

# **CORPORATE PARENTING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**5 October 2015**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Brain (Chair)

Councillors: Oliphant, Clelland, Simcox and Robson

## **CP08 APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor McNally and co-opted members Julie McCartney, Ann Page and Sasha Ban.

## **CP09 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2015 were approved as a correct record.

## **CP10 SATISFACTION SURVEY – YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRESENTATION**

The Committee took part in a group work session with young people, to discuss the results of the 'Tell Us' Survey. It was reported that there was a 22% return for 11-17 year olds and some returns were received from care leavers. In addition, work was carried out with One Voice to look at consultation for younger children, as a result of this a stall was in place at the Fostering Fun Day where responses were received from 5-11 year olds. From the survey, information was also gathered around the aspirations of young people.

The groups looked at the answers that Looked After Children gave around safety; in schools, where they live, on the internet and when out and about.

The point was made that there are a number of areas where it was felt young people would be more positive, however it was acknowledged that this may be due to the age of some of the young people who took part. It was confirmed that work is ongoing around how to gather the views of a wider range of Looked After Children as not all young people want to provide information through the survey. It was also pointed out that some young people will always just want to return home and therefore there will be limitations as to how happy and satisfied they will be.

It was suggested that some of the questions should be made clearer so that there is no ambiguity in the results.

**RESOLVED -** That the Committee noted the information presented.

## **CP11 PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW**

A report was presented around current performance for looked after children's services for 2015/16. It was confirmed that there are currently 373 looked after children, this is a 10% increase over the last six months. It was noted that a number of audits are ongoing around the reasons for this increase, however during May to August there was a reduction in the number of Looked After Children leaving care.

In terms of age ranges it was noted that there has been an increase in the number of under 2's coming into care. There are also higher numbers of 15 to 17 year olds in care, this is evenly split between males and females.

The number of children accommodated under a Section 20, cases that have parental agreement and have not been to court, have increased by 12.5%. This continues to be under scrutiny as well as ensuring parents are giving informed consent. It was noted that the increase in Section 20 cases is in line with national trends.

It was noted that placement stability remains strong, with 83% of children who have been looked after for over two and a half years in the same placement. This is higher than the national average of 67% and the regional average of 69%.

It was reported that 140 children (37%) are placed out of the Borough. From this figure 80% are placed with Gateshead Foster Carers living outside of the Gateshead boundaries. 14 looked after children are placed outside of the region; two are placed in Sheffield due to risks with being closer to home, five are placed in London with family. It was confirmed that those children placed outside of the area are still visited by their social worker and Chris Hulme visits on a monitoring basis.

In terms of adoptions, there has been nine adoptions between April and August 2015, five of which were within the best interest date timescale, this is a decrease on last years figures. It was reported that there has been an increase in the time taken to match a child to an adoptive family, from 210 days to 255 days. It was confirmed that this is due to the additional needs of some of the children being placed.

In relation to care leavers it was noted that 83% of the 191 young people aged 18 to 21, are in suitable accommodation. It was reported that three young people are not in contact with the service and do not want to be contacted. 27 (45.8%) of those young people are in education, employment or training.

It was reported that the MOMO (Mind of My Own) app has been launched, this allows young people to raise issues and get quick response times. It was confirmed that by week four there was 40 users of the app.

**RESOLVED -** That the Committee considered the contents of the report.

## **CP12 FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Committee received a report highlighting progress over the last 12 months in the Fostering Service.

There are 350 foster carers currently, which is an increase on previous years. It was reported that de-registration figures were high in the last year but this was because a number of carers became adopters or special guardians. It was also reported that there has been a high number of connected people identified and the service has done well in placing children with family members. In relation to the age of carers it was noted that 53% are over the age of 50, there are also a number who are in their late 60's and this needs to be considered in terms of recruitment in the near future.

The number of referrals during the year was 345, this is a 7% increase from previous years and is a growing trend. The highest demand for placements was from the 10-15 years age range, also large sibling groups was a key feature during the last year.

In terms of conversion rates for carers, from enquiry to approval, this currently stands at 13%, this is against a national average of 11%. It was noted that careers events have been held and continue to be popular, however all local authorities are recruiting from the same pool and all face similar pressures.

Key areas for service development were identified; reviewing of Payment for Skills scheme to ensure it is working, development of the Staying Put scheme which will have a knock on effect of reducing placements, continuing work to achieve recruitment targets. It was also noted that additional support and training will be developed for complex teenager placements as well as reducing Independent Fostering placements.

It was questioned what support would be developed for complex teen placements. It was confirmed that this would involve additional training, a more responsive proactive service, models from across the country have been looked at. Work is also ongoing with the Youth Service in order to enhance the current package and maintain these placements.

It was queried whether any provision had been made for any refugees who may be coming into the area. It was confirmed that there is a small diverse range of BME foster carers, which is always looking to be increased, and neighbouring local authorities can be called upon if necessary.

It was suggested that new carers should be welcomed by the Mayor as an opportunity for them to be recognised.

**RESOLVED -** That the Committee considered the contents of the report.

**CP13 THE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Committee received the annual report outlining the work of the Looked After Children and Young People Health Team during 2014/15.

It was reported that the team remains stable and the yearly returns have improved for immunisations, dental checks and annual health assessments. It was noted that initial health assessments continues to be a challenge with only 51.2% compliance. It was confirmed that consents are coming through but there are issues around capacity in the team. In terms of Review Health Assessments, the return is adequate and 86% were completed within 28 days of their due date.

Leaving Care Health Consultations have been redesigned following issues raised by the CQC around quality of the assessments. Work continues with the Children and Young Peoples Service to deal with the psychological needs of some of the looked after children.

It was noted that the Drug and Alcohol Services are now commissioned by a different provider and this has led to more recognition of lower level referrals. Sexual Health Services figures remain stable, with five known pregnancies of looked after young women. The Family Nurse Partnership continues its positive work to support mother and baby placements. In addition, one young dad was identified during 2014/15 and he has been referred to the Young Dad's Project through his Social Worker. It was acknowledged that the service will not be aware of all fathers, therefore they will not all engage with the service and support organisations.

The Designated Doctor and Nurse have attended foster and adoption panels and provided advice. In addition training has been provided to foster carers as well as staff training around quality of health assessments. A number of audits have been carried out on the back of inspections, this was the first of three commissioned services to be inspected.

Over the next year Newcastle Gateshead CCG and South Tyneside Foundation NHS Trust will consider a new business plan and it is hope that this will strengthen the team. It was also noted that service provision will be reviewed against statutory guidance. Other priorities for the coming year include developing a regional pathway for the management of children with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Work will also be ongoing to improve initial health assessment timeframes.

The Designated Doctor, Dr Helen Palmer, gave an update on the work around Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. It was noted that nationally 1 in 1,000 children are affected with many affected in terms of behaviour and development. Guidance has been received and it was reported that work is ongoing to develop regional guidance. It was felt that any effect on young people who are looked after could ultimately impact on placement stability as a result of challenging behaviours. Committee felt that this was a wider issue

that should perhaps be addressed by the Families OSC as it affects a wider range of children, not just those who are looked after.

It was queried why one looked after young woman was not able to access support through the Family Nurse Partnership. It was confirmed that this was due to lack of capacity within the FNP, it was noted that the team went back to the FNP twice to explain that this was a special case, however the young person was not able to access the support and it was confirmed that looked after children are not prioritised. The Committee commented that looked after young people should be prioritised due to their vulnerability. It was confirmed that this is the first refusal from the FNP that the team had seen and that service have agreed to be involved in place planning.

RESOLVED - That the Committee considered the contents of the report and its comments be noted.

#### **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 INSPECTIONS BY OFSTED OF GATESHEAD CHILDREN'S HOMES AND REGULATION 44 VISITS**

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, Children and Families, Service Manager for Looked After Children and the Registered Manager of each Home.

RESOLVED - That the information be noted.