

**GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD MEETING**

**Tuesday, 14 December 2021**

<b>PRESENT:</b>	Councillor Gary Haley	Gateshead Council (Chair)
	Councillor Angela Douglas	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Freda Geddes	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Hazel Weatherley	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Sheila Gallagher	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Ian Patterson	Gateshead Council
	Linda Hubbuck	CCG
	Dr Kate Ward	CNTW
	Nicola Barrass	Care Leavers
	Malcolm Hedley	Foster Carers
	Sarah Diggle	Secondary School Governors
	Caroline O'Neill	Strategic Director, Children's Adult and Families
	Andrea Houlahan	Deputy Strategic Director for Children Social Care and Early Help
	Moira Richardson	Public Health
	Deborah Ewart	Housing
	Chris Hulme	Children's Rights Officer
	Kirsty Sprudd	Gateshead System - Commissioning
	Jean Thompson	Virtual School Head for LAC
	Jill Little	Vice Chair - Corporate Parenting Partnership
<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b>	Rosalyn Patterson	Gateshead Council

**1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Lynne Colledge.

**2 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

**3 EDUCATION ANNUAL REPORT**

The Board received the Virtual School Education report.

It was reported that, as of 30 November 2021, there were 445 children looked after in Gateshead between the ages of 0-18 years old. 80 children within this cohort receive education out of the Borough. 75 of these looked after children have an

EHCP and 47 receive SEN support.

Pupil Premium Plus grant has increase to £2345 per child for children in care. The Virtual School retains £600 for additional service delivery to children in care and schools. The funding is distributed across schools based on two completed Personal Education Plans (PEPs) per year. It was noted that schools have to evidence the spend through PEPs and the service does challenge schools on its use of Pupil Premium Plus. It was confirmed that the number of returned PEPs from schools has increased following a change in process. There is now two windows for PEP submissions; October / November and April / May, this therefore focuses schools to ensure they return 6 monthly PEPs. The Virtual School quality assures the PEPs and picks up any actions, in particular around transitions. The April / May submission therefore gives the Virtual School opportunity to put support in place in advance of the transition being made.

It was reported that the rate for PEP return in Gateshead is 95% and 80% for out of borough education. It was acknowledged that this is the highest return for several years. The team is now focused on ensuring out of borough returns, which is gradually increasing.

As a result of Covid and new virtual ways of working the virtual school team has been able to attend more PEP Reviews. This has led to building better relationships with schools, particularly with those schools that are out of the borough.

In terms of educational attainment there were 37 looked after children in year 11 for 2020/21. As no exams were held due to the pandemic, the results were based on teacher assessment. There were 9 children with five passes at grade 4 and above, including maths and English, this equates to 24%. There were 12 children (32%) with five passes at grade 4 and above, not necessarily including Maths and English. There were 19 children (51%) achieving five passes at grade 1 and above and 31 children (84%) achieving one pass at grade 1 and above.

In relation to Key Stage 1 attainment there we 20 pupils in the cohort for 2020/21, attainment would previously have been measured through SATs results. For this year teacher assessment showed; 55% achieved the expected level in writing, 60% in reading, 50% in Maths and 50% achieving the expected level in all three areas.

It was noted that attainment under teacher assessment is much better than in exams which is evidence that looked after children need to be supported through other ways of learning.

It was reported that access to Higher Education for looked after children is much lower with the national average being 13%. In Gateshead this figure was 12.6% in 2019, 18% in 2020 and 21.2% in 2021, therefore significantly higher than the national average. Most of these young people graduated successfully. Research has shown that 25-30% of care leavers will undertake higher education in later life.

It was noted that there have been no permanent exclusions for looked after children since 2019. The Virtual School works hard to prevent exclusions and will challenge schools. There have been some cases where alternative provision and managed

moves have had to be undertaken but a permanent exclusion would be a very last resort for a child in care.

The number of fixed term exclusions is higher than the Virtual School would like, therefore monitoring has been increased and all schools have been asked to report all fixed term exclusions of looked after children. This will help the team support that young person to stop the situation escalating further. During the academic year 2020/21 there were 20 looked after children who received fixed term exclusions, a total of 31 fixed term exclusions which equates to 83.5 days of missed education.

There is now a new resource which replaces the 'letterbox programme', called the Treasure Chest. This includes Maths and English resources predominantly for Key Stage 1 and 2 and is aimed at getting looked after children learning at home with their carers. The feedback has been very positive so far and a full evaluation will be carried out once the second pack has been delivered this month.

The team now has three very experienced Education Support Workers with the most recent team member qualified and skilled in; counselling, cognitive behaviour therapy, trauma and attachment, psychology and therapy.

An Education Enrichment Programme has been developed by the Virtual School, this is led by an Outdoor Activity Leader and offers experiences beyond that of the classroom. This is a twice weekly programme for those pupils struggling to attend and engage with their schools. The programme is accredited and is becoming increasingly popular. The programme is aimed at building confidence and social skills so the young person can get back into school, it offers an holistic approach to learning.

Due to the pandemic the Pathways2Work Project has not been able to run, however it is expected that this will be developed through the year. The project is aimed at helping young people in years 10-13 to find work experience to develop confidence and increase life chances.

It was reported that for previously looked after and adopted children the Virtual School Head continues to be a source of advice and information. Work is ongoing to try and develop a network of adopters to offer training and information sharing.

The Education Psychologist continues to work with the Virtual School one day per week. It was noted that, due to a national shortage of EP's this cannot be extended. The psychologist is involved directly in case work and statutory processes such as EHCP's, delivers training and monitors transition.

It was reported that there is a DfE piloted project for all Virtual School Heads to strategically look at the education of children who have or have had a Social Worker. This therefore extends the cohort significantly and there is a need to work closely with schools to manage the needs of this large cohort. The aim of this is to make visible the disadvantages that children with a social worker can experience and to narrow the gap in attainment.

A pilot programme is currently being run at Kingsmeadow Secondary School, an

extensive robust training programme in trauma informed practice using virtual reality technology has been rolled out. The programme has been very successful in getting all staff in the school to access the training and is beginning to change mindsets of staff. The aim is to roll this out to all schools. An evaluation of the programme will be sent to the DfE in March. It is hoped that this will increase attendance, reduce fixed term exclusions and reduce managed moves and use of alternative provisions to avoid permanent exclusions as well as changing the mindsets of those people supporting young people.

It was reported that throughout the pandemic a full service was maintained. It was noted that a lot of Foster Carers made the choice for children in their care to remain at home. In these cases £200 of Pupil Premium Plus funding was redirected to Foster Carers to help them support the education of their foster child. This was well received and weekly Virtual School contact was maintained to check in and offer individual support where it was safe to do so.

It was suggested that a School Improvement Plan be attached to the final report prior to its publication. It was also suggested that initiatives such as Social Workers in Schools, be included in the Board's work programme going forward.

It was questioned how the use of the £200 paid to Foster Carers was evaluated. It was confirmed that a random sample of Foster Carers was taken and that a lot of the money was reimbursement of what they had already spent on educational resources. It was confirmed that generally the funding had been used very wisely.

More information was requested on the 20 young people receiving fixed term exclusions. It was confirmed that some of these young people have had more than one exclusion for low level behaviour. The Virtual School has worked closely with those schools to advise how they can better support the young person. It was acknowledged that it also relates to the level of tolerance of schools and the team continues to challenge schools over exclusions of looked after children.

It was questioned what there are less out of borough PEPs being returned. It was explained that this is because Local Authorities have different processes, some placements are in Scotland which do not have a requirement for PEPs so a report has to be accepted in that case. It was acknowledged however that although this return figure is improving it remains a challenge.

The point was made that the Regional Adoption Agency provides post adoption support so care needs to be taken that work is not being duplicated so more joint working may be required.

It was suggested that it would be useful for the Board to see trends over time in relation to attainment, achievement and exclusions; at least for the previous three years, in future reports.

The suggestion was made that School Admissions may be able to help in terms of developing an adopters network as they would hold that information upon registration of a child in school.

There was also a suggestion that consideration be given to the creation of a virtual school governing body.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Virtual School will continue to promote the education of all children who have or have had a social worker and offer a high standard of educational support to all children in care.
  - (ii) That the Virtual School will continue to maintain the high percentage of PEP reviews, and the timely return of all PEPs both in and out of borough and to continue to promote the importance of full attendance of all professionals at PEP meetings.
  - (iii) That the Virtual Schools will continue to provide appropriate intervention and provision for those Children in Care who have gaps in their education and also support those at risk of permanent exclusion to maintain their school place and to challenge where schools have not provided appropriate provision.
  - (iv) That the Virtual School will ensure that Pupil Premium Plus and the additional Pupil Premium Plus is allocated and used appropriately by schools and to challenge school to be more accountable for their use of the funding.
  - (v) That the Virtual School change the culture in schools, colleges and other services around responding to children with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and to make them the best they can be in managing and supporting this vulnerable group of children through the delivery of high quality training.
  - (vi) That an improvement plan be developed to sit alongside the Virtual School report.
  - (vii) That publication of the report be delayed until further work is carried out and gaps in it updated.

#### **4**

#### **ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Board received a report on the work of the Adoption Service for 2020/21.

It was noted that Gateshead is part of five local authorities in the North East working with a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt North East, to recruit, assess and approve adopters for the children for whom a plan of adoption has been made.

Over the last 12 months the average number of days between a child entering care

and moving to an adopted family is 358 days. In comparison this figure stood at 508 days in 2015, therefore timescales have significantly reduced.

Of the 93 children who ceased to be looked after over the last year, 8 were adopted, this equates to 9%.

It was noted that babies and children under three are most likely to be adopted. There are challenges around adoption of sibling groups if there are older children in those groups.

It was reported that the number of children for whom a Placement Order was made has increased from 20 last year to 27 in 2020-21. The number of children matched with adopters this year is 20.

It was also reported that the RAA has not achieved sufficiency of adopters which means the authority has to place them outside of the region through other agencies which incurs additional expense of around £35,000.

The number of children who have been approved for adoption this year is 24 and in the last 12 months 28 children have been adopted.

Fostering to Adopt arrangements allows babies to be with placed with their anticipated adopters. As of September 2021 there were 8 children placed in Foster to Adopt placements, there have been no adoptive placement breakdowns since 2019.

RESOLVED - That the Board considered the report and agreed a report on the RAA be brought back to the next meeting.

## **5 HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF LAC REPORT**

The Board received on the work undertaken by the CCG to support the health and wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers in Gateshead.

Due to the challenge of Covid during 2020/21 there has been an impact on the overall timeframe for initial health assessments (IHA). At the end of March 2021 the number of IHA carried out within 20 working days fell from 87.3% in the previous year to 65.3%. However 98% of review health assessments were completed within the month due, which is an improvement on 91% seen in the previous year, this exceeds the CCG target of 95%.

All 33 young people turning 18 during the year had their leaving care health passports completed.

The Health KPI's for physical health show that Gateshead is achieving higher than the national and regional returns for completion of health assessments, developmental checks, immunisations and dental appointments. However, it was noted that the number of dental checks did drop during Covid. From January 2021 Foster Carers were advised to book dentist appointments.

KPI for emotional health and wellbeing is based on the Strength and Difficulty screening undertaken by the local authority. It was noted that gap is diminishing every year and the overall score is reducing, this is attributed to the single point of access.

Delivery of CNTW consultation sessions continued throughout Covid, during the year 56 children and young people were discussed.

In quarters one and two of 2021-22 the picture is improving, with 73.5% of IHA completed within the timeframe. 93% of review health assessments were completed within the month due, however there has been pressures within the 0-19 service due to staffing which has impacted on timeframes.

The Designated Doctor and LAC Health Team continue to undertake quality audits. Consultation data for Quarters one and two show that 37 consultations were held for Gateshead children, with only a minority of those requiring onward referral to another service.

It was reported that the LAC Health Team has remained the same whilst numbers of children have increased, therefore work is underway to secure additional resources.

In January 2021 a number of young people from Gateshead and Newcastle were recruited to develop a video with Digital Voice on the views of their health needs. The video described some of the challenges faced and support required relating to their health needs.

The Specialist Nurse LAC is leading on a development to enhance support to young people with the key aim of delaying pregnancies. There is also enhanced LAC and care leavers information being shared through GP training.

It was confirmed that further work is underway looking at the Strength and Difficulty questionnaires so that those scores are resulting in something.

The Board felt that the work with Digital Voice was a very powerful tool and any suggestions as to where this could be shown would be helpful.

It was questioned as to the uptake of Covid vaccines within the cohort. It was noted that statistics for this particular cohort are not known, however up to 8 December 2021, 50% of eligible 12-15 year olds have received their vaccination. It was also noted that information has been shared with Foster Carers to ensure consents are in place, apps have been updated and Social Workers are encouraging take up. It was agreed that officers would look to update the vaccine locations on the app and better publicise that. It was also highlighted that PA's need to help take young people for their vaccines and that the CCG has secured funding to give care leavers bus passes so they can access vaccine sites.

RESOLVED - That the content of the report be noted and future reports be brought to the Board twice yearly.

## 6

### **EARLY PERMANENCE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Board received a report on early permanence and the work over the last year. Placement with foster carers, with a plan of adoption allows the authority to avoid delay in achieving stability and reduces the number of placements.

In early permanence planning foster carers are approved adopters, the speeds up planning and allows babies to bond with their families and avoids a move between foster carer and adopter.

It was noted that Gateshead is performing well and in all cases courts have approved the plans. An Early Permanence Panel meets on a monthly basis to consider all decisions. If it was felt that there was any risk in approval the child would not be put in a foster to adopt arrangement.

Since 2019 there has been 43 children with a plan of adoption, 13 of these (30%) were early permanence placements. It was confirmed that there has been no placements with agency carers for foster to adopt arrangements.

RESOLVED - That the Board noted the content of the report and the Early Permanence process.

## 7

### **CHILDREN'S HOMES REPORT**

A report was brought to the Board on the outcomes of the four inspection visits to Gateshead's Residential Children's Homes, which were carried out between May and August 2021.

It was reported that all home received a 'good' rating, comparatively neither statistical nor neighbouring authorities have achieved that.

It was noted that Grove House was rated 'good' where it had previously been 'outstanding'. This was on the basis of one safeguarding issue where an inspector had not been signed in to the daily log book. It is anticipated that Grove House will be able to regain its outstanding rating next year.

It was confirmed that there was exceptionally positive feedback on all four homes.

It was reported that there is a five year plan in place to increase capacity and offer additional support. Planning permission has been granted for a home for children with autism / complex needs. A specialist team has also been recruited for residential provisions to promote Trauma informed practice and promote placement stability, jointly funded through the CCG and the authority.

Work is ongoing to find another therapeutic home in Gateshead.

RESOLVED - That the Board noted the information contained in the report and agreed to receive further reports on a quarterly basis.



## 8

### CARE EXPERIENCED SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

The Board received a report on the work of the service to support care experienced young people.

It was noted that staff have continued to work throughout the pandemic with the focus of the team being on supporting young people through lockdown. The team supported 20 young people aged between 18-21 who live alone, this was through daily contact and doorstep visits.

Positives to be take forward from the pandemic was that care leavers benefitted from the increased level of contact and the team will continue carrying out these regular contacts, through Facetime, phone calls, visits.

It was reported that the number of 'Staying Put' placements once young people reach their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday is 43%. This is double that of statistical neighbours and above the national average.

Digital Voice work with care experienced young people around their experiences of using health services. This highlighted the struggle for some young people just to do basic things. In response to this there is a pilot project to supply care experienced young people with bus passes to enable them to access health services and maintain relationships with those people close to them.

It was noted that more work is needed around the cost of living crisis, and in particular the offer for those living alone.

The Board was keen to see more financial support and financial literacy for young people. The Board also requested something to be brought back on the health appointment pilot, it was noted that regional benchmarking is ongoing which could be fed back in.

The Board also requested the work of the Young Ambassadors be reported on. It was confirmed that they are not yet officially in post but will be represented on this Board once they are.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Board noted the content of the report.
  - (ii) That the Board was satisfied with progress and the level of support Care leavers are receiving in Gateshead.
  - (iii) That the Board would welcome further information on the health appointment pilot and work of the Young Ambassadors.

## 9

### OFSTED FOCUSED VISIT OUTCOME

The Board received the outcome of the focused visit by Ofsted of Gateshead's Children's Services.

The visit was very positive across the whole service, in particular strong leadership and highly skilled workforce. Partnership working was also highlighted as effective.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Board noted the outcome of the Ofsted visit September 2021.
  - (ii) That the Board will receive a post Ofsted action plan so it can monitor progress against the areas Ofsted identified for improvement.

## **10 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 1 March 2022 at 2.00pm.