

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of Corporate Parenting Board was held on Friday 11 August 2023.

Present: Cllr Lisa Evans (Chair), Cllr Carol Clark (Vice-Chair), Cllr Pauline Beall, Cllr Alex Griffiths, Cllr Mick Moore, Cllr Sufi Mubeen (sub for Sally Ann Watson) and Cllr Hilary Vickers.

Officers: Vicky Davidson-Boyd, Debbie Farrow, Adele Moore, Johanne Parker, Elaine Redding, David Willingham, Janet Wilson and Rachel Harrison.

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Sally Ann Watson.

CPB/7/23 Declarations of Interest

In relation to item 7 Annual Report of the Fostering Panel, Cllr Pauline Beall declared an interest as a Member of the Fostering Panel.

CPB/8/23 Minutes

AGREED the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

CPB/9/23 Corporate Parenting Board – Annual Report 2022/23

Members considered the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022/23. The report provided an overview of the work undertaken by the Board for the year 2022/23. It outlined progress against key Corporate Parenting priorities, as set out in the Council's Children and Care Leavers' action plan.

Key points:

- The five key priorities from the Children in Care and Care Leavers Action Plan helped focus and steer work throughout the last year.
- The number of children in care had stayed broadly stable for the past 4 years, though had increased slightly in 2022/23. The growth had been largely due to an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- The Council had secured more proportionate legal orders for some Children and Young People as a direct result of the improved offer around Special Guardianship Orders. This prevented some children from becoming the subject of Interim Care Orders or Care Orders solely for financial reasons.
- There were 20% of children attending Children in Our Care review meetings, but a much larger percentage (over 80%) were having their views heard through written submissions or via advocates.
- The 'No Limits' scheme was to be launched to enable Council Members and officers to give their time, make a financial contribution to support children in our care and care leavers or contribute to giving schemes such as the book at Christmas.

- The Council was in the process of opening two new children's homes to support their work on sufficiency planning.
- Work had started with the Northeast Fostering on a new approach to recruitment of foster carers and their assessment as part of the Councils' plans to increase the number of in house foster carers and to extend the Mockingbird model.
- Plans for a new youth space in Stockton Town Centre which would provide a base for Let's Take Action Group which would play a big role in its design.

Charts

- Regarding the types of placements being occupied in 2022/23, the vast majority - 93% - of Children in Our Care (CIOC) were placed in kinship foster care (25.9%), Independent foster agencies (IFAs) (21.1%), in house fostering (18.3%), with parents (11.4%), then external children's homes (9.7%) and then independent living (6.6%). The remaining 7% of the cohort were placed in seven different types of placements.
- In terms of the ages of children in our care, most aged 0-5 were placed in house fostering or kinship fostering; most aged 6-10 were placed in kinship foster care or with an independent foster agency (IFA); most aged 11-15 were placed with an IFA or kinship foster care; most aged 16-17 were placed in independent living and, most aged 18+ were placed in independent living.
- 6 in 10 children became looked after due to a S20 (they could not live with their families). An increase of 1 from the previous year and marginally below regional based on the most recent data.
- 3 in 10 children became looked after due to an interim care order (an arrangement to enable the Local Authority to protect a child and enable further assessment). This was in line with the previous year and also with regional based on the most recent data.
- 1 in 20 children were detained on child protection grounds in Local Authority accommodation. This was a smaller proportion than the previous year and below regional on the most recent data.
- 1 in 50 children were the subject of a Full Care Order (an arrangement to enable the Local Authority to protect a child from suffering or from being at risk of significant harm). This was more than was the case in 2021/22 and this proportion was larger than across the Northeast based on most recent data.
- 1 in 100 children had Youth Justice Legal Status and this was the case in 2021/22 and this proportion was the same across the Northeast overall based on most recent data.

Performance summary

In terms of performance, the Council had experienced some notable improvements since year end 2021/22, with evidence of sustained improvement and a notable amount of above regional average performance based on available information.

Discussion

- The Chair welcomed new members and emphasised the importance of being a Corporate Parent.
- The Board supported the Northeast Pathfinder pilot to increase the number of inhouse foster carers and ensure the council is providing the right offer. Members requested an update of the pilot be brought back to a meeting near Christmas time.
- Discussion was held around the establishment of a Care Leavers Board, the purpose of the board and who the most suitable person to Chair the meeting would be.

- Members asked, if the type of care a child grew up in, affected a child's likelihood in attending university. Officers replied that is not something that had previously been looked into but could possibly be looked at in the future.
- An explanation of Virtual School was provided to the board to help their understanding for future meetings.

RESOLVED that the Annual report be endorsed, and the discussion noted and actioned, as appropriate.

CPB/10/23 Ofsted Themes In House Residential Provision

The Board received a report on the findings of Ofsted inspections of Stockton-on-Tees Borough Councils' residential provision.

Out of the 7-council run Children's homes 4 were rated good, 1 outstanding and 2 required improvement.

There had been some challenges for the homes in the last couple of years. These included:

- The recruitment and retention of suitably qualified and experienced Registered Managers and Residential Care Workers.
- A reliance on the use of agency staffing to meet the needs of young people.
- Staff development and progression planning for staff and managers.
- The homes needed maintenance and redevelopment.

As recognised by Ofsted:

- The children were making good progress.
- Children and young people could form trusted relationships with staff, and this was evident across all the homes.
- The children's many achievements were captured.
- Managers invested in their staff and recognised their potential.

Discussion

- The Board thanked officers for a good report.
- Brief discussion was held around the availability of qualified agency staff and the new portal being used to ensure any agency staff used in future would be suitably qualified.
- Board members asked about the possibility of apprenticeships being available in the future to invest in the local community. Officers replied currently there were no apprenticeship opportunities. The interim Director of Children's Services spoke about the Social Worker Academy being scaled up with apprenticeships being considered as an option.

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

CPB/11/23 Brief Performance Report for Stockton's Children's Homes Outcomes

Consideration was given to a report that provided the Board with Stockton's Children's Homes performance, in comparison to the national picture, and provide assurance of the quality of those children's homes, operated by Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council.

Nationally the number of children's homes in England continued to rise, as of 31 March 2023 there was a 9% increase in the number of children's homes compared with 31 March 2022.

As of the 31 March four out of seven of Stockton's homes were judged good or outstanding improving to five out of seven after the release of the national data. It was noted one home had been closed for refurbishment and therefore had not received an inspection in this time.

It was accepted that the children's homes in Stockton had declined in their overall judgements in the past 2 years. Two homes had been downgraded from Outstanding to Good. The decline was due to a combination of Registered managers leaving the Local Authority and recruiting suitably experienced Managers to the positions.

It was explained despite the difficulties the homes had faced, it was important to note that Stockton's Outstanding Children's home was among the top 10% in the country, and the good homes were among the top 69%.

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

CPB/12/23 Annual Report of the Fostering Panel 2022/23

The Board received the Annual Report of the Fostering Panel for 2022/23.

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 were provided with information relating to: -

- the role and operation of the Panel.
- the Constitution and membership of the Panel.
- Quality Assurance.
- Data relating to suitability to foster applications and Foster Care Reviews.
- Extension to Temporary Approval of Connected Carers
- Long-Term Fostering Matches.
- Feedback in respect of Panel Functioning.
- Training for Panel

The Committee noted the current position:

- On 31 March 2023 there were 162 approved fostering households, a decrease of 4 from the previous reporting period (166)
- There were 88 mainstream approved foster carers (which had reduced by 3 from the previous year).
- There were 74 approved connected carers (which had decreased by 1 from the previous year).
- Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, 10 mainstream foster carers resigned (compared to 14 during the previous year). 4 of these carers retired from fostering due

to age/ill health, 4 due to work commitments, 1 following an allegation and 1 transferred to their own local authority.

Discussion

- Board Members were disappointed with the number of social workers unable to attend the Fostering Panels. Officers replied that nonattendance was not due to not wanting to attend but competing demands.

RESOLVED that the Annual Report of the Fostering Panel for 22/23 be noted.

CPB/13/23 Adoption Tees Valley Update

The Board considered the annual report of Adoption Tees Valley, which was the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), for the 5 Local Authority Councils of Darlington; Hartlepool; Middlesbrough; Redcar and Cleveland; and Stockton.

Some key highlights from the report included:

- This year had been one of building on partnerships, and existing practice to strengthen and improve adoption in Tees Valley. There had been more work with regional partner Regional Adoption Agency's (RAA's), and the regional Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAA's), on collaborative projects. Work had continued with the 5 partner Local Authorities to continue to strengthen early twin track care planning for adoption.
- The adoption team had been working on trauma informed practice, inspired by one of the presentations at the national RAA Adoption Support Conference in September 22. Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) implemented a model of the Trauma Timeline, and use of the trauma tree in assessments of adopters, and in preparation for matching children. Staff, adopters, partner Local Authorities and Panel were reporting very positively on this practice, which helped to focus on the long term needs of the child, arising from early trauma.
- While there have been the same number of Early Permanence (EP) placements as in the previous year, more prospective adopters had been approved for early permanence.
- The focus had also continued on adoption support, including on the long-term identity needs of adopted children and adults. With more early permanence for children, and continuous development of the framework for these placements, more adoptive parents were meeting with the parents of the child from the outset.
- This year followed the "tail" of the Somerset judgement, and its repercussions for children in the adoption system across England. A small number of children in Teesside had delayed adoption orders, and there were some delayed placements due to the legal implications of Somerset in the previous year: for this reason, a small number of children who had gone on to be adopted, or even placed for adoption within this period, could have had that part of their adoption journey in the previous year.
- Adoption Orders were higher than the last year, while children placed for adoption remained the same as in the previous year. This level of placement activity was at a lower level than has been the case, which followed the national trend, where adoptions from care had reduced over the last 2 years. Of Significance in this region

was the increase in numbers of Placement Orders granted within this year – 87 which was the highest level in the previous 4 years.

- Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) continued to perform well in timeliness of adoption for children. Many children were being placed within government set timescales for placement once the Placement Order (PO) was granted.
- Timescales (PO to match) had improved this year, from 174 to 146 days and ATV continued to perform better than the England average by some 50 days, although remained over the government target.
- The time from a child starting their first care placement to moving in with adoptive parents had increased, with average days being 411 across the Tees Valley, which was lower than the national target (421 days) and 70 days lower than the England average.
- The number of families approved over the past year had risen from the previous year, with 55 families having been assessed and approved to adopt. While this increase was welcomed, Adoption Tees Valley continued to need more families for siblings, for older children up to the age of 5, and for children who may have some uncertainty in relation to developmental delay.

Discussion

- Members thanked officers for a detailed and comprehensive report.
- Board Members asked the Adoption Tees Valley Service Manager what Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council could do better. The Adoption Tees Valley Service Manager praised Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council for the collaborative approach of working together with partner agencies including the permanence champion. The Assistant Director, Children Social Care thought Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council needed a deeper understanding of what early permanence meant and more awareness of what a child's final destination could be as soon as the council was made aware of them.

RESOLVED that the report and discussion be noted

CPB/14/23 Forward Plan

Members noted the Board's Forward Plan.