

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

**Tuesday, 24 May 2022**

<b>PRESENT:</b>	Councillor Gary Haley (Chair)	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Freda Geddes	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Hazel Weatherley	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Sheila Gallagher	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Ian Patterson	Gateshead Council
	Dr Kate Ward	CNTW
	Sarah Diggle	Secondary School Governors
	Andrea Houlahan	Deputy Strategic Director for Children Social Care and Early Help
	Deborah Ewart	Housing
	Chris Hulme	Children's Rights Officer
	Alison Ferguson	CCG
	Ben Van Wagtendonk	Gateshead Council

<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b>	Suzanne Storey	Gateshead Council
	Gary Lewis	Gateshead Council
	Claire Morris	Gateshead Council
	Maxine Duffy	Gateshead NHS Foundation Trust

**1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Jean Thompson, Victoria McKay, Jill Little, Lynne Colledge, Cllr Angela Douglas, Moira Richardson and Linda Hubbucks.

**2 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

Matters Arising

It was noted that officers will look at creating an Action Plan to go alongside the minutes to identify actions, outcomes and progress to be reported on at each meeting.

It was suggested that a discussion be held at the next meeting around the findings of the Josh MacAlister Care Review which has recently been published.

**3 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW**

The Board received the performance report for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

It was reported that at the end of March 2022 there were 485 LAC, a 10.2% increase from the same point last year. Research undertaken showed a national increase in demand on social care services, which was further complicated by the pandemic. It was confirmed that services are still seeing the impact of Covid 19 with significant pressures emerging as a result.

Although there has been a slight decrease (1.6%) in the overall number of contacts received there has still been an increase of 21% in the number of those contacts progressing to a Social Care referral.

There has been a 14.2% increase in the number of children open across the service and an 11.6% increase in the number of Child Protection Plans. There has also been a 14.8% increase in the number of children becoming looked after for the first time.

There has been a 2.4% decrease in the number of children on Interim Care Orders but a 4.9% increase in children on Full Care Orders.

It was noted that the number of children becoming looked after for the first time has increased, however overall has remained fairly static over the last five years. Of this cohort 72.5% were previously subject to a CPP which indicates that most children do not enter care without having had support provided to try and avoid entry to care.

In terms of children becoming looked after for a second or subsequent time has decreased slightly from the previous year.

As at December 2021 47.4% of placements were outside of Gateshead, this is a slight increase on the previous year end figure. The number of LAC in non-Gateshead provision is static at 19.5%.

In terms of legal status it was reported that there has been an increase in the number of full care orders, a significant increase in Section 20 voluntary agreements and a slight decrease in the number of children on Interim Care Orders.

It was noted that the age profile of LAC shows similar proportions across most age groups, however there has been a large increase in the 0-4 years age group, a 40% increase on last year's figures.

The number of LAC in three or more placements continues on a downward trend and is below local and national averages. Long term placement stability, which measures LAC for 2.5 years or more in the same placement for at least two years, has increased very slightly by 0.8% to 71.9%. This is above the national and regional averages.

The number of children who have ceased to be looked after has increased slightly on last year. 33.5% of these children returned home, 21.7% as a result of turning 18, 27.3% had Special Guardianship Orders and 9.3% had Adoption Orders. Child Arrangement Orders accounted for 4.3% of children ceasing to be looked after.

It was concluded that demand has increased across the service but that stability

continues to be a strength. It was confirmed that a deeper dive will be taken into this going forward in order to better focus resources.

It was questioned as to whether there would have been increased pressures on the service without Covid. It was confirmed that over the last two years there has been an increase in children requiring care and support in their home, there has been increased numbers of referrals linked to Covid due to isolation and impact of that on mental health, financial crisis leading to deprivation and poverty. It was confirmed that this is also the national picture. It was also noted that there are higher proportion of children living with extended families who the service also supports. It was acknowledged that the last two years have been extremely challenging in terms of resources.

It was questioned how Gateshead's figures compare to other local authorities in relation to the number of children in care outside of the area. It was noted that these figures would be brought back once the new system was fully embedded and regional benchmarking has taken place.

It was questioned as to whether the increase in 0-4 age group coming into care was consistent with other areas. It was confirmed that this position is not unique to Gateshead, a pre-birth service has been developed with is led by Victoria McKay, as other authorities have teams working intensely with pregnant women to break the cycle. Further information will be brought back to the Board as this develops.

RESOLVED - To note the contents of the report and receive further information on the areas requested.

#### **4 GAP ANALYSIS - UNPLANNED TEENAGE PREGNANCY AMONGST CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Board received a report on the GAP analysis undertaken to identify any service improvements that may lead to a reduction in unplanned teenage pregnancy amongst looked after children.

Between July and October 2021 two questionnaires were circulated, one for professionals and carers and the other for young people. 116 responses were received from carers and professionals and 110 from young people. Of the young people who responded some were not care experienced, the majority of responses were from males.

The findings from the questionnaires showed that the large majority of responders received sex education at school and 90% felt that this was the right place to receive such information. Of those who responded to the question around who the correct person was to deliver Sex and Relationship Education (SRE), the majority felt this should be school. However, it was noted that nationally there are 12.5% of young people not in education so there are many missed opportunities in terms of delivering SRE for those young people not attending school.

Confidentiality was seen as a barrier with 23% of young people who responded stating they were worried that their personal data would not be kept private.

In terms of the professional survey, a wide range of groups responded including GPs, Social Workers, Youth Workers and carers. The vast majority of these professionals considered part of their role was to provide sexual health advice to young people.

From the recommendations a number of changes have already been made, such as PDF leaflets on contraception and sexual health now being available. Other recommendations outlined the responsibility of SRE on all corporate parents, information sharing between GPs and services and Social Workers to identify any young people not in education to ensure provision is in place to address sexual health needs.

It was questioned as to whether many young people are accessing unfiltered advice through the internet. The Board was reassured that the majority of young people stated that they were getting their information from school.

RESOLVED - That the Board considered and noted the recommendations from the GAP analysis.

## **5 CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD EXPLOITATION**

The Board received a report on the response by the service to children and young people linked to contextual safeguarding and child exploitation.

It was reported that at its focussed visit in September 2021, Ofsted did challenge the service on its approach to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. Following this challenge, officers spoke to colleagues from across the country around their approach and also Durham University has recently been appointed as world leading expert on the issue and is looking at different models.

It was acknowledged that there are a lot of resources within the service and there is a proposed model which does not require additional resources. It is proposed that the contextual safeguarding team will be allocated case responsibility from the point of initial referral where there is a need for intervention due to the young person experiencing harm beyond their families. The team will comprise of Social Workers with a case load of no more than 16 per social worker. They will work intensively with families to offer parenting support, this will be out of office hours as well, and it is envisaged that involvement will be no longer than 12 months. It was noted that this would involve realignment of current resources within the service.

It was questioned how a caseload of 16 cases per social worker compares to a normal caseload. It was confirmed that this varies depending on the nature of cases but that a caseload policy is in place which puts a maximum cap of 25 cases per worker. This is reviewed on a weekly basis but remains a challenge due to the increase in demand.

The Board asked what would happen if parents did not engage. It was noted that this is the crux of social work practice and it is important in these situations for social workers to be tenacious.

It was reported that in terms of the Social Workers in Schools model, they are currently being upskilled on exploitation so they can be an informal basis of support through pastoral support as some families do not want social work intervention.

RESOLVED - That the Board considered the proposals set out in the report.

## **6 GATESHEAD SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT**

The Annual Report was received for information.

## **7 CHILD PROTECTION AND CHILDREN IN NEED ANNUAL JOINT REPORT**

The Board received the Child Protection and Children in Need Annual Joint Report. It was noted that in Gateshead there is Tier 2 and Tier 3 services; tier 2 is the Early Help offer and Tier 3 is the statutory intervention services that cover CIN and CP Plans.

Cases are triaged by the multi-agency safeguarding thresholds and assessed as to what support is required. If they do not meet the thresholds they would still be signposted to other services if there was a need there.

In terms of the bespoke Edge of Care offer, the team continues to work to prevent those teenagers who have difficult family relationships from coming into care of becoming subject to a Child Protection Plan. This is through wraparound support, parenting intervention, working with young people, non-attenders at school and education provisions.

The number of children requiring Social Workers has increased and complexities of these cases have increased. It was acknowledged that there is a mental health crisis and parents are struggling and families are experiencing loss. There has been an increase in domestic violence during lockdown, which children and young people have been witnessing. The service is not seeing a decrease in the number of referrals and the end of the impact of the pandemic is not being seen. As a result of the pandemic a lot of early intervention has not happened and more children have ended up in care as a result.

It was noted that the practice model continues to develop and evolve and the Quality Improvement Group continues to look at the framework. There has been a lot of audit work undertaken and the new recording system in Mosaic can do a lot more in terms of showing more clearer a child's journey.

It was reported that the number of Children in Need at the end of 2021/22 was 1979 on plans, compared to 1505 in 2018/19, which is a significant increase. The point was made that the full impact of the cost of living increases has not yet been seen to it is anticipated that the figures will increase further.

It was questioned whether there has been an increase in families who don't have English as their first language, such as refugee families presenting. It was confirmed that the service has not seen an increase in these families nor has it seen families

who do not have access to public resources presenting. It was acknowledged that early intervention work is carried out with a lot of these groups of people so it is hoped that the impact of that work means they will not require tier 3 intervention or support. The point was made however that it is still early days in terms of the Ukraine crisis, with refugees only just starting to arrive in Gateshead, this will continue to be monitored.

RESOLVED - That the Board considered and noted the report.

## **8 REDUCING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN REQUIRING CARE STRATEGY**

The Board received a report on the recently approved strategy; 'Reducing the number of children requiring care'.

The main objectives of the strategy are; to keep families together safely, develop enough and affordable high quality placement options and achieving permanence quickly.

The strategy was written with the purpose to prevent children unnecessarily coming into care if it is not the most appropriate option for that child. There is a high number of kinship carers in Gateshead, these carers have a close link with the child.

It was noted that there has been an increase in the number of children requiring a high level of intervention when they had not previously been in contact with the service.

It was noted that the Strategy has been agreed by Cabinet and therefore a report would be brought back to a future meeting to look at the impact of this strategy.

RESOLVED - That the Strategy be noted and a further report be presented to the Board at a later date on the impact of the strategy.

## **9 BENCHMARKING THE CARE EXPERIENCED SERVICE**

The Board received a report on the benchmarking exercised undertaken in relation to the care experienced young people's service.

The Leaving Care Team Manager met with one of the newly appointed Young Ambassadors to go through their experience of being in care. The self-assessment checklist was worked through and identified how Gateshead performed on each point and which areas required further development.

Benchmarking against other local authorities in the area showed that Gateshead offers a broad range of support which is reassuring.

Darlington recently received an excellent focussed visit and officers from Gateshead made contact with Darlington officers to see what type of support they were offering. Currently Darlington Council use their taster flats for 6 weeks at a time to allow young people to understand the practicalities of living alone and in between these times they use the flats to undertake preparation for independence work with young

people aged 16-18.

Work is ongoing to look at the possibility of a Community Psychiatric Nurse having some time within the service to support young people and offer some clinical supervision to PA's. This is a successful model operating in Darlington currently.

As part of a Digital Me Project one of the barriers to living independently was highlighted as affordability of travel, this included to attend essential appointment. Therefore a 12 month pilot for free travel for care experienced 18-25 year olds throughout the region has been secured. This amounts to £350 per year for 133 young people.

It was noted that pre-Covid there was a good drop in support offer, work is continuing with young people around what they would like to see and looking at activities to build connections and improve wellbeing. In terms of monitoring this it was noted that this would be part of the remit of the Inspection Preparation Group.

It was requested that the Board be assured that none of the care experienced young people are on pre-paid gas and electric metres and that none of them are paying water rates. It was confirmed that this would be looked at and picked up in the financial report which is due to the next Board meeting in September.

It was suggested that a seminar be held for all Councillors on this subject.

RESOLVED - That the report be noted and proposals agreed.

10

## **CHILDREN'S HOMES UPDATE AND REG 44 VISITS REPORT**

The Board received the quarterly report in relation to Children's Homes inspections and visits for the period January 2022 to March 2022.

It was reported that all four homes are due to be inspected by the end of the summer, at present no monitoring visits are held because all homes were found to be good so Ofsted revisit on an annual basis.

The Regulation 44 Visitor is independent from the local authority and visits on a monthly basis. They speak to young people and partners and provide recommendations.

It was questioned as to the Council's responsibility for homes in the area that are not run by the Council but by external agencies and organisations. It was confirmed that private homes can open anywhere and be ran by private providers as long as they are Ofsted registered. The responsibility on the local authority only comes when they place a child in that provision. It was confirmed that local authorities are required to notify another local authority if they are placing a child in that local authority area, however this does not always routinely happen. It was also noted that if a home opened in the borough the service would try to ensure that they take Gateshead children, however this would only be if necessary as such placements are expensive.

It was suggested that case studies from young people living in children's homes would be useful for future reports.

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

## **11 CHILDREN LIVING IN 'OUT OF AREA' AND 'AT A DISTANCE' PLACEMENTS**

The Board received a report for information in relation to 'out of area' and 'at a distance' placements. It was noted that these placements are usually as they are the safest for that child, this could be in terms of access to specialist provision and resources that are not available in the area. It was noted that in future reports, maps of placements could be included.

These placements are monitored very closely so that the authority knows how to support them. There is a financial impact as a result of such placements as these can be very expensive. The service tries to support Gateshead children and young people in-house as far as possible but currently need outweighs local resource.

It was reported that for cases where a child is placed outside of the area this requires Director sign off, therefore there is a lot of scrutiny on those decisions.

It was requested that a cost breakdown of various placements be included in a future report.

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

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

Tuesday 20 September 2022 at 2pm