

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee: Minutes

Date: Wednesday 12th July 2023

Time: 4.00pm – 5.40pm

Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall

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

Non-voting observer:

T Stephenson – Chair, Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association

Meeting theme: Homes

72. Notification of the Chair and Vice Chair 2023/24

Councillor Anna Bradnam was appointed Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee and Councillor Michael Atkins was appointed Vice Chair for the municipal year 2023/24 by the Children and Young People Committee on 27th June 2023.

73. Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Martin Purbrick, the recently appointed Executive Director for Children, Education and Families and Director of Children's Services, to the meeting as an observer. Brian Relph, Interim Service Director for Fostering, Regional Adoption and Specialist Young People's Services, was also welcomed to his first meeting.

74. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Atkins, substituted by Councillor P Slatter, and Councillor A Hay.

There were no declarations of interest.

75. Minutes – 29th March 2023 and Minutes Action Log

The minutes of the meeting on 29th March 2023 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair. The minutes action log was noted.

76. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

77. Participation Report

Members were updated on the summer activity programme and wider participation activity since the last meeting. Three workshops had been arranged to produce pieces for the summer art exhibition in response to feedback from children and young people, and this year's event would be held in person. The Young Recruiters Group had been involved in interviewing newly qualified social workers for Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) places and Young Trainers had delivered their first training session for this cohort. The 'Every Word Matters' project had sought children and young people's views on the language used around the social care experience. The output would be published in around a month's time and would be used as a key training resource for professionals and to inform the language used around children and young people and in documentation.

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

- welcomed the work being done to support and engage with the children and young people in the Council's care, and to listen and learn from their experience.
- noted the creation of a new social worker academy to support newly qualified practitioners and to provide continued professional development opportunities to more experienced staff.
- welcomed the 'Every Word Matters' project, commenting that Members would want to reflect on its recommendations in relation to the language used in committee meetings and documentation. **Action required**

The Chair emphasised the importance of the programme of activities arranged by the Participation Team in enriching the lives and experience of the children and young people in the Council's care.

It was resolved unanimously to:

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

78. Cambridgeshire Foster Carer's Association and the Fostering Service report

The report was a collaborative document prepared jointly by the Fostering Service and the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (CFCA), reflecting the open and constructive relationship which existed between them. Their representatives met regularly with the shared aim of improving services for the children and young people in their care. A number of working groups had been established to support the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers. Work on bringing together foster carer recruitment and retention activity was on-going, and the Fostering Recruitment Ambassadors were doing proactive work to raise the awareness of fostering opportunities. The peer mentoring scheme was continuing to grow and develop,

providing support to both new and established foster carers. Within the Council, the Fostering Service was entering a period of transformation to support best practice and to enable it to be competitive within the commercial market.

The Chair of the CFA noted that Government guidance on an increase to national minimum payments had been issued in April, but that this had not yet been actioned by the Council. She highlighted the impact of the cost of living crisis on foster carers, and that some might now feel the need to take on additional work which would mean that they could not always be available to the children in their care. The Interim Service Director apologised to the Council's foster carers for the delay. Discussions were taking place with the newly appointed Director of Children's Services and Peterborough City Council about the uplift, and he gave an assurance that this would be resolved by the end of the month. Any payments would be backdated. **Action required**

The Interim Service Director spoke of the opportunity which was presented by the appointment of a new senior leadership team and management structure within Children's Services. The purpose of corporate parenting was to deliver children to a happier future. He wanted to see the Council continue to grow as a fostering-orientated organisation, with foster carers feeling part of the Cambridgeshire family. There was a need to provide foster carers with competitive remuneration packages, excellent training opportunities and wraparound support. The transformation work was at an initial information-gathering stage, but there would be opportunities for foster carers and children and young people in care to be involved in subsequent stages of the process.

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

- welcomed the increasing recognition of caring as a career, and an appreciation of the work done by carers.
- asked for an update on Fostering Service recruitment and retention activity.
Action required
- asked what improvements could be made to the in-house foster carer offer. Officers stated that this would be explored in conjunction with the Commissioning team as part of the Fostering Service's transformation work. For the first time, independent fostering agencies had been unable to attract enough foster carers. The larger houses often needed by fostering families were growing increasingly expensive and post-pandemic children were coming into care with greater and more complex needs. The traditional fostering model was not designed to cope with this situation. The service transformation would take account of this changing landscape and would include looking at the offer from other local authorities in relation both to allowances and value-added offers. The Chair welcomed this bench-marking activity, and spoke of the need to ensure that foster carers were not left out of pocket in providing support to the children in their care.

The Chair of the CFCA emphasised the importance of retaining experienced foster carers. The financial allowance was an important element of this, but so was the wider support which was available to foster carers. The Association was looking forward to seeing the refreshed offer.

- asked about the out of hours support available to fostering families on Friday afternoons and evenings and over weekends. Officers confirmed that out of hours support was available from the Fostering Service. Work would also be taking place to look at the feedback from foster carers on what support they wanted to see.
- requested a structure chart for Children's Services, which included officer names. It was recognised that this would need to be updated as the transformation programme progressed. **Action required**

It was resolved unanimously to note the contents of the report.

79. Fostering Service Annual Report 2022/23

The Fostering Service Annual Report 2022/23 covered the second full year of operation for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fostering Service. During this period 11 new fostering households were recruited to Cambridgeshire, with 22 households resigning. Although it was regrettable to lose any fostering households this represented a reduction over previous years and related to changes in personal circumstances, ill health and an aging population of foster carers rather than dissatisfaction with the support they received. There were 112 referrals for Special Guardianship assessments during this period, and 14 assessed private fostering arrangements in place. As of 31 March 2023, 51% of children in the Council's care were living in in-house foster homes and there were 169 fostering households in total.

Investment had been made into a dedicated foster carer support team, alongside focused recruitment and retention activity and a continued focus on delivering a child-centred approach. There had been seven marketing campaigns during 2022/23, and Foster Carer Ambassadors had been involved at each stage of their planning and delivery. One of the most powerful recruitment tools was the recommendation of existing foster carers, and officers would be looking how best to share and showcase this. The number of enquiries had reduced, but the number of applications had remained relatively stable with a conversion rate of 14.5% of enquires to applications. Two complaints had been received during 2022/23, one of which was partially upheld and one which was not upheld.

In response to questions from individual members, officers:

- confirmed that an Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) was expected. Foster carers would have an opportunity to contribute to the inspection if they wished.
- confirmed that exit interviews were conducted with foster carers who left the Council.
- stated that the Fostering Service felt stable and that there had been good internal communications around the transformation programme. There was no significant churn amongst social workers.

- explained that private fostering arrangements for students attending language schools were mainly located in Cambridge. There had been a reduction in these arrangements due to covid, but it was expected that numbers would increase again over time. Payment rates were generally good and much of the children's time was occupied by the language schools, making this an attractive option to potential foster carers and leading to less fostering households being available in Cambridge.

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

- welcomed the balanced approach to complaints.
- welcomed the flexibility being shown to offering online or in-person meetings.

It was resolved unanimously to:

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

80. Performance Scorecard – May 2023

The figures for Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) had been omitted from the published report. These were reported as a full time equivalent (FTE) of 9.6 IROs, with an average caseload of 64, which was within recommended guidelines.

In response to questions from members, officers:

- acknowledged that the targets relating to the timeliness of the adoption process were both below target, with time to placement at 568 days (target of below 400 days) and time to match 313 days (target of below 183). Work was continuing around early permanency, which was designed to limit the number of moves a child made before finding their permanent home. However, the figures also reflected a conscious decision to persevere with looking for permanent homes for less easy to place children.
- undertook to provide a response outside of the meeting on the reasons behind the drop in the number of care leavers with a pathway plan in place over recent months. **Action required**

The Chair endorsed the performance scorecard as a useful document for members to track and monitor performance.

It was resolved unanimously to note the Performance Scorecard for May 2023.

81. Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 222/23

The submission of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) annual report was a statutory requirement. The purpose was to identify good practice and any areas for

further development. The stability of the staff team was good, providing continuity of support to children and young people.

The Chair welcomed the clear format of the report and the inclusion of anonymised case histories, which gave good insight into the IRO's work. She noted their significant workload and expressed her thanks for their work, noting that feedback received on the IRO service during the period covered by the report was overwhelmingly positive.

It was resolved unanimously to:

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

82. Sub-Committee Workshop/ Training Plan

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

83. Sub-Committee Agenda Plan

Work would be progressed outside of the meeting to populate the Sub-Committee's agenda plan, including looking at how its business aligned with the work of the Children and Young People Committee. **Action required**

It was resolved unanimously to note the agenda plan.

[Chair]