

Contact Officer: Jodie Harris

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Wednesday 13 January 2021

Present:

- Councillor Viv Kendrick (Chair)
- Councillor Carole Pattison
- Councillor Richard Smith
- Councillor Karen Allison
- Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources, Improvement and Partnerships)
- Stewart Horn, Head of Joint Commissioning - Children and Families
- Barry Lockwood, Kirklees Fostering Network
- Keith Fielding, Kirklees Fostering Network
- Janet Tolley, Virtual School Head Teacher
- Sara Miles, Interim Head of Service – Family Support and Child Protection
- Elaine McShane, Service Director - Family Support and Child Protection
- Sanna Mahmood, Care Leavers Advocate – Family Support and Child Protection

In attendance:

- Richard Parry, Strategic Director for Adults and Health
- Suzanne Whiteley, One Adoption West Yorkshire

Apologies:

- Cllr Andrew Marchington
- Cllr John Lawson
- Gill Addy, Designated Nurse Looked After Children
- Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director, Learning and Early Support - Learning and Skills
- Julie Bragg , Head of Corporate Parenting (Children and Care Leavers)
- Anna Gledhill, Service Manager Quality Assurance and Social Work Practice Lead – Children and Families
- Colleen Kenworthy
- Christine Carmichael
- Ophelia Rix, Principal Social Worker

1 Membership of the Board/Apologies

The Chair welcomed Board Members. Apologies had been received from Cllr Andrew Marchington, Cllr John Lawson, Gill Addy, Jo-Anne Sanders, Julie Bragg, Anna Gledhill, Colleen Kenworthy, Christine Carmichael and Ophelia Rix.

2 Interests

No interests were declared.

3 Minutes

The Board considered the minutes of the last meeting held on the 3rd November 2020 and noted that Councillor Karen Allison's apologies had not been noted.

The Chair requested that Gill Addy be removed from the attendance list of the previous meeting as she had sent apologies.

RESOLVED-

That the minutes of the last meeting, held on 3 November 2020, be approved as a correct record to include the above amendments agreed by the Board.

4 Admission of the Public

It was agreed that all agenda items would be held in public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No questions from the public were received.

7. Role of the Corporate Parent

The Board considered a verbal update on the role of the Corporate Parent from Richard Parry, Strategic Director for Adults and Health.

The Board were provided with an overview of the range of services within the Adults and Health Directorate. It was noted that within Adults Social Services there was a significant focus on maximising the independence of residents in Kirklees by:

- Working in close partnership with the NHS to support individuals from hospital discharge, within their homes and communities;
- Using assistive technology to help local residents to be more independent and safer within their homes;
- Enabling access to employment by providing learning and skill building opportunities such as 'Real Employment' and supporting Mid-Yorkshire Hospital Trust to develop 'Project Search';
- Increasing community capacity through the work undertaken by the Community Plus and Local Area Co-ordinators teams.

The Board were further advised of recent work undertaken in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic. This included:

- The Kirklees Libraries Service which had undertaken some work focused on reducing social isolation and provided virtual workshops to support children with reading and other educational activities.
- The Customer Services Centres in both Huddersfield and Dewsbury had continued to deliver some face to face support throughout the pandemic but this was limited by the Covid-19 restrictions.
- The Contact Centres had adapted to deliver most services by phone to support to Kirklees residents.
- Working closely with local GP's was to continue during the Covid-19 vaccine rollout to support vulnerable individuals to access the vaccination offer safely;

Richard Parry described the work that was being carried out to support the transition period from 'child' to 'adult' for individuals with a disability.

The Board noted that, services within the Children's and Young People Directorate worked closely with a range of groups and organisations to help support young people in Kirklees and asked how collaborative working was being used to support this area of work.

Richard Parry advised the Board that the services within the Adults and Children's Directorates were working collaboratively to manage the transition period. This included regular engagement with Parent Advocate Groups, who worked closely with teams in Children's services, to support the Transition Programme.

The Board highlighted that it had been recommended that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for Care Leavers were offered to 18- 25-year olds and agreed to examine the work of external services to determine where workstreams could be linked.

RESOLVED –

- 1- The Board noted the update on the role of the Corporate Parent and thanked Richard Parry for his contributions.
- 2- That the Board would consider an update on the continued progression of the Transition Programme at a future meeting.
- 3- That the Board consider an update on the approach to commissioning across Adults and Health, Children's Services, and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) at a future meeting.
- 4- That the Board examine the work of external child and adolescent mental health services at a future meeting.

8 One Adoption West Yorkshire – 6 Monthly Report

The Board considered the half yearly Adoption Agency report from One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) presented by Suzanne Whiteley.

Suzanne Whitely highlighted the key issues from the report which set out the work and developments within OAWY between April 2020 and September 2020 and advised the Board that:

- There had been some challenges to staff morale as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, but managers had worked hard to support their teams;
- Most of the vacant positions within OAWY had now been filled, and interviews were scheduled to recruit to any remaining vacant posts;
- Letterbox work had been redirected to the Leeds office as an interim measure whilst accommodation in Kirklees and Calderdale was refurbished;
- This created some delays as staff had to travel from Huddersfield to Leeds to access files and process file work;
- A reduction in income from the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) ,as a result of the pandemic, had put pressures on the budget but a plan had been actioned to address this;
- The 'Duty and Advice' service was running remotely and a telephone choice system had been implemented to efficiently direct incoming calls;
- The Operational Leads group had met to discuss aligning adoption payments and joint audit work was agreed;
- The Centre of Excellence project had progressed but due to increased costs the final model was amended to remove the post of the Assistant Psychologist;
- A medical advisor protocol has been agreed and 'Peer Supports' and audits had taken place across the region to support the improvement of medial information provided to adoptive families;
- Work with Virtual School Heads across the region continued progress and the educational helpline was well used;
- Virtual training sessions with schools, and workshops with doctors, to increase awareness around 'Attachments and Trauma' had been delivered and were well received;
- The Special Guardianship (SG) support plan was being tested by the kinship teams across the five local authorities (LA's) in West Yorkshire;
- A therapeutic parenting programme for SG's had been commissioned and a group application for funding on behalf of the region was to be made;
- The Grandparents Plus project was progressing well with the further support provided from the ASF Covid-19 funds;
- Training in 'Non-Violent Resistance' had been commissioned for the kinship teams across the five LA's;
- The OAWY's website had been resigned and was now live;
- There was a significant increase in families interested in becoming adopters during the first half of the year;
- OAWY had undertaken a review of perspective adopters and the decision was made to temporarily hold applications for young children;
- Technology had been used to continue to deliver the work of OAWY virtually throughout the pandemic and training workshops and 'profiling events were well received;
- OAWY (after adopting the University of East Anglia's model) used virtual technology to increase the 'getting to know you' phase which helped build relationships between children and adoptive families;

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- Meetings of Virtual Adoption Panels were being held more frequently (7 or 8 times per month) and the feedback on the virtual arrangements from social workers was positive;
- Reports presented to panels were given 'good' or 'excellent' feedback which was reflective of the continued hard work of social workers;

Suzanne Whiteley further highlighted the key statistics within the Performance Reports (appendix 2) noting that in the first 6 months of 2020/21:

- 61 adoptive families were approved by OAWY across the region;
- 52 families had been matched with children from West Yorkshire which was an increase when compared to the same timeframe in the previous year;
- Within the 61 approved households 12 individuals (11%) of the children matched had a BAME backgrounds, 9 households (15%) were approved for sibling groups and 16 households (25%) were open to an Early Permanence Placement.

In response to a question from the Board regarding the budget, Suzanne Whiteley explained that OAWY had undertaken work to address pressures, such as examining the interagency budget and vacancy monitoring.

In response to a question from the Board regarding the outcomes of the discussions with CCG's in relation to the Centre of Excellence project, Suzanne Whitley advised that there was an agreement across the region to fund the Centre of Excellence, but an amendment had been made to the final staffing model as there had been an increase in the cost of commissioning of the Assistant Psychologist post. The amendment removed the post to ensure costs were within the budget.

The Board then enquired about the plans to track the outcomes and impact of the Centre of Excellence project and Suzanne Whitley explained that OAWY had implemented measures such as 'goal-based outcomes' to monitor and evaluate outcomes. A Project manager was also supporting the evaluation work in the interim in the absence of an Assistant Psychologist.

In response to a question from the Board concerning the position of letterbox work, Suzanne Whitley confirmed that post was still being directed to Leeds, but accommodation had now been secured Kirklees.

The Board asked what impact the pandemic had on Court proceedings. Suzanne Whitley explained that there had been some delays in terms of initial care proceedings and adoption order applications, but these were managed more efficiently as the pandemic has progressed.

Clarity was requested on the reasons why adoptive families for younger children who were put on hold. Suzanne Whitley explained that this was because there was a high number of families who were seeking approval for the younger age range of children. The decision was taken to prioritise families who were open to taking children from groups who were considered more difficult to place. This had been a temporary position and OAWY had ensured transparency when communicating with the families involved.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Board noted the OAWY 6 Monthly report and thanked Suzanne Whiteley for her contributions.
2. That figures be provided to the Board on the number of staff from Kirklees who had attended the Non-Violent Resistance Training.

9. Children's Performance Highlight Report

The Board considered the Children's Performance Highlights Report presented by Elaine McShane, Service Director for Family Support and Child Protection, Janet Tolley, Virtual School Head Teacher and Stewart Horn, Head of Joint Commissioning, Children and Families.

Elaine McShane presented the performance data relating to children entering care, children in care and placement stability, looked after children (LAC) reviews, visiting, and missing.

The Board were advised that:

- There had been an increasing trend in the number and rate of children in care from 65.8 (659 children) in December 2019 to 68.7 (688 children) in November 2020.
- The increase had now stabilised and the number and rate of children in care had not increased to the figure projected.
- This was partly attributed to the work of the Community Plus Service, Third Sector groups and their role in supporting families.
- Of the 80 children placed outside of Kirklees, or more than 20 miles from their home address, the large majority were placed in a fostering placement and some of these placements now had a permanency decision.
- 15 requests for Initial Review forms were received by the Child Protection and Review unit in November 2020 relating to 23 children in total.
- For all referrals received in November all children and young people were allocated an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) within 24 hours and Initial Child Looked After Reviews were arranged for all but 1 child within 4 weeks of them becoming Looked After.
- In November 2020, the Child Protection and Review Unit held 177 Looked After Review Meetings, with 98.2 % of these were held within timescales.
- A virtual approach to reviews had been taken as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic but it had been taken into account that some children preferred face to face reviews.
- Independent Reviewing Officers were closely monitoring Child Looked After Review timescales to ensure that this high percentage was maintained and improved upon.
- Where there were circumstances where a child's review meeting was not held within the statutory timescales a clear rational was recorded on the child's record.
- Mid-way reviews were embedded into practice and continued to demonstrate evidence of improved oversight of children's files and planning for children by Independent Reviewing Officers.

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The Board were informed that key areas to improve were placement stability, allocated social worker stability and reducing the number of children placed more than 20 miles outside of their home address.

It was also noted that the reporting strategies for when LAC go missing were also being reviewed and a priority was to use return interviews to identify why (Looked After Children) LAC choose to go missing.

Janet Tolley presented the update on Looked After Children Education Outcomes and highlighted that:

- The initial focus was the transition back into education school closures with a continued focus on supporting young people who were learning from home.
- 100% of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were completed within the Summer Term which were all being held virtually.
- 87% of initial PEPs had been completed within 10 school days of a child coming into care since September 2020.
- Work was ongoing with social work teams to improve both PEP and initial PEP completion and the quality assurance of PEPs.
- 85% of school moves were planned across the service to ensure a smooth transition with no break in provision.
- 92.5% of moves took place within the statutory timescale of 20 working days;
- It was a priority to reduce the number of school moves and any breaks in education where possible.
- Attendance and Persistent Absence (PA) remained a high priority.
- The Covid -19 pandemic made it difficult to compare absence data with the data from the previous year due to illness school bubble closures.
- It was important to consider the emotional impact the pandemic was having on children when addressing attendance.

The Board was concerned that Foster Carers would be unable to grant permission for LAC to receive Covid-19 testing in Schools. In response Elaine McShane agreed that it was important to make sure provision and guidance was in place before lateral testing was implemented in schools.

Stewart Horn, representing Gill Addy, presented the Looked after Health update and it was noted that:

- Kirklees Local Authority's 12-month data showed that that 93.8% and 90.5% of the 'Developmental' assessments (for under 5-year olds) and 'Annual' assessments (for over 5-year olds) were completed within statutory timescales;
- Monthly Locala data for November showed that 100% of the 'Initial Health Assessments' were carried out within the correct timescales;
- Staff who had been redeployed were back in post and current guidance stipulated that all health staff working with Children and Young People should remain within their usual job roles;
- Dentists were only performing emergency procedures which prevented LAC from accessing routine dental checks;

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- The request to the Kirklees Dental Commissioner and NHS England for vulnerable children to receive dental checks was declined.
- This had been raised as a national issue which the Local authority was also to continue to address locally;
- There was a downward trend in under 5's registrations at Dental surgeries;
- 0.42% of looked after young people were identified at their last review health assessment as having a dependant problem with substances;

In response to a question from the Board regarding how many children had received an assessment, Stewart Horn clarified that 100% of children had an assessment but the percentage was lower as the data took into account where there was a small breach in timescale.

Elaine McShane presented the report in relation to Looked after Children Convictions and explained that it was a key objective to examine in more detail the nature of any convictions on a broader scale.

The Board discussed the Council's role, as a Corporate Parent, in supporting LAC involved in minor offences to avoid excess criminalisation and questioned who was responsible for cases involving LAC to be brought before a Court. In response, Elaine McShane confirmed that though children's homes may notify the Police of offenses involving LAC, that the decision to prosecute was taken by the Police. It was further explained that there were ongoing discussions with the Police and children's homes to avoid prosecution where possible.

Elaine McShane presented the update on Care Leavers in the report, and explained that:

- There had been an increase in the percentage of Care Leavers the Council were in contact with throughout June and July 2020 due the isolating nature of Covid-19 Restrictions;
- The Community Plus service helped to make sure that Care Leavers had the same access to community support as any other individual;
- The pandemic had a significant impact on the increasing demands for tenancies and there were still a number of young people awaiting allocation of a tenancy;
- Strong links with Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing (KNH) and the Housing Panel had been maintained to ensure that suitable accommodation is available;
- The Number 11 and 12 drop-in centres were closed due to the pandemic;
- Work was ongoing with Assets Management to be in a position to open the drop-in centres to provide a safe space for young people;
- There had been a recent review on the financial and practical offer to Care Leavers which was to be implemented following its approval.

The Board requested data showing the number of Care Leavers in education or employment after the age of 18 and a broader compassion of the numbers of Care Leavers in employment/education with peers of the same age to identify any potential inequalities gaps.

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Further positive pieces of work were highlighted by the Board including the Kirklees Active Leisure placement offer to Care Leavers and the Huddersfield Town Foundation employability project.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Board noted the Children’s Performance Highlight Report and thanked Elaine McShane, Stewart Horn and Janet Tolley for their contributions.
2. That a report showing the details of fostering placements outside of Kirklees, or those placements that were more than 20 miles from the child’s home address, be presented at a future meeting of the Board.
3. That granting permission for LAC to receive lateral Covid-19 tests in schools should be discussed with the relevant teams and at a future meeting of the Fostering Network.
4. That a report detailing the nature of convictions using a broader scope be considered at a future meeting of the Board.
5. That the report on the review of the financial and practical offer to Care Leavers would be considered at a meeting following its approval.
6. A report showing the number of LAC who were in post-18 education or employment, with a comparator to children who were not looked after, be provided to a future meeting of the Board.

10 OFSTED and Improvement Board Update

The Board considered a verbal update on the OFSTED and Improvement Board presented by Tom Brailsford, Service Director for Resources, improvement and Partnerships, Children and Families.

It was explained that:

- the Board had been renamed the ‘Ambition Board’
- A new membership had been agreed to broaden the remit of the Board to include representation from SEND, Social Care and Learning Performance.

RESOLVED – That the update on OFSTED and Improvement Board was noted and Tom Brailsford was thanked for his contributions.

11 Overview of Number and Age of Children in Care

The Board considered a report on the Overview and Age of Children in Care which was presented by Elaine McShane, Service Director for Family Support and Child Protection. The purpose of the report was to provide information relating to the number and profile of children in our care, including information related to the number of Children placed outside of the District.

The Board were informed that there had been a recent increase in the number of children in care in April 2020 which coincided with the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The increase had now stabilised, and Kirklees’s the current number of LAC was 68.6% as of November 2020 which compared with the statistical neighbour average

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(Local Authorities that the Department for Education regard as similar to Kirklees socio economically,) of 92.2% and with 67% nationally.

Elaine McShane advised that there had been some early challenges when usual support systems, such as schools, closed due to the pandemic. It was noted that removing children had a detrimental impact on both parties and that it was important to take into consideration that these were unprecedented times. Wherever possible services were creative about the package of support delivered to counteract the effects of the pandemic and to support families to stay together, but children were removed where deemed necessary.

RESOLVED - That the report on Overview and Age of Children in Care was noted and Elaine McShane was thanked for her contributions.

12 Updates from Board Members on Interaction with Services

The Board considered verbal updates from Board Members in relation to progress and key issues following interaction with Services and partners to challenge the role of the Corporate Parent.

The Chair noted that the virtual awards for Children and Care Leavers which was a positive event and that Care leavers continued to share updates on their recent achievements.

The Board were advised that the Chair continued to hold regular one to one meetings with Heads of Services, Service Directors and the Strategic Director within Children Services.

RESOLVED – That the update from Board Members on Interaction with Services was noted.

13. Corporate Parenting Board Agenda Plan 2020/21

The Board considered the agenda plan of the Corporate Parenting Board for 2020/21.

The Chair noted that there were a number of reports which had been deferred due to pressures on officers as a result of the pandemic and the recent lockdown. These items would be rescheduled for consideration at a future meeting of the Board.

RESOLVED- That the agenda plan for 2020/21 was noted and that deferred reports be rescheduled for consideration by the Board at a later date.