

## Corporate Parenting Board

A meeting of Corporate Parenting Board was held on Friday, 2nd July, 2021.

**Present:** Cllr Barbara Inman (Chairman), Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Lisa Evans (Sub for Cllr Robert Cook), Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Sally Ann Watson

**Officers:** Michael Henderson, John Devine, David Willingham, Mandie Rowlands, Jonathan Fawcett (SBC)

**Also in attendance:** Sarah McNulty (North Tees Hospital), Emma Groves (TEWV)

**Apologies:** Cllr Robert Cook

### **1 Declarations of Interest**

### **2 Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2021**

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **3 Children in our Care – comparative analysis - Presentation**

The Board received a report, and presentation that assisted Members to gain a full understanding of the nature and scale of issues in relation to looked after children in Stockton-on-Tees.

The statistical analysis looked to provide a context to the current position, including appropriate comparisons with other local authorities over a timescale of several years.

The statistical analysis contained details on:

- Children looked after at 31 March, by local authority;
- Children who started to be looked after during the years ending 31 March, by local authority.
- Children who ceased to be looked after during the years ending 31 March, by local authority.
- Children who ceased to be looked after and the number and percentage adopted during the year ending 31 March, by local authority.
- Care leavers now aged 19, 20 and 21 by activity, by local authority.
- Care leavers aged 17 and 18 by activity, by local authority
- Children in care return and quality report, and
- Children looked after who were missing or away from their placement without authorisation, by local authority.

#### Discussion:

- Members noted that the data provided indicated a continued rise in the number of Children in Our Care.
- There was work being undertaken to move children through care, as quickly as possible, and return them, from care, when it was safe to do so. More work was being developed to support families prior to care being necessary. The number of children who started to be looked after, appeared to be reducing, which may be an indication of work, already undertaken, taking effect.
- It was suggested that future reports could include some analysis, commentary, and footnotes where some explanation of figures would be helpful
- The Board was aware of an ongoing, internal review of Children's Services and relevant outcomes of this would be provided to the Board, at an appropriate point.
- the Council had strong processes for recording children, who went missing, and staff were particularly vigilant in this area.
- The Council was being proactive in engaging potential future social workers and recruiting trained ones.
- Some care leavers were given the opportunity to take up apprenticeships within Council services.
- There had been a drop in children adopted during 2020 and it was suggested that this may be linked to the pandemic.

**RESOLVED that** the data and discussion be noted/actioned as appropriate.

#### **4 Out of Area placements - An overview of support during COVID**

Members considered a report that was intended to provide a brief overview of the monitoring process in regard to external residential children's homes where children in our care lived. It was also intended to provide assurance that children in our care, who were placed in those homes were receiving a good quality standard of care.

It was noted that, when there was a need to place a child in residential care, internal residential placements were always considered in the first instance. There were, however, times when this was not appropriate, or possible. In such situations, the Council turned its joint venture partners, SPARK of Genius and, only when this option had also been exhausted, did the Council seek to purchase a placement from other providers.

The importance of placing children in our care in suitable and safe accommodation remained high on the Council's agenda. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic had provided additional challenges, over the last 12 months. There had been a shortage of available placements and an increased reluctance from

providers to take children in an emergency.

Visiting providers had been a challenge and, in some instances, not possible. However, the Resource Team which were responsible for finding placements and monitoring those placements had been creative and responsive to concerns in placements, during this period. Meetings had been virtual, when visits had not been possible, and records examined electronically.

This report combined summative data from Ofsted inspection judgements and 'in house' monitoring visits, thus providing assurances on the quality of placements and appropriate responses when this was a concern in regard to where our young people were placed. Additionally, the report captured collective themes and concerns from visits, as well as referencing any feedback, from providers, on their experiences of working with the Local Authority.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, Ofsted suspended routine inspections to Children's Residential homes from March 2020. Instead, Ofsted completed Assurance/Compliance visits to homes. During these visits, inspectors evaluated that children were well cared for, safe, and that leaders and managers were exercising strong leadership. However, no judgements were issued during these visits. This has meant that homes ratings had remained static throughout the past year.

The Council was notified that two such compliance visits had taken place in homes where we had children placed, that raised concerns. The Council ensured that face to face monitoring visits were undertaken to these homes and support was offered to ensure that our young people were safe. Both young people had since been moved from the placements.

Discussion:

- It was agreed that the next update report would include more specific data, on geographical locations, of out of area placements, and an indication on whether the placement was due to capacity in the Borough or whether specialist provision was necessary, which was not available in the Borough.
- Finding/creating placements, within the Borough, for our children in care was a high priority.

RESOLVED that the report and discussion be noted/actioned as necessary.

## **5 Children in Our Care Strategic Group Update**

Members were provided with an overview of work and discussions at the Children in Our Care (CIOC) Strategic Group meeting.

The Strategic Group had considered several areas including:

,

- Children's Services Review
- Multi-agency support for vulnerable teenagers
- Child's Voice
- CIOC Health Report.
- Children's National Review
- CIOC Action Plan

-It was explained that the Strategic Group Action Plan was being refreshed to identify clearer objectives. Details would be presented to the next meeting.

- all children had received an annual health assessment.

-the Clinical Commissioning Group had written to all dental practices advising that children in our care should receive priority appointments.

-the voice of the child was central to strategies and plans and should be a thread in all documents.

RESOLVED that the report and discussion be noted/actioned as appropriate.

## **6 Forward Plan**

The Board noted its Forward Plan