



Agenda Item 5

Scrutiny Panel Conclusions and Recommendations – Outcomes for Looked After Children

Falkirk Council

Title: **Scrutiny Panel Conclusions and Recommendations – Outcomes for Looked After Children**

Meeting: **Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **17 November 2016**

Submitted By: **Director of Corporate and Housing Services.**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. The report sets out the work and recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel established to review outcomes for looked after children.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Committee:-
- 2.2. approves the recommendations of the Panel, set out in appendix one, section 10; and
- 2.3. refers the Panel's recommendations to the Executive for approval.

3. SCRUTINY PROCESS

- 3.1. The panel was established to look at the outcomes of looked after children and if these varied from all children why that was so and could they be improved. The panel was chaired by Councillor Meiklejohn. The other Panel members were Provost Reid, Councillors Chalmers, Hughes and McLuckie.
- 3.2. The process comprised of a series of meetings, visits and presentations including discussions with advocates of looked after children and looked after children and young people themselves. These were designed to give Members a complete picture of what services were delivered to looked after children, how those services could improve and importantly the issues that were important to looked after children themselves.
- 3.3. The following table outlines the work of the Panel. It should be noted that the Panel's work was slightly disrupted due to the Inspection of Children's Services that was being undertaken at the same time.

	Purpose of Meeting	Date	Meeting Format
1	Scoping Meeting		Private
2	<p>Background and Context</p> <p>Members were provided with a presentation to outline the background to the topic. In particular information on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation – what makes a child looked after and what are our obligations; • looked after children in Falkirk – who are they and why are they looked after; • Role of Reporter and children's Hearings; • Outcomes for looked after children and their non-looked after peers - comparisons to be made between different groups of looked after children and with looked after children across Scotland; • Cost of services; • What are the trends in the data – looking at Falkirk in comparison with the rest of Scotland and general trends; • Issues, challenges and opportunities 	1 st September 2015	Public
3	<p>What Services do we deliver to looked after children:</p> <p>How the Council meets the needs of looked after children. – what are the successes and challenges in providing services to looked after children including an overview of the services provided specifically to looked after children and the challenges of looked after children accessing mainstream services.</p> <p>Presentations from the perspective of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Social work • Housing • Transitions – Positive and sustained destinations 	22 September 2015	Public

4	Corporate Parenting - Roles and responsibilities - Champions boards	13 November 2015	Public
The Panel then took a break due to the inspection of Children's Services which was taking place at the same time as the Panel.			
5	Meeting with the Panel, young people and their advocates.	24 February 2016	Private
	Meeting with Foster Carers' Consultative Committee	3 March 2016	Private
	Visits to Mariners and Former Focus School Site	14 & 17 March 2016	Private
6	Presentations from Specialist services. Understanding specific needs of looked after young people and specialist services that are in place to support them. - Cluaran - Intensive Family Support Service - LAC Psychologist - Through and After care	1 June 2016	Private
7	Presentations from Other Councils. What do other Council's do to support their looked after children including the services they provide, the way they organise to support Corporate Parenting and also any challenges they see in the future supporting looked after children. North Lanarkshire Perth and Kinross	2 June 2016	Public
8	Meeting with Looked After Children and Their Advocates	20 September 2016	Private
9	Conclusion Final meeting for Members to discuss and determine recommendations based on previous sessions and the evidence provided	12 October 2016	Public

- 3.4. During the course of the course of the Panel's deliberations they received a range of information and presentations which supplemented a small pack of information prepared in advance.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1. The process followed the guidelines for such meetings and allowed all Members to participate in the work of the panel, hear evidence and arrive at conclusions.
- 4.2. The Panel's conclusions can be grouped under four headings:
 - Earlier intervention
 - Balance of Care
 - Corporate Parenting
 - Transitions and After Care.
- 4.3. Under each of these headings, there are a number of recommendations including specific recommendations for Children's Services and the Children's Commission as the main delivery group for the Community Planning Partnership to take forward. Where appropriate a timescale has been allocated to each recommendation alongside responsibilities.

5. IMPLICATIONS

Financial

- 5.1. The Panel has asked for further work on a number of areas of spend. It is anticipated that any financial implications will be considered once that work is concluded.

Resources

- 5.2. Nil

Legal

- 5.3. The Panels recommendations have taken account of the Council's obligation to looked after children and how these can best be achieved.

Risk

- 5.4. There is risk that the Council won't achieve its priorities and obligations if the recommendations are not taken forward.

Equalities

- 5.5. If the recommendations are accepted then each review will include an EPIA as per the Council's agreed process of review.

5.6. Nil

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1. The Panel has spent some time looking at the outcomes we would expect for children and how in many instances looked after children don't achieve these. They have looked at the factors that impact on children achieving outcomes, the services that are there to meet their needs, how these are delivered and where there is scope for change and improvement. Importantly the Panel met with looked after children themselves and used the information provided to reflect on the information provided by services.
- 6.2. Importantly the Panel have thought about how the engagement started with this process and will be continued through the establishment of a Champions Board.
- 6.3. If the recommendations are approved and progressed then the hope is that looked after children will have a better chance of improved outcomes.

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Date - 7 November 2016

APPENDIX ONE

Report from the Scrutiny Panel on Looked After Children including conclusions and Recommendations

List of Background Papers:

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

- None

FALKIRK COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL

OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SCRUTINY PANEL

- 1.1. This report sets out the work of the Scrutiny Panel established to look at the outcomes for looked after children. This report notes the evidence considered by the Panel, its conclusions and recommendations. It should be noted that the evidence has not been presented in the sequence heard by the Panel.
- 1.2. The first meeting of the panel considered a draft scoping document and scrutiny panel guidance. It was agreed that the Panel would consider the following:
- 1.3. The scope of this scrutiny process will be to examine outcomes for looked after children. Why, if at all, are outcomes for looked after children are different from their non-looked after peers and are there differences between different groups of looked after children, i.e. those with Special Educational Needs, those looked after away from home, looked after at home, in residential care and foster care etc.?
- 1.4. The Panel considered the context to the panel including: the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014; the creation of the new Children's Services; that the service was due an inspection in autumn 2015; discussions on looked after children at the performance panel, and Councillors as corporate parents.
- 1.5. Importantly it was agreed that the panel needed to focus on outcomes rather than why children or young people come into care in the first place or indeed how we might stop young people coming into care.
- 1.6. The scoping meeting was held in order to ensure that the panel had a plan for its work going forward. It was important that the panel gathered the right evidence. It was agreed that the panel would hear from Council officers, get factual information, meet with stakeholders and hear from expert witnesses.
- 1.7. The Panel was chaired by Councillor Meiklejohn, and membership comprised, Provost Reid, Councillors Chalmers, Hughes and McLuckie.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. The panel was provided with a presentation on the legal context and legal considerations regarding looked after children and service delivery. The presentation covered the following points:
- the definition of looked after children at home and away from home;
 - an explanation of key jargon used in the field;
 - information on the Children's Panel and Child Protection Register;
 - details of the process of permanence orders and adoption;
 - an overview of the most relevant legislation including the Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011 and Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014;
 - statistical information on the number of looked after children locally and in other authorities;
 - a breakdown of the placement types nationally and in Falkirk Council, and
 - Information on the duties of corporate parents.
- 2.2. The panel asked if the number of young people who could ask for continuing care was known. They were advised that as the Act had only come into force in April 2015 the uptake of provision was not yet known, but that the service had identified ten young people who were eligible. It was noted that if a young person left care before they were fifteen and a half they would not be eligible for continuing care. Continuing care related to financial and peer support as well as the provision of continued accommodation up to age 21. Reference was made to the issue of homelessness and that some former looked after children struggled to find suitable housing as hostel provision did not meet their needs. The Council does not have specialist housing provision for former looked after children, but were looking at options around this.
- 2.3. Members discussed the age limit for receiving continuing care. The Panel were advised that the provision was part of the Act and that there was not yet guidance on the matter. 'Who Cares?' Scotland had lobbied the Scottish Government on the issue of the maximum age for after care. This age could be increased in specific cases by order of the Minister.
- 2.4. The panel discussed the role of the Children's Hearing system and public perception of Children's Panel members. A question was asked regarding whether or not the Children's Panel could determine what type of placement a child was given. It was noted that the Children's Panel was able to recommend placement in a residential school but it needed to be assessed as an appropriate placement for that child. A social worker would determine if the child could cope in particular settings and if a place was available. Clarification was also given on the differences between residential care and a residential school, the latter of which provided care and education at one location.

- 2.5. In response to a question on the higher proportionate use of residential facilities in Falkirk compared with the national average, the Panel was advised that a lot of work would be required to unpick why that was the case. Although there were more looked after children away from home, in residential care as opposed to foster care, there were less children in total looked after in Falkirk proportionately, when compared to the national average.
- 2.6. The panel asked if there was a lack of facilities and foster carers locally and were advised that the service was negotiating with providers to increase the number of local residential placements available. It was anticipated that there would be eight additional beds provided. It was noted that Children's Services continually sought to increase the number of foster carers in the area and that word of mouth had proven to be the most successful recruitment method. In partnership with Falkirk Football Club some free advertising had been accessed at football matches with leaflets handed out.
- 2.7. Members then sought information on the types of relationships involved in kinship care situations. In most cases the child was looked after by a grandparent and that in almost all instances, it was a family member.
- 2.8. The panel discussed the recruitment and retention of foster carers exploring what approach was taken by other Councils and levels of remuneration. The panel were advised of the three levels of payment to foster carers in Falkirk, which were dependent on experience. Further to the basic rate, foster carers received an age related allowance for each child in their care. All Councils take a different approach and that currently foster carers were exempt from claiming Child Benefits, but that this may change under universal credit. In terms of recruitment and retention there was pressure from competition with private agencies. The service heard from current foster carers that money was not their main motivation and that they believed the Council offered the best training and support to foster carers in the area.
- 2.9. There was discussion on outcomes achieved by placement type and that children looked after away from home generally had better outcomes than those looked after at home.
- 2.10. The panel was then provided with a presentation on outcomes for looked after children. The presentation covered the following points:
- statistical information on the number of looked after children;
 - information on the national picture regarding placement types used;
 - school attendance, exclusion rates, tariff scores, and positive destinations for children looked after at home and away from home;
 - placement costs and the stability of such placements, and
 - anonymous case studies.
- 2.11. The panel further discussed recruitment of foster carers. It was noted that on average it took between 80 to 100 hours to assess someone as a foster carer from their expression of interest to registration by the agency (Falkirk

Council) and longer before a child could actually be placed. Initially interest parties were invited to an information evening, which was held twice a year.

- 2.12. Members asked what the future pathways were for looked after children who entered secure units and if they were placed into other care. The Chief Social Work Officer stated that the procedures were robust. This is the one area where the Children's Panel can only make a recommendation for secure care but the decision to implement can only be made between the Chief Social Work Officer and the Head of the Unit. There was a weekly review of this and a further three monthly review by the Children's Panel. The panel was informed about the transition process undertaken with children in secure units to make any future move go positively. Generally the pathway was to a residential placement first and then home where appropriate or to a further local placement or independence.
- 2.13. The panel discussed additional support needs and asked about the provision made available to looked after children in this area. Evidence was presented on contracts with other providers of family support services and their role was to intervene and prevent a situation resulting in a child becoming looked after. The Council had a robust exclusion policy and that before any decision was taken to exclude a looked after child there must be discussion between the social worker and the service manager. Schools were supported and challenged with the aim of increasing attendance as that would lead to better outcomes and more positive destinations.
- 2.14. Members asked if former looked after children could be given higher priority on the housing list. It was noted that a presentation would be given at a future meeting of the panel from Housing.
- 2.15. The panel discussed that for a future meeting on specialist services an invitation could be made to the NHS. The looked after children psychologist was scheduled to present as part of the specialist services meeting. The psychologist is funded by the Council although remains an NHS employee but the Council was able to determine which young people were prioritised. Further, the Council had determined the content of the job specification when the post was created. The Panel was reminded that during previous discussion at the scrutiny committee there had been consideration of whether or not the service should be funded by the Council, NHS or a joint funded project.

3. GENERAL SERVICES PROVIDED FOR AND TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN INTENSIVE

Strengths and Challenges in Meeting the Needs of Looked After Children: A Social Work Perspective

- 3.1. The panel discussed mental health services provision to young people and asked about Government funding for these services. It was noted that Child

and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) had bid for funding and that the Council was liaising with the service to discuss best use of the funding. In terms of partnership work, this was carried out by the 'team around the child' which included teachers, social workers, health professionals and the family. The group works to plan the best support for a young person. For looked after children a more formal review process is also undertaken.

- 3.2. Members discussed the provision of accommodation for children and young people and highlighted that some units allowed young people to be part of a wider community but others were in quite isolated settings. The Panel was advised that it was important to have a range of services to meet a range of needs. Children looked after in rural settings were able to access local community facilities through transport arrangements and buses. The Panel were advised that feedback received by the service was that children in rural settings were as happy as those accommodated in towns and that both settings have resulted in positive outcomes.
- 3.3. The panel discussed transitions and the use of halfway houses. It was noted that there was work to be done in this area particularly in relation to corporate parenting responsibilities. A move on flat already exists adjacent to the Tremanna Unit. It was also asserted that children's plans were now more outcome focussed and that through the introduction of new legislation the voice of young people have a more prominent part in influencing services. The service was increasing the provision of residential care in central Falkirk by four beds and there were two additional beds being brought on stream in Denny.
- 3.4. Members then discussed the emotional impact of this work on staff and asked about case loads. It was noted that there were approx. 290 live cases with each team and that the service had robust supervision processes in place including a one-to-one with staff at least once a month. All team managers are accessible to their staff and teams support each other. There is further work carried out in relation to training and induction and the service recognised that the work does take a toll.

Positive Destinations

- 3.5. The panel discussed the challenge of the wider economic climate on achieving positive destinations and commented that a number of positive destinations reported were not sustained. Information provided was on school leaver destinations, previously provided by Skills Development Scotland, and that participation measures tracked young people up to 20 years old. In the previous two weeks the most recent statistics had been released. The service sought to obtain the names of those included in the data in order to liaise with schools and identify if positive destinations had been maintained. The panel were advised that if former looked after young people became unemployed and registered at the Job Centre Plus then the Council was informed of this. The employment training unit continues to advertise and make opportunities

available to young people. In trying to achieve positive destinations the service had redesigned its careers information provision to allow young people to talk of their aspirations and work toward meeting them. However, the service also monitored labour market opportunities to ensure that what a young person wanted was achievable. The Panel was assured that the service was focussed on ensuring that no young person slipped through the cracks in provision by being as joined up with partners as possible. The Panel were also advised that the Council gave priority to care leavers in its modern apprentice scheme.

Using Data to Help “Get It Right For Every Child”

- 3.6. The panel considered what extra support was provided to looked after children as they were at a high level on the risk matrix. The tracker tool presented at the meeting, highlighted weekly progress. As looked after children approached their leaving date they were taken to speak with both further education and higher education institutions. From the next school session a UCAS portal would be provided. The service sought to ensure that looked after and former looked after children identify themselves as such on application forms. In relation to years one and two the Panel were advised that if a child was looked after then this was included in their pupil profile and the Heads of House do social education with looked after children to raise aspirations.
- 3.7. Members asked about the numbers of looked after children who progressed onto further and higher education. The Panel were advised that this information would be provided to the Panel. In relation to a question on the challenge of transition to a university environment, evidence was provided on the approach taken by Stirling University which was proactive in asking the Council to be told which applicants were looked after so that they could put support in place. Further, universities can access additional funding to support looked after students. There had been discussions about the possibility of a summer school to aid transition.

Housing

- 3.8. The Panel then looked at the role of housing in supporting looked after children.
- 3.9. The panel discussed the transition for looked after young people when entering independent accommodation for the first time. They highlighted that being allocated a tenancy close to people with chaotic lives can cause conflict and negatively affect looked after young people who are on a transitional journey. They discussed the provision of halfway house options for the move from school and residential as moving to independent accommodation was a lot to deal with at one time. They also highlighted that the bidding process could be intimidating and asked if the service provided support to secure the most appropriate type of tenancy.

- 3.10. The Panel were advised that there were currently gaps in the provision such as in relation to halfway houses. The Director of Children's services highlighted that for young people in Tremanna there was the option of moving to the flat next door and to then move to a supported tenancy as a staged process.
- 3.11. Members raised concern in relation to care leavers becoming isolated and suggested that a group home setting would fill a gap. It was noted that the average age for a young person to leave the family home is 26, whereas it is often expected that a looked after young person will maintain a tenancy at a much younger age. The Housing Division advised that the position had been to not separate provision for homeless people and looked after young people but that if the view of the Council was that these groups should not be mixed then arrangements would be reviewed. The current set up was for generic mixed provision. There was a key worker who made bids for looked after young people and that informed decisions were taken about where these young people should move to, for example if they should be placed near to their family etc.

4. CORPORATE PARENTING

- 4.1. The panel were provided with a presentation on corporate parenting which covered the following points:-
- what is a corporate parent – roles and responsibilities in legislation and good practice;
 - where we are on the journey in Falkirk;
 - brief overview of approach to corporate parenting and in particular champions, and
 - Way forward for corporate parenting in Falkirk.
- 4.2. The panel sought clarification on which organisations had responsibilities as corporate parents. Organisations on the Falkirk Community Planning Partnership were corporate parents and work had been taken forward by Falkirk Community Trust with looked after children and the arts highlighted. The Panel were advised that there were twenty four organisations listed in the guidance with corporate parenting responsibilities. The Council was working actively in this area with both the employment training unit and community and learning development making significant contributions.
- 4.3. The panel discussed funding for projects to support looked after children across the partnership. It was noted that the looked after children's psychologist was solely funded by the Council but as part of a wider service provision jointly funded by the NHS. The panel discussed the referral process to the looked after children's psychologist, waiting times and qualifying criteria to access Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Members expressed concern that the requirement to have been diagnosed with a mental health condition prevented many people accessing the service who needed it. It was noted that young people were able to access the looked after children's

psychologist service without an existing diagnosis of mental illness and that a consultation was offered by CAMHS to young people following an attempt to take their own life.

- 4.4. Members discussed the role of Police Scotland in signposting and highlighted the valuable work carried out by community constables. It would be helpful to know if Police Scotland were aware of which children and young people in a community are looked after. Police Scotland is developing national guidance on its approach to corporate parenting. The panel commented that the police had an important role to play in early intervention and contributing to a multi-agency approach.
- 4.5. The panel raised concerns regarding challenges around the housing bidding process for looked after young people and a suggestion was made that looked after young people could get prioritised for certain areas and suitable housing.
- 4.6. The panel then discussed the approach for Falkirk to a potential Champions Board. The Panel were advised that there was an increasing shift toward champion's boards and that Dundee Council was considered an example of best practice nationally. The approach taken by a number of authorities had been considered and information on the format at Argyll & Bute Council; Leicestershire County Council; Lancashire County Council; Midlothian Council, and Dundee City Council. A proposal would be developed by the strategy group in the New Year following determination of funding.
- 4.7. It was suggested to the Panel that there are a number of key principles that should be considered with regards to taking this forward. These are:-
 - The engagement of children and young people;
 - Development of a model that is sustainable and not tokenistic;
 - Engagement with partners, and
 - Consideration of the role of members.
- 4.8. The panel discussed the approach to be taken locally and highlighted a number of points around corporate parenting including the establishment of a champion's board. The panel also considered principles by which a champion's board would have to be established. These are -
 - that the model selected should not be too intrusive into a young person's life;
 - that members role should be to provide strategic direction and not line manage officers;
 - that different approaches may be required for children looked after at home and for those for whom the Council was the main parent;
 - that members should most likely not be directly involved with looked after young people but could have a role in monitoring their progress and wellbeing, and

- that a former looked after child should be a member of any champion's board.

5. MEETING WITH ADVOCATES AND YOUNG PEOPLE.

5.1. The Panel were from the outset clear that any recommendations would have to be informed by the views of looked after children themselves. In addition to meeting with young people when visiting various specialist services, a special evening meeting was held. There were introductory remarks which highlighted:

- Elected members are corporate parents;
- they do not have day to day responsibilities, but have a duty to ensure Falkirk Council's policies and approaches are meeting the needs of young people;
- this meeting was an opportunity to gain information on the young people's experiences and that members would welcome hearing about their:
 - Thoughts;
 - Aspirations, and
 - Barriers encountered.

5.2. 'Who Care's?' Scotland presented an interview from a care experienced young person and the following key themes emerged:

- multiple placement moves had a significantly negative impact on the young person;
- their final placement was very stable, met their needs and they felt loved;
- school adapted the environment to meet their needs: key staff, quiet space, high levels of communication with care setting;
- staff working in residential care environments were not permitted to say the word "love";
- even within a stable placement there was still a high turnover of staff working with the young person, this made them feel vulnerable and at times frightened of not knowing who would be on duty in the morning;
- there was no opportunity to remain in contact with ex-staff when they moved on, "they were my family when I was there";
- no ability to find out why staff move on; and
- the need to build and maintain strong positive relationships.

5.3. A discussion followed which facilitated discussion with 3 care experienced young people and the following key themes emerged:

- sometimes in foster care you can feel unwanted;
- there is an expectation that you will just fit into a new setting;
- sometimes expected to share a bedroom with another young person, therefore no personal space;

- returning home from school to discover that you are being moved placement has a very negative impact on emotional health and wellbeing;
- more support to prepare for hearings would be good;
- smaller meetings would also help;
- young people struggle when attending meeting and reports are shared and staff sit round reading about them. It would help if all papers were shared and read ahead of the meeting and that the meeting focuses on updates, changes and ways forward, rather than going over the whole history every time;
- young people like the residential setting opportunity to meet and get to know other young people very well and establish relationships;
- staff frightened to show caring expressions towards the young people;
- young people would benefit from access to WiFi;
- young people would like to have greater transport availability when in remote residential settings, and
- wage paid by ETU - £2.30 per hour, if having to cover lunches and other expenses then there is little left.

5.4. Further to the points previously raised the following issues emerged through a general group discussion:

- further assistance with financial planning would be welcomed;
- forming a positive relationship with a significant adult (like Who Care's Worker) that does not have any expectations on finding a solution or placement would be welcomed;
- stickability came through loud and clear as a key positive support;
- fear of the unknown was a significant concern;
- packages need to be designed around the needs of the individual, and
- there is a need for everyone working with the individual to know something about their situation, but not everything. For example discomfort was caused by Education staff sitting through the full children's hearing.

6. SPECIALIST SERVICES

Family Support

6.1. The Intensive Family Support service (IFSS) had a minimum of two contacts per week with service users but maintained a flexible approach by providing support during crisis points. As the service operates 7 days per week with a shift system the need to use residential accommodation provision was often avoided.

6.2. There was a challenge when returning young people from a residential setting and the level of support decreases to maintain the changes that young person has made with less professionals around. The service does not provide educational support as this was delivered by Cluaran. The age to access the service had been extended from birth upwards.

6.3. The panel discussed the presentation and highlighted:-

- The integration of Education and Children and Families Social work services into Children's Services
- The level of contact families have with other agencies
- The role of the Children and Families Social Work in supervised contact meetings
- Placement breakdown
- Barriers to accessing the service.

Oxgang School Support Service

6.4. The panel were provided with a presentation on how education supports looked after children.

6.5. The panel discussed the impact of attendance on attainment and the need for early intervention. The Panel heard that there was an internal looked after children scrutiny group which meet on a six weekly basis to monitor those pupils with attendance below 80%. The service also asked schools for predicted grades, including at primary, in order to track progress. There was work ongoing to address the discrepancy in attendance rates between children looked after at home and those looked after away from home, the latter generally having higher rates of attendance.

6.6. Members discussed the Oxgang School and Support Service. It was noted that the provision had been adapted to give an enhanced offering in relation to nurture. Officers highlighted that where there had been behavioural challenges these had related to emotion expression difficulties. The school was working closely with families and had an open door policy with parents. In relation to a question on children moving from the school to mainstream, the panels was advised that since the start of the spring term in 2015 3 children had entered mainstream with ongoing support.

6.7. The panel then discussed measures in place to avoid exclusions from mainstream schools and commented on the duty to provide high quality education to all children. Schools have a range of options available to them such as staged interventions, detention, and removal to other classes and nurture provision. However, in the case of a significant event, such as a violent incident, the options open to the school are restricted as safety is a key priority. In response to a question on the differences in exclusion rates between looked after children and others, the panel were advised that looked after children were 7 to 8 times more likely to be excluded. It was noted that there had been a recent policy change which meant that no looked after child could be excluded without reference to central management.

Throughcare & Aftercare

- 6.8. A critical aspect of services to young people is the provision of Throughcare and Aftercare. It was noted that this service was registered with the Care Inspectorate and in the two most recent inspections had achieved the highest number of areas to be scored as a six. Big Lottery Funding had been used to introduce a peer mentoring project which would run for five years and facilitated training for care leavers to support younger people in the care system.
- 6.9. The service was planning to provide Aftercare to young people up to 25 in line with changes brought in by the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. There had also been Big Lottery Funding used to secure a temporary post to help support care leavers navigate the welfare benefits system. The project evaluation demonstrated the issues faced by care leavers in using the welfare benefits system particularly in relation to conditionality and sanctions associated with benefits. Care leavers had a dedicated key worker but support was provided by a range of partners, including: Careers Scotland, NHS Forth Valley, Housing, and Criminal Justice. The importance of Aftercare was highlighted as the average age for young people who have not been looked after to leave home was 26 whereas for the looked after population it was around 18.
- 6.10. The panel then discussed the presentation and highlighted the following points:-
- The importance of collaborative work
 - The positive impact of the key worker and peer mentoring approach
 - How a halfway house, shared home or 'house nearby' may be used to assist young people with their transition from care
 - The allocations policy and that care leavers do not need to present as homeless to be allocated a property. However there is a perception that they do.

Looked After Children Psychologist / CAMHS

- 6.11. The Panel was interested in seeking the views of other professionals in other public sector agencies. They therefore heard from a representative of NHS FV Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychologist. This presentation noted that outcomes for looked after children tended to be poorer than their non-looked after peers - the difference being particularly seen in terms of mental health. Further challenges were presented as looked after young people were less likely to engage with the service and were more likely to drop out early. There was also a lack of home visits and parental advocacy. It was stated that looked after children often fell out with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) criteria. Intervention from this service helped to improve outcomes for those who are at risk of poor outcomes. The looked after children psychologist worked with young people, their carers and the entire network around the child. She noted that the waiting list target was 18 weeks but that looked after children in crisis needed to be seen more urgently.
- 6.12. The panel was then provided with information from a survey which had been carried out with social workers, looked after young people and their carers. The survey had gathered information on how different groups rated the service

provided. The work of the service helped lower the number of placement breakdowns.

6.13. The panel then discussed the presentation and highlighted the following points:-

- The referral process for young people and where the service sat in relation to CAMHS
- Links to Intensive Family Support Service
- How to sustain improvements that young people made and help them build resilience
- Training provided to foster carers.

Cluaran

6.14. This service worked with 12 to 16 year olds and provided holistic support with the aim of having young people remain in community settings. The staff team had a variety of skill sets and backgrounds. Family work was central to the service which also provided crisis support. When young people were referred to the service they were usually in a situation of needing immediate intervention.

6.15. In order to make a difference to young people the service worked to improve the key relationships in the young person's life and considered what behaviours needed to change. However, it was important to recognise that it was not just the young person themselves who may need to change and that other people around the young person should be aware of their behaviours. There was a strong team around the child approach with individually tailored programmes which were asset based and built on the existing strengths of the young person. The service provided a therapeutic, calming space for the young person to enjoy. The young people who used the service felt listened to and trusted the staff to support them.

6.16. The panel was then provided with details of two case studies. Members then discussed the presentation and highlighted the following points:-

- The good links between the service and Forth Valley College
- The referral process
- The use of volunteer support

7. PRESENTATIONS NORTH LANARKSHIRE AND PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCILS

7.1. The Panel received a presentation from an officer from North Lanarkshire Council who provided the panel with a presentation on early intervention. The panel were advised that in this area there was always a need to continue improvement and work to address new challenges. North Lanarkshire had started the journey of moving the balance of care around 2004. The Council's residential provision had been under pressure and to address this. As such a Community Alternatives Service was introduced which focuses on early intervention for young people aged 12 and older. The social work locality teams

had been redesigned. A further part of the early intervention model incorporated a Families First approach which involved children under 12 years old. Families First, which was focussed on younger children, had links with Health Visitors and worked in a joined up way. The early intervention approach was a seven day a week service which ran into the evening and included emergency out of hours provision so that a quick response could be given to families when necessary. There were now quicker responses than under the previous model.

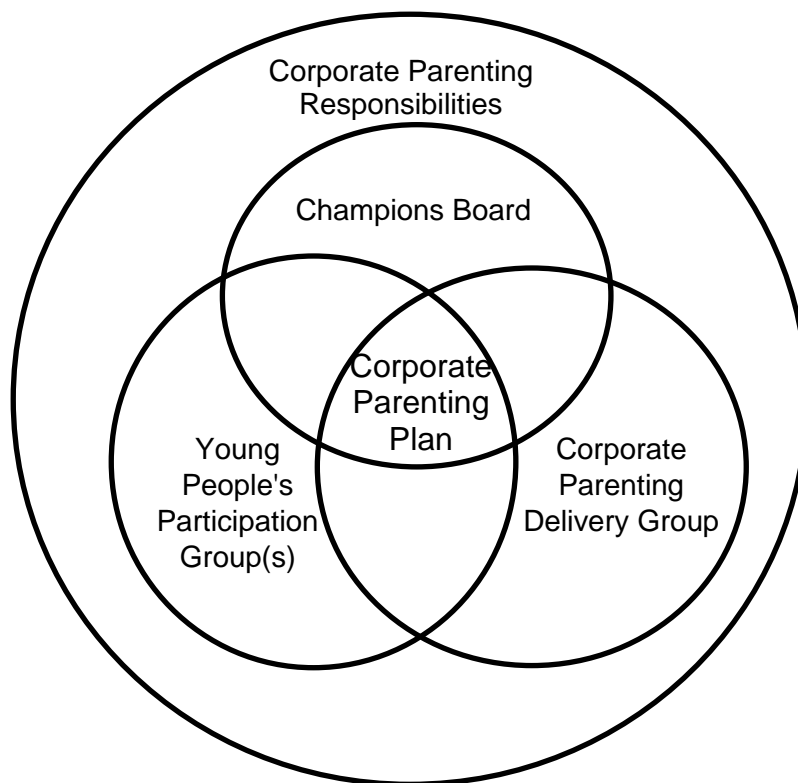
- 7.2. It had been important to keep staff engaged and informed during the transformation and this had been a long term process involving over 200 staff. There had been a significant investment of time to inform staff with a need to ensure this is an on-going process due to staff turnover.
- 7.3. Part of the early intervention work was to take a whole systems approach. This involved including aspects that had previously been less integrated such as youth justice. The service had developed links with HMYOI Polmont and secure units to help young people return to communities.
- 7.4. The panel were advised of the financial savings which had been achieved as a result of the change in approach to early intervention, including a discussion of budgets for external residential provision, disability residential services and Self Directed Support (SDS). It was highlighted that this presented an opportunity to do more for young people in the community.
- 7.5. Information on foster care and kinship care was also provided. Nationally 82% of looked after children were in community settings while that figure was over 95% for North Lanarkshire. However, it was highlighted that foster care placement break down resulted in around one third of the Council's residential placements. Moving placements was not good for the young person and that it was best if a young person had continuity and stability in their placement. Therefore the Council tried to personalise the service provided to the young person where they were. The Panel were also advised that it was important that social work and housing work closely together in order to achieve positive outcomes for looked after children.
- 7.6. Discussion included:-
 - Foster carer recruitment
 - The difference in outcomes for young people in foster placements compared to other settings, particularly in relation to improved educational outcomes
 - Staff qualifications and continuous professional development, and
 - The length of time before the impact of the shift to early intervention was seen.
- 7.7. There followed a presentation by Perth & Kinross Council which included their approach to corporate parenting. A collaborative approach was being developed and included the views of young people alongside community planning partners.

- 7.8. The number of looked after children population had increased year on year, Perth & Kinross was number three in Scotland for maintaining young people in a community placement. There were also more children in kinship care than foster care. Perth & Kinross operated a Kinship Care Panel with an independent chairperson where family members' suitability was assessed. The Family Placement Team had been reshaped to work more closely with kinship carers. The service worked to support kinship carers and they had received the same level of pay as foster carers for some time in Perth & Kinross.
- 7.9. The service was open to change in order to address future challenges and was undertaking a transformation project to look at alternatives to internal residential provision. In general the panel were advised to keep a focus on ensuring swift decisions were taken regarding permanence orders. They had introduced an additional review within six weeks; this supplemented the review carried out after 72 hours. This work was measured and reported to the Community Planning Partnership and council committees. How information was reported to elected members was important. Information which was reported included the balance of care and the number of placement moves a young person experienced.
- 7.10. In terms of continuing care, these duties had been embraced and of 28 young people in a community placement who turned 16 years old, 23 remained in their placement. However, this increased the pressure on foster care resources and was recognised as a national issue. The service was good at retaining contact with care leavers by developing positive relationships at an early stage.
- 7.11. Discussion included:-
- The process of increasing kinship care placements
 - The affect of parental substance misuse
 - The review of residential provision, and
 - Engagement of young people in a Champions Board.

8. PROPOSALS FOR THE CHAMPIONS BOARD – CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- 8.1. Members of the Panel considered proposals for the development of a champion's board for the Council area. It was agreed that while the champions board would be developed by the Council it will include a remit for the whole community planning partnership. The following framework was agreed as the recommendation of the panel to the Council. It was however agreed that plans should not be too rigid as young people's views require to be taken into account.

8.2. Proposed Structure



Champions Board

Purpose

- 8.3. The Champions Board is a forum for looked after and previously looked after young people in Falkirk. It will allow young people to make their needs and wishes known and enable them to work with elected members to effect positive change. The Champions Board is one of the ways that Falkirk Council and partner agencies will meet their responsibilities as Corporate Parents.
- 8.4. “Adult Champions” will be required to engage with trained and supported young people as equals and to provide them with positive role models as to how to listen to each other and to communicate. The board might initially meet quarterly and six monthly thereafter.

Leadership and Membership

- 8.5. Chaired or co- chaired by a senior Elected Member, it is proposed that Falkirk’s Champions board is made up of 3 or 4 Elected Members, 4 or 6 care experienced young people, 2 to 3 support workers who the young people are comfortable with as well as the Council’s strategic lead for corporate parenting.

Role

- 8.6. The role of Champions Board members is new and innovative within Falkirk and is in its infancy across Scotland. The key elements of this role involve scrutiny challenge and advocacy on behalf of care experienced young people.
- 8.7. The considerations of the Board would be reported to the new Community Planning Executive Group i.e. the group of CE from across the public sector who would have responsibility for progressing any relevant action, reporting on progress and updating the Community Planning Leadership Board on issues of Corporate Parenting.

Participation Group

Purpose

- 8.8. It is proposed that over the next 12 months, a number of participation groups will be developed, involving care experienced young people from a range of settings, ages, common interest groups etc. From these groups, a smaller group of interested young people will be supported and trained by the dedicated Champions Board staff to talk about their experiences and identify key issues for themselves and others.
- 8.9. These young people will set the agenda for the Champions Board and some of them will become Champions Board members.
- 8.10. Participation groups will continue to run and to feed into the Champions Board on an on-going basis.

Leadership and Membership

- 8.11. Led by young people, the participation group will involve young people in foster and residential care; young people looked after at home and those who have left care. The group will also involve the dedicated Champions Board staff who will support the young people to talk about their experiences and to identify key issues for themselves and others.

Corporate Parenting Delivery Group

Purpose

- 8.12. It is proposed that this group would support and oversee the work with the Participation group and the Champions Board by helping them develop the corporate parenting strategy and by facilitating the involvement of all Corporate Parents. This would be the “making sure things happen group”. The group will have leadership and planning functions and will have responsibility for delivering outcomes.

Leadership and Membership

- 8.13. Led by the Children's Commission, it is proposed that membership of the Corporate Parenting Delivery group would involve young people, dedicated Children's Champions and a combination of strategic and operational officers representing key corporate parents and those involved in the management of front line services for care experienced young people.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1. The Panel acknowledged that the outcomes for looked after children were equal to those young people not looked after. It noted that outcomes for children looked after away from home were in some instances better than for those looked after at home at least in the short to medium term. However it was recognised that the achievement of outcomes for children who are looked after can be impacted on by the very circumstances that led them to require to be looked after in the first instance. The Panel therefore agreed that whilst acknowledging that we wanted to improve outcomes for all children, those outcomes need to be realistic whilst maximising potential.
- 9.2. In coming to its recommendations the Panel identified some emerging themes:
- 9.3. **Earlier intervention** available at the right level at the right time can prevent an escalation of risks which otherwise would lead to a child being taken into care.
- Improving support to young people with mental health issues.
 - Improving the range of accommodation options for care leavers
- 9.4. **Balance of care.** Reducing numbers of young people placed in residential provision by increasing family based placements. Increasing the capacity and number of Falkirk Council foster carers.
- 9.5. **Corporate parenting.** Developing and embedding the culture and responsibility of corporate parenting within and across key agencies and partners.
- 9.6. **Transitions and after care.** Ensure that systems and processes meet the needs of young people in relation to key transitions of their lives including education, employment, housing, adult services and health services.
- 9.7. Importantly the Panel recognised that to improve outcomes we must seek to raise aspirations of young people themselves. This will be an important role for the Champions Board but should underpin all that we do.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1. The recommendations of the Panel are presented to the Scrutiny Committee under the themes noted above. It is recommended that these

recommendations are approved and forwarded to the Executive for consideration:

Early Intervention

- 10.2. It is recommended that the Children's Commission recognise and ensure that:
- 10.3. Relationships between young people and those involved in their care are key to developing positive outcomes. The principles of relationship based practice therefore need to be developed and embedded by all relevant professionals;
- 10.4. The named persons in all services are appropriately trained and supported to recognise the specific needs of looked after children and young people in order to lift their aspirations and improve outcomes especially in education;
- 10.5. Mental health services are aligned to meeting the needs of looked after children and that these are provided appropriately;
- 10.6. Attainment is a priority particularly for looked after children including those looked after at home through promoting attendance and engagement in learning. To achieve this:
 - A practice model is developed to assess the improvement in learning that has been achieved during the period of being looked after
 - An educationally rich care environment is put in place for all children looked after away from home.

Balance of Care

- 10.7. It is recommended that Children's Services:
- 10.8. Undertake a review of Falkirk Council foster carer provision with a view to increasing the number of care placements available. This review would include the following:
 - Consideration of the outcome from work streams from the National Review of Foster Care which are expected to report in the near future;
 - Review fees and allowances for foster carers, noting that the outcome of the National Review of Allowances may impact on this;
 - how to use creative and innovative ways to engage with prospective foster carers
 - Support for foster carers.
- 10.9. This review to be reported back to Scrutiny Committee by March 2017.
- 10.10. Investigate and report back to Members on the potential for spend to save proposals in regards to providing more local provision for those children currently looked after out with of the Falkirk Council area.

Corporate Parenting

- 10.11. It is recommended that the proposals for the Champions Board are approved and that the Executive Group of the Community Planning Partnership agree a reporting framework for taking forward actions within individual organisations.

Transitions

10.12. It is recommended that:

- 10.13. Children's Services and Corporate and Housing Services report back to Members before the end of March 2017 on the provision of housing and support for children leaving care. This report will include how to overcome the challenges of providing accommodation, the potential for a protocol for housing options, the need to continue support and how this is provide, the role and remit of the leaving care service and how we provide support to older young people in line with our new obligations;
- 10.14. A proposal for a 'family firm' is brought forward by the end of March 2017 for the Council in the first instance but with as a view to extending this to other public sector agencies if appropriate. This proposal will be presented by the Children's Commission; and
- 10.15. A scoping exercise is undertaken and the results reported to the Children's Commission Leadership Group to identify the issue sand challenges in relation to the level and range of support available to young people who have left care and are at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

Councillor Cecil Meiklejohn
Chair of the Panel