

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

**Thursday, 4 July 2019**

**PRESENT:** Councillor B Oliphant (Chair)

Councillor(s): M Hall, D Bradford, P Craig, S Craig,  
C Davison, M Ord, R Oxberry and N Weatherley

**CP1 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Clelland, Councillor McMaster, Councillor McCartney and co-opted members Penny St Bernard and Malcolm Hedley.

**CP2 MINUTES**

RESOLVED - The minutes of the last meeting held on 28 March 2019 were agreed as a correct record.

**CP3 CONSTITUTION**

RESOLVED - That the Constitution of the Committee and the appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair as approved by the Council for the current municipal year be noted.

**CP4 GATESHEAD COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

Committee received the annual report on the Adoption Service. As was required by all local authorities a regional adoption agency was formed, Adopt North East, the adoption team moved from December 2018 so the report only covers activity from April 2018 until December 2018.

It was reported that LAC numbers remained relatively static. There was a reduction in the number of 6-8 year olds coming into care and the largest increase was 9-11 year olds.

From April 2018 to March 2019 there were 28 children placed for adoption, 10 girls and 18 boys. There were 18 children placed individually and 10 children were part of a sibling group, five groups of two children. It was acknowledged that the performance was good in terms of keeping siblings together.

46% of the adoptions were done within best interest timescale, this performance has decreased since the same period last year. However it was confirmed that this was due to delays in DBS checks which affected a sibling group of three, as well as delays in family finding due to concerns around foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and external family finding to reflect the child's cultural background. It was acknowledged that there is a balance between keeping sibling groups together and ensuring best interest timescales are met.

Committee was advised that for the period April 2018 until November 2018, 14 adoptive families were approved, in total 12 matches were made before the team moved to Adopt North East. It was clarified that the Council still has oversight of matches and Elaine Devaney is the agency decision maker, however the agency has responsibility for family finding and recruitment of adopters. It was also noted that the Early Permanence Group still meets on a monthly basis so officers are aware of any drift or delay.

It was questioned if there are any breakdown of placements. It was confirmed that there are not a lot of breakdowns, approximately one per year, these are usually in relation to older children with complex needs. Committee was advised that there is also the Adoption Support Team in place so there is a robust package of support available to prevent adoption breakdowns. If this happens follow up work is carried out through disruption meetings, however there are very few cases.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the performance of the adoption service in 2018/19 and noted the changes in service delivery.

## **CP5 PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY**

Committee received a report on Gateshead's Fostering Service outlining performance over the last 12 months.

Committee was advised that payment for skills scheme continues which supports the best possible Foster Carers to meet the needs of children and young people. Over half of placements (51%) of placements were requested as emergencies, this figure is similar to previous years.

It was reported that there is not always a lot of spare capacity for emergency placements, this is due to an aging population of Foster Carers which is a challenge across the region. The Marketing and Recruitment Officer is currently working with Corporate Communications to develop a range of ways of encouraging new Foster Carers. More community based resources are being used, for example attendance at local food markets, as well as a lot of digital marketing. The most successful channels with which to promote foster caring in Gateshead has been through the Council's website, radio adverts, Council News, leaflet drops and local press as well as bridge banners, however this is no longer allowed due to health and safety reasons. It was noted that Facebook is becoming a more popular way of advertising. The aim is to recruit 30 new Foster Carers this year. Committee was advised that as a local authority we offer very good support and a lot of Foster

Carers choose Gateshead as they are aware of the quality of training and support offered.

It was questioned what causes potential Foster Carers to drop out of the assessment process early. It was explained that sometimes they realise it is not right for them as a family. During the initial visit the social worker will explore their reasons for wanting to foster and give them further information on what is entailed, this can initially discourage people. Pre-approval training is also carried out followed by assessment and once passed they are referred through to Panel. It was noted that there is an eight month timescale to get to Fostering Panel.

Committee queried what training has to be undertaken. It was confirmed that all Foster Carers must do standard training within 12 months, depending on the level of Foster Care depends on the number of courses required. It was also noted that for certain Foster Carers specific training will be identified around the needs of a child in their care.

It was questioned what type of issues would make a potential Foster Carer unsuitable. This would include such things as non-disclosure of an offence, attitude and value base. Committee was advised that it can be very individual and is about the assessor and how they assess whether the skills will transfer to foster caring.

Committee questioned how those Foster Carers who are dealing with challenging young people are supported. It was noted that all Foster Carers undergo robust assessments and are supervised on a monthly basis so that any concerns can be dealt with immediately. Action plans can also be put in place where there are concerns. Standard of care meetings are also held to ensure Foster Carers are meeting standards.

RESOLVED - That the Committee noted the report.

## **CP6 EARLY PERMANENCE**

Committee received a report on early permanence, this includes Fostering for Adoption and Concurrent Planning. This ensures permanent care arrangements are secured as quickly as possible.

It was noted that the Adopt North East Early Permanence Project is funded by the DfE, the aim of which is to embed early permanence planning through cross-sector expertise, best practice sharing and upskilling the workforce. There is a drive to recruit more adopters willing to foster first, this ensures a more seamless transition and avoids disruptions in a child's life, as well as helping them to bond and make attachments with adopters. Usually if a placement is not a foster to adopt the child or young person will be with a Foster Carer for a year before settling with its adoptive parent. It was acknowledged that this can be quite a disruption in a child's life.

It was reported that as of June 2019 there were 28 children and young people in the adoption process with only 2 of those being in foster to adopt placements. Over the

last three years seven babies have been in foster to adopt placements, all of which have been successful.

Committee was advised that Adopt North East take the view that if there is a chance of a child reuniting with its birth family they would not be placed in a foster to adopt placement.

It was noted that in Gateshead the average time between court approval and being matched with an adopter is 4.28 months. From entering care to being placed for adoption children in Gateshead wait on average just over one year. Although this figure is less than the national average there will be more work undertaken to get more foster to adopt placements. It was pointed out that adults are not always keen to take the risk of fostering to adopt, however in those cases where it has worked there has been very positive feedback.

Committee questioned why only babies are subjects of fostering to adopt arrangements. Committee was advised that this is such a new process and most adopters only want babies so that they are with the family from the start. Also, once a child is 2 or 3 there is more likely to be disruption trauma as they have made links with their foster family, this creates more issues. It was also noted that the babies successfully placed in foster to adopt placements are those babies from families which the teams have had dealings with, for example where the baby is the fourth or fifth child, where there is less risk of the court not awarding a placement order.

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

## **CP7 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee received the report setting out the provisional work programme for the municipal year 2019/20.

RESOLVED -

- (i) That Committee endorsed the provisional work programme for 2019/20.
- (ii) That Committee noted that further reports will be brought to the Committee to identify any additional issues which the Committee may be asked to consider.

## **CP8 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.

## **CP9 REGULATION 44 REPORT**

The Committee received a report outlining Ofsted regulation 44 independent visits and inspection outcomes carried out in the Council's children's homes between April and June 2019.

RESOLVED - That Committee noted the contents of the report.