

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

Monday, 26 March 2018

- PRESENT:** Councillor B Oliphant (Chair)
- Councillor(s): A Geddes, C Davison, M Hall, N Weatherley, D Bradford, L Kirton, K McCartney, C McHugh and S Ronchetti
- CO-OPTED MEMBERS** Jeremy Cripps, Malcolm Hedley, Caitlin Fintoni and Abigail Smith
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor(s): G Haley
- APOLOGIES:** Councillor(s): B Clelland and E McMaster
- Co-opted Member(s):

CP26 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr McMaster and Cllr Clelland.

CP27 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2018 were agreed as a correct record subject to Jeremy Cripps being added as in attendance.

CP28 YOUNG PEOPLES PRESENTATION - APPRENTICESHIPS

Committee received information around care leavers' apprenticeships and spoke to two care leavers who were currently undertaking apprenticeships within the Council.

It was noted that there are currently 13 apprenticeships which have been ring fenced for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. This adds to the offer of the Council as corporate parents to ensure those children and young people are prepared for adulthood and a move to independence.

It was reported that one of the apprenticeship posts created was that of a business apprentice to work alongside the Children's Rights and Enforcement Team. The apprentice will also represent young people on the Fostering Panel, Corporate Parenting Partnership and on this Committee.

It was noted that work is ongoing to look at any additional support which may be needed to support these young people during their apprenticeships to ensure they complete it successfully.

Discussions are ongoing with senior leaders around what else can be done, for example guaranteed offer of an interview for looked after children and care leavers. It was noted that some of the apprenticeships are for 18 months, whereas usually they are for 12 months, however this would be up to the individual departments and entry requirements, although there is flexibility when it comes to these apprentices.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the information presented.

CP29 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

Committee received a report and presentation on performance in relation to looked after children up until the end of January 2018.

It was reported that at the end of January there were 388 looked after children (LAC). This was made up of 263 individual families, therefore there are a number of sibling groups within the overall number. In terms of statistical and regional figures Gateshead is slightly higher and is also above the national average. It was noted that the LAC population is not static and that 148 children entered care and 130 left care over the last year. On average 16 children per month enter the care system and 13 leave care.

Committee was advised that the main reason for children entering care was due to abuse or neglect. The definition for this category is “children in need as a result of, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; also includes children at risk of domestic violence”. The largest proportion of children leaving care return home when it is deemed safe to do so. The next largest group of young people leaving care was because of a move to independent living.

It was noted that the majority of young people in care are in mainstream fostering. There are currently 18 LAC in independent fostering places, it was acknowledged that this figure is small in terms of neighbouring authorities. There has been an increase since last year in family and friend placements.

It was reported that targets are being met in relation to timeliness of LAC reviews and placement stability. During April – January 2018, 20 adoptions took place, of which 13 were within the best interest date timescale. However, targets around the use of adoptions, SGO’s and timeliness of children being placed for adoption have not been met. There have been improvements in the number of care leavers in education, employment or training and also the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation. In terms of placement stability there has only been 25 children out of 389 who have experienced three or more placements moves in the last 12 months, this is 6.4%. This figure compares favourably to the national picture which is around 10% of children experiencing three or more moves on average.

It was noted that adoption figures across the country have reduced, with a general reduction in the number of adopters nationally and regionally.

It was questioned whether the increasing number of LAC is due to the impact of Universal Credit. It was confirmed that there is not enough data to know that yet,

however, neglect and abuse are the highest factor as to why children come into care which could be some indication of a link to poverty.

It was queried whether support is offered once a child returns home. It was confirmed that all risk factors are tested before a child or young person returns to the family home, work would be ongoing to look at risk and manage any pinch points by working with parents to help and upskill parents. The support length to these children would depend on the individual circumstances.

It was questioned how Gateshead's out of borough placements compare to other authorities and how can the number be reduced. It was confirmed that a lot of the out of borough provision actually belongs to Gateshead, and a lot of carers living outside the area are still registered with Gateshead, for example there are a lot of friends and extended family placements through regulation 24 assessments. It was noted that LAC will always try to be kept within the Gateshead boundary area but there will still be assessments and support to carers outside of the area. There is also a small number of residential places outside of Gateshead. It was also confirmed that there are 18 independent fostering agency places in Gateshead, this is one of the lowest in the region. It was also acknowledged that there is a promising picture in relation to adoption targets, currently there have been 19 this year, although this is slightly lower than last year.

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

CP30 CASE STUDY - PERFORMANCE/PLANNING/SAFEGUARDING OF CARE LEAVERS

A case study on the support to care leavers was presented to the Committee. It was noted that the Care Pledge and the local offer fits under the new legislation which requires local authorities to publish a 'Local Care Leaver Offer'.

The Government introduced a set of Corporate Parenting principles that all areas within a local authority should recognise as part of their role as a corporate parenting. The principles require corporate parents to;

- Act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing of LAC
- Encourage LAC to express their views, wishes and feelings
- Take into account the views, wishes and feeling of LAC
- Help LAC gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its partners
- Promote high aspirations and seek to secure the best outcomes for LAC
- Ensure LAC are safe and they have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- Prepare LAC for adulthood and independent living

It was reported that the role of the personal advisor has changed under the new guidance, there is now a duty to support young people up to the age of 25, previously this was only required until the young person was 21.

All care leavers have a Pathway Plan, this sets out what is needed and who will support them, based on previous assessments and plans and is reviewed on a six monthly basis.

It was noted that previously the accommodation model did not meet young people's needs, therefore work has been undertaken with Commissioning and a new housing model will commence from 1 July 2018. The new model will provide emergency supported accommodation, a short term assessment unit, medium 24 hour supported accommodation with step down shared living and dispersed houses, supported lodgings and taster flats. A multidisciplinary panel will monitor all placements, therefore there is end to end pathway with more structured support built into the supported lodging accommodation model. This brings all services together to manage the young people effectively.

Prior to any move towards independence links are made with partners, Learning & Skills offers courses on budgeting, banking and debt management. There is also support in terms of Universal Credit and 2 Way Tenancy Solutions provides support in relation to managing a tenancy.

In terms of financial support there are leaving care grants in place to support young people in education, employment or training. In addition there is help for young people in higher education in relation to their accommodation during holiday periods and university fees. In relation to education, employment and training study programmes have been developed to offer employability skills, mock interviews skills to help young people progress into work. For young people who have had special educational needs packages are in place to help them gain skills to enter employment.

It was confirmed that there has been improvements made in terms of young people in education, employment or training (EET), the number of young people in EET has increased by 10% in the last 12 months.

It was questioned whether apprenticeships could be created within businesses that the Council commission. It was confirmed that a stakeholder event is to be held to build into the local offer and advise what is expected of stakeholders as corporate parents. There has been a commitment made that every contract will have commitment built into it to look at the possibility of apprenticeships.

It was queried whether there is medical support continuity if a young person moved placements. It was confirmed that all young people have a health passport and personal advisors ensure they are registered with necessary health professionals. It was acknowledged that there are challenges around ensuring all young people understand what the passport is for.

The point was made that there has previously been times with care leavers refusing to engage in education, employment or training and it was questioned whether the

use of a personal adviser would help in these situations. It was confirmed that currently there are 13 young people not engaging and therefore they have to be classed as NEET, even if they may be in work etc.

It was questioned what the situation would be with a young person attending university outside of the area. It was confirmed that in this situation a young person could still return to their foster placement and the service would work with the leaving care service in the young person's new area. There are currently 15 young people attending university outside of the area.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Committee was satisfied with the level of support Care Leavers are receiving in Gateshead.
 - (ii) That Committee agreed to receive a further report on the support offered to Care Leavers.

CP31 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT

Committee received the provisional work programme for the municipal year 2018/19.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That Committee endorsed the OSC's provisional work programme for 2018/19 and referred it to Council in June 2018 for agreement.
 - (ii) That the Committee noted that further reports will be brought to the Committee to identify any additional issues which it may be asked to consider.

CP32 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.

CP33 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.

Chair.....