

Contact Officer: Jodie Harris

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Tuesday 5th October 2021

Present: Councillor Viv Kendrick (Chair)
Councillor Richard Smith
Councillor Karen Allison
Councillor Andrew Marchington (ex-officio)
Stewart Horn, Head of Joint Commissioning - Children and Families
Elaine McShane, Service Director - Family Support and Child Protection
Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources, Improvement and Partnerships)
Ophelia Rix, Head of Service for Children in Care, Care Leavers and Looked After Children
Janet Tolley, Virtual School Headteacher
Sara Miles, Head of Service – Resources, Improvement and Partnerships
Gill Addy, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children
Colleen Kenworthy - Kirklees Fostering Network
Jo-Anne Sanders, Service Director, Learning and Early Support - Learning and Skills
Keith Fielding, Kirklees Fostering Network
Dale O'Neill – Children's Scrutiny Panel Co-optee

In attendance: Suzanne Whitley – One Adoption West Yorkshire
Michelle Rawlings – One Adoption West Yorkshire

Apologies: Christine Carmichael - Kirklees Fostering Network
Councillor Elizabeth Reynolds
Councillor Carole Pattison

1 Membership of the Board/Apologies

The Chair welcomed Board Members to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Councillor Elizabeth Reynolds, Councillor Carole Pattison and Christine Carmichael.

Error! Unknown document property name. – Error! Unknown document property name.

2. Minutes

The Board considered the minutes of the last meeting held on the 29th June 2021.

RESOLVED- That the minutes of the previous meeting be approved as a correct record.

3. Interests

No interests were declared

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. One Adoption West Yorkshire Annual Report

The Board considered the One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) Annual Report for 2020 – 21 presented by Suzanne Whitley, Service Delivery Manager, and Michelle Rawlings, Interim Head of One Adoption West Yorkshire. They gave an overview of the work undertaken by OAWY as well as a general update in terms of the national picture with regards to adoption. It was noted that:

- Nationally, the latest figures released showed that there was no longer a gap between children waiting and the number of adopters available.
- There was a mismatch between the needs of the children requiring adoption and the adopters willing to consider these priority children.
- The government had provided £1million to the adoption sector to improve the recruitment and preparation of adopters with a key focus on attracting more adopters from black and minority ethnic communities.
- The national campaign #YouCanAdopt was launched in September 2020 focussing on myth busting about who can adopt and was followed up with a pilot project for Black Adopters in Birmingham and London.
- A further campaign around adopting brothers and sisters together was launched with a more targeted approach to seek adopters specifically for priority children.
- The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) was committed until July 2022 and the next Spending Review was predicted to clarify the longer-term plans for the ASF.
- 2020/21 had been an unprecedented year for OAWY as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- OAWY maintained the Duty and Advice service and (whilst staff worked from home) and provided the same level of support for families as before the pandemic.
- OAWY had continued to work in partnership with Operational Leads across the 5 West Yorkshire Local particularly focussing on the impact of coronavirus upon children's care planning and moving into adoption.

Error! Unknown document property name. – Error! Unknown document property name.

- Discussions had also taken place around the implementation of aligning adoption and special guardianship payments and joint audit work had also been discussed and agreed.
- The work across the region from the Education Lead alongside the five Virtual School Heads (VSH) continued to grow. The helpline was well used and accessed by adoptive parents, schools and other professionals offering advice and support as needed.
- This helped gain a current understanding of the difficulties faced by families and professionals and how best to support them.
- Work had continued to increase the awareness of attachment and trauma in West Yorkshire schools through the delivery of workshops and training sessions to school staff, childcare provisions and to adopters in partnership with the service delivery teams.
- The two key areas for development regarding Special Guardians (SG's) was the implementation of a regional support plan and the implementation of a regional approach regarding the financial support to SG's.
- A therapeutic parenting programme designed for SG's called 'Guiding Guardians' had been commissioned. The first program was in March and OAWY made a group application to the fund on behalf of the region.
- The Kinship (formerly Grandparents Plus) project was progressing well with the further support provided from the ASF Covid-19 funds.
- Between April 2020 and March 2021, 207 children had a plan for adoption ratified by the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities Agency Decision Makers.
- This was a reduction from last year's full year figure of 220 children from across the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities and reflects the delays in the court arena caused by the pandemic.
- 118 adoptive households were approved during the year an increase in previous years.
- Priorities included placing sibling groups together and increasing adoptive families from BAME backgrounds whilst also not relying on matching children to ethnic minority.
- As of the end of March 2021 there were 137 children with a plan for adoption and a placement order, from the 5 West Yorkshire local authorities not currently placed and requiring adopters.
- The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family (indicator A1) for children in West Yorkshire was 534 days, the National Indicator target was 426 days.
- The average time for those children adopted in the period, between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family (Indicator A2) for children in West Yorkshire had increased to 259 days, the National indicator target was 121 days. This reflected an issue of a national decline in the number of adopters available and the complexity of children waiting for adoption.
- The first half of the year saw an increase in enquiries to adopt and with a backlog caused by the pandemic this presented real challenges for the recruitment teams.
- Two additional social workers were recruited to join the Recruitment and Assessment teams in to increase capacity.
- Adoption Panel was continued to be held via Zoom and had moved from 7 to 8 Panels meetings per month to increase capacity.

Error! Unknown document property name. – Error! Unknown document property name.

- When supporting transitions, individual risk assessments were undertaken to minimise risk and the University of East Anglia Moving to Adoption model had been utilised where possible.
- OAWY commissioned the Voluntary Adoption Alliance within the region to provide families more locally for priority children. This contract commenced at the end of May 2020 with the aim of 30 families being provided within an 80-mile radius, in fact, 34 children were placed by the end of the year.
- There were 2 disruptions of adoption placements (preadoption orders) during 2020/21. This was a decrease from the previous year where there was 7 disruptions.
- A disruption review had been commissioned to analyse the circumstances of the disruptions.

The Board noted the contents of the report and were invited to ask questions.

Responding to a question about delays in the adoption process from stage 1 to stage 2 Michelle Rawlings, Interim Head of One Adoption West Yorkshire, explained that there were some delays in the assessment of potential adopters. This was due to the additional pressures placed on GP surgeries during the pandemic which impacted their ability to carry out medical assessments which were a key requirement of the assessment process. There were also further challenges caused by COVID-19 such as staff sickness alongside an increased volume of enquiries to manage and respond to. However, two additional social workers had been recruited to add further capacity, and delays in the Courts and GP surgeries had now improved. It was agreed that the Board may send OAWY officers the details of any individual cases where delays were reported for them to investigate.

In response to a question around the further context of the disruption figures, Suzanne Whiteley explained that disruption rates in West Yorkshire fluctuated between 0.7% and just over 2% nationally and Kirklees was below the national average in terms of disruptions.

The Board wanted to know what learning could be taken away from the pandemic and in which ways the national lockdown's may have helped adoptive families and reduced the number of disruptions.

Suzanne Whiteley agreed there had been a wide range of learning points arising from the pandemic in terms of disruptions. This included the promotion of the University of East Anglia's approach to transitions and the importance of the 'getting to know you stage' in building the relationship between adopters/foster carers and children. Understanding family's needs in terms of support was also an important factor in minimising disruptions and OAWY made sure that a comprehensive core offer of adoption support was available.

Error! Unknown document property name. – Error! Unknown document property name.

Positives aspects of the national lockdown included giving families time to cement their new relationships without external challenges/distractions (i.e.- such as children going to school). However, there were also some challenges particularly in respect of adopters/foster carers being unable to access their usual support networks (i.e.- friends and family.)

The Board welcomed information regarding the success of the multidisciplinary team and the therapeutic programme for special guardianship. The Board also commented that creative methods of delivering training established in response to the pandemic should continue if the new format was welcomed by recipients.

RESOLVED: The Board noted the contents of the report, and it was agreed that OAWY would receive the details of specific families who had reported delays in progressing from stage 1 to 2 and would provide a response following investigation.

8. Children's Performance Highlights Report

The Board considered the latest reports giving key highlights on Performance Monitoring data for the Children's Service for Children in Care, Fostering and Children's Homes up to the end of August 2021.

Ophelia Rix, Head of Service for Children in Care, Care Leavers and Looked After Children presented the data relating to 'children entering care, children in care and placement stability'. It was noted that:

- There was currently a decreasing trend in the number and rate of children in care from 68.7 (688 children) in November 2020 to 64.7 (648 children) in August 2021. The current 12-month average for Kirklees was 66.9 (670 children) and was below Statistical Neighbours 2020 rate of 92.2.
- This may be due to the use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's), an alternative legal order which gave parental responsibility of a child to connected family and friends.
- The data showed that in Kirklees SGO's were particularly effective in ensuring successful outcomes for children and young people.

The Board welcomed this information and requested that a piece of work be undertaken around understanding the use of SGO's in neighbouring Local Authorities and suggested sharing Kirklees's best practices with those authorities.

In relation to educational outcomes Janet Tolley, Virtual School Headteacher reported that:

- 100% of PEPs were completed within the Summer Term in-line with the new termly processes.
- The Virtual School was currently leading on all PEPs since the Covid-19 lockdowns began in March 2020.
- PEP meetings were currently held virtually and enabled the virtual school to be involved in every young person's meeting whilst bringing together social workers and schools to provide high quality wrap around support.

Error! Unknown document property name. – Error! Unknown document property name.

- 100% of school moves since the start of the academic year were carefully planned across the service to ensure a smooth transition with no break in provision.
- Absence/ Persistence Absence (PA) figures could not be compared to previous years due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic where reported absences were higher due to illness, and school bubble closures.
- This negatively impacted on the number of PA pupils, even though many of these young people were not attendance concerns.
- This was reflective of the national situation and the local one, where Kirklees was subject to public health restrictions and high rates of infection over a longer period.
- The Virtual school continued to monitor individual attendance closely and work to support young people on an individual basis.
- A key priority of the Virtual School was to support young people with their mental health to ensure that they were engaging with education in the recovery from the pandemic.
- The full detailed Virtual Head Teacher Report (containing the data for the previous academic year) was scheduled to be presented to the full governing board and then could be provided to the Corporate Parenting Board for consideration.

The Board noted that the information was reassuring, and it was agreed that the Virtual Head Teacher Report (containing the data for the previous academic year) be presented at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Gill Addy, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children presented the data relating to Children Looked After Health and highlighted that:

- Initial health assessments: Kirklees rolling 12-month data showed that 88.8% were completed in the statutory 20 working day timescale.
- Initial Health Assessments were carried out by telephone due to social distancing restrictions in clinics. This allowed birth parents and social workers to be involved.
- Review health assessments: Kirklees rolling 12-month data showed that 88.2% and 92.2% of the 'Developmental' assessments (for under 5yrs old) and 'Annual' assessments (for over 5 yrs. old) were completed in statutory timescales.
- Dental Checks within last 12 months: Kirklees rolling 12-month data showed that 50.7% of children had attended the dentist.
- This was an improving picture from times when the closure/limited availability of dentists during the Covid-19 lockdowns prevented routine checks.
- A new 'Flexible Commissioning' dental project aimed at vulnerable children, was allowing easier access to some named dental surgeries in Kirklees.
- Substance misuse: 5 young people (0.97%) had admitted to, or were known to, use substances that significantly affected their life when asked at their Review Health Assessment (RHA).
- This information was dependent on voluntary admission but there may be a more accurate source for this information through social workers and the substance misuse service. Any young person misusing substances at any level is offered support.

In respect of the 'flexible commissioning project' the Board requested that the details of registered dentists were shared with foster carers through the Kirklees Fostering Network and Gill Addy agreed to identify the correct contacts.

Responding to a question from the Board about the length of the project and continued funding, Gill Addy explained that the project was to be promoted across key partners and through the Oral Health Advisory Group. The Board noted the information relating to Looked After Children Health welcoming particularly the benefits of the 'flexible commissioning project' and the approach to its promotion. It was also agreed that the Annual Health Report would be presented to a future meeting of the Board.

In relation to Looked After Children Convictions, Elaine McShane, Service Director - Family Support and Child Protection suggested that a report on Looked After Convictions including the outcome of the Youth Justice Inspection be provided to the next meeting of the Board.

Ophelia Rix presented that data on Care Leavers and noted in relation to 'Contact with Care leavers' that there had been an increase in contact with Care leavers during June, July, and August 2021. This was to be viewed in the context of this group all being aged 18 plus. However, Ophelia noted that in some situations, young people did not wish to keep in contact with their Personal Advisor (PA's). It was agreed that a full report be presented to a future meeting of the Board that sets out the work of the PA service and the legal requirements in relation to contact with Care leavers.

In relation to adoption Sara Miles, Head of Service – Resources, Improvement and Partnerships advised that the Annual Review of Fostering report was to be presented to the next meeting of the of the Board. Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources, Improvement and Partnerships) highlighted that over 76% of children and young people were in foster care which was above the national average. Going forward, it was noted that recruitment and retention of foster carers was a priority and in relation to this, the Board highlighted the importance of learning from foster carer exit interviews.

RESOLVED: The Board noted the Children's Performance Highlights Report and it was agreed that:

1. A piece of work be undertaken around understanding the use of Special Guardianship Orders in neighbouring Local Authorities and to share Kirklees's best practices with those authorities.
2. The Virtual Head Teacher Report (containing the data for the previous academic year) be presented at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.
3. The Annual Health Report would be presented to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.
4. The names and contact details for the dental surgeries registered under the Flexible Commissioning Project be provided to the Kirklees Fostering Network.
5. A report on Looked After Convictions including the outcome of the Youth Justice inspection be provided to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Error! Unknown document property name. – Error! Unknown document property name.

6. A report in relation to PA Contact with Care Leavers be provided to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.
7. The Annual Review of Fostering report be presented to the next meeting of the of the Corporate Parenting Board.

9. **Staying Put Policy**

The Board considered a report setting out the refreshed Staying Put Policy presented by Elaine McShane, Service Director - Family Support and Child Protection who highlighted the following key points:

- All Local Authorities were required to set out how they will operate a Staying Put scheme. The refreshed policy set out the arrangements in Kirklees for Care Leavers aged 18 and above to continue living with their foster families.
- The report was approved by Cabinet on 27th July 2021 and was well received.
- There was strong national evidence to support that young people's life chances are improved when remaining in a supportive family home post 18.
- The policy set out an improved support and financial offer which reflected the importance of Staying Put Carers and the role they play in equipping young people with the emotional confidence and practical skills needed to live independently, whilst they remain living in a supportive family home.
- A key priority was to make sure no Staying Put Carers were financially worse off and there were a number measures included in the policy to mitigate the issue of Staying Put Carers experiencing a detrimental financial impact through their benefits being reduced.
- The service was to work with existing Staying Put Carers and young people living these arrangements to communicate changes on a one to one basis to ensure support in relation to financial impact queries.
- A simplified guide to Staying Put will be produced aimed at Foster Carers and young people who may be considering Staying Put for their future together.
- Regular updates on progress and the impact/outcomes as a result of implementing the policy will be scheduled in the forward plan and provided to Corporate Parenting Board

The Board noted the refreshed Staying Put Policy report and welcomed its arrival. In the discussion to follow the Board highlighted the importance of viewing Staying Put Carers as the continuation of family to young people and that the language used when engaging with Staying Put Carers should reflect this. The Board also suggested that an event should be held with tax advisors for staying put foster carers to help them understand the changes. Elaine McShane agreed with the Boards comments advising that advice on tax could be included in the formal launch. It was also explained that some work was being undertaken to improve language to reflect that Staying Put Carers are family.

A question was asked around backdated payments. Elaine McShane responded to advise that the current understanding was that changes to payment would take affect from the date when the policy was approved by Cabinet, but agreed to check the information.

Error! Unknown document property name. – Error! Unknown document property name.

Responding to a question around reviewing and measuring the success of the refreshed policy, Elaine McShane advised that it was important not to wait for a formal review to make improvements where there was delegated authority to do so, but reassured the Board that any changes would be made in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member and that the Board would also be briefed of any changes made or proposed. There were also plans to conduct a formal review alongside this in 6 months.

RESOLVED: The Board noted the contents of the Staying Put Fostering Policy report, and it was agreed that:

1. Information regarding backdated payments be provided to the Board.
2. That any changes made or proposed be reported to the Corporate Parenting Board following consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member.

10. Virtual School Governing Body Update

The Board considered a verbal update on the Virtual School Governing body presented by Janet Tolley (Virtual School Headteacher) who explained that the Governing Body meetings were half termly and the next one was to take place on the 21st October and an update would be provided to the Board at its next meeting.

RESOLVED – The Board noted the Virtual School Governing Body Update.

11. Children’s Ambition Board Update

Tom Brailsford, Service Director (Resources, Improvement and Partnerships) gave a verbal update on the work of the Children’s Ambition Board. It was noted that the Board continued to broaden its scope of focus to include the SEND transformation programme and continued to monitor the work from the children’s social care 10-point improvement plan. It was suggested that a report on SEND Transformation be provided to the Board in relation to Looked After Children, the Board noted the update and agreed that the report be presented to a future meeting.

RESOLVED:-

1. The Board noted the Children’s Ambition Board Update
2. It was agreed that a report on SEND Transformation be presented to the Board in relation to Looked After Children within the Calendar year.

12. Updates from Board Members on Interactions with Services

Board members shared verbal updates following interactions with services. It was noted that:

- The Chair of the Panel had met with the independent Chair of the Kirklees Safeguarding Partnership, had attended a webinar on contextual safeguarding and had visited the Kirklees Food Network to understand the impact of families under greater financial strain.

Error! Unknown document property name. – Error! Unknown document property name.

- The success of the Children in Care Council's Safety and Music Project was highlighted and Board members suggested that work be undertaken to identify potential to expand the project.
- The Children's scrutiny Panel had established a work programme of visits to front line services.
- Most recently the Panel had visited The Valley's Cluster Children's Social Work Team. The Board noted that front line staff were positive about their casework and opportunities for development.
- It was also noted that a member of the Adults Mental Health Team had been working alongside the children's social workers to provide advice to the wider family supporting children and that this was an example of particularly effective partnership working between services.

RESOLVED:- Board Members noted the update on Interactions with Services and it was agreed that:

1. Work be undertaken in respect of expanding the Children in Care Council's Safety and Music Project.
2. The outcomes of future Children's Scrutiny Panel visits to front line services be reported to the Corporate Parenting Board.
3. That the team planning the Children's Celebration event be informed to send the relevant details to Kirklees Foster Carers

14. Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme and Agenda Plan for 2020/21.

The Board considered the work plan for 2021/22.

RESOLVED –

1. The Board noted the forward work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year,
2. It was agreed that all reports identified for presentation to the Board at a future meeting be incorporated to the work programme at the appropriate time.