Annual training programme

Linda highlighted that the EPEP had been implemented during the previous term and compliance was 88% and the Virtual School was aware of the issues for the young people who did not have them. Schools did see the value of the EPEP and once they had completed one, the process became more straightforward.

The Chair commented that the framework which the Virtual School had to work in had many contradictions and queried how this could be married up with the Progress 8 targets. Linda advised that since September, Ofsted reports that started to emerge would begin to identify if curriculum or progress was most important and it remained to be seen how this would transfer to data collection.

Upon consideration of the information, it was: -

21. RESOLVED that the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher be noted.

Regulation 44 Visits – May to October 2019

The Board received a report providing an update on the findings in relation to Regulation 44 visits of children's homes undertaken between May 2019 and October 2019.

Colombo Road had received an inspection from Ofsted since the last report to the Corporate Parenting Board and had been judged to be Outstanding for the third visit in a row. The Regulation 44 visits had also been positive with the number of recommendations reducing from 20 to 13 in the reporting period. The voices of young people and their parents came through strongly in the visits and the therapeutic dog at the home had also had a significant impact on the young people living there.

Monument View had also received an Ofsted inspection in recent months and their judgment had reduced from Outstanding to Good. Ofsted had not yet released their full inspection report, therefore the reasons for the change in judgement were not formally available as yet.

The Chair commented that the therapeutic work done at Monument View had not seemed to be valued by the inspector. She felt that the staff were doing an excellent job and was concerned for the impact on staff morale. Sharon Willis noted that there was some work to be done in supporting the staff and there was concern that how well you had to do to get a Good rating was not recognised. Keith Munro added that the comments from young people and parents continued to be good.

Grasswell House had been on a journey following a Requires Improvement judgement and was now rated Good. The home had been inspected the previous week and was found to have 'Improved Effectiveness'.

Revelstoke Road remained Good and despite having a number of critical incidents, Ofsted was very satisfied with how these were being dealt with. All staff were working hard to keep the home improving and the Signs of Safety Model was due to be implemented in the home.

Councillor Davison asked if further information could be given on what was a 'critical incident' and what action was taken to mitigate its effects.

Keith Munro advised that some critical incidents had to be notified to Ofsted and some were based on judgement. If a young person went missing, that would be a critical incident. Staff worked to establish push and pull factors and put strategies in place to reduce those. Notifications had to be made by the home within 24 hours.

The Chair referred to the PACE parenting model mentioned in the report and suggested that a paper could be brought to the Board on this in the future. She highlighted that the physical environment of the homes was fabulous with comfortable communal areas and recently refurbished kitchens.

Having considered the update on Regulation 44 visits, it was: -

22. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Provisional Work Programme 2019/2020

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

In addition to the report requested on the PACE parenting model, which would be produced by Sharon Willis and Dr Liz McManus, it was proposed that examples of the new EPEPs be brought to the July meeting.

23. RESOLVED that the work programme be noted and the suggested new items added.

(Signed) L FARTHING
Chair

