

# Children and Young People's Partnership

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Partnership was held on Monday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2015

**Present:** Jane Humphreys (SBC – CESC) (Chairman),

Peter Kelly, Emma Champley, Simon Willson, Cllr Mrs Ann McCoy, Caroline Wood (substitute for Julie Nixon) (SBC), Ian Coates (Cleveland Police), Janet Mackie, Linda Watson (NTHFT), Phil Cook (SRC), Chris Davis (TEWV), Joanne Shaw –Dunn (Substitute for Natasha Judge) (Healthwatch), Aishah Waithe (substitute for Steve Rose) (Catalyst)

**Officers:** Michael Henderson, Jayne Parry, Heather Johnson (SBC)

**Apologies,** Sarah Bowman- Abouna, Julie Nixon (SBC), Priti Butler (Big Life), Julie Allan (Probation), Steve Rose (Catalyst), Maryssa O'Connor (Secondary School Rep), Caroline Reed (Primary School Rep), Charles Ellis (4Children), Paul Williams (CCG)

## 1 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## 2 **Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2014**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

Members noted the very positive work that had taken place with Stockton Youth Assembly with regard to engagement with this Partnership. A report would be submitted to the Partnership's March meeting.

## 3 **Looked After Children and Young People – Evaluation of activity and performance**

The Partnership received a report that provided analysis of activity and performance for children and young people who were looked after by the Council, taking account of most recent benchmarking data available. The report provided context for a presentation that was delivered to members at the meeting.

Information contained in the report and presentation included:

- Rates of LAC in the Borough, the Tees Valley and Nationally
- A chart of 16 indicators showing the ranking of the Council for compared to Tees Valley Councils and statistical neighbour group
- Performance and Outcomes
- Resource and Budget pressures
- Profile of Looked After Children in Stockton
- Placement of the Children e.g. numbers in foster care, residential
- Current Internal Provision
- Provision for Care leavers
- Pressures
- What actions were underway to provide improvements
- Initiatives LAC were involved in.

The report and information had been prepared to support the self- evaluation of performance, alongside the recent work on development of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Strategy 2014 -17, which was also made available to members. The Strategy provided a wide ranging assessment of needs, achievements and priorities for improvement, taking account of the issues identified through analysis of performance.

Members discussed the information. Discussion could be summarised as follows:

- it was agreed that all partners had a corporate parenting obligation.
- expenditure on residential placements in Stockton was appreciably higher than the regional, national and statistical neighbours' average.
- Members discussed the relative costs associated with internal and external residential and foster placements. It was noted that internal provision was considerably less than independent provision. Local Authority weekly fostering rate ranged from £134 to £357 depending on age of child. Independent fostering rates, going to the agency, not the carer, ranged from £687 - £777.
- In terms of attainment LAC did well at KS1 and 2 but performance in KS4 was challenging. This picture reflected overall performance of schools and pupils in the Borough.
- There was discussion on transition and Education, Employment and Training (EET) opportunities for care leavers. It was noted that transition were managed by a Personal Education Plan and leavers received substantial support during this time. Phil Cook, Stockton Riverside College (SRC), was keen to discuss issues around transition and the college becoming more active in this area. It was agreed that arrangements be made for this issue to be discussed at the 14 – 19 Partnership and/or meetings at the college.
- There were 380 LAC in the Borough with 133 placed out of the Borough. Most placed outside the Borough were within a 20 miles radius but some were further than this and there were, obviously, extra costs associated with this.
- It was agreed that Early Help was a key element of reducing the number of children and young people coming into the looked after system.
- Members noted some of the current pressures including:
  - Increase in younger children requiring residential care.
  - Social work support to children and young people placed outside the Borough.

- Young people were remaining in care longer. This was considered to be positive, however, it did present pressures in terms of capacity.
  - Financial pressures in relation to asylum seeking care leavers.
  - Supporting young people in further education.
  - Support to children to maintain them in permanent placements.
- Details of actions to address improvement included:
- Work around the LAC population
  - Early Help Strategy being implemented
  - Increased provision via SPARK
  - Transfer of foster carers from Independent agencies
  - Increase numbers of fosterers and adopters - marketing officer appointed last year
  - Supported lodgings social worker
  - Additional staff in child placement including permanent recruitment officer

RESOLVED that:

1. the information provided and discussion held by the Partnership be noted.
2. necessary arrangements be made for this issue to be discussed at the 14 – 19 Partnership and/or meetings at the college.

### **Conversation with Lets Take Action Group**

At this point 6 young people from the Lets Take Action Group (LTA), which included looked after young people and care leavers, joined the meeting.

The Partnership was keen to hear about the Group members' experiences, how things might be improved and any concerns they had.

The Partnership had provided some questions and each of the young people provided a response. The questions were:

Q1- when you lived with your birth family do you think that if you had help sooner –this might have helped you and your family stay together –and what sort of help do you think would have helped?

Q2 –do you think that the key people involved with you now listen to your views i.e. social worker / teacher/ carers etc?

Q3- what are the positive things in your life currently-and what would you want to change?

Q4- how can we improve the support you get –are there any gaps in services for you?

Q5 –what don't you like about being a child in care or a care leaver?

Responses cut across a number of the questions and an overview of responses has been provided below:

- Some young people felt that interventions could have been made sooner, as prior to the intervention they had not been looked after properly, or had been looking after siblings themselves. Another felt that, given their particular circumstances, an earlier intervention would have been difficult.
- The young people, generally, felt that they were listened to and were supported by social workers, carers and others. One young person explained that he felt part of a family and commented that 'family didn't have to be blood' and 'all of them care'. Another referred to living in supported lodgings and being supported with independent living skills – 'this was a very positive placement'.
- Comments included 'I'm looking forward to going to University', 'I'm enjoying going to college, life is amazing and I recently won an award' I'd like to be an apprentice engineer and I'm getting support to help me with this'
- A young person explained that she felt there had been gaps in the process and she wasn't always clear about what was happening; and if/ how she could make contact with her siblings.
- A number of the young people did not like the fact that they could not live with their brothers, sisters and wider family.
- One young person had felt concerned that he would have to move into independent living and he wanted to stay with his placement until he had finished college – this prospect had upset him. He explained that his concerns had been listened to and had been addressed.

The young people were given the opportunity to ask the Partnership any question. Questions related to:

- Commitment to care leavers up to 25 – the Council did have a commitment and a duty to support care leavers could return to the Council for education and accommodation support.
- Helping children understand their situation throughout their time in care- Social workers and other people involved with care would help with this, and booklets were produced for children coming into care. This issue would be looked at further.

The Partnership was informed that a number of young people in care had had siblings adopted and the contact they could have with siblings was uncertain and often wasn't explained. There had been a suggestion that a DVD be made to show to potential adopters about siblings left in care encouraging sibling

contact, post adoption.

Members heard about a project that the LTA Group had been involved with relating directly to a document that was being produced for care leavers. It was noted that they had encountered some barriers that could have resulted in their input not being fully utilised. The Group had been very disappointed and annoyed, as the document was for care leavers. The situation had been resolved and the Group had been satisfied with the outcome. The Chair explained that she had an open door and she was happy for any similar issues to be raised with her.

Finally, the young people were asked about transitions. There was an indication that the work of youth directions might not be sufficiently highlighted for all young people in care. This would be looked at. Phil Cook suggested that the SRC may be able to arrange special access routes to what the college offered, as well as a number of seminars to inform LAC ahead of transition. Phil would progress this and engage with the LTA Group to decide how things might operate.

RESOLVED that

1. the feedback and discussion be noted.
2. Issues and any actions identified from the feedback be picked up through the Chair, or as indicated.

### **Forward Plan**

RESOLVED that the Plan be approved.