

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD MEETING

Tuesday, 21 September 2021

PRESENT

Councillor Gary Haley (Chair)	Gateshead Council
Councillor Angela Douglas	Gateshead Council
Councillor Sheila Gallagher	Gateshead Council
Councillor Freda Geddes	Gateshead Council
Councillor Ian Patterson	Gateshead Council
Nicola Barrass	Care Leavers
Linda Hubbucks	CCG
Lynne Colledge	Northumbria Police
Dr Kate Ward	CNTW
Sarah Diggle	Secondary School Governors
Malcolm Hedley	Foster Carers
Deborah Ewart	Housing
Andrea Houlahan	Deputy Strategic Director for Children Social Care and Early Help
Caroline O'Neill	Strategic Director, Children's Adults and Families
Moira Richardson	Public Health
Jean Thompson	Virtual School Head for LAC
Jill Little	LAC Service Manager

IN ATTENDANCE: Jon Gaines Service Manager, Quality Assurance -
Gateshead Council

Rosalyn Patterson Democratic Services Officer - Gateshead
Council

1 APOLOGIES AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair Welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the Board and gave an overview of the aim of Board, introductions were made.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Hazel Weatherley and Kirsty Sprudd.

2 CONSTITUTION

The Board received a report setting out the Terms of Reference of the Board.

RESOLVED - That the terms of reference, membership and schedule of meetings be noted.

CORPORATE PARENTING PARTNERSHIP ACTION PLAN

A report was received providing the context of the Corporate Parenting Plan and Corporate Parenting Partnership Group. The operational plan aims at ensuring strengths are built on to improve outcomes for all LAC.

The Corporate Parenting Partnership Group meet on a quarterly basis. The Group will take forward recommendations from this Board and work towards the operational plan.

Seven workstreams have been identified and all are underpinned by the principles of;

- Co-production with children, young people, carers and other stakeholders
- Focusing on the impact of any actions on the lives of children and young people in care and Care Leavers
- Proactive solution focused approaches

Key priorities have been identified for 2021, these are;

- Education, Training and Employment –
 - ensure all Gateshead children have an effective, high quality PEP
 - develop a process to ensure all post-16 young people have a written career plan
 - ensure consistency of engagement of post-16 young people with EET and to achieve 90% attendance
- Health –
 - Face to face health assessments and identifying health needs of care leavers
 - Strengthen provision of emotional and mental health support and strengthen assessment of mental health needs on entering care
 - Improve support to reduce unplanned pregnancies and the number of babies of care leavers coming into the care system
- Participation –
 - CMT to be delivered by young people to better understand the current challenges faced by children and young people
 - Voice of the Child Audit to highlight areas for development and strengthen the voice of the child in LAC reviews
 - Organisation of a virtual celebration event to recognise achievement during the pandemic
- Placement and accommodation –
 - Sufficiency planning within Gateshead
 - Dovetailed with work on alternative education provision
 - Develop the Shared Lives offer as an alternative to fostering and residential placements post 16.

- Care Leavers –
 - Develop a multi-agency Care Leavers Group to consult with young people in order to improve service delivery
 - Consult with young people regarding their transition to the Leaving Care team, accommodation and the SAILS panel process
 - Consult with young people in relation to their awareness of entitlements as care leavers

The Board was provided with the operational plan that sits under each workstream. The operational work has been under review since April and therefore some have been RAG rated.

Concerns were raised around the opening of an adult shop in the centre of Gateshead and that as corporate parents there is no way of objecting unless the owners make an application for a license. It was suggested that this should be considered by the Community Safety Board and the Safeguarding Partnership and that officers may wish to pick this up with neighbouring authorities which have been in a similar position.

School attendance rates were questioned and it was confirmed that LAC attendance has fluctuated due to Covid outbreaks. Work is ongoing to improve attendance and is being closely monitored.

The point was made that the link with schools is not explicit in the plan. It was acknowledged that there are links with schools and that the Head of the Virtual School is a member of this Board. It was also confirmed that during the pandemic children were RAG rated in terms of their needs and therefore identifying which children needed to access schools. In addition keeping Foster Carers safe was also a consideration, although there was very little reluctance from Foster Carers in terms of allowing their foster children to attend school. It was noted that the Virtual School Head works closely with the service and has close relationships with schools to ensure LAC are attending school or that they receive an alternative education offer.

It was questioned whether checks are carried out regarding suitability for home learning when children are placed. It was confirmed that all placements go through a rigorous assessment which will ensure there is sufficient space, equipment and a supportive environment for learning.

It was confirmed that Operation Endeavour is still in operation and ran throughout the pandemic.

RESOLVED - That the Board noted the contents of the report.

4 PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY ANNUAL REPORT

The Board received a report outlining the challenges faced by Children's Social Care in relation to placements for LAC.

It was reported that there has been a rise in the LAC population at a time where

there is less placements available to offer. The number of LAC increased from 420 to 454 at its peak in August 2020. Services are already stretched so this increase has had a big impact on the service itself.

Over 80% of LAC are placed within the Borough and it is hoped that this number can be increased further. Work is ongoing to increase the number of Foster Carers and also to increase capacity within Children's Homes and thus reducing the number of out of borough placements.

Good progress is being made in terms of the recruitment strategy but there remains challenges in terms of placing for example; complex young people, teenagers, sibling groups. In addition there is a need to look at placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children as well as home-from-home placements and long-term carers. It was acknowledged that this is a big task and a number of media channels are being used to promote this.

In terms of residential homes, medium term financial funding has been secured to develop two further homes for children with complex needs and for those with the most challenging, high risk behaviours. Planning applications are underway for these properties.

It was noted that in terms of the regional and national picture, Gateshead is doing well, however there is still work to be done to bring more LAC back into Gateshead.

The Board was advised that the service is not only experiencing an increase in the volume of young people in the system but also an increase in more complex young people. Therefore, there is more reliance on external providers to meet those needs which has costs associated and thus adds additional pressure onto the service.

It was questioned whether the increase in complex cases is unique to Gateshead. It was confirmed that this is a national and regional issue with more complex cases requiring mental health services. Work is ongoing with partners as this has been recognised as part of a therapeutic need for more trauma based practice. Interviews have been held for a psychologist and specialist nurses, jointly funded through the CCG to develop services to support these LAC.

It was also confirmed that this has been recognised by Health nationally and that what Gateshead is striving to do in terms of bringing more LAC 'in-house' is the best way forward. This offers more stability, thus less trauma to the child, and enables the child's needs to be met more holistically than if they had been placed with a private provider.

RESOLVED - That the Board noted the contents of the report and would give consideration to the frequency of updates to be received.

5 MISSING FROM HOME ANNUAL REPORT

The Board received a report summarising missing from care episodes from August 2020 to July 2021 and the assessment of risk for those young people at high risk of

exploitation.

During the reporting period there were 861 missing episodes, of which 510 (just under 60%) were LAC. The highest number of these missing episodes were from residential provision. It was noted however that a large number of these missing episodes related to a small number of children who went missing on more than one occasion.

All children who go missing are offered a Return Home Interview. A Return Home Support Worker has been in post for a couple of months and is making good progress in engaging with young people and building relationships through weekly visits to residential homes. It is hoped that this work, along with data from the police, will give a clear picture as to where the risk areas are.

Although missing episodes have increased there is structure around this to try and reduce and to improve those young people's understanding of keeping safe. Work is ongoing with police colleagues as well as MSET, where high risk cases are discussed.

In terms of police work it was noted that Missing From Home Coordinators look at plans around the child to prevent missing episodes and then consider Return Home Interviews to ensure the right police disruption is put in place.

It was reported that the uptake for Return Home Interviews was previously around 34%, however now there is a dedicated post in place uptake has increased, with some young people actually requesting a return interview. The officer in post has 100% success rate for Return Home Interviews and is an experienced practitioner of working with difficult to engage young people. The officer is also targeting young people who repeatedly go missing and working to support their interests and hobbies as a way of disrupting future episodes.

RESOLVED - That the Board noted the contents of the report and would give consideration to the frequency of updates to be received.

6 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

The Board received a report and presentation on performance data relating to LAC.

It was reported that there has been a 5% increase in the number of LAC since the start of the pandemic. Research from the ADCS reflected a national picture of increasing demand during the pandemic. Since March 2020 there has been a 16% increase in contacts received by the service, 28% increase in referrals an 18% increase in the number of children open across the service. There has also been a 29% increase in children subject to Child in Need Plans and 20% increase in the number of children on Interim Care Orders and 12% increase of children on Full Care Orders.

The number of LAC, as at the end of July 2021, was 433. However, this figure reached 454 in August 2020, which is the highest ever in Gateshead.

It was noted that during the reporting period, 169 children entered care, 142 of which was for the first time, and 184 ceased being looked after. 54.3% were placed within Gateshead, however, there has been an increasing need for the use of agency foster placements with the number increasing from 35 in July 2020 to 52 in July 2021.

In terms of the age of LAC this remains similar to previous years with the majority of LAC being aged 10-15 years old. In relation to placement stability, the proportion of children experiencing three or more placements in the last 12 months remains low at 7.3%, this is below the national and regional average. The proportion of children who have been looked after for 2.5 years or more and in the same placement for at least two years has reduced slightly to 69.2%, however this is still above the national average of 68.9%.

184 children ceased to be looked after over the last 12 months. Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) accounted for 32.6% of children ceasing to be looked after which is significantly higher than the national average of 13%. This increased demand has informed the development of the Kinship Care Team.

It was suggested that a short case study be included in future performance reports and it was considered timely to include a case around kinship care in the next report.

RESOLVED - (i) That the Board noted the contents of the report and would give consideration to the frequency of updates to be received.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It was agreed that the draft minutes from the Board would be shared with all elected Members as Corporate Parents in Gateshead.

8 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 14 December 2021 at 2pm.