

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee: Minutes

Date: Wednesday 20th March 2024

Time: 4.00pm - 5.40pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald PE28 4YE

Present: Councillors A Bradnam (from 4.38pm), E Meschini, A Hay, A Sharp and P Slatter (Chair)

Meeting Theme: Health

97. Chair's Announcements

The Vice Chair advised that the Chair sent apologies that they would be joining the meeting late as they were chairing a meeting at another local authority. The Vice Chair would take the chair for the duration of this meeting.

Members paid tribute to Councillor Mac McGuire, who had sadly passed away. He would be much missed.

98. Changes to Sub-Committee Membership

The Committee noted that Councillor Alan Sharp succeeded Councillor Mac McGuire as a Member of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on 8 December 2023, and that Councillor Elisa Meschini was appointed a substitute member of the Sub-Committee on 21 February 2024.

99. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bulat (substituted by Councillor Meschini).

There were no declarations of interest.

100. Minutes – 15th November 2023 and Minutes Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th November 2023 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

Members reviewed the minutes and action log. With regard to Minute 89, Foster Carer Update, the Chair raised that there had been a discussion around making more or larger housing available to foster carers so that they could care for children, or increase the number of children in their care. They asked that this should be added to the action log with an update requested or that a report on this should be brought to a future meeting. **Action required.**

The Service Director advised that officers were working on the Corporate Parenting Strategy and that dates to discuss this would be circulated at the end of the month. It was proposed to establish a Corporate Parenting Steering Group rather than a board. The terms of reference would be circulated to all Sub-Committee members. **Action required.**

101. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

102. Participation Report

The Participation report ensured children and young people in care were empowered to express their voices and experiences to improve services, for example through the Children in Care Council and Care Experience Forum.

The presenting officer highlighted the start of both the Participation and Strategic Group and a Youth Group located in March. Drop-in sessions at key provider locations were also available, and the Council had re-launched the Mind of My Own app.

Individual Members raised the following points in relation to the report:

- questioned how success was measured regarding the Participation Strategic Group and the Bright Spots Survey. The officer highlighted that the Bright Spots Survey was commissioned by an independent company.
- highlighted that the Bright Spots Survey differed from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire.
- sought further information regarding the March Youth Club, commenting that they would like to see this facility made available to more children. Officers advised that geography was a barrier to in-person engagement in Cambridgeshire, but that the March club was open to all between the ages of around 8 and 13.
- sought clarification on how the Children in Care Council operated. Members learnt that it was currently only an in-person offer, unlike the Care Leavers Offer, as the online safety of younger children remained a priority. However, officers were keen to explore ways to engage safely with as many young people as possible.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the contents of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with the lead officers.

103. Cambridgeshire Fostering Service and Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (CFCA) Report

Members received a report from the Fostering Service in partnership with the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (CFCA). Foster carer retention was a key

focus of the partnership, and a Retention Working Group had been established. The CFCA had raised issues reported by foster carers such as: delays with passports, transport for children in care, savings for children in care, emergency clothing payments, re-evaluation of fostering fees and allowances, childrens' files, online safety training and the dialogue between the Fostering Service and CFCA.

Individual Members raised the following points in relation to the report:

- queried the average delay regarding passports. Officers did not have these figures, but highlighted the frustration that some foster carers were experiencing.
- questioned when responses to the CFCA's queries about delays with passports and transport for children in care would be available. The Members were informed that this information would be included in the report to the next meeting. – **Action required.**
- queried the issues with transport for children in care. Officers highlighted that transport could need to be more specialised than other education transport and the Fostering Service were in conversations with the Education Transport Team.
- welcomed the exploration of giving carers more delegated authority.

[Councillor Bradnam joined the meeting at 4.38pm]

- learnt that foster carer remuneration arrangements were complex. The CFCA had received assurances that this would be reviewed and that foster carers would be consulted. It was expected that it would take around a year to develop a fair and equitable system.
- confirmed that fostering households had an £18k tax allowance and foster carers were supported through the Fostering Network to ensure they were paying the correct tax.
- emphasised the importance of training for foster carers regarding online safety. Members were informed that the NSPCC had good training resources on its website, but many foster carers benefited from additional support. The aim ultimately was for social workers to have the skills to provide support with this.
- acknowledged that there had been communication challenges in the past between officers and the CFCA, but that a strong relationship was now being forged. Officers highlighted the work being done by the Chair of the CFCA , and emphasised the importance of recognising foster carers as a group of lead professionals.
- welcomed the relaunch of the retention meetings.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the content of the report.
- b) Raise any queries they have with the lead officers.

104. Annual Health Report February 2024

The Sub-Committee received a report which provided an update on health services for children in care. The report provided an overview of the Integrated Care Board's (ICB) activities to ensure robust monitoring and quality assurance systems were in place to meet the health needs of Cambridgeshire's children in care including those with a disability. The Designated Nurse highlighted that the report was produced prior to the launch of the pathway, therefore they hoped to see an improvement the timeliness of the completion of initial health assessments (IHAs) in the next report. They also highlighted that although there were delays, all required health assessments were being completed. Use of enduring consent would help speed up Review Health Assessments.

Individual Members raised the following points in relation to the report:

- queried why the majority of Initial Health Assessments (IHA) were not completed within twenty working days. Members were informed that there had been a high turnover in staff in Children's Services, however the new Head of Corporate Parenting was leading work to improve performance.
- asked about access to dental care for children in care. The presenting officer highlighted that free prescriptions for care leavers were being explored. All children could access NHS dental services, but the issue was with local capacity. Members learnt that 77% of children in care in Cambridgeshire had seen a dentist in the last 12 months, which was higher than the average for other 0 to 18-year-olds in Cambridgeshire. There were five dentists across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough who provided open access to children in care.
- were pleased to see the positive immunisation uptake.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the content of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with the Lead Officers.

105. Clinical Team Annual Report February 2024.

Members received the Clinical Team Annual Report. The Clinical Lead highlighted an error in Table 3.6, which included 79% which should have been removed. The team was almost fully staffed, although it was highlighted that the Specialist Clinician vacancy was not a full-time position. The number of referrals had doubled in the past year.

Individual Members raised the following points in relation to the report:

- confirmed that the therapy models had shown to be effective in practice. Members were informed that there was a selection of therapy models and each clinician was trained in their own specialist modality. The presenting officer assured Members that the Clinical Team would not use practices that were not researched.
- queried the declined referrals mentioned in 3.6 and 3.8 of the report. Members were informed that children needed a period of time to adjust to a new home before

therapeutic work could begin. The Clinical Team would provide comprehensive and robust feedback to social workers, with information on when, and how, to be referred back to the Clinical Team.

- clarified that half of the clinicians had undertaken trainer training, with the aim for the whole team to be trained.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the content of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with the Lead Officers.

106. Corporate Parenting Performance Report

The report provided an update to the Sub-Committee on the performance monitoring information for February 2024. The Chair had exercised their discretion to allow an updated report to be tabled which included some data and presentational corrections.

Individual Members raised the following points in relation to the report:

- queried the staffing numbers stated in the scorecard as '#N/A.' Members were informed that this was an error, and the correct information would be presented at the next meeting – **Action required**.
- clarified that the Service Standards targets were set by the Authority.
- highlighted that information on homes stability was missing from the Homes section of the scorecard.
- asked for more information regarding the 12.2% of children in care who have had 3 or more homes in the last 12 months. Members were informed that the percentage included positives moves, such as a move from a short term to long term placement. A report would be presented at the next committee meeting analysing home stability.
- highlighted an error in the scorecard which stated that 0% of children who had been in care for 2.5 years had been in their current home for 2 years or more. The presenting officer clarified the correct figure was 73.3%, which was above the target of 68%.
- questioned how the 66.6% of Cambridgeshire's children in care in schools rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted compared to the wider cohort and asked that officers explore adding this to the scorecard. **Action required**
- clarified that the reference to 7% of initial health assessments being completed on time was an error.
- highlighted that the percentage of children leaving care who were adopted should be 22.2%, not 25.7%.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note and comment on performance information.

107. Sub-Committee Workshop and Training Plan

An officer highlighted the aim to provide Local Government Association training on corporate parenting to Members. The Chair highlighted the importance of making trauma awareness training available to all Members. **Action required**

The workshop and training plan were noted.

108. Sub-Committee Agenda Plan

A Member suggested that officers write to District Council housing providers to remind them of their statutory responsibilities to care leavers and asking them to be mindful of the need for fostering households to have more bedrooms to enable them to care for more children. It was recognised that the decision rested with District Councils. The Service Director for Fostering, Adoption and Corporate Parenting undertook to reflect on this. **Action required**.

The agenda plan was noted.

Chair