

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee: Minutes

Date: Wednesday 15th November 2023
Time: 4.20pm – 6.20pm
Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald PE28 4YE
Present: Councillors A Bradnam (Chair), A Bulat, A Sharp and P Slatter

Meeting theme: Education

84. Chair's Announcements

The Chair expressed the Council's pride that the Children in Care Council had received a National Voice Award from the National Children in Care Council for their Every Word Matters project. Production of their animated video was led by a care leaver and discussed how the words people used could make children and young people feel, and the importance of talking to them about the words that were used and hearing their views. The video is available to watch on [YouTube](#).

85. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Atkins (substituted by Councillor Slatter), Councillor Hay (substituted by Councillor Sharp) and Councillor McGuire.

Technical difficulties had prevented the Chair of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association from joining the meeting remotely, and the Chair expressed her apologies for this.

There were no declarations of interest.

86. Minutes – 12th July 2023 and Minutes Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th July 2023 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair. The action log was noted.

87. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

88. Participation Report

Summer activities had been well received, especially the three art workshops and the art produced would be donated to the Council's contact centres. A youth club had been established for 8-12 year olds and seasonal events were being planned for care leavers

at locations across Cambridgeshire in recognition that this could be a difficult time of year for them. This would include providing a food parcel.

In response to questions from individual members, officers stated:

- the seasonal events for care leavers would offer an opportunity to engage with these young people on career planning and to sign-post them to sources of further information and support. The Chair referenced councillors' knowledge and experience across a wide range of professions which could provide an additional resource.
- the joint Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Participation Team had five officers. Following the uncoupling of the two authorities Cambridgeshire now had two Participation officers. There had been no noticeable impact to date on the services provided and the groups established previously were being maintained.

The Executive Director for Children, Education and Families stated that hearing from children in the Council's care and care leavers was a priority. Work was being progressed to broaden the number of children and young people engaged in this dialogue so that they were able to influence their own care and also the work of the directorate and the Council. A new service director would be joining in December 2023 who would be leading this work.

The report was noted.

89. Foster Carer Update

The report had been produced jointly with the Chair of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (CFCA). The increase in payments to foster carers described at the last meeting had now been implemented, including all backdated payments. There was a continuing focus on the recruitment and retention of foster carers with a 100% increase in enquiries. Twelve new fostering households had been approved to date which was bucking the national trend. An increasing number of foster carer resignations were being seen nationally and there had been 16 to date in Cambridgeshire, although this seemed to be slowing down. This included a number of foster carers who were retiring, and reflected the aging demographic of the county's in-house foster carers. The uncoupling of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's Children's Services was viewed as a natural progression by foster carers and was being done incrementally to minimise disruption.

In response to questions from individual members, officers stated:

- following the uncoupling from Peterborough City Council all foster carers would remain with their respective local authority. No children had been moved or affected by the change.
- Local Authority fostering outperformed any other type of fostering arrangements in terms of the stability of the homes it provided and cost. A variety of recruitment initiatives were being used to appeal to different and diverse cohorts of potential foster carers. However, the market was tight and cost of living increases were impacting on people currently considering fostering. Realistically, most foster carers

- needed three or four bedroom houses and these were out of the reach of most younger households. Officers were looking at ways this might be addressed.
- currently around 40% of Cambridgeshire's children in care were placed out of county.
 - the new Head of Fostering was leading work to build on the existing relationships with foster carers. Exit interviews were conducted with all foster carers leaving the Council, and concerns which had been expressed around social worker support would be addressed as part of the service re-shape.

The report was noted.

90. Cambridgeshire Fostering Service

The Sub-Committee was advised of the principles and plans around a planned re-design of the Fostering Service. This included a separate recruitment and assessment team to ensure that potential applicants would receive an efficient and timely response and two supervision and support teams. The retention of a separate Quality Assurance service would enable it to act as a critical friend and to drive improvement, and there would also be a clinical team. The changes would deliver the additional support for foster carers requested by the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (CFCA) and consideration was being given to an opt-out rather than opt in approach on this. An ambitious service improvement plan was being developed and would include additional support to fostering families caring for the increasing number of adolescents in the Council's care. Work was also in hand to increase the number of emergency foster carers and to develop specialisms amongst both foster carers and practitioners.

In response to questions from individual members, officers stated:

- there was more discretion available in relation to kinship assessments, and that a key consideration was the quality of the relationship between the family member and the child.
- there was national debate around whether councils should we be more flexible about their requirements in relation to foster carers' accommodation. Some local authorities actively worked with district councils to look for accommodation for foster carers, although in practice this tended to work best for children with disability issues. The question of partnership working would need to be discussed with district councils. The Chair commented that there was a need for larger affordable housing for this type of provision.

The report was noted.

91. Virtual School Annual Report 2022/23

The Virtual School (VS) annual report for 2022/23 annual report had been shared with the Children in Council and informally with Sub-Committee members, but the validated data would not be available until March/ April 2024 and an addendum would be issued at that time. The focus of the report was on attainment and progress. There was still a significant attainment gap for children in care in comparison to their non-care experienced peers. The dashboard had been improved and the data was being used to

inform the decisions being made, including identifying young people on the cusp of achieving a Level 4 pass (Good) and having their papers re-marked. This had resulted in one young person achieving Level 4 and 10 young people being within 10 marks of achieving grade 4. Additional support had been put in place to support those young people to re-sit their GCSE and to access courses at a higher level. Work had also been undertaken with an educational psychologist to drive improvement amongst Early Years cohorts to close the attainment gap.

Members welcomed the VS acting forcefully in support of the children and young people in the Council's care in relation to their educational attainment. They also welcomed the work being undertaken with West Suffolk College and additional funding being sought from the Prince's Trust in relation to employment.

In response to questions from individual members, officers stated:

- half of young people in care were not sitting 8 GCSE subjects. Officers were looking at this with schools, but that conversation needed to be based around the needs of the young person.
- an increase in the number of school exclusions was being seen both locally and nationally. The VS was proactive in opposing exclusions and suspensions and promoted a trauma informed practice approach at both school and multi-academy trust (MAT) level, working closely with officers in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) team. The Chair commended the training on a trauma informed approach which had been undertaken by a number of councillors and the Council's senior management team. She suggested that more members of the Children and Young People Committee and Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee might like to do this training if capacity was available.
- most Post-16 unaccompanied asylum seeking learners were located on the Cambridgeshire/ Peterborough border. Officers were looking at how to better capture their prior attainment and encouraging a variety of local colleges and providers to consider what additional opportunities they might offer for this group of young people.

The Chair thanked the VS for working hard on behalf of the Council's children in care in Early Years and other educational settings. This supported the best outcomes for children in care as well as best value for money.

It was resolved to:

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

92. Children in Care and Care Leavers Education, Employment and Training Action Plan Update

The Sub-Committee was advised that officers were working strategically to raise participation in education and learning. Provision could be an issue and there was a

need to focus on more vulnerable children such as those with additional needs, or who were known to the Youth Offending Service. The personal advisors based in care leaver teams were good at engaging more hard to reach young people, but there were still some young people who chose not to engage.

The Chair welcomed the gradual improvement being seen and the practical help on offer to help young people find out more about Higher Education.

The report was noted.

93. Corporate Parenting Scorecard September 2023

Key issues for improvement were identified as the number of visits to children in care and the timeliness of initial health assessments (IHAs). The homes stability figure was shown as around c7%, but officers judged the actual figure was around 10%. The difference was due to technical issues with the data system and old data not having been updated.

The Chair noted that the Children in Care Council had asked that the word 'homes' should be used rather than the term 'placements'.

In response to questions from individual members, officers:

- confirmed that the additional data provided this time included the detail which lay behind the summary report which was usually presented.
- stated that they expected to see a decline in figures nationally around access to dental care. They were looking to work with health colleagues to establish pathways around dental issues. There was a drop-in clinic in Ely for emergency treatment.

The Chair stated that the majority of issues around initial health assessments related to the Council's performance and delays in referrals. She had met health colleagues and hoped to see a significant improvement by February. Health was allocating c90% of children within target times, but Council referrals were delayed. The Interim Service Director for Fostering, Regional Adoption and Specialist Young People's Services acknowledged this, stating that this was ultimately a practice issue and that whilst it was a tough issue he was confident that improvements would be seen by January.

The report was noted.

94. Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022/23

The Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2022/23 set out the Council's target of being an ambitious corporate parent. This would involve improving when and how councillors and officers saw the Council's children in care, how that time was used and looking systematically at the experience of children in care and care leavers. Caseloads were high and there was a large number of children and young people living out of county. The report also examined the offer to unaccompanied asylum seeking children and permanence planning alongside a focus on building bridges with care leavers and examining why some of them chose not to stay in touch.

Officers were looking at the possible establishment of a Corporate Parenting Board with multi-agency partners and the development of a three-year corporate parenting strategy. They welcomed the suggestion of a Member/ officer workshop to discuss this. Action required

It was noted that section 1.5 of the report wrongly stated that the three informal meetings each year were jointly chaired with a young person, which did not happen at present.

It was resolved to agree the report and the areas of development listed for Corporate Parenting in 2023/24.

95. Sub-Committee Workshop/ Training Plan

The Chair asked that trauma informed training should be added to the Sub-Committee Workshop/ Training Plan for those members who had not yet done this. Action required.

It was agreed that training relating to corporate parenting should be offered to all county councillors wherever possible. Action required

It was resolved to note the Sub-Committee workshop and training plan.

96. Sub-Committee Agenda Plan

The Chair stated the wish to review the current thematic approach to meetings. Action required

The Executive Director for Children, Education and Families reported a change in approach on contextual safeguarding. Details of this would be shared with Sub-Committee members. Action required

(Chair)