

## **S21. Scrutiny Panel Conclusions and Recommendations – Outcomes for Looked After Children**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which set out the work and recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel established to review outcomes for looked after children. The report set out: details of the scrutiny process undertaken by the panel, and the summary and conclusions reached. The report by the Scrutiny Panel was appended to the report which set out the panel's specific recommendations. Fiona Campbell provided an overview of the report.

Members commented that the report showed that the panel had undertaken a comprehensive review of the area and they thanked the panel members and supporting officers, external organisations and young people for their work and input.

The committee discussed that the panel, as part of its evidence gathering, heard that there had been instances of young people returning home from school to discover that they were being moved placement and that this had a very negative impact on emotional health and wellbeing. Members highlighted that this practice must not occur and that every young person in Falkirk should have equality of opportunity. Members highlighted the Champions Board as a key instrument going forward.

Regarding the panel's recommendation that the Children's Commission ensure that mental health services are aligned to meeting the needs of looked after children, members highlighted that there was a national shortage of children's psychologists. This shortfall in provision was particularly acute in relation to those young people with learning disabilities.

The committee sought clarification on what was meant by a family firm approach. Fiona Campbell stated that the family firm concept meant that corporate parents across the community planning partnership would offer more opportunities to looked after children to be part of their organisations. This would be achieved in different ways including the provision of training, work experiences and modern apprenticeships. She stated that the Employment and Training Unit were involved in looking at how to support looked after young people. She advised that as the Council's workforce was reducing there would be a need to develop innovative ways to offer opportunities. It was important to raise the aspirations of looked after young people.

Members asked about the support available to foster carers and the work undertaken to recruit more foster carers. Frank Kennedy stated that all foster carers get allocated a social worker as their primary source of support and that this individual is different to the social worker dealing with any child in their care. In terms of recruitment, demographic pressures meant that new foster carers tended to be replacing those lost through retirement and that net gains were difficult to make. The service ran regular recruitment campaigns and had built up a relationship with Falkirk Football Club to advertise for new carers at their events. More recently the service had looked at innovative methods including the use of digital marketing to recruit more foster carers.

The committee discussed the role of scrutiny panels. It was stated that they were fulfilling their aim and looking at topics in a new way. Members also highlighted the work carried out by policy development panels as a good way of drawing thoughts together on complex issues.

Members discussed the work of the looked after children's psychologist who was funded by the Council but formed part of NHS Forth Valley's provision. David Mackay advised that this post was subject to ongoing negotiation between the Council and NHS Forth Valley. The post holder had been highly commended for her work by the Children's Commission. He stated that ideally there would be more of this type of provision.

## **Decision**

### **The committee:-**

- (1) noted the recommendations of the Panel, set out in appendix one to the report, section 10, and**
- (2) referred the Panel's recommendations to the Executive.**