

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 13 December 2017

Time: 4.00-6.55pm

Present: Councillors L Every (Chairman), A Hay (Vice Chairman), A Bradnam and C Richards

Apologies: Councillor A Costello

Observer: P Asker (until 6.10pm)

1. NOTIFICATION OF CHAIRMAN/WOMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN/WOMAN

The Democratic Services Officer reported that on 14 November 2017 the Children and Young People Committee had appointed Councillor Lis Every as Chairman and Councillor Anne Hay as Vice Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee for the remainder of the 2017/18 municipal year.

Councillor Every stated that the decision to establish the new Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee (CPSC) in place of the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board was taken by Council on 17 October 2017 and reflected the importance which Members attached to their role as Corporate Parents. It also made clear the Council's commitment to working closely and transparently with its Looked After Children, their carers, care leavers and all those services and organisations who worked with them. The CPSC would meet in public and its reports, discussions and decisions would be open to public inspection in accordance with Council practice. The Children and Young People Committee would remain responsible for policy decisions relating to the Council's Corporate Parenting functions, but its new Sub-Committee would enable Members to drill down in detail into specific issues, develop closer working relationships with key partners and stakeholders and provide constructive challenge to officers and hold them to account. The importance of supporting the county's Looked After Children and care leavers could not be over-emphasised and members of the Sub-Committee would be undergoing a rolling programme of training and workshops to equip them with the skills and knowledge they would need to fully discharge their role. Members were also committed to putting the voice of Looked After Children and care leavers at the heart of the Sub-Committee's work through participation in its public meetings, input from the Voices Matter panel and private meetings and workshops.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were noted from Councillor Costello. There were no declarations of interest.

3. CO-OPTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVES

The Chairman offered a warm welcome to Poppy Asker, a young care leaver and member of the Voices Matter panel who was attending the meeting as an observer. She invited Ms Asker to join the discussion of all items on the agenda.

The Head of Countywide and Looked After Children's Services stated that Members had given a clear steer that they were keen to co-opt two young people as an integral part of the membership of the new Sub-Committee. Officers had discussed the practicalities of this with Councillor Every in her capacity as the Chairman of the

Corporate Parenting Partnership Board, the body which had preceded the creation of the new CPSC. In particular, both the Chairman and officers were mindful of the need to balance the wish to open up participation as widely as possible with the potential safeguarding issues arising from the fact that meetings would be held in public and participants' names would be placed in the public domain. On this basis, it has been agreed that young people would probably need to be aged 12 or over to sit as co-opted members. Officers had talked to members of the Voice Matter panel about the new CPSC and the role envisaged for its co-opted young people and had written to all Looked After children aged 12 or over inviting expressions of interest.

The following points were raised in discussion of the report and in response to questions from Members and those present:

- The timing and location of future meetings should be reviewed to make sure that they were accessible to the young people appointed as co-opted members. If possible, it would be good to schedule CPSC meetings just after the Voices Matter panel so that the panel could see the agenda and reports and feedback any comments. Members suggested that Huntingdon would provide quite a central location if a suitable venue could be found;
(**Action:** Democratic Services Officer/ Participation Manager)
- The observer commented that the reports for the meeting were very long and not always easy to understand. It was agreed that whilst sufficient detail was required to enable Members to make fully informed decisions in future each report would also include a brief summary containing the key points in easily accessible language to make them accessible to the widest possible audience;
- (**Action:** Democratic Services Officer/ All report authors)
- Those children and young people with the most chaotic lifestyles could also be the most vulnerable and needed to have their views reflected;
- The need to establish a dialogue with young people who were not members of the Voices Matter panel and with younger Looked After Children. This might include written communications, social media, use of the Youthoria website and briefing carers and other services. Members emphasised the importance of this being a two-way conversation and the Chairman stated that she would want children and young people to feel able to generate ideas about subjects the Sub-Committee should look at as well as commenting on the reports generated by Members and officers.

Summing up, the Chairman re-stated the Sub-Committee's commitment to ensuring the county's Looked After Children and care leavers were placed at the centre of its work. She also highlighted the need to establish a range of mechanisms to encourage an open two way conversation between Members and young people.

It was resolved to:

- a) note the report and indicate views on the proposed way forward.

4. THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CORPORATE PARENTS

The Assistant Director: Children and Families stated that Cambridgeshire County Council currently had 702 Looked After Children (LAC) in its care. The duties of a corporate parent were the same as those of any good parent – to support the health,

education and wellbeing of the child and to nurture their talents, skills and aspirations. Corporate parents would stay alongside the young people in their care until the age of 25 and during this time they needed to ensure and demonstrate that they were caring about them as well as caring for them. Whilst acknowledging the complexity of issues involved, officers advocated asking the question 'Would this be good enough for my child?' when considering the services and support provided to the county's LAC.

The following points were raised in discussion of the report and in response to questions from Members:

- Members reviewed and noted the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee's Terms of Reference;
- The establishment of the new CPSC was an important step in strengthening the role of Members as Corporate Parents;
- Officers stated that Leeds City Council had been rated Outstanding in relation to its services to Looked After Children and that they were looking at examples of its practice to see how these might inform services in Cambridgeshire;
- The Vice Chairman emphasised the importance of ensuring that the work of the Sub-Committee made a positive difference to the experience of Looked After Children and their carers.

It was resolved to:

- a) note the roles and responsibilities of the Corporate Parent for Cambridgeshire's Looked After Children.

5. PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Service Development and Commissioning Manager stated that the report contained some key data relating to Looked After Children (LAC) within the county and that officers were seeking a steer from Members on the type of information and level of detail they would find useful going forward. It was intended that this would be a standing agenda item so that Members would over time have the benefit of comparative month on month data to help identify both trends and anomalies. Officers in the Business Intelligence Team were currently working on the Corporate Parenting data set and it was hoped that a refined version would be available in time for the next meeting.

Officers highlighted the following points in the report:

- An increase of 10 children in care between April and October 2017. Children could only be taken into the county's care with the personal approval of either the Service Director or Assistant Director (Cambridgeshire) for Children and Families so officers were satisfied that all children and young people entering the care system in Cambridgeshire did so appropriately;
- All LAC received the same level of care, but within this group there were lots of smaller cohorts with specific needs (for example, those with special educational needs or disabilities and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)) so data was collected both for the group as a whole and for subsets within it;

- An improvement between April and October 2017 in the number of LAC visits carried out within the required timescale from 70.3% to 88.3%. It was noted that monthly visits were not always required in settled placements;
- Out of county placements were generally considered less positive because they took children away from familiar surroundings and people and were often more costly, but in some cases they were the best option. For example, quite a high proportion of UASC were accommodated in Peterborough as the city offered some services and cultural support networks which were not readily available elsewhere;
- Officers worked in close co-operation with colleagues across the Eastern region to accommodate UASC. Under arrangements agreed with central Government Cambridgeshire would accept up to 92 UASC;
- Officers apologised for the omission of some figures from the tables in the report. This would be corrected in future versions.

The following points were raised in discussion of the report and in response to questions from Members and those present:

- The Chairman stated that there had been some issues with the availability of data in the past which she hoped would not be repeated. It was imperative for officers to have access to accurate and up to date information in order to provide accurate reports and for Members to effectively scrutinise the service provided and to make informed decisions. If this information was not forthcoming Members would wish to be made aware so that they could take this up at an appropriate level;
- Members asked that future reports should either avoid the use of acronyms or include an explanatory table or footnote;
- Members noted that accommodation for care leavers was not subject to inspection by Ofsted and identified the issue of 'care leavers in suitable accommodation' as one which they would wish to look at in more detail in future; (**Action:** Democratic Services Officer/ Head of Countywide and Looked After Children)
- The county had exceeded the target set by central government in relation to adoption timescales in the current year. Targets were tightened each year in order to provide on-going challenge;
- The presentation of the table relating to 17-21 year olds should be revised in future reports to make clear what it is showing. Acronyms should be removed or explained; (**Action:** Service Development and Commissioning Manager)
- Officers undertook to provide definitions for the acronyms 'RHOM' and 'NREQ' (**Action:** Service Development and Commissioning Manager)

- LAC visits: Members asked for more information on why children were not always being visited within the specified timescales and by how long visits were overdue;
(**Action:** Head of Countywide and Looked After Children)
- Members noted an increase in the number of LAC with three or more changes of placement within the year in the period from April to October 2017 and asked for some analysis of who these children were and why this was happening;
(**Action:** Head of Countywide and Looked After Children)
- Members asked that the table of information on LAC accommodated out of county should also show the number of LAC accommodated in-county and that the total LAC population figure should also be included. They would also like an indication of how the out of county were accommodated, for example with foster carers, in children's homes or living independently;
(**Action:** Service Development and Commissioning Manager)
- The observer acknowledged that in some circumstances a move out of area or to another part of the county could offer a young person a fresh start. However, for others moving even a relatively short distance from home could be unsettling and upsetting. In her own case she was told initially that she would have to change schools during an exam year, she had been given very little information about where she would be taken and she was not able to contact either her allocated social worker or a duty social worker as it was a weekend.

Officers stated that there was an expectation that a support network would be in place when a child was taken into care, but they acknowledged that weekends posed a particular challenge as most social workers were off duty. They would always endeavour to keep a child at their existing school unless there were good reasons not to, but if foster places were not available locally it was not always achievable;

- A Member asked whether children were told that a placement might only be temporary when it was necessary for operational reasons to place them away from their local area. They felt it was important that the child should be kept informed about what was happening and why. The observer stated that it was sometimes said that children were too young to understand, but in her experience they would want to have the option of knowing.

Officers stated that there was a balance to be struck between giving enough information to provide reassurance without providing so much that it became overwhelming. Information would also be tailored according to the age and circumstances of each child;

- A Member asked that figures for numbers of foster carers should be included in the report each month, including recruitment figures;
(**Action:** Service Development and Commissioning Manager)
- To include data on the number of health assessments carried out each month and how many of these were not carried out within the required timescale. This would be followed up with the local Clinical Commissioning Group if appropriate.
(**Action:** Service Development and Commissioning Manager)

Summing up, the Chairman stated that the performance report would be a standing agenda item at all future meetings and Members would want to shape it over time to ensure it contained the all of the key information they needed.

It was resolved to:

- a) consider the data;
- b) highlight key themes;
- c) review the performance and outcomes for Looked After Children and care leavers;
- d) identify any additional information Members would want to see included in future reports.

6. FORWARD AGENDA PLAN

Members discussed the list of possible future business items contained in paragraph 2.2 of the report and reviewed the draft Forward Agenda Plan attached at Appendix 2. The Chairman stated that she would want officers and Looked After Children to advise the Sub-Committee of any areas of concern to them or any issues which they felt the Sub-Committee should consider at future meetings.

The following issues were identified for initial inclusion in the Sub-Committee's Forward Agenda Plan. Additional items would be added as identified:

- Mental Health/ Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMH), including information on criteria and thresholds
- Health assessment issues
- Access to further and higher education: current data and experience of young people and what could be done to further improve outcomes
- Foster carer recruitment, including marketing information and qualitative information
- Bright Spots report (produced bi-annually): developed by Coram Voice with the aim of improving the wellbeing of children and young people in care by identifying and promoting practices that have a positive influence on them
- Youth offending
- Workforce development: A monthly report to provide assurance that all Looked After Children had an allocated social worker and that appropriate training arrangements were in place
- Fostering Service Annual Report
- Adoption Service Annual Report

Members noted that some local authorities offered care leavers exemptions or discounts on council tax. Officers reported that some local district councils had asked for more information about this and work was in hand to try to scope what this would mean in real terms for each district and city council. Members felt that it would be important to establish whether such discounts or exemptions would have a knock-on effect on any other benefits young care leavers might be receiving. Members noted that the Children's Society had produced a briefing on council tax exemption for care leavers and that the Department for Communities and Local Government had written to local authorities about the options and asked for sight of both of these documents.

(**Action:** Head of Countywide and Looked After Children)

The Chairman stated that the Communities and Partnership Committee had appointed Lead Members for each District and City Council and suggested officers might usefully liaise with them on this subject. An update report on council tax exemptions and discounts for care leavers should also be brought to the Committee's next meeting.

(Action: Head of Countywide and Looked After Children)

Members agreed that meetings should be held bi-monthly for the remainder of the current municipal year and that provisional dates should be set for the 2018/19 municipal year. The frequency of meetings would be subject to periodic review as the extent of the Sub-Committee's workload became clearer.

It was resolved to:

- a) review and comment on the draft Forward Agenda Plan attached at Appendix 1;
- b) discuss additional items to be added to the Forward Agenda Plan;
- c) agree to meet bi-monthly for the remainder of the current municipal year and to set provisional bi-monthly meeting dates for 2018/19.

7. CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE WORKSHOP/ TRAINING PLAN

Officers proposed that the Sub-Committee's workshop and training plan should initially be designed to provide Members with the key information they needed to know, an introduction to the services supporting Cambridgeshire's Looked After Children (LAC) and care leavers and to provide a good sense of the child's perspective.

The following comments arose in discussion of the report and in response to questions from those present:

- Members welcomed the Assistant Director's suggestion that they include visits to the spaces where decisions were made, such as LAC reviews, and talk directly to the officers involved in this crucial work;
(Action: Assistant Director: Children and Families/ Service Development and Commissioning Manager)
- The Chairman commended the loyalty and commitment of the officers she had met so far who were involved in supporting the county's LAC;
- Members asked that either a single initial training session should be arranged between 10.00-4.00pm or two half day sessions to cover the items described at paragraph 2.1 of the report. Members' availability should be canvassed by doodle poll.
(Action: Service Development and Commissioning Manager)

Summing up, the Chairman emphasised the need for all members of the Sub-Committee and of the Council to receive the training needed to enable them to properly understand their role and responsibilities as corporate parents and to discharge these duties properly. She noted that the Members' Seminar on 12 January 2018 would include training on safeguarding and corporate parenting responsibilities.

It was resolved to:

- a) consider the appropriateness of the training proposal;
- b) make additional suggestions;
- c) agree preferred times and dates for training and visits.

8. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

Members reviewed and discussed the Fostering Service Annual Report 2016/17. The following comments and questions were offered by those present:

- A Member emphasised the importance of focusing on the quality of foster care places as well as the quantity;
- Officers confirmed that in-house foster care placements were generally preferred as they tended to keep children closer to their local communities, enabled joined-up provision around clinical and other support mechanisms, allowed officers to develop close working and support relationships with the foster carers and cost less than independent placements. However, it was not currently possible to accommodate all of the county's Looked After Children (LAC) with in-house foster care providers. In some cases independent foster care might also offer the best solution to a child's particular needs;
- The Chairman asked what could be done to raise the profile of this new Sub-Committee amongst foster carers as a demonstration of the Council's commitment to the vital work which they did and to ensure that their voice was heard. Officers stated that they were currently seeking the views of foster-carers on what support they would most like to see offered and that a new interim Foster Care Manager had recently been appointed to drive this work forward. The Chairman asked that the Sub-Committee should be updated on the outcome of this work when it was available;
(**Action:** Interim Foster Care Manager)
- Members noted the reference to private fostering arrangements at paragraph 15 of the annual report and sought more information. Officers stated that this related to young people staying with families other than their own under a private arrangement, for example whilst attending a language school or college. As these were not LAC this was primarily a safeguarding issue and so a matter for the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Members noted this, but asked that their wish to ensure that this issue was actively monitored by the appropriate body should be noted;
- Members noted that the Children and Young People Committee appointed two Member representatives to the Fostering Panel. Currently these were Councillor Simon King and Councillor Peter Topping;
- Members noted that all children in foster care received an annual review and that any cases causing concern, where significant variations were suggested to the fostering arrangements or where allegations had been made would be referred to the Fostering Panel;
- A Member questioned the significant drop in the number of short breaks. Officers stated that current figures were higher and that these figures related solely to short breaks for children with disabilities;

- A Member welcomed the appointment of new social workers and foster carers, but questioned whether this was having an impact on the service provided whilst they settled into their new roles. Officers stated that there was less staff churn amongst staff in the foster care service and that this ensured a level of continuity and experience;
- The Assistant Director: Children and Families stated that councillors had a key role to play in spreading the message within their communities that the Council was actively seeking to recruit new in-house foster carers and to make people more aware of the opportunities and support packages on offer. All Members expressed their willingness to actively support this work and asked officers to keep them informed about what they could do to help;
(**Action:** Assistant Director: Children and Families)
- A Member emphasised the importance of supporting and retaining existing in-house foster carers as well as actively seeking to recruit more;
- Members noted that difficulties finding suitable accommodation could be a factor in discouraging social workers from considering vacancies in Cambridgeshire. They stated that work being done within the Education team to identify accommodation for teachers and suggested officers might usefully liaise with the Senior Adviser: Curriculum, Teaching and Leadership about this.
(**Action:** Assistant Director: Children and Families)

It was resolved to:

- a) note the report.

9. YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

Members reviewed a report suggesting various ways in which they could get to know the county's Looked After Children and care leavers, and for the young people to get to know them. Officers confirmed that they would invite some young people to the initial training session requested by the Sub-Committee so that they could let Members know in person the things which were most important to them.

The following points were raised in discussion of the report and in response to questions from Members:

- The Chairman emphasised the importance of keeping young people informed of the decisions being made as a result of their input and to ensure two-way communication between members of the Sub-Committee and young people;
- Members re-stated their wish to establish an appropriate mechanism to ensure that the voices of younger Looked After Children and those who chose not to engage with representative groups like Voices Matter should still be heard. Officers undertook to reflect collectively on how best this might be achieved and how to most effectively communicate the Sub-Committees' discussions and decisions to young people;
(**Action:** Participation Manager)
- Members asked for advice on whether they should undergo a Disclosure and Barring Service check given that it was proposed that they would have direct access

to personal information about children and young people in care and, on occasion, direct contact with the children and young people themselves;
(**Action:** Assistant Director: Children and Families and Democratic Services Officer)

- Members endorsed the suggestions contained in the report for ways in which they could meet and start to get to know the LAC and care leavers;
- The Assistant Director: Children and Families offered bespoke safeguarding training to all members of the Sub-Committee as required.

It was resolved to:

- a) consider the various ways suggested to engage with Looked After Children;
- b) decide which methods are to be implemented.

10. VIRTUAL SCHOOL

The Head of the Virtual School introduced her report which set out the role of the Virtual School, provided the most current data on educational achievement for Cambridgeshire's Looked After children (LAC) and described the relationships between the Virtual School, the Accelerating the Achievement of Vulnerable Groups Steering Group and the Educational Achievement Board. She reported that a consultation on the role of the Virtual School and Headteacher and of the Designated Teacher in each school had recently taken place and that the results would be available in the new year. The Virtual School provided support to Cambridgeshire LAC from Early Years to the age of 18 and a seconded member of staff had been appointed to work with those at the top end of the age range to support their transition to Post-18 provision.

The following points were raised in discussion of the report and in response to questions from Members:

- The Chairman noted that Councillor Costello was one of two elected Members who sat on the Accelerating the Achievement of Vulnerable Groups Steering Group which would provide a useful perspective for the Sub-Committee on its work;
- The Head of the Virtual School reported that her team regularly visited schools which had Looked After Children on roll to offer support, including attending Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings where appropriate;
- A Member noted that there was no alternative provision within the county for girls under the age of 11 and asked what support was available to this group. The Head of the Virtual School confirmed that this was the case and that currently two girls within this age group were being provided with bespoke support packages. The Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability Services was carrying out a review of the support provided to children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs and this would be used to inform decisions about the shape of future provision;
- Pupil Premium Plus payments for Looked After Children were made to the Head of the Virtual School who was responsible for their allocation, so they were always used to benefit the child for whom they were intended;

- Personal Education Plans were subject to quality assurance every term;
- Due to the relatively small number of Looked After Children and the unique nature of each child's particular needs it was difficult to draw meaningful comparisons with the educational performance of their peers, or even in comparison with other LAC in the county or nationally. A different dashboard was being developed which it was hoped would address this issue and this should be available for the next meeting. Members welcomed this work, but stated that they would still want the report to contain one-off achievement figures too.

It was resolved to:

- a) note and comment on the report.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee will meet next in February 2018, date and venue to be arranged.

Chairman
(date)