

# Corporate Parenting Board

A meeting of Corporate Parenting Board was held on Friday, 11th February, 2022.

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

**Officers:** Rhona Bollands, Martin Gray, Michael Henderson, Jo Lee, Mandy Rowlands, Jane Smith

**Also in attendance:**

**Apologies:**

## **1 Evacuation Procedure**

The Evacuation Procedure was noted.

## **2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **3 Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2021**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December were confirmed as a correct record.

## **4 Independent Review Unit Annual Report 2020/2021**

Members received a report that provided information regarding the effectiveness of the Independent Review Unit in Stockton-on-Tees and its contribution towards the quality assurance and improvement of services for Children in Our Care.

It was explained that the provision of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) was a statutory requirement, and the Council was required to have a formal process for the Independent Reviewing Officer to carry out the two separate aspects to the function of an IRO, these being:

- To chair a child's review.
- To monitor the appropriateness of the care plan on an ongoing basis, ensuring care plans fully reflected the child's current needs.

The responsibility of an IRO was to offer overview, scrutiny and challenge regarding case management. The IROs had a key role in relation to the improvement of Care Planning for Looked After Children (LAC), with emphasis upon challenging drift and delay.

In Stockton on Tees the IROs were also responsible for Chairing Child Protection Case conferences. The chair of a Child protection Conference was accountable to the Director of Children's Services, and should be a professional, independent of operational and/or line management responsibilities for the case. Additional responsibilities of IRO's included undertaking foster care reviews.

## Discussion:

- the need for escalation had reduced and officers were encouraged to intervene, as early as possible, using a quality assurance tool. The tool facilitated work between IROs. Social Workers and Team Managers and helped prevent formal dispute processes. However, a consistent response to the tool needed to be embedded across the service.
- There had been challenges around some longstanding IROs leaving the service and a revised management structure and new ways of working had been introduced. New staff members had joined the team, including some who had previously been field workers, and a key priority was to support these new staff members.
- The field workers, who had moved to the Independent Review Unit, had created capacity issues in social work teams and it was noted that the Children's Services Review had identified some additional resources that would help with this.
- The IROs needed to be independent but also work as part of the system, to continually improve it

**RESOLVED** that the report and discussion be noted.

## **5 Performance Report for Our Place – Edge of Care Service**

Members considered a performance report relating to Our Place – Edge of Care Service.

It was explained that the Edge of Care Service had opened 31st January 2018 with the purpose of providing a range of intensive prevention and support strategies aimed at avoiding family breakdown, where without this level of intervention, the child/ren were likely to become a Child/ren in Our Care.

Over time, the service had shifted in its purpose to responded to demand and presenting need. Year on year, the data demonstrated an increase in demand for support to children, already in care. Significantly, in 2021, this accounted for 38% of the referrals.

There had been opportunities provided to learn about the quality and impact of the service from children, carers and parents and social workers. Those that had provided feedback (though limited in number) had rated the service in the main as excellent. The service had received only 1 complaint, this was responded to and resolved at the early resolution stage.

It was explained that the Council would be implementing the 'Mockingbird Model' in its foster care system. This was an innovative foster care delivery model that created an extended family/community network of support. Enhancing the development of foster care skills and reliance leading to better retention of quality foster families who were better equipped to meet the

challenging and complex needs of children and young people. Having skilled workers and strong working relationships between the Fostering Team and Our Place was already advantageous as the Council moved through the elements to develop the 'Mockingbird Model' and the intention was to align the support for foster carers, not only with each other but with residential support that could be built on further.

Additionally the recent changes in legislation and guidance regarding multiple houses coming under one children's home registration brings possibilities to develop further the provision delivered from across the councils' children's homes. It was therefore proposed to develop an additional property to work alongside the current service, as well as invest further in the turnaround provision to reduce the need for Our Place to have to accept referrals for children already in care.

The service would be commissioning an independent evaluation to inform next stages.

Members were advised of work to review the service's statement of purpose.

Discussion:

- It was agreed that more work with families, around feedback, was needed and a questionnaire was being developed.

RESOLVED that:

1. the report be noted
2. the proposal to seek a further independent evaluation be noted
3. the further work to review the statement of purpose be noted
4. the proposals for further development, including the proposal to seek a further property to expand the service be noted.

## **6 Children in Our Care Strategic Group**

Members received an update report on the work of the Children in Our Care Strategic Group (CIOCSG) and progress against priorities and the action plan.

The report also provided details of the findings coming from a 2 day focussed visit that had taken place in December 2021.

RESOLVED that the update be noted

## **7 Forward Plan**

The Board noted its Forward Plan.