

GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE PARENTING SUB OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING

Tuesday, 19 July 2016

PRESENT: Councillor B Oliphant (Chair)
Councillors: B Clelland, S Green, J Adams and E McMaster

CO-OPTED MEMBERS: John Wilkinson, Julie McCartney and Jeremy Cripps

CP1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors McHatton, Simcox and S Craig.

CP2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 11 January 2016 and 21 March 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

CP3 CONSTITUTION

The Committee agreed the constitution of the Committee and the appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair for the current municipal year.

RESOLVED - That the information be noted.

CP4 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Committee received a report on the Looked After Children Improvement Plan. It was noted that at its recent inspection Ofsted looked at the whole journey of a looked after child and the outcomes they achieve. Overall the service did well however, some areas were identified as requiring improvement. From these recommendations an improvement plan has been developed to address the issues.

The improvement plan highlights a number of key tasks and timescales. Key tasks include; improving the quality of children's plans, including pathway plans; ensuring child protection conferences and reviews are used to drive forward progress and improving the attendance of education professionals at reviews to ensure focus is on the young person's educational outcomes. In terms of health, the improvement plan looks to develop the support to care leavers to understand their health history and ensure they have regular and timely access to mental health services. It was reported that a Band 6 nurse has now been appointed so there is additional capacity to support care leavers. Through the transformation of mental health services there

is additional counselling that LAC and care leavers can access.

In terms of educational attainment it was noted that there are challenges in relation to outcomes. It was noted that Gateshead figures are similar to the national picture and work is continuing to narrow the gap in attainment between LAC and other pupils. It was acknowledged that generally there are between 40-60% of the LAC cohort with some degree of special educational need which means that there is a difficult starting point initially. To improve the picture for LAC there is now tighter tracking and this coincides with the new national assessment system that looks at progress made.

A Learning Mentor has been appointed to work with those pupils who are at risk of exclusion and to ensure pupils are kept engaged and are sitting exams. It is hoped this appointment will help LAC pupils build self-esteem at a time when they are being challenged. This appointment has been made using Pupil Premium money.

Work is ongoing to establish a protocol for care leaver support, meetings have been held with education and training providers to look at what offer can be given to LAC. Bi-monthly meetings are being held between Connexions, REALAC team and LAC services to profile young people and identify what is best for each individual child.

Concerns were raised about the attendance at review meetings and what can be done to improve this, for example video conferencing. It was noted that officers are looking at different ways to hold review meetings, there are challenges in terms of teachers attending during the school day. Generally LAC reviews are held within school and discussions are ongoing around telephone conferences for Child Protection Conferences.

It was questioned what the issue is with care leavers access to mental health services. It was explained that this is due to care leavers falling into adult services, however the redesign of the mental health service, the EMIL project (Expanding Minds Improving Lives) is looking at ensuring the service is more wide ranging. There is ongoing work to support and understand how to access mental health services so that care leavers can be sign posted. It was also noted that older care leavers do not always want the support of LAC services, therefore it is important to ensure they receive the correct information to allow them to access other support services.

Concerns were also raised around those LAC who have no special educational needs but who are not doing well at GCSE's and it was questioned what routes there are for those young people. It was confirmed that all young people have a Connexions Advisor and the REALAC team have pathways to work for each looked after young person. Work is ongoing to look at what is out there and matching it to providers.

It was questioned whether there are any softer measures, for example in terms of extra curricular activities that a LAC may be involved with, as this could lead to other development opportunities. It was confirmed that this would be part of the discussion with their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and their Social Worker during a LAC Review. It was pointed out that this is separate to an education plan and is social

care led. It was suggested that this information could be extracted further in the future. It was noted that part of foster carer's objectives is to promote self identity and secure attachments, also the Celebration of Achievement Awards are held annually and are not necessarily academically led. It was acknowledged that there may be a role in Personal Education Plans (PEPs) to include extra curricular activities.

It was queried what measures schools are taking to help children who struggle in exam settings. It was acknowledged that this is not about school willingness but rather about exam conditions which cannot be changed. Designated persons within schools will try and engage with young people who have anxiety about exams.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the views of the Committee on the development of a Looked After Children Improvement Plan be noted.
 - (ii) That the Committee agreed to receive a progress update in March 2017.

CP5 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

- RESOLVED -
- That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the remaining business in accordance with the indicated paragraphs of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

CP6 REGULATION 44 REPORT

The Committee received a report on the Ofsted inspection outcomes and regulation 44 independent visits carried out in the Council's children's homes. The reports written as a result of the visits are circulated to the Service Director, Social Work, Care Wellbeing and Learning, Service Manager for Looked After Children and the Registered Manager of each Home.

- RESOLVED -
- That the information be noted.