

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

**Tuesday, 1 March 2022**

<b>PRESENT:</b>	Councillor Gary Haley (Chair)	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Angela Douglas	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Freda Geddes	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Hazel Weatherley	Gateshead Council
	Councillor Sheila Gallagher	Gateshead Council
	Lynne Colledge	Northumbria Police
	Linda Hubbucks	CCG
	Dr Kate Ward	CNTW
	Nicola Barrass	Care Leavers
	Malcolm Hedley	Foster Carers
	Andrea Houlahan	Deputy Strategic Director for Children Social Care and Early Help
	Chris Hulme	Children's Rights Officer
	Kirsty Sprudd	Gateshead System - Commissioning
	Jean Thompson	Virtual School Head for LAC
	Steve Horne	Gateshead Council

<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b>	Heather Jenkins	Gateshead Council
	Angela Stephenson	Gateshead Council
	Catherine Hardman	Gateshead Council
	Saira Park	Gateshead Council
	Emma Blackwell	Gateshead Council
	Rosalyn Patterson	Gateshead Council

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Ian Patterson, Sarah Diggle, Caroline O'Neill, Moira Richardson and Deborah Ewart.

**1 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

**2 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING**

The Board received a report on the work undertaken to support the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities.

It was reported that corporate parenting awareness training has continued to be offered. Prior to the pandemic, discussions had been underway looking at a refresh of the training, however a new Workforce Development Adviser will be in post from March and will lead on looking at new training.

Workforce Development supported two Young Ambassadors to deliver corporate parenting training to the Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

With the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy funding, Human Resources and Workforce Development have been working with services within the Council to ensure that any looked after child who applies for an apprenticeship and meets the essential criteria is guaranteed an interview.

Traineeships are now being offered to looked after children and care leavers in the Council and it is hoped this will lead to apprenticeships.

The point was made that our looked after children need to be promoted across all Gateshead employers, for example with the imminent development of the Quays will provide employment and apprenticeship opportunities. It was noted that a report has been taken to Cabinet on the Care Leavers Covenant and an event is taking place at Newcastle College on 24 March aimed at getting local businesses on board to assist care leaver's from across the North East.

It was confirmed that at least one Young Ambassador will be attending the Corporate Parenting Board in the future.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the corporate training offer continues to be reviewed and developed.
  - (ii) That there will be continued support for looked after children to apply for apprenticeship vacancies.
  - (iii) That the traineeship offer is developed.

### **3 MSET ANNUAL REPORT**

A report was presented on the work of the Strategic and Operational MSET groups during 2021-22.

The Operational Group sits monthly to discuss cases of children at risk of missing, slavery, exploitation or being trafficked. The Strategic Group (JSEG) meets quarterly to look at themes, procedures and protocols. It was reported that Gateshead has refreshed its Missing Children Protocol and is now rolling out as best practice across the region.

Over the last year the Strategic Group has seen an increase in the number of children coming to MSET with cognitive functioning difficulties. This has led to an update being given to JSEG around Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. In addition there has been input from a diverse range of agencies including, Children's Society Prevention Programme, Regional County Lines Coordinator and the Violence Reduction Unit.

It was noted that work has been undertaken with the Children's Safeguarding Partnership to increase early identification of exploitation within Early Help Services

of the council. It was questioned as to how assured the Board should be that this has led to a reduction in cases being presented to pre-MSET. It was confirmed that process changes mean that there are now earlier strategic meetings so there is earlier intervention prior to coming to MSET. It was also noted that Gateshead is good in terms of scoring cases on the vulnerability tracker and recording the rationale behind decisions around whether cases should go to MSET.

Board was advised that MSET roadshows are planned for April and May to increase front line practitioner's awareness of the Operational MSET processes. It was acknowledged that this will be extremely beneficial given the turnover and staff and the need to keep new staff up to date.

The point was made that MSET is added value so a lot of cases are being dealt with pre-MSET. It was also noted that the Young Ambassadors are helping with work to see the journey of a child who has gone through such processes.

It was questioned as to how Gateshead is performing in relation to other areas. It was confirmed that Gateshead has good recording and rationale of decisions with does not always happen elsewhere. Gateshead continues to see similar issues to the national picture, for example neuro-diversity, county lines and online exploitation.

RESOLVED - That the Board noted the information contained in the report.

#### 4

#### **SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN UNIT - ANNUAL REPORT**

The Board received the annual Safeguarding Children Unit (SCU) report for 2020/21.

It was reported that the team is made up of 9 Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and the unit is currently in the process of recruiting a new Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

The role of the SCU was summarised, the role includes; chairing complex strategy meetings and reviews for Care Order's, adoptions and secure accommodation. IRO's are involved throughout care proceedings and chair post-18 reviews and Foster Carers reviews. The IROs offer challenge and quality assurance, develop training and give evidence in Court proceedings. There is also close working with the Children's Rights and Engagement Team to make structure changes to ensure more independence of this role from Children's Services to reinforce the voice of the child.

Over the past year the SCU has successfully adapted to home working with conferences being held online quickly into the pandemic. The IROs continued to meet with children throughout the pandemic, this ranged from doorstep visits and walks, to video calls. It was noted that Child Protection Conferences were held within timescales throughout the pandemic and an IRO was appointed to cases within 48 hours of a child coming into care.

In terms of challenges it was acknowledged that the increased numbers of children in the system, currently 475, has increased IROs workload. In addition, there is increasing complexity of cases with reduced services which creates challenges.

There are challenges in terms of keeping families safe where conferences are being held virtually and there is a history of domestic violence for example.

The next steps for the SCU include leading the development of narrative practice, this is where all reports and plans are written to the child. Where this has taken place the feedback from families is extremely positive, families have stated that this means so much more. Work is also underway to develop ethnicity training, more choice around hybrid conferences as well as the re-development of the Families Rights and Advocacy Gateshead (FRAG) which gives a voice to parents and families.

The point was made that the increase in LAC numbers is not necessarily as a result of more children coming into the system, but rather fewer children exiting care. Therefore discussions have started to look at and understand if the children and young people in care whether this is still the right plan for them. It was noted that there has been a number of children's family networks that have evolved and Children's Services is keen to work with IROs to ensure only children in care are those who need to be in care. It was agreed that one plan for the rest of a child's life is not always best and that innovative work needs to take place to look at individual cases. It was also noted that a discussion has been held with the regional CAF/CASS lead around this who has advised there is an opportunity for expedited judiciary if required for such cases.

The Board noted that statistics do not tell the full story and requested that the new Mosaic reporting show more context behind these figures. It was confirmed that Mosaic can report on age range, provision, gender and wards which can all tell a story.

It was acknowledged that there is great work taking place around rehabilitating families so that children can return home, however it was noted that two thirds of these children return to care within five years. Therefore it was suggested that consideration needs to be given to the support that is in place in these cases. It was acknowledged that this work cannot be done in isolation and through family group conferencing there is a good opportunity for wraparound support to be put in place and identify what the family needs to sustain arrangements.

RESOLVED - That the information contained in the annual report be noted.

## **5 LEARNING FROM INSPECTIONS, PEER REVIEWS AND LEARNING REVIEWS ANNUAL REPORT**

The Board received a report on the statutory reviews that have been carried out over the last year, including a Rapid Review Meeting following a serious incident notice. It was reported that this was undertaken quickly and that further learning from this will be brought back to the next meeting.

A learning review has taken place to look at the quality of leaving care support offered to those young people who become parents. A new information sharing protocol has been developed to address information sharing at a strategic and operational level and is being shared nationally.

A 7-minute briefing is available to raise awareness of the need for professional curiosity and advised how to access support. Gateshead's updated missing protocol procedures will now be rolled out regionally.

It was noted that conversations have started around early deaths of care leavers, work has started locally and regionally to scope out experiences. However it was acknowledged that there needs to be something nationally to improve the picture. It was agreed that this should be looked at for Gateshead in terms of transitional safeguarding.

The Board was provided with an Ofsted report on care leavers' views on preparing to leave care. Within the key findings of the report there are recommendations for corporate parents. It was suggested that the recommendations could be an opportunity for a self-assessment and an opportunity for the Board to input. It was also noted that this marries with the work currently underway around focussed visits on care leavers. The Board agreed that this work should include participation from the Board's care leaver representative and Young Ambassadors.

RESOLVED - That the Board noted the findings from the reviews and agreed to receive further information around benchmarking the Care Leavers Service.

## **6 YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE UPDATE**

The Board received an update on the Youth Justice Service performance and the key priorities for 2021-23.

It was noted that the Chair of the Youth Justice Board is currently Caroline O'Neill and that this will pass to Andrea Houlahan in the next few weeks.

Last year the Youth Justice Board decided on a two year reporting period and agreed nine key priorities;

1. Ensure our young people are children first and offenders second – a young advocate role is in place to critically look at the work of the service.
2. Ensure looked after children are not overrepresented in the Criminal Justice Service – a Decriminalisation of LAC group has been set up and takes place bimonthly, this has led to more information sharing and joint working to divert LAC from charge.
3. Identify and intervene early with young people to address behaviour that could lead a young person into the Criminal Justice System – to highlight what is available for young people on the fringe of ASB and offending.
4. Ensure education teams effectively meet the needs of young people within the criminal justice system
5. Promote the health and wellbeing of young people in the Youth Justice System
6. Support young people transitioning between Children's and Adult's services
7. Understand and intervene with young people experiencing criminal exploitation
8. Understand serious youth violence in Gateshead and what can be done to

- reduce harm to the public and manage the risk
9. Build our understanding of the specific problems faced by young people in Gateshead.

It was questioned why 18 applications for Divert from Charge have been returned to the Officer in charge of the case. It was confirmed that unless the cases in question warrant remand they will go through Divert from Charge route, otherwise they will be returned to the officer in charge to review. It was agreed that data in around this in terms of care leavers and looked after children could be provided to the Board.

The Board was keen to support the Youth Justice agenda particularly in terms of looked after children and welcomed ideas to be fed in from other organisations. It was suggested that further links could be made with the LAC Health Team around information sharing outside of the meeting.

It was questioned where targeted intervention work is taking place and how Ward Councillors would be made aware of this. It was confirmed that this is linked to the Community Safety Team and neighbourhood Police which has helped fund outreach work where tasking has identified hotspots, for example in Birtley, Saltwell Park and Gateshead Interchange. It was agreed that the Neighbourhood Management Teams would be asked to inform Councillors of any outreach work taking place in their areas.

- RESOLVED -
- (i) That the Board continues to receive updates on the key priorities.
  - (ii) That the Corporate Parenting Board consider how it can support the Youth Justice Board.
  - (iii) That the contents of the report be noted.
  - (iv) That the Board would be interested in receiving updates about Divert from Charge in relation to LAC and Care Leavers.

## **7 REGIONAL ADOPTION AGENCY REPORT**

The Board received a presentation on the work of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt North East.

In 2015 the DfE paper advised each local authority to become part of a RAA and in 2018 Northumberland, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Gateshead Councils formed the RAA, Adopt North East.

The RAA is responsible for recruitment, assessment and approval of adopters, family finding for children and support for adopters, those adopted and those affected by adoption.

In terms of governance, lead members, including portfolio leads meet annually. An Executive Board and Senior Leadership Group meet quarterly and an Operational

Leadership Group meets on a monthly basis. There are 46 staff within the RAA, this includes 31 Social Workers. Workforce development within the RAA was outlined and noted that 18 different training events were attended by RAA staff.

In terms of performance for Gateshead, 25 children were referred, 21 placed with adopters and 23 adopted, 6 in this financial year.

It was reported that Gateshead is a flagship for early permanence and has placed a higher proportion of children in early permanence placements in 2020/21. It was acknowledged that this is only done when the service is confident that permanence plans will come to fruition. It was confirmed that since the fostering to adopt approach started in practice, no child has had to move from a fostering to adopt placement in Gateshead. In most cases these children are placed straight from hospital which provides bonding opportunities as early as possible.

It was reported that there has been no disruption of adoption placement in Gateshead since the RAA has been in existence, which is a positive performance indicator and reflects the work of the Social Workers.

It was noted that there has been an increase in the number of initial contacts of potential adopters, however there is a drop off from contact to registration of interest. The authority has questioned the RAA about what is happening in relation to this and has asked for further work to be done.

In terms of adoption support, this is for a minimum of three years, however adopters can access support throughout the lifetime of a child.

It was noted that there has been no inspection of the RAA as of yet. It was also reported that there has been difficulties in the RAA matching families with children with specific needs therefore the Council has had to source placements and pay additional interagency fees on top of the RAA fee. The authorities are challenging the RAA on what they are doing regarding sufficiency issues.

The point was made that following the Somerset ruling it is disappointing not to see the medical advisor role mentioned in the RAA's presentation. It was also acknowledged that clinical staff are feeling that they panels are being held ad hoc which leads to difficulties in terms of diary management. It was acknowledged that the Somerset High Court ruling was about adoption cases where a correctly appointed medical adviser was not used and this occurred in a high number of authority areas, including Gateshead. It was confirmed that this has been proactively reviewed in Gateshead and established which care plans are affected in order to circumvent issues with court proceedings. It was also pointed out that this has not affected any child in Gateshead being placed. In terms of planning for panels it was agreed that this issue would be picked up outside of the meeting. The point was made that there is no SLA or memorandum of understanding between the RAA and Foundation Trusts.

The issue was raised around placement disruptions and children coming back into care and tensions in terms of who leads on the work, ie the local authority or the RAA. It was confirmed that the post-adoption contract was changed by the RAA

however if there is confusion feedback will be provided to the RAA.

It was noted that a financial review of the RAA is ongoing and part of that is around sufficiency, it was agreed the Board would be updated on the review before the RAA Executive Board Meeting so there will be a chance to raise questions.

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

**8 2022/23 DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME**

The Board received the draft work programme for 2022/23 and was asked to provide any suggestions.

**9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair advised that officers Caroline O'Neill, Steve Horne and Jon Gaines, would be leaving the Council. The Board gave thanks for all their hard work over the years.

**10 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 24 May 2022 at 2.00pm.