

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee: Minutes

Date: Wednesday 29 March 2023

Time: 16:00pm – 17:15 pm

Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors A Bradnam (Chair), A Bulat, A Hay, and P Slatter

Meeting theme: Health

63. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor L Nethsingha (Councillor Philippa Slatter substituting) and from T Stephenson, Chair of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers Association (non-voting observer)

There were no declarations of interest.

64. Minutes – 16 November 2022 and Minutes Action Log

With regard to Minute 57, Virtual School Report, Councillor Bulat clarified that she was Chair of the Combined Authority South ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) Local Partnership. Subject to this clarification, the minutes of the meeting on 16 November 2022 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

The action log was noted. Councillors requested that action log items 58-61 were actioned, and the action log updated to reflect this before the next meeting. Action required.

65. Petitions and Public Questions

There were no petitions or public questions.

66. Participation Report

The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee received a report on activities run by the Participation Team for children and young people in care. This included young people's involvement in: informal Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee meetings; the Virtual School's 'Usualising Care' project; the 'Every Word Matters' project and recording studio session; an examination of suitable housing and the joint housing protocol by the Care Leavers Forum; a meeting with the Chair of the Children and Young People

Committee and the Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire County Council; the recruitment of foster carers, Anglia Ruskin university social work degree applicants and ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) newly qualified social workers; a youth leadership event hosted by the British Youth Council; and contact centre inspections. Future action by the young people included: a consultation on the impact of South Cambridgeshire District Council's services on young people; the Annual Children in Care Awards; a potential podcast through the 'Every Word Matters' project; and Easter activities chosen by the young people.

The Chair thanked officers for the work of the Participation Team.

In their discussion of the report, members:

- Asked that reports and project names used language that was accessible for young people. Asked that a more meaningful phrase be identified to replace 'usualising care'. Officers undertook to raise this with the Virtual School, which was leading on this work. **Action required.**
- Expressed pleasure that the young people in care had been invited to engage with a South Cambridgeshire District Council task and finish group.
- Stated that they had used questions proposed by the Children in Care Council at interviews the previous week for the new Executive Director for Children, Education and Families.
- Learned that there were currently eleven members of the Children in Care Council, but that attendance at meetings varied due to after-school activities and other commitments. Meetings were arranged for different days to facilitate wider attendance. Care Leaver Forum meetings were attended by varying numbers of care leavers, and this tended to depend on the subject matter. In November, the Care Leaver Forum had hosted a 'meet and greet' event to encourage wider engagement and work to recruit new members was on-going.
- Were informed that Anglia Ruskin University had asked for input when assessing social work degree applications from two trained young recruiters bi-monthly for an eight-month period. There was a pool of around 20 trained and supported young recruiters.
- Asked whether Sub-Committee members would see the young inspectors' report on Cherry Lodge. Officers suggested that this could be added to the next informal Sub-Committee meeting so that the young people could present it. **Action required.**

It was resolved to:

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

67. Report from Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association and the Fostering Service

The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee received a standing report on the work of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (CFCA) and the Fostering Service. This included information on: the new transport booking portal; the establishment of a feedback loop system to look at how issues raised by the Foster Carer Forum but beyond the remit of the Fostering Service could be addressed; coffee mornings for potential foster carer applicants; the new Head of the Fostering Service; and payment of a further one-off £250 cost of living payment per household. Scheduled activity included: a questionnaire for the CFCA annual meeting and business plan; a summer picnic; preparations for the annual Children in Care Awards; incorporation of the national passport policy in the fostering induction pack; a review of payments to improve financial support; and work to facilitate access for children in care to their savings, especially when leaving care. The Easter Activity Day had been cancelled due to an increase in coronavirus cases, but the summer activity programme was scheduled to go ahead.

The CFCA currently had 163 registered households and the Fostering Service was continuing to work closely with the Association and with all of Cambridgeshire's foster carers. This included a carer retention working group which continued to meet monthly. Feedback in response to this had been positive, and in the 2022/23 financial year had led to the retention of 13 fostering households who might have been considering leaving fostering.

In response to the report, members:

- Noted that the foster carer recruitment campaign remained on-going. This would make a wider call for foster carers in response to concerns that focussing recruitment on certain groups might discourage some people from applying. The campaign used online platforms.
- Received confirmation that there was currently a net loss of foster carers to the county. Although the Council offered carers comprehensive non-financial support, movement away from the in-house service into private companies occurred predominantly due to the level of remuneration available. The Chair asked for data on the number of in-house foster carers leaving the service and the reasons why. Action required.
- Emphasised the need to ensure that the importance of foster carers was recognised throughout the Council.
- Expressed appreciation that a further one-off cost of living payment had been provided to foster carers. The member pressed that action should continue to be taken to improve foster carer retention.
- Were informed about a member champion role in Peterborough.

- Thanked the Chair and Vice Chair of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association for their contributions.

It was resolved to note the report.

68. Health Report

The Designated Nurse introduced the health report, highlighting an above average completion rate for review health assessments completed within statutory timescales and improved access to dental services for children and young people in care. A health questionnaire had been completed by the Children in Care Council seeking their views about health appointments. The four responses received indicated that the young people preferred face to face appointments. This would provide useful evidence in discussions with health providers. Feedback on the format of the questionnaire favoured fewer and more use of multiple choice questions. There was evidence that questions were understood literally and this would be considered in future studies.

The completion of initial health assessments (IHAs) within statutory deadlines remained an area of challenge. The Designated Nurse gave an assurance that 100% of IHAs were completed, but acknowledged that the numbers completed within statutory deadlines were low. Since coming into post the Designated Nurse had requested further information to understand the delay in completing the IHAs within the 20 day timeframe. Members noted that nearly half of social care referrals were received after the 20 working day target. This may be due to other priority safeguarding activities taking place during that period or delays obtaining the necessary consents.

The Chair stated that the timeliness of IHAs was a continued area of concern for the sub-committee. She was reassured that the Designated Nurse shared this concern and partnership work with the Head of Corporate Parenting was planned to address this. She further noted that feedback from the questionnaire stated that a child had not understood the language used and emphasised the need for professionals to use accessible language.

The Head of the Assessment Service gave an assurance that he would work with managers within his team to see how the IHA referrals process could be expedited.

In their discussion of the report, members:

- Learned that a national audit had commenced to look nationally at delays in initial health assessment completion times.
- Noted that it was taking an average of 16.5 days in Cambridgeshire from an IHA referral being received to the assessment being carried out, so if referrals could be expedited the county was well placed to achieve the statutory 20 working day timescale.
- Were reassured that in all cases a child received a paediatric child protection medical assessment within 24 hours of entering care, so any immediate health needs would be identified at that point.

- Understood that a health action plan was formulated as part of the IHA which allocated responsibility for actions associated with the child's plan.
- Asked whether capping the number of IHA appointments to 15 per month would lead to a backlog.
- Promoted the importance of preventative measures in relation to dentistry to mitigate the impact of NHS dentistry service waiting lists. The Healthy Mouth Programme was already being delivered by Public Health and the Chair asked that the Director of Public Health should be asked what training in teeth cleaning and gum care were delivered in schools and pre-schools. Members also raised the possibility of using unspent central government resource to deliver private dental care nationally for children in care. **Action required**
- Agreed that data from the NHS England national audit would be shared with the Sub-Committee when available. **Action required.**
- Recognised that children responded to the questionnaire freely, adding additional options and comments to questions. The Designated Nurse acknowledged respondents' expressed preference for multiple choice questions, but noted that this could limit the responses received.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the content of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with the lead officer.

69. Performance Scorecard

The performance scorecard demonstrated that of the 644 children in care, 191 had been placed with in-house foster carers; 91 were in independent living accommodation; 59 were in residential care; and 13 were with their parents.

In response to the report, members:

- Asked whether the average caseload was high in comparison to other local authorities, especially for Independent Reviewing Officers. Officers advised that IROs caseloads were well within the guidance of 72 cases. Children's social worker caseloads were higher than would be wished and an active recruitment campaign was being undertaken with the aim of reducing caseload numbers over time.
- Were reassured that the service considered the Ofsted rating of schools attended by children in care. Officers would avoid placing a child or young person in a school with a rating below Good. However, if a child was settled in a school which subsequently received a lower Ofsted rating they would need to consider whether a change in school was in the child's best interests. It might be considered more

appropriate to put in place an additional support package, in liaison with the Virtual School.

The Chair noted that the time taken to achieve adoption had increased and asked whether there was a strategy in place to improve this. Officers stated that the service aimed for permanent placement where possible, although for some children a long-term placement took more time and this impacted permanency figures. The Head of the Regional Adoption Agency was asked to provide an update to the sub-committee on permanent placements. Action required.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the content of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with the lead officer.

70. Sub-Committee Workshop and Training Plan

Details of a relational and developmental trauma and loss workshop taking place on 27 April 2023 would be recirculated to members after the meeting, alongside further information on PARCA (Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Refugee Community Association). Action required.

It was resolved to:

Note the sub-committee's workshop and training plan.

71. Agenda Plan

It was resolved to:

Note the sub-committee's agenda plan.

(Chair)