

MINUTES of a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE** held on 13 December 2016 at County Hall, Matlock

PRESENT

Councillor J A Coyle (in the Chair)

Councillors C Bisknell, D W E Charles, D Greenhalgh, J Street, A Western

55/16 **MINUTES RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

56/16 **CHILDREN IN CARE PERFORMANCE REPORT** The Children in Care performance tables were presented. It was reported that 76.1% of young people now had a chronology, and this was an increasing trend which would assist in the analysis of risk for children. Derbyshire had commenced 103 S47 enquiries during 2015/16 to date, and this was below the England and statistical neighbour average. This meant that children in Derbyshire were less likely to experience a child abuse enquiry, which could be seen as a positive indicator. However, it was necessary to be mindful to explore any allegations of abuse against children. Other child protection statistics were increasing, which would indicate that officers responded to abuse allegations when they were made.

As at the end of October, there had been 613 children in care, and this was a slightly increasing trend. However, Derbyshire was well below the statistical neighbour and England average. Children in Derbyshire were also less likely to come into care than other children in the country. The majority of Derbyshire children in care were placed in foster care in Derbyshire, but 18.9% were placed in agency fostering placements, which was a concern due to the high cost of such placements. 12.2% of young people were in residential care, 7% of which were agency placements. The children in care sufficiency group had been meeting to progress plans to reduce the number.

Derbyshire had a small number of children who had had three moves or more. Stability was a key factor in enabling young people to achieve better outcomes, and this was another area of focused work for the children in care sufficiency group. It was anticipated that when year end figures were published, Derbyshire would be performing better in this area than other places in England. There was a slightly increasing trend in re-admissions to care, and 16.9% of children by the end of October had been re-admitted to care within a twelve month period.

There had been an increasing trend in the use of Special Guardianship Orders made by the court, and this reflected the increasing use of family and friends placements for children. 300 children were living with Special

Guardians, and this trend was felt to be positive as children's outcomes were generally improved when they lived with family/friends rather than in local authority care. Although the current number of privately fostered children was the highest in the last year, this continued to be a very low figure. Identification and reporting of private fostering was notoriously low despite repeated awareness raising in teams and communities.

Children in Derbyshire's care were generally placed close to their home address, and 17% of young people were placed 20 miles or more away from home. This was likely to be due to placement availability and choice at the time of admission, although it could be due to a decision regarding a safeguarding risk. Around a third of children in care were placed outside of the local authority boundary.

All visits to children in a rolling 12 months were completed over 90% of the time consistently, and performance in the appropriate sequence for the child was just over 50%. Recent improvements in the availability of management information data should enable improved performance over time, although consideration would be given as to how this was reported on to make it more reflective of specific visiting expectation. Over 90% of visits were conducted in a timely way to children placed outside of Derbyshire. In terms of children missing from home, Derbyshire's current 15/16 outturn showed that 61 young people had had 206 missing episodes, and whilst these figures were improving, the focus continued on reducing children running away.

Consistent social work allocation to enable relationship building was a concern, and 21.6% of children had had 3 or more social workers in the last year. Recruitment and retention was an ongoing issue for all areas, but was more significant in the south. The Strategic Workforce Group was identifying methods to improve recruitment and retention. Review performance was consistently good, and 96.3% of children were participating in their reviews.

Performance in annual health checks had improved, with 90% being completed on time. Improved tracking and recording had supported the improvement, but there needed to be a focus on under 5 year olds' health surveillance. Dental care required further attention, and raising awareness of the need for dental surveillance with social workers and carers needed to continue. The performance and attention to children's emotional health and wellbeing appeared poor when considering SDQ scores, and this had been highlighted with Heads of Service. Funding had recently been agreed to ensure that all children admitted to care were assessed by health professionals to understand their emotional wellbeing.

Whilst Derbyshire remained committed to pursuing adoption for children who other local authorities had deemed impossible to place, there were delays

within the system. The numbers of children the authority was achieving adoption for was down on previous years, and the number placed for adoption was also decreasing. Clarification of the key drivers and barriers to improving adoption performance was necessary, and an adoption challenge day had been scheduled for 25 January 2017.

Children's Services was working closely with Dartington Research Institute on a programme to improve the flow of children and young people through the care system. Performance in this area had slowed down, and more children could be remaining in care for longer than necessary. The children in care sufficiency board was leading on this work. Over 95% of care leavers were in appropriate accommodation, but NEET/EET was an area of poor performance, with only 48.7% of care leavers being EET. Activity had increased between the Service for Teenagers and the Localities to improve performance, and a strategy would be presented to the next Committee.

57/16 UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM SEEKING CHILDREN An update was provided on the numbers and support undertaken by the Virtual School with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). There were currently 23 UASC that Derbyshire County Council had responsibility for, all of which were in the secondary age range and Post 16. All but one were male. An overview was given in which local authorities the UASC received their education, and there were 2 UASC awaiting placements who had recently come into care.

It was likely that UASC would have little or no English, either verbal or written, and intensive packages of language tuition would be required. Based on current experiences, 50% of UASC were illiterate in their own language and had required pre ESOL support. The Virtual School had liaised with colleges to create language tuition packages as there was currently no provision in place for students under 16 within Derbyshire. The Virtual School had also liaised with schools through the advisory Service to support the schools admissions process for school age UASC.

The challenges the Virtual School had experienced to date were highlighted, along with the achievements. In terms of next steps, the MAT PA/ESO with responsibility for UASC within the Virtual School Team would commence in December 2016, and further ESOs would be appointed during 2016/17. Work was taking place with the newly created UASC Social Work Team, and with colleagues to achieve quick access to ESOL. Pre-ESOL courses were being identified across the county, along with training needs for Virtual School staff and partners. ESOL courses were being developed with Further Education colleges, and it was the intention to develop a Cultural Engagement Programme to help young people integrate into Derbyshire and the wider society. It would also be necessary to ensure the status of UASC

was recorded correctly in the service user group on FWi, and an induction pack would be developed for use in schools and with Foster Carers.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

58/16 EXCLUSION RATES FOR CHILDREN IN CARE There had been 24 children in care who had received at least one fixed term exclusion during the 2016/17 academic year up to 30 November 2016. Two had been within the primary age range and 22 within the secondary age range. A breakdown was provided by gender and year group, and also by location of school the children attended. The 24 children in care had received a total of 42 fixed term exclusions, and this had resulted in 161 sessions being lost. The most common reasons for exclusion were persistent disruptive behaviour and sexual misconduct. Exclusions were most common in Key Stage 4. Of the 24 children in care who had received at least one fixed term exclusion during the 2016/17 academic year, 16 had received at least one fixed term exclusion during 2015/16.

Of the 2 primary aged children in care that had been excluded, one had an EHCP, and 15 of the secondary aged children in care that had been excluded had an EHCP or SEN support. Both primary aged children in care that had been excluded lived with foster carers, and of the 22 secondary aged children in care that had been excluded, 18 had a foster care placement and 4 were living in a residential home.

In terms of next steps and further areas for improvement for the Virtual School, a meeting had been held with senior managers to discuss strategies to significantly reduce the number of exclusions, and there would be a programme of multi-agency training to understand and support children in care who had experienced loss and trauma and who had attachment issues. Exclusion data would be interrogated further to identify patterns of absences, and this would provide the information required to support the EWOs in challenging schools further. Work would take place to ensure that there were early warning systems in place, especially for those placed out of county, and there were action plans in place for all pupils receiving their second exclusion. It was the intention to continue to develop alternative educational provision where mainstream had temporarily broken down and was not meeting the young person's needs, and improved access to data, more regular reviews of PEPs and frequent tracking should identify issues before they escalated. It was aimed to improve liaison with relevant agencies to target schools where fixed term exclusions were repeated, and to ensure there was prompt crisis response/support from the Virtual School. Training to schools on strategies to understand and manage behaviour would be developed, and the Attachment Aware School programme would be extended. A Task and Finish Group would be set up to monitor and share information on the exclusion of persistent absences.

It was felt that awareness of exclusion rates needed to be raised in schools, particularly where there was an issue, and it was agreed that a letter would be sent to all Head Teachers reminding them of their corporate parent duty and to indicate that exclusion data would be shared where necessary.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

59/16 FOSTERING SERVICE QUARTERLY RETURNS There had been a rise in the number of new born children being looked after – 78 new born children had been admitted to care over the last year. The change would need to be met by reviewing the capacity of carers for babies able to take children under Fostering to Adopt. There continued to be a high number of discharges from care of older children at care leaver age – 89 care leavers had left care in the last twelve months, and this was reflected in Derbyshire's high number of Staying Put placements.

Since the start of the 2016-17 financial year, the authority had seen a rise in the number of children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies – the average number of placements, for the first half of the year, had been 115.5 per month. From previous returns, it was noticeable that many IFA placements had become 'established', with a child remaining with their agency carer for 2.9 years on average, whilst 'footfall' into the agency placements had been low. Once children had been placed they would stay and often remained until care leaving age. From the current return, it was apparent that the trend had started to change, and 86 agency placements had commenced within the calendar year. Seven placements were over five years old, which was a decrease from the previous year, and the average duration of an IFA placement, to date, had now dropped to 1.4 years.

At the end of Q2 for the financial year 2015/16, the authority had placed 124 children with IFAs at a cost of £4,928,038. Of these placements, five had been UASC. At the end of Q2 for the financial year 2016/17, the authority had placed 115 children with IFAs at a cost of £4,919,558. Of these placements, 15 had been UASC admitted into care. The cost of placing non UASC children had been £4,454,411. Over the last twelve months, the authority had seen a decrease of 19 non UASC IFA placements. Although this could be partially explained by fluctuations in the looked after population, capacity monitoring had showed an increase in the amount of placements being undertaken by Derbyshire County Council foster carers.

Foster care was still the main form of care provision for looked after children, and accounted for up to 80% of all placements. Of these, approximately 75% would be made by LA carers, and between 50-60% of these would be fostering at any one time. Carers who were not fostering would either be waiting for a decision on a new placement, recovering from

illness or unable to care due to circumstances beyond their control, or taking a planned break. From the OFSTED Fostering return for 2015/16, only 5% of County Council carers had an active vacancy.

At the end of Q2 2016-17, the County Council had 416 fostering households offering 762 potential placements spaces, of which 463 had been filled. This represented an increase in the number of placements being undertaken by the authority's carers. The number of placements now offered had dropped, and this reflected a change in the way carers were approved. It was felt that this gave a clearer indication of how many placements the carers could provide. There had been 324 mainstream and 142 short break placements, with 115 children in IFAs. The authority now held a 74% share of all fostering placements at a rate of 61% carer utilisation. This was above the national average, and the figures represented a significant rise in 'in house' carer activity. From the last quarter, the authority had placed an additional 17 mainstream children and 14 more children through short break and Link care.

The authority had received 273 enquiries at the end of Q2 2016-17, and of these, 37 had been word of mouth, with 16 for Regulation 24/Family and Friends carers – this had been a decrease, largely due to changes in court practice. The number of enquiries received was higher than that received in previous years, and there had been a spike of activity over the last two months, with an interest in offering care to UASC. From the enquiries received, and the initial visits undertaken by the Recruitment Team, 19 assessments had commenced with 2 deferred. This had been a decrease when compared to the same period in the previous year, and the reasons for this were being explored. A breakdown was given of the method of enquiry, but evidence had showed that Word of Mouth recommendations were those that were most likely to be approved and to create carers who offered a broader range of care.

Recent recruitment activity over the last three months had included an UASC press release, focussed disability recruitment events, and ongoing Talk Fostering open evenings. The Fostering Recruitment Team were also undertaking some assessments for Supported Lodgings providers, primarily for UASC aged 16+. The service would monitor, and seek to mitigate, any impact of the reduction in dedicated hours by the Corporate Communications Team to the Fostering Service.

In Q1 2016-17, 11 new foster carer households had been approved, and at the end of Q2, 19 new foster carer households had been approved. Of the 19 approvals, 6 had been from Chesterfield, which accounted for the largest single area of new carers. The authority had seen a considerable rise in the number of Contract Carers – at the start of the 2016-17 financial year, the Contract Care Team had had 39 carer households, and over the last six months, this had risen to 49 households. This would enable the authority to

maintain more placements in house. In Q2 2016-17, the authority had lost 30 carers, which had been an increase of 13 resignations over the previous quarter. Of these carers, the average duration of tenure with the authority had been 105.5 months, which was significantly higher than the Fostering Network average and indicated a higher number of longer serving carers leaving the services. Five carers had fostered for the authority for over 15 years, and 16 carers had resigned who had fostered for less than the Fostering Network national average of 93.5 months. Work was continuing to embed the Fostering Charter, with the intention of improving partnership working with foster carers and reducing avoidable resignations.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.