

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee: Minutes

Date: Wednesday 16 November 2022

Time: 16:00pm – 17:35 pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors A Bradnam (Chair), A Bulat, A Hay, M McGuire (left 17:00pm) and L Nethsingha (Vice-Chair)

Non-voting observer:

T Stephenson – Chair, Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association

Meeting theme: Education

51. Membership Update

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the appointment of Councillor L Nethsingha to the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on 22 September 2022, replacing Councillor P Slatter.
- b) Note that Councillor P Slatter was appointed as a substitute member of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee on 22 September 2022.
- c) Note that Councillor L Nethsingha was appointed Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee by the Children and Young People Committee on 19 October 2022.

52. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

There were no apologies for absence or declarations of interest.

53. Minutes – 3 August 2022 and Minutes Action Log

A member commented that some action log updates had not been provided and requested that actions were numbered in future to improve ease of referencing. Officers undertook to update the action log and circulate it before the sub-committee's next meeting. Action required.

The minutes of the meeting on 3 August 2022 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

The action log was noted.

54. Petitions and Public Questions

There were no petitions or public questions.

55. Participation Report

The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee received a report which noted activities run by the Participation Team which delivered projects and events for young people in care. This included young people's involvement in: the Every Word Matters project, a lyric writing workshop, mural construction at a supervised contact centre, a virtual art exhibition, training for foster carers and ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) newly qualified social workers, and a performance project. The Children in Care Council had also met with members of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee, designed coming into care packs, and created a video.

In response to the report, members:

- Congratulated the Participation Team for winning the Coram National Voice Participation Award.
- Thanked officers for supporting young people to attend informal Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee meetings.
- Welcomed the ways in which the Every Word Matters work had influenced language used on the Performance Scorecard.

It was resolved to:

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

56. Report from Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association

The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee received a standing report on the work of the Foster Carers' Association. This included:

- Authorising foster carers to make minor amendments to transport arrangements, such as pick up times, to address concerns regarding transport provision.
- Additional work was taking place to address the delay in transport plans for emergency care arrangements.

- Removal of the annual review of those in settled circumstances.
- Process development and employment of a business support officer had occurred to mitigate concerns regarding young people's savings.
- An £100 emergency clothing allowance would be paid as e-vouchers, rather than the expenditure needing to be paid up front by foster carers and reclaimed.
- Procedure had been implemented to aid the quick acquisition of passports.
- Retention had increased. Between the 2021 and 2022 April-September quarter, there had been a 47% reduction in foster carer resignations. Further, most resignations had been retirements. Newly implemented retention visits had occurred for eleven households, eight of which had remained in the service.

It was noted that, since report publication, the number of Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association Committee members had increased from four to six. The committee were aiming for twelve to sixteen members.

The recently elected Chair of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association, Tracey Stephenson, thanked officers for their help in producing the report. She noted that 100/176 foster care households in Cambridgeshire had opted into the CFCA. A survey was being produced to establish what support existing members required, but the CFCA currently offered: monthly meetings; in-person support groups in Huntingdonshire, Cambridge, Ely and Fenland; an online teenager carer support group (as requested by the retention group); a mentor scheme for new foster carers and those under assessment; and a carer retention working group.

In response to the report, sub-committee members:

- Reflected upon promotion of membership to the CFCA through incorporation of its details in welcome packs and CFCA attendance at Foster Service events, such as Journey to Foster training and the Emergency Foster Care event scheduled for 25 November 2022. Fostering mentors often belonged to the CFCA and also promoted the organisation in the mentor group's bi-monthly meetings and at events. Supervising social workers were also utilised to establish why foster carers might choose not to be a part of the organisation.
- Established that the additional payment of £250 to foster carers to address rising energy costs was singular as the service was unable to provide further funding. Additional methods of supporting carers through the energy crisis were being sought and Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee members were invited to contribute their own ideas. One member suggested collaboration with the district councils, some of which were already providing signposting to financial aid and employee assistance programmes.
- Requested that, in future, the service complete the 'Alignment with Corporate Priorities' section of the report. Action required.

It was resolved to note the report.

57. Virtual School Report

The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee received a report which detailed the work of the Virtual School with regard to children in care, children previously in care, and children with a social worker. There had been a 60% rise in enquires to the Virtual School from carers of children previously in care. The response to this had been an increase in resource and seeking proactive measures, such as providing training. Trauma informed training was being strengthened across the education directorate and now used virtual reality headsets. Also, an app was in development for social workers which would provide signposting for Children in Need and those with Child Protection Plans. Key successes of the Virtual School included the introduction of target attainment and progress monitoring in personal education plans; and collaboration with thirteen academy trusts.

In response to the report, sub-committee members:

- Thanked officers for the content of the report and appreciated the glossary included at the back.
- Welcomed the Virtual School's collaboration with the Regional Adoption Agency.
- Noted that training provided by the Virtual School was available at no cost to all schools in Cambridgeshire and those outside Cambridgeshire attended by Cambridgeshire's young people in care. The offer was gaining traction as schools became aware of the Virtual School, and it was hoped that the County Council's involvement with this offer would increase uptake further. Councillors expressed that providing training for the management of children in care would help schools meet the needs of children outside the care system as well as within. Officers agreed, but noted that all schools had a statutory duty for SEN provision as well.
- Welcomed the service's work supporting young people awaiting refugee status and the right to work or employment in the UK. They encouraged partnership working on this subject with the Combined Authority's Skills Team and Planning Partnership for this. It was agreed that the Virtual School would contact Councillor Bulat, Combined Authority Independent Chair for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Planning Partnership, with regard to this. Action required.
- Established that home schooling for children in care was not advocated by the Virtual School, but that some children were educated off school site for reasons including placement change, escalation of need or awaiting special provision.

It was resolved to:

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

58. Regional Adoption Agency Annual Report

The first Annual Report of the Regional Adoption Agency noted that between April 2021 and March 2022: 65 children had been placed for adoption and 42 adopters had been approved; 18 Stage 1 complaints had been received, three of which were upheld. The budget for 2021/22 was £2,145,980 with an underspend of £288,108.28 caused predominantly by staff vacancies, including three managerial vacancies and a 50% social worker vacancy rate. This had resulted in increased wait times for the 107 referrals – a greater number than anticipated. Low recruitment had been mitigated by virtual information sessions and agency/ independent staffing. Vacancies were now filled.

In response to the report, members:

- Requested the report was circulated to the Children and Young People Committee. Action required.
- On behalf of the sub-committee, the Vice-Chair asked for their endorsement of the focus on early permanence to be communicated across.
- Heard that numbers of children with special guardianship orders or adoption referrals remained high, with 60-70 referrals for initial assessments from April - November 2022. This was especially true with regard to teenagers. Therefore, an additional social worker had been approved into the Support Team funded on an annual basis by the Adoption Support Fund. Further, it was anticipated that a group support offer would reduce waiting times. Increased therapeutic upskilling was also offered to support to families.
- Noted that the Regional Adoption Agency had no dedicated resource going forward and was developing a business case. The Assistant Director for Children and Safeguarding would discuss this outside of the meeting with the Executive Director for Children's Services and the Head of the Regional Adoption Agency. Action required.

It was resolved to:

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

59. Children in Care/ Care Leavers EET Promotion Action Plan Update

The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee received a report listing the action plan for promoting children and care leavers' access education, employment or training (EET). Quarterly reporting had been developed for NEET young people (those not in education, employment or training). Provisional data for 2022 showed that 54.1% of

young people were in education, employment or training. This was a 5.1% increase upon 2021 figures. Further, the most recent Anglian Ruskin University open day had been attended by ten young people in care.

The improvement had been caused by: early identification of children at risk, links with out of county support services, inclusion work, positive activities, careers guidance, partnerships with specialist education and training personal advisory organisations, challenging employer perceptions of young people in care, bespoke training and summer activities. The service was seeking to change attitudes towards EET and improve aspirations of young people through earlier future planning.

In response to the report, members:

- Were pleased at the efforts being made to improve young people's aspirations, including work with further education providers. Collaboration amongst education providers would inspire young people accessing courses at a lower level to progress learning.
- Suggested encouraging young people to consider language or IT courses. The officer responded that surveys received from personal advisers and social workers clarifying their young people's interests informed what industries the team promoted year on year. This ensured opportunities sought from education and training providers aligned with young people's interests. In the previous year, construction work had been the focus.
- Expressed a desire for quantitative data on EET outcomes for young people in each district. This was not currently available, although there was an appetite for it, in part due to Cambridgeshire care leavers not necessarily remaining in-county.

It was resolved to note and comment on the report.

60. Performance Scorecard

The performance scorecard demonstrated that of the 642 children in care, 214 had been placed in-house; 78 were in independent living accommodation; 56 were in residential care; and 10 were with their parents and subject to full care orders.

The officer thanked the Chair for creating an environment which empowered the young people to speak at the informal Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee. Following that meeting, wording on the scorecard had been adapted in response to challenges from young people regarding language. Young people had been invited to continue to reflect upon the scorecard.

In response to the report, sub-committee members:

- Agreed that targets for initial health assessments and annual dental examinations had been impacted by capacity, out of area placements, personal choice amongst older children, and recording. For children coming into care, resolving legal

concerns were often be deemed a higher priority by the social worker than these assessments. However, annual health assessment statistics were improving and there had been an increase in capacity for dental provision, despite dental health provision being a national issue. In some instances, annual health assessments were performed in Cambridgeshire for children also living out of area, although this movement could impact the child.

- Raised the drop in the number of care leavers with a pathway plan. Officers stated that high numbers had occurred due to failures in reporting, staff/team performance, difficulties for young people surrounding the transition to 18, and the failure to close the pathway plans of young people who had transitioned into adult social care. Effective action had occurred to mitigate this, including: temporary movement of social workers from the Under-18 Team into the Children in Care Team; clear demarcation of the Children in Care Team and Leaving Care Team; and retraining of social workers to improve individual performance.

Now pathway plan performance had improved – pathway plans had been completed for 95% of 18-21 year olds. Performance clinics and weekly data reviews occurred to ensure this statistic remained stable.

- Emphasised that, while preventative measures, such as monitoring and targeted strategies, occurred and residential units were good at reporting instances of children going missing, the numbers were cyclical, often with the same young people leaving their home repeatedly. Officers were seeking the cause of this through return interviews. Originally, they had theorised that it could be placement-based, seasonal or temperature dependent, but found that these theories were inaccurate. Officers noted that some slides on interpreting data for missing children had been produced and could be shared with councillors. **Action required.**
- Clarified that the statistic at the bottom left of page 132 should read that the length of time children had been in care was counted in **days** and requested that this was specified in future reports. **Action required.**
- Requested sight of the pathway planning workshop presentation for social workers, a report on this would be brought to the next meeting or workshop. **Action required.**

It was resolved to:

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

61. Sub-Committee Workshop and Training Plan

It was resolved to note the sub-committee workshop and training plan, pending the inclusion of a possible workshop on Care Leaver Pathways.

62. Agenda Plan

It was resolved to note the agenda plan. Going forward, the Chair asked that the whole administrative year should be included on the agenda plan.

The Chair thanked Fiona van den Hout, Head of Corporate Parenting, for her service as she would be leaving her current role before the next meeting.

Chair