

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

Monday, 10 October 2016

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

CO-OPTED MEMBERS John Wilkinson and Jeremy Cripps

CP7 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Simcox and co-opted members Sasha Ban and Ann Page.

CP8 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

CP9 YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRESENTATION - 'TOTAL RESPECT'

The Committee received a presentation from young people on the work of the Regional Children in Care Council. The Regional Children in Care Council identified a number of campaign areas including; housing, life skills, money, employment and training.

The young people informed the Committee that the average care leaver on benefits is left with £21 a week for food. The Committee worked in groups to create meal plans on a budget.

During feedback it was noted that there is an expectation that foster carers would help teach young people in their care life skills such as cookery and budgeting.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the information presented.

CP10 HEALTH OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN - ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received the annual report on the work of the Looked After Children and Young People Health Team in 2015-16.

Key activity over the last year includes the work of the Designated Doctor, Dr Helen

Palmer, in identifying children who have evidence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Work has been ongoing to ensure children becoming looked after have Initial Health Assessment's, of the 180 notifications received over the year, 172 had their Initial Health Assessment's completed, 47% of which were completed within 28 days. It was also reported that 85.9% of the 313 Review Health Assessment's carried out were completed within 28 days of their due date.

It was noted that work is ongoing to ensure care leavers receive their Leaving Care Health Passports, this identifies any health needs. In terms of statistical returns there was a high percentage had health assessments, dental appointments and immunisations. Overall this was above national, regional and previous year's figures, although it was noted that dental appointments dipped due to reporting after 1st April, however there are no concerns regarding looked after children's access to dental services.

Work continues around the development of the Expanding Minds Improving Lives project and within that looked after children have been identified as a priority group. In terms of drug and alcohol services there were 42 referrals received, this is an increase on the previous year figures, however it was acknowledged that the previous year's data was limited. The majority of referrals were for nicotine, cannabis and alcohol. It was reported that there were 59 looked after children contacts into sexual health services, these contacts were for contraception, pregnancy testing and STI screening.

It was noted that Dr Palmer is a member of the Adoption Panel, 52 medicals were undertaken during the year and 27 matches were made, this is an increase on the previous year. Dr Palmer also attended 10 Foster Panels over the last year and it was reported that there was a fall in the number of adult medicals requiring medical advice compared to the previous year.

Training has been provided to foster carers, including specific training on caring for children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Looked after children's health needs were also included in safeguarding training to GP's and A&E obstetric and paediatric staff.

The Clinical Commissioning Group has invested additional resources into the team, with a Specialist Nurse and part time administrator being appointed. The Designated Nurse LAC, Linda Hubbucks, is now Designated Nurse in the CCG and will have a strategic role covering Newcastle and Gateshead. The position on the team has been replaced by a Named Nurse LAC. Work is ongoing to develop RAG rating for young people, in relation to their health needs, to prepare them for independence and support their transition to leaving care. The RAG rating will tie in with the young person's pathway plans and will profile their individual needs. In addition, there is work continuing on the development of a database to record and analyse health needs. This will help the team to profile the total population of Gateshead.

It was noted that during the current year further development and monitoring of the strengths and difficulties questionnaire process will be undertaken as well as improving timeframes for Initial Health Assessments. It was reported that Dr Palmer will be retiring at the end of 2016 so contingency planning is underway.

Dr Palmer spoke to the Committee about her work on identifying looked after children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. It was reported that this has become apparent through fostering concerns. The only clinic in the country to deal with the disorder is in Southampton, which would be robust psychological testing over a number of days. It was felt that this would not be appropriate to the children diagnosed within Gateshead, therefore training has been provided on how to diagnose the disorder through the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service. A pathway has been drawn which fulfils international criteria. There is a lot of work ongoing to identify affected children in Gateshead, for example looking at how they have come into care. It is important to identify early in order to prevent secondary diseases occurring, in addition many are not mature enough to leave care at 18 therefore this needs to be taken into account during pathway planning.

It was acknowledged that this has increased since 2015 with one third of looked after children having that disability, therefore a lot of training has been delivered, for example to foster carers. It was also recognised that there is a huge stigma attached to Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and now expectant mothers are being advised that no amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy.

It was questioned whether this was the findings of a conclusive study. It was noted that this has been through diagnosis and also has been exemplified through an increase in Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, with more complex needs and worse outcomes for children and young people. It was confirmed that training is in place for foster carers and schools are visited after diagnosis.

It was queried whether there was any scope in health authorities coming together to develop a specialist unit in a more central location in the country. It was acknowledged that there needs to be a local resource as there are too many children, with approximately 500 within Gateshead's population. It was noted that the clinic in Southampton would only take children with evidence of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, however this can be diagnosed locally anyway, it is also felt that it would be too stressful for children.

It was questioned how these learning difficulties can definitely be attributable to Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder when learning difficulties can be for a number of reasons and include a lot of contributory factors. It was noted that there has been a vast increase in Autism Spectrum Disorder and this is one of the causes. It was reported that there are 600-800 children and young people in Gateshead and Newcastle who do not have typical Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and the wider parameters need to be examined.

RESOLVED - That the comments of the Committee be noted.

CP11 FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received a report on the work of the Fostering Service over the last 12 months. During the year the number of looked after children peaked at 376, but

has now dropped back to 340. It was reported that over the last year the Fostering Service has worked on providing a range of placements, approving a cohort of adopters, there has also been some de-registrations of foster carers due to retirement or change of circumstances.

In terms of the number of referrals it was confirmed that 62% of placements were needed on the same day, 6% were needed for the following date and 24% were planned placements. It was recognised that the majority were made on the same day in crisis situations.

It was noted that 42 sibling groups were referred, one of which was a group of five. It was acknowledged that it is unlikely that there would be an available foster carer to take all five siblings, typically the most a foster carer could take would be a sibling group of three. The team would look at each case individually and in each case it would be expected that contact would remain between the sibling group.

During the year there was an average of 20 enquiries per month from potential foster carers. It was reported that the conversion rate from enquiries to approval is approximately 11% nationally, however over the last year this dropped to 8% in Gateshead. It was acknowledged that there is a complex process before panel and work is ongoing to increase the conversion rate. A recruitment and retention strategy is in place to promote the service, there has been publicity through the Council's website, Council News, bridge banners, posters and radio adverts.

Service development will continue around the Staying Put scheme which allows young people aged 18 and over to remain in their fostering placements. It was noted however that this reduces the number of foster placements available, therefore the service will ensure there is a robust recruitment strategy in place.

It was questioned how the service ensures the retention of foster carers. It was noted that this is done through payment for skills and ongoing professional development to keep foster carers as upskilled as possible. It was confirmed that work is ongoing to increase the availability of complex teenage placements by ensuring foster carers have the skills to manage these young people. It was also pointed out that Gateshead is above target in terms of placement stability and the service is continuing to strive towards ensuring good standards continue. It was reported that the aim is to recruit 30 new sets of foster carers every year, and that both formal and informal support will be provided by using experienced foster carers to buddy newly recruited carers.

It was queried whether any of the foster carers move from the Council into private agencies. It was confirmed that this does not normally happen, however the Council does receive a number of foster carers moving from private agencies. It was confirmed that this year there has been 24 foster carers de-registered, however 25 have been recruited, and there were no foster carers who left to go to other agencies. Committee was advised that the Council offers whole family support and a competitive package which ensures that foster carers feel valued.

It was questioned whether there is a focus on training foster carers in relation to young people leaving care. It was confirmed that this is part of young people's care

plan and pathway, which is monitored by Independent Reviewing Officers, and foster carers must show delivery of independent living and development skills.

The point was made that recruitment of foster carers from the BME community is low. It was acknowledged that the service is linking in with local groups to increase recruitment, however, because there is a small number of looked after children from the BME community it is about making sure foster carers have placements. It was confirmed that there are good links with the Jewish community made through the recruitment strategy.

RESOLVED - That the comments of the Committee be noted.

CP12 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

The Committee received a report on performance during the first six months of 2016/17. It was reported that the number of looked after children peaked at 378 in July and currently there are 352. The rate per 10,000 in Gateshead remains higher than the national rate of 60 per 10,000, although figures have remained stable for a number of years.

In terms of age and gender of looked after children this has also remained stable, although there has been some fluctuation in relation to 0-2 year olds and 9-11 year olds. It was noted that the majority of young people are under a Care Order, 56%. It was also noted that placement stability is good, with only 2.1% of looked after children who had three or more placement moves. In addition, 86.3% of children who have been looked after for more than two and a half years have lived in the same placement for at least two years, this is compared to the national average of 67%.

It was reported that out of borough placements have increased to 41% which equates to 151 children and young people. Of this figure, 84% are placed within the region. It was noted that four looked after children are placed in Barnet for religious and cultural reasons. The majority are in foster placements and of those a small number are in independent placements, 22 are placed with relatives and family friends.

Committee was advised that all LAC Reviews are currently within timescale. By the end of September 11 adoptions took place and 12 Special Guardianships.

It was recognised that there is an increased focus on care leavers, during 2016-17 there will be 149 young people aged between 17 and 21. It was noted that only four are in unsuitable accommodation, three are in custody and one young person is in hospital sectioned under the Mental Health Act. In terms of care leavers not in employment, education or training (NEET) there is a whole Council support to get them apprenticeship ready.

It was reported that the Mind of My Own (MOMO) app continues to be used by looked after children. Both independent and informal advocacy continues to be provided to young people.

Committee was advised that the Celebration of Achievement Awards Night will be held on 27 October at the Lancastrian Suite.

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

CP13 CASE STUDY - OUT OF BOROUGH PLACEMENTS

The Committee received a report on the number of out of Borough placements. It was reported that there is a contract framework with other local authorities for the provision of residential beds from Independent Fostering Agencies. Provision is monitored and evaluated by the commissioning team within the Council. They oversee to ensure performance is to standard and offer quality assurance prior to any agency being added to an approved providers list.

It was noted that an annual check is carried out on all providers to look at issues such as; health and safety, financial viability, safeguarding, equality and diversity and Ofsted inspection rating. This ensures that any independent fostering agency is operating within legislation and is compliant and best value for the Council.

It was reported that, as at the end of September, there was 114 looked after children placed outside of Gateshead, either with foster carers, connected people or independent fostering agencies. It was noted that the majority are placed within the region to ensure accessibility into Gateshead for reasons such as education.

It was questioned whether the children placed outside of Gateshead are continued to be monitored. It was confirmed that Social Workers must still do the same level of visits and the Independent Reviewing Officer will still hold the same reviews, there is also additional work for those placed far away.

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

CP14 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.

CP15 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.

