

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN – MEMBERS GROUP
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN

31st January 2013

1.0 Purpose of the Report:

To provide an Annual Report to inform Members of the Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the wider Council on the work of the Looked after Children-Members Group.

2.0 Background and Context

Corporate parenting places a collective responsibility and accountability on Local Authorities to achieve good parenting for all children and young people in their care.

Good corporate parenting means that all the needs of children in care are met to the highest standard possible. It requires ownership and leadership at a senior level with a central principle that every elected member and every employee within North Yorkshire along with partner agencies should seek the same outcomes for the children in our care as they would for their own children.

The remit of the Group is attached as Annex A.

3.0 The Looked after Children-Members Group (LAC MG)

The Looked after Children-Members Group is made up of nine elected members and one non-elected member (a representative from the voluntary sector) and provides a sounding board and alert system for the Lead Member for Children & Young Peoples Service; County Councillor Tony Hall. As a group we not only monitor and analyse all aspects of the Council's responsibilities as a corporate parent but also champion the role and the responsibilities of elected Members as corporate parents.

I took over the chairmanship of the Group in the summer 2013 and it has been a very steep learning curve but one that has been both interesting and extremely rewarding.

4.0 Young People's Council (YPC)

It is important for us to link with the children and young people in the care of the County Council directly and so we encourage young people from the Young People's Council (YPC) to attend our meetings and share their news, views and ideas with us. The YPC has a place on the agenda for every meeting of the LAC MG. Since taking over as the chairman of the LAC MG I have put in place some changes to the agenda, not only do we now have a glossary of acronyms associated with Looked After Children, but we also include the photographs of all the members and officers associated with the Group. I hope this will help to develop the relationship between the LAC MG and the YPC by helping them to quickly assimilate within the group. I know it can be a daunting experience taking part in a meeting when you do not know others sitting round the table! To develop the links further we are also arranging a joint meeting between the two groups with the intention that this is a regular occurrence.

5.0 Regular Reports

The reports the LAC MG have considered over the past year have included:

5.1 Quarterly Data Reports

This report is provided to the LAC MG at every meeting and allows us to monitor the statistical position with respect to Children Looked After by North Yorkshire. The latest information we have looked at was at the end of Quarter Two 2013/14 (30 September 2013). This saw the total number of Looked After Children had fallen from 494 at the end of quarter one to the current figure of 472. This decrease is due to a significant drop in admissions during August and September, whilst the number of discharges remains fairly steady resulting in a net decrease in the number of Looked After Children. This decrease in the number of Looked After Children means that the rate of Looked After Children (per 10,000 0-17 population) in North Yorkshire remains lower than the National average and the average of our statistical neighbours.

It is important to us that children and young people come into our care as a last resort. Our preference would always be to give support to families so that where possible the family can remain together. However we also accept that in some cases this is just not possible so we want to see those children and young people in our care in stable placements. It is reassuring for us to see that placement stability in North Yorkshire continues to be good. The percentage of Looked After Children in the same placement for 2 years or more and the percentage having more than 3 placements in a year continues to be better than both the national average and that of our statistical neighbours. We are reassured to see, however, that this does not mean the authority sits back and does nothing but, for example, it is currently working on increasing the number of foster carers to improve stability still further.

5.2 Missing Looked After Children

Our latest report informed us about looked after young people who have been reported missing to the police during April to September 2013. The Statutory guidance defines missing as - *Looked after child missing from their placement: Where a looked after child is missing from their placement, and his/her whereabouts are not known and/or the child is known or suspected to be at risk, considered to be at risk they should be reported to the police as missing and a record of this should be made.*

During the reporting period April-September 2013 we were advised that 40 young people were reported missing to the police and out of that 40, 29 of them had more than one missing episode and 10 young people met the trigger where a strategy meeting should be considered (being reported missing 9 times out of 90 days).

To help the Group develop their understanding case studies had been included. We found this helpful and agreed it would be useful to have an anonymised 'pen portrait' of a child or young person in the care of the County Council presented to each of our meetings. In the hope that this would give us a more personal approach to corporate parenting.

5.3 Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) for Looked After Children

The Group had some concerns about initial health assessments for looked after children after receiving a report that informed us that the timeliness of IHAs was not in line with National requirements. We asked that officers working closely with health colleagues to look at how this could be improved and to report back to us. It was reassuring to receive a report that identified a clear action plan including further training for the Specialist Nursing Team (SNT) on the computer system used for recording IHAs and a bi-weekly secure email being set up from Children's Social Care to the SNT advising them of any new looked after children.

We have also invited Dr Natalie Lyth the designated Doctor for safeguarding children to report back on the findings of the re - audit of IHAs that should be completed in the summer 2014.

5.4 Fostering and Adoption Service

As I mentioned earlier in this report, work is ongoing to increase the number of foster carers and work is also being undertaken to increase the number of adoptive parents for older children, sibling groups and children with special needs. It proves more of a challenge to place an older child as so many prospective adoptive parents want to adopt a young child or baby.

The Department for Education has published the results of the adoption scorecards for 2010-2013. (The scorecards were introduced as part of a new approach to address delays in the adoption system.) North Yorkshire County Council has again been rated as doing 'very well' in achieving timeliness of adoptions. With the thresholds for this being made more stringent each year it is encouraging to see we continue to be rated as doing very well and with the work to increase the numbers of adoptive parents we hope to see this continue.

5.5 Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report

It is a statutory requirement for the Independent Reviewing Service to report to the Corporate Parenting Board of the Local Authority on an annual basis. We were advised that during the 2012/13 period there had been some staffing difficulties which had led to challenging caseloads and prioritising of the chairing of meetings. This has now been addressed and the team is now working at full strength.

The Group have questioned the caseload of the IROs which is currently averaging at around 70 (the IRO Handbook suggests a caseload of 50-70). We were advised that their workload is currently being reviewed to identify those elements that could be undertaken by others, for example chairing some meetings.

One strong message that came through the report was the need to ensure that there is consistently good communication between social workers and foster carers and that effective partnership working is in place. The Group feel that good, clear communication is a sound basis for all elements of children's social care and welcome its reinforcement in this instance.

5.6 Educational Attainment

The Education for Looked After Children Virtual School monitors and supports all North Yorkshire Looked After Children wherever they are placed, to ensure their educational needs are met. The annual report to the LAC MG gives us the statistical information on the attainment of Looked After Children and provides examples of intervention strategies employed by the team to improve achievement, ensure progress and remove barriers to learning.

It was particularly pleasing for the Group to hear that 23 care leavers are currently attending university and the numbers of care leavers who are engaged in further education is 8% with only one person currently not in education, employment or training (NEET). There is good progress reported at the end of KS1 and clearly becoming involved in the education of young children, in early years settings has been helpful. There has been a recent announcement of an increase in the pupil premium and the group have asked for further information on how schools use the pupil premium and how school governors could be encouraged to challenge its use.

The role of the Looked after Children- Members Group

Extract from North Yorkshire County Council Constitution (Issue 7 – October 2012, Page 128)

9.5 The role of the Looked After Children Members' Group will include the following (which is not exhaustive):

- a) Monitoring and reporting to the Executive Member on all aspects of the Council's responsibilities as a Corporate Parent in relation to looked after children, and on any specific issues they are required to consider.
- b) The monitoring shall include performance against key indicators for the quality, stability and outcomes of Looked After arrangements for all children and young people in the preceding year.
- c) Enquiring into issues about looked after children who are also disabled.
- d) The numbers of teenage pregnancies arising in relation to looked after children and their health and sex education.
- e) Health issues affecting the Council's looked after children.
- f) The educational attainment of the Council's looked after children and the work of the Virtual Head Teacher.
- g) Considering the minutes and reports from the Young Person's Council.
- h) The recruitment and retention of social workers and staff and the morale of all service staff and officers.
- i) Any issues affecting looked after children in relation to drugs, alcohol and smoking.
- j) The transition arrangements for all looked after children as they enter adulthood.
- k) The work of the Young People's Champion.
- l) The Looked After Children Members' Group will undertake inspections under Regulation 33 of residential homes. This will involve reporting any concerns from the residential homes and receiving any concerns raised by officer Inspections of residential schools.
- m) Any other relevant matter considered appropriate by the Lead Member for consideration by the Group.

Annex B

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN – MEMBERS GROUP

Forward Plan 2014

Date	Recurring Items	Safeguarding	Performance & Items for Information	Attainment	Health
15 Jan 2014	<p>YPC feedback – James Parkes / YPC Chair</p> <p>LAC quarterly data & analysis report - Alan Tucker</p> <p>Members Reg 33 Inspections / summary report – Martin Kelly</p>	<p>Missing LAC Update – Kathy Peacock</p> <p>IRO Annual Report for 2012/13 – Angela Murray</p>	<p>Preparation for OFSTED highlight report – Judith Hay / Emma Chawner</p>	<p>LAC education attainment – Annual report - Alan Clifton</p>	<p>Preparation for CQC Inspection highlight report - Elaine Wyllie</p> <p>LAC Initial Health Assessments progress report – Vicky Metheringham</p>
11 April 2014	<p>Joint meeting with Young Peoples' Council</p> <p>LAC quarterly data & analysis report - Alan Tucker</p> <p>Members Reg 33 Inspections / summary report – Martin Kelly</p> <p>Care Leavers Service – Howard Smith</p>	<p>Children and young peoples version of the IRO annual report – Angela Murray</p>		<p>Pupil Premium – Alan Clifton</p>	

19 June 2014	YPC feedback – James Parkes / YPC Chair LAC quarterly data & analysis report - Alan Tucker Members Reg 33 Inspections / summary report – Martin Kelly				LAC Initial Health Assessments progress report – Vicky Metheringham
27 Oct 2014	YPC feedback – James Parkes / YPC Chair LAC quarterly data & analysis report - Alan Tucker Members Reg 33 Inspections / summary report – Martin Kelly				Feedback from re-audit of initial health assessments - Dr Natalie Lyth
15 Jan 2015	YPC feedback – James Parkes / YPC Chair LAC quarterly data & analysis report - Alan Tucker Members Reg 33 Inspections / summary report – Martin Kelly Care Leavers Service – Howard Smith	IRO annual report and feedback on progress on action plan – Angela Murray			
Proposed agenda item – to be scheduled	Information on children and young people looked after by friends and family including but not exclusively: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How many children and young people fall into this category within NYCC?</i> • <i>What is the County Council policy on family and friends carers?</i> • <i>What is the statutory guidance on payment to friends and family carers?</i> • <i>What checks are made with family and friend carers to ensure suitability of arrangements?</i> 				

Please be aware that this is a working document and therefore alterations to the timing of agenda items may be unavoidable