

Corporate Parenting Board

A meeting of Corporate Parenting Board was held on Friday, 12th August, 2022.

Present: Cllr Barbara Inman (Chair), Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Carol Clark, Cllr Robert Cook,, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Hilary Vickers, Cllr Tony Riordan(vice Cllr Sally Ann Watson).

Officers: Martin Gray, Rhona Bollands, Jo Lee, Johanne Parker, Mandie Rowlands (D-CHS); Nigel Hart (D-CS).

Also in attendance: Cllr Lisa Evans.

Apologies: Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

CPB Evacuation Procedure

7/22

The Evacuation procedure was noted.

CPB Declarations of Interest

8/22

There were no Declarations of Interest recorded.

CPB Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2022

9/22

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 10th June 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

CPB Children in Our Care Placements and Care Leavers' Accommodation Updates

10/22

Further to discussion at the last meeting, Members were provided with assurance from the Director of Childrens Services regarding both the steps taken by the authority when children in our care were placed in provision which was less than good; and how our approach to placement of care leavers within accommodation was being reviewed.

Every attempt was made to place children within our care within 'good or better places' however such was the lack of availability of provision both locally and nationally, placement within 'less than good' provision was unavoidable but was not done so without extensive checks and balances being undertaken. This involved thorough planning and dialogue with the homes involving the social worker and placements teams, as well as the Independent Reviewing Officer. An assessment of suitability of a place was not solely based on an Ofsted judgement, which could often be a more technical assessment, but would include consideration of the views of children themselves.

Every effort was made to avoid external out of area placements but sometimes these were unavoidable and were used when distance from potential risk / threat was part of the criteria for placement.

Placement sufficiency is a national challenge as evidenced by the Independent Care Review and an examination by the Markets and Competition Authority. Equally, within Stockton, we were reviewing our model of provision in an effort to have more control over quality and cost and keep more of our children in the

Borough, and this would include consideration of our provision as well as further provision via the joint venture.

Members were assured that much work was undertaken to assure the quality of our provision with regional tools and information shared amongst local authorities across the North East, much desk top analysis undertaken, site visits and the views of young people sought, as well as professional assessment of whether the placement was the right fit for the young person.

Regards post 16 provision, it was noted that one property that had been considered was now not being pursued, and whilst a number of individual units within one building had worked well previously, it was extremely difficult to source locations and properties. Therefore, officers were again reviewing the suitability of the model currently.

Members asked and received assurance that all ward members would be consulted about proposed placements within their wards and their comments taken into consideration.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

**CPB
11/22** **Adoption Tees Valley Annual Report 2021 - 22**

RESOLVED that consideration of the item be deferred until the next meeting.

**CPB
12/22** **Annual Report of the Fostering Panel - 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022**

The Board received the Annual Report of the Fostering Panel for 2021/22.

The Fostering Panel considered matters referred to it under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the Care Planning and Case Review Regulations 2010. The Panel considered the assessment of applicants' suitability to foster for both unrelated and connected foster carers. The Panel sought to reach a recommendation in respect of suitability and terms of approval, identifying type of fostering, numbers and characteristics of the children the carer should foster. The Panel also considered and made recommendations in respect of matches of children with long term foster carers.

Members noted the following implications on the service as a result of the Corona pandemic:-

- Foster carers demonstrated a significant commitment and determination to offer children in their care a period of stability and security during a period of high risk and change;
- Most children were home-schooled during the first series of school closures and foster carers were creative in ensuring children had the opportunity to continue to learn and develop;
- Children were encouraged to return to school during the second period of school closures; where the decision was made for children to continue to be home schooled, this was made in conjunction with social workers, school and

the carer.

- Foster carers adapted quickly to offer creative ways of supporting children to maintain regular contact with their birth families including the use of video links, videos, photographs and regular written updates. Foster carers promoted face to face family time for children, once it was assessed as safe to do so;

- Availability of placements has been restricted throughout both years both in-house and via the Independent Fostering Agencies. This is because of foster carers shielding or taking a break as well carers self-isolating for periods because of Covid-19;

- Whilst fostering enquiries initially increased, the number of people requesting information packs has been significantly reduced in comparison to previous years;

- The number of resignations has increased during this current reporting period. Analysis of the reasons for resignations identified that a number of foster carers in the 60+ age bracket made the decision to retire either due to having had a period 'on hold' as a result of shielding or recognizing that the expectations and risks associated with fostering were too high. For other carers significant health issues led them to submitting their resignation, whilst others had experienced a change in their personal circumstances during the period of the pandemic.

Members noted that in the year in question there were 21 approved foster carers; a decrease from the previous year during Covid when the regulations were relaxed temporarily and the Authority was able to recruit former carers that had previously retired and could provide support as a contingency arrangement.

As at 31 March 2022, there were 166 approved fostering households, a decrease of 11 from the previous reporting period (177). There were 91 mainstream approved foster carers (which had reduced by 12 from the previous year), and there were 75 approved connected carers (which had increased by 1 from the previous year). Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, 14 mainstream foster carers had resigned (compared to 15 during the previous year). 6 of these carers retired from fostering due to age/ill health, 4 for personal reasons due to a change in personal circumstances, 1 following an allegation, 2 following a disruption and 1 retired though continued to care for a young person under a staying put arrangement.

Members queried the process undertaken for re-recruitment of former foster carers and asked about the regularity of checks of their criminal record. It was noted that DBS checks were undertaken every 3 years and in between that period, carers were obliged to notify the Authority of any change, as would the Police. On receipt of such a notification, the Foster Panel would look at the circumstances and make a recommendation to the Assistant Director for determination.

RESOLVED that the Annual Report of the Fostering Panel for 21/22 be noted.

**CPB
13/22**

Corporate Parenting end of year performance update 2021/22

The Board received an end of year 2021/22 Corporate Parenting performance

update.

In broad terms, we had experienced an improvement in the last year and in some areas the Authority had outperformed the region. In the last year, fewer children were in our care and more children ceased to be in our care. More children did however start to be in our care.

When children were in our care, fewer children had their annual health assessment than did in the year before, but this was counter to the direction of travel in the previous period. Fewer care leavers received a service at the end of the period and more care leavers aged 18 – 21 stayed with their foster carers.

The Council was now taking less time to place a child with a matched adoptive family and, as a result when children were adopted, even less time was now taken to move them in with their adoptive family.

In relation to the leaving care cohort, whilst fewer 17 – 18 year olds were in education, employment or training, more 19 – 21 year olds were. The difference between those age groups continued when we see that more 17 – 18 year olds were in suitable accommodation, but fewer 19 – 21 year olds were.

Compared with the region, overall we had performed better in terms of:

- Number of children starting to be children in our care
- Time taken in days between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family;
- Time taken in days between receiving authority to place a child and deciding on an adoptive match;
- Care leavers in receipt of service at end of period;
- Percentage of care leavers aged 19 – 21 in education, employment and training.

RESOLVED that the End of Year Performance Update report be noted.

**CPB
14/22** **Children in our Care Strategic Group**

The Board received an Update Report for Children in Our Care Strategic Group as at August 2022.

Members noted the progress made the progress made in the following priority areas:-

- Priority 2. Improve outcomes and life chances, with a focus on:
2.2 Closing the educational gap between children in our care and those that are not;
- Priority 4. Develop and communicate our vision, embed our approach and intent.
4.3 Identify clear Corporate Parenting roles and opportunities including our 'No Limits' programme;
- Priority 5. Improve outcomes for Care Experienced young people (Care

Leavers) by focusing on:

5.6 Further develop our procedures to prevent and reduce homelessness for 16–17-year-old Care Leavers.

The CIOCSG was sighted on a recent consultation launched by OFSTED around introducing a separate judgement on 'The experiences and progress of Care Leavers' within the wider inspection of Local Authority Children's services (ILACS) framework. Following research undertaken by OFSTED it was felt that the previous process of embedding OFSTED's evaluation of the experiences and progress of Care Leavers within the wider 'Children in care and Care leavers' judgement had not maximised the profile of Care Leavers to the extent that OFSTED had intended.

Like children in care, Care Leavers were a significant cohort. In England there were more than 80,000 children in care with almost 45,000 Care Leavers aged between 17-21 years, with Local Authorities in England also having responsibilities towards approximately 30,000 Care Leavers up to the age of 25 years.

The aim of the proposals being put forward by OFSTED was to ensure that they give Care Leavers a clearer profile in their evaluation of the effectiveness of Local Authority children's services. Our responses to the consultation would inform updated arrangements which OFSTED aim to introduce from January 2023. The consultation itself ran from 20 June-29 July 2022. A report from the consultation would be published in December 2022.

Members requested an update on how many 16-17 year olds were homeless within the Borough; and though pleased to see the number of school exclusions reducing, wished to see a breakdown of those that were in mainstream and special schools.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The Children in Our Care Strategic Update be noted.
2. The Board be provided with details of on how many 16-17 year olds were homeless within the Borough; and a breakdown of the school exclusion numbers to show those that were in mainstream and those in special schools.

**CPB
15/22**

Forward Plan

Members noted the Board's Forward Plan.