

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 25 April 2018

Time: 16.30-18.35pm

Venue: Room 128, Shire Hall, Cambridge

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

Co-opted Members: P Asker and S Day

Apologies: None

24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence or declarations of interest.

25. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 21 FEBRUARY 2018

The minutes of the meeting on 21 February 2018 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

26. ACTION LOG

The Committee reviewed and noted the Action Log. The Chairman stated that it had been resolved at the previous meeting to ask the Chairman of the Children and Young People (CYP) Committee and the Executive Director for People and Communities to consider adding the question of possible council tax discounts or exemptions for care leavers to the agenda for a future CYP meeting. It was anticipated that this would go to the next CYP meeting and officers were investigating the issue in more detail in order to provide the necessary facts and figures to enable the Committee to make a considered decision.

27. CO-OPTION OF TWO YOUNG PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVES

The Chairman stated that she was delighted to report that two young people had agreed to join the Sub-Committee as non-voting Co-opted members to represent the views of the county's Looked After Children and care leavers. The appointments would be for a period of two years with the option of extending this for a further year by mutual agreement. The Co-opted members would bring forward items for consideration representing all age groups and cohorts and she welcomed and encouraged their full participation in the Sub-Committee's work. It was important to be mindful that the Co-opted members' role was to represent the collective views and experience of Looked After Children and care leavers in Cambridgeshire. Whilst this might on occasion include aspects of their own experience she reminded all present that meetings were a public forum and that no personal information would be offered or sought.

It was resolved to:

- a) co-opt P Asker and S Day as non-voting members of the Sub-Committee for a period of two years, with the option of extending this for a further year by mutual consent.

28. YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

The Participation Service Development Managers welcomed the co-option of two young people's representatives to the Sub-Committee. A third young person had agreed to attend as a substitute if needed and it was hoped to identify an additional substitute to try to make sure two young people were able to attend every meeting. Following each meeting the Co-opted members would provide feedback on what was discussed and the decisions taken to all of the county's Looked After Children and care leavers. They would also take a key role through Voices Matter to establish a two way flow of information between the young people and the Sub-Committee. Officers would work with the Co-opted members to agree how best they could support this work.

A number of changes to the staffing and organisation of the Participation Service were reported. These included the appointment of Jacqui Barry and Claire Betteridge as the strategic leads for the service. The recruitment of two participation workers was underway and once appointed they would work with the Co-opted members, Voices Matter, officers and Sub-Committee members to shape the future role of the Participation Service. All Looked After Children and care leavers were being updated about the changes.

During discussion it was noted that:

- The next meeting of Voices Matter had been due to take place in May during the main exam period and so would be rescheduled;
- The annual Fun Day and celebratory events would look a little different this year due to the on-going changes in staffing, although the offer would be fulfilled. Officers would work closely with the Sub-Committee on the shape of this offer in future years. The Chairman commented that she hoped it would be possible to offer a fun outdoor social event this summer at a convenient location, perhaps in the form of a family picnic. She asked that plans for the event and the date should be shared with Members when available;
(**Action:** Participation Service Managers)
- Fiona MacKirdy had now left the County Council and had been replaced by Fiona van den Hout as the Head of County Wide and Looked After Children.

It was resolved to:

- a) note the update regarding the Participation Team and steps to involve young people within the Sub-Committee.

29. PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Assistant Director for Children's Services invited questions on the report and continued feedback on the content and presentation of the information it contained. She noted that the data was correct as of February 2018 which was the most up to date information available at the time the report was published.

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

- There had again been an issue with late notifications from Social Care impacting on initial health assessments and this had been exacerbated by some large sibling groups coming into care during the period. Officers were working hard to address this issue;
- Paragraph 2.9: The Vice-Chairman noted that in February 2018 73% of the county's Looked After Children were placed with foster carers and 7% in children's homes. She asked that future reports should specify how the remaining children were accommodated to give a complete picture;
(**Action:** Head of Partnerships and Quality Assurance)
- Paragraph 2.10: Members noted a continued reduction in the number of Looked After Children reported missing within the month in the period to February 2018. Officers reported that this reflected the national experience that the number of children going missing tended to reduce during periods of bad weather. In the majority of cases children went missing for very short periods, but there was a formal notification process for any case where a child was missing for more than six hours. This included it being reported to the Assistant Director for Children's Services and a multi-agency team response. Any child going missing was offered a return interview to talk through the reasons for them leaving their placement;
- A Member asked whether any assessment had been carried out of the time and cost implications of social workers visiting those children accommodated outside of the county. Officers confirmed that the Joint Commissioning Unit was very much aware of this issue and was constantly striving to accommodate more children within Cambridgeshire as this offered the best outcomes in the majority of cases, as well as being the most cost effective;
- Officers stated that current practice was to stay in touch with care leavers until the age of 21 or the age of 25 for those still in education. Under new legislation the offer to stay in touch could be extended to all care leavers up to the age of 25 which officers considered a very positive development;
- The Chairman noted that the report stated that a sharp increase had been seen in February 2018 in the number of boys at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) and asked for more information. Officers noted that the figures in the report related to all children in Cambridgeshire and not solely to Looked After Children. The CSE risk assessment tool had been agreed by the Local Safeguarding Children Board and was an evidence-based multi-agency bench-marking tool which drew on information from a wide variety of sources including social workers, education and health care professionals, police, parents and the children themselves. Local intelligence was being used to look at what was happening to safeguard any child identified as at risk;

- In response to a question from the Chairman, the Co-opted Young People's representatives stated that they found the current report format more accessible than previous versions;
- Officers stated that the increase in the number of Looked After Children who had three or more placements during the year was by definition a cumulative figure. Whilst no child should have more placements than was necessary there was sometimes a good reason for this, but each case was scrutinised closely. The Vice Chairman asked whether it would be helpful in future reports to show those changes in placement which arose from natural progression and those which resulted in placement breakdown. Officers noted the need to avoid numbers becoming so small that individual children might be identified and suggested that they review the figures and discuss the presentation of this information in future reports with the Chairman before the next meeting. A separate agenda item on placement breakdowns would also be added to the Forward Agenda Plan to allow the Sub-Committee to explore this issue in more detail;
(**Action:** Head of Partnerships and Quality Assurance/ Democratic Services Officer)
- The Assistant Director for Children's Services reported that the Voices Matter panel had offered valid challenge to officers in relation to 'Staying Put', whereby fostered young people in England had the right to stay with their foster families when they reached 18, if both parties agreed. She suggested that this should be added to the Forward Agenda Plan so that the Sub-Committee could examine and hold officers to account on their response;
(**Action:** Democratic Services Officer)
- The Chairman invited the Co-opted members to consider whether there was any additional information they would like to see included in future Performance Reports and let the Participation Service Managers know.
(**Action:** Participation Managers)

Summing up, the Chairman thanked officers for their continued work to develop the content and presentation of the Performance Report to provide the Sub-Committee with key data and to identify trends.

It was resolved to:

- a) review performance in relation to Looked After Children;
- b) comment on the themes and trends identified in the report.

30. VIRTUAL SCHOOL

The Head of the Virtual School stated that in response to a request from Members at the last meeting her report contained current key data relating to the Virtual School and suggested possible areas for future detailed consideration.

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

- Paragraph 2.1: Members noted higher numbers of Looked After Children in Years 10-13 and asked whether this reflected a change of policy at that point. Officers stated that the majority of mid-term and emergency additions and unaccompanied

asylum seeking children (UASC) were seen within this older age range, leading to higher overall numbers;

- Officers confirmed that the higher percentage of Looked After Children with special educational needs (SEN) amongst the older age groups reflected a standard pattern as additional needs were identified over time;
- The Head of the Virtual School reported a significant number of unscheduled school moves amongst students in Year 11. The Assistant Director for Children's Services stated that officers actively sought to maintain the stability of educational placements during Year 11, but that in some cases it was not possible to achieve this. It could be particularly difficult in the case of young people coming into care at short notice within this age group;
- The Virtual School did not work with pre-Early Years children and it continued to work with young people until they finished their Year 13 studies, so the number of students was not directly comparable with the total number of Looked After Children;
- A Member expressed concern about the holistic outcomes and cost implications of the high number of Looked After children being educated out of county. Officers stated that meetings were carried out by Skype where appropriate to reduce Virtual School staff time and travel costs, but acknowledged that this was a continuing area of challenge;
- Paragraph 2.3: A Member highlighted the relatively small sum of £300 per year of central Government funding for Looked After Early Years children which limited the interventions which could be funded. Officers acknowledged the importance of early intervention to support the best outcomes long-term and stated that an application could be made to fund additional support for Early Years children with specific needs;
- Paragraph 2.4: A Member welcomed the positive impact of the Year 6 Intervention Project, but noted that this was limited to a single year. Officers stated that they were currently examining whether similar interventions might be extended to cover Years 2 to 5 via a top-slice of the pupil premium;
- Officers reported that a second officer had recently been appointed to work with students at Key Stage 5 to allow students to work with the same person throughout Years 11-13. They reported a strong improvement in completion rates for Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for post-16 students from around 40% to around 90% in the most recently reported figures. Careers advice for Looked After Children should be a priority in schools, but it was unclear if this was the case. However, all Looked After Children would have a named Virtual School link person and they could contact them for additional guidance. A Co-opted Member questioned the training that careers advisers received and whether their expectations in relation to Looked After Children were sufficiently aspirational.

The Chairman emphasised the importance of high quality careers advice to all young people and the impact which this could have on their future outcomes. She noted that less of Cambridgeshire's Looked After Children were moving into higher education than those cared for by its statistical neighbours. It was imperative that Looked After Children received the careers advice and support they needed to

enable to them to realise their full potential. The Sub-Committee would welcome a focus on Post 16s and the Year 6 Intervention Project in the next Virtual School report. This should include information on what the new and existing Virtual School staff were doing to support Post 16s generally and with particular regard to accessing further and higher education. Members would also welcome different data being included in the report, including on placement moves. The report in September should focus on admissions, refusals and alternative provision and should again include a section containing current data relating to the Virtual School. (**Action:** Head of the Virtual School).

It was resolved to:

- a) identify and prioritise items for future agendas.

31. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN: REDUCING THOSE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING – REFRESHED STRATEGY

The Countywide Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Manager stated that the county's NEET reduction strategy had recently been reviewed and would be presented to the Children and Families Leadership Team in May 2018. The refreshed strategy aimed to establish cross-directorate support to stop young care leavers becoming NEET. This would include support prior to Year 11 and for the transition to Post 16; within Years 12 and 13; and with moving into employment and in relation to benefits, especially for those in supported housing. It would also cover data, quality assurance and workforce development including training for those supporting young people to ensure the full range of services were offered to them. The agreed version would be shared with the Sub-Committee at a future date. (**Action:** Countywide NEET Manager/ Democratic Services)

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

- Care leavers were a vulnerable group and their reasons for becoming NEET were varied;
- A Member asked whether Virtual School staff would be working with schools to make sure that Personal Education Plan (PEP) reviews were being carried out promptly and that it was clear who was responsible for making sure this happened;
- Post 16 young people would have a Pathway Plan in addition to a PEP. Both Plans were led by the young person and co-ordinating the two Plans was a developing area of work.

Summing up, the Chairman stated that it would be useful to bring the NEET Strategy back to the Sub-Committee after sign-off. That report should also include NEET Looked After Children figures relating to schools and alternative provision settings and information on quality assurance in relation to alternative provision in relation to Looked After Children. (**Action:** Countywide NEET Manager)

It was resolved:

- a) note the report.

32. FOSTER CARE RECRUITMENT UPDATE

The Residential and Placements Provisions Manager stated that 73% of Cambridgeshire's Looked After Children were currently placed with foster carers. In November 2017 the General Purposes Committee had agreed substantial additional investment from the Council's Transformation Fund to finance a three year programme to recruit additional in-house foster carers. The aim was to launch this new campaign in June 2018. With the permission of the Chairman he tabled a paper providing recent additional information on numbers and types of fostering placements.

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

- Officers confirmed that existing in-house foster carers and Looked After Children continued to be an integral part of the training provided to new foster carers. A focus group had been established to inform the new three year strategy and included one foster carer who had returned to the in-house fostering service from an independent provider;
- Officers confirmed that they continuously reviewed the support package offered by independent fostering agencies to ensure that the in-house offer remained competitive;
- Feedback from foster carers who had returned to the in-house service suggested that agency carers could sometimes be left with empty beds and that they preferred to be kept busier;
- Officers emphasised the need to be honest and transparent with prospective foster carers about their understanding of a young person;
- Officers confirmed that there were geographical differences in the recruitment of foster carers with it being relatively easier to attract people in Huntingdonshire and Fenland and relatively more difficult to recruit new people in the City;
- A Member asked whether it would be possible to work with independent providers with places in Cambridgeshire to see if they would be willing to allocate these places to Cambridgeshire children in return for the Council offering up places it held with out of county providers. Officers stated that many independent foster carers within the county would have out of county children in settled places and they would not want to disrupt these. They had approached some agencies and asked them to let the Council know when they had places become available within Cambridgeshire. However, there was no requirement on them to comply. The Independent Fostering contract was due for renewal at the end of the year and the issue would be reviewed again then;
- A Co-opted Member asked whether Looked After Children and young people might usefully be involved in recruitment days and activities for prospective new foster carers. Officers confirmed that this option could be explored and reported that some local authorities offer short 'speed-dating' style sessions with existing foster carers, young people, social works and other key stakeholders to give them a flavour of the range of support on offer;

- The Assistant Director for Children's Services stated that the Council's offer to foster care carer's was second to none and that it was vital that prospective foster carers were made aware of the quality of the support package on offer.

Summing up, the Chairman stated that all councillors were acutely aware of the invaluable role played by foster carers and were committed to supporting them in this. She would welcome a further update report in September 2018 and asked that this should include proposals on how the Sub-Committee could actively engage foster carers in its work.

(Action: Residential and Placements Provisions Manager/ Democratic Services Officer)

It was resolved to:

- a) note the report.

33. FORWARD AGENDA PLAN

The Sub-Committee reviewed and commented on the forward agenda plan.

It was resolved to:

- a) note and comment on the agenda plan.

34. SUB-COMMITTEE WORKSHOP AND TRAINING PLAN

The Chairman thanked the Participation Service Development Managers for the useful and informative training session which they had delivered for Sub-Committee members on 10 April 2018. This had been followed by a visit to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub in Huntingdon which Members had also found most useful. Members confirmed that they would like the next training session to focus on foster care. The Chairman asked that officers should also discuss with Co-opted Members how best to meet their training needs.

(Action: Participation Service Development Managers/ Residential and Placements Provisions Manager)

It was resolved to:

- a) note and comment on the Sub-Committee Training Plan.

35. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Sub-Committee will meet next on Wednesday 13 June 2018 in Meeting Room 2, Huntingdon Library, Princes Street, Huntingdon.

Chairman
(date)