

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE: 21 FEBRUARY 2018

Date: 21 February 2018

Time: 4.45pm-6.50pm

Venue: Meeting Room 2, Huntingdon Library, Huntingdon

Present: Councillors L Every (Chairman), A Bradnam (from 5.05pm to 6.45pm), K Cuffley, L Joseph and C Richards

Observers: P Asker, S Day and M Davis

Apologies: Councillor A Costello (substituted by Councillor K Cuffley) and Councillor A Hay (substituted by Councillor L Joseph)

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillor A Costello (substituted by Councillor K Cuffley) and Councillor A Hay (substituted by Councillor L Joseph).

There were no declarations of interest.

13. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 13 DECEMBER 2017

The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

14. ACTION LOG

The Action Log was reviewed and the following updates and comments noted:

Minutes of the meeting on 13 December 2017:

- i. Minute 3: Co-option of Young People's Representatives: Officers would advise the Chairman of future dates for meetings of the Voices Matter Panel when these had been arranged.
(**Action:** Service Development and Commissioning Manager, Looked After Children)
- ii. Minute 8: Fostering Service Annual Report: The Interim Foster Care Manager stated that 40 new sets of foster carers had been approved in the current year with a further 23 in assessment and 21 having expressed interest. This positive position was attributed to a combination of factors including a specific focus on foster carer recruitment within the Council and boosting the online element of the recruitment campaign. The average time taken from an initial expression of interest in fostering to approval as a foster carer was around four and a half to five months.

A Member emphasised the value of word of mouth in promoting the work of foster carers and the opportunities available. They also stressed the important role to be played by all County Councillors in raising awareness of the fostering opportunities and of engaging with local groups such as Parish, District and City

Councils, LGBT organisations and faith and community groups to make them aware of the opportunities available. The Interim Foster Care Manager stated that he was exploring with the Communications team the possibility of providing councillors and officers who worked directly with the public with badges prompting the public to ask them about fostering. He also thanked councillors for including County Council social media posts about fostering on their own accounts which helped spread the information to the largest possible audience. The Chairman stated that Members were very supportive of the drive to raise awareness of the in-house fostering opportunities offered by the County Council and asked that officers should keep them informed of anything they could do to support this.

(Action: Interim Head of Foster Care/ Communications Team)

- iii. Minute 9: Young People's Participation: The Chairman stated that she would be meeting informally with officers and the young people who had expressed interest in being co-opted to the Sub-Committee as Young People's Representatives to discuss what would work best for them to support their attendance and participation in meetings.

15. VIRTUAL SCHOOL

The Chairman stated that Members had asked that the Virtual School should be a standing item on the agenda, but that this did not mean that a report should be submitted to each meeting. Their wish was that reports should be submitted at key points in the school year or relate to specific areas of interest to Members. She noted that three young people with experience of having been Looked After were attending the meeting as Observers and invited them to comment and ask questions about any items on the agenda.

The following comments arose in discussion of the report and in response to questions:

- In relation to the summary at the top of the report the Head of the Virtual School clarified that the Virtual School supported Looked After Children within Cambridgeshire County Council's care and not all Looked After Children living within Cambridgeshire;
- Members confirmed that the core set of factual data should include numbers on roll, the number of children in county and out of county, the age profile of the children, how many had special educational needs and the number and age range of Looked After Children within each District Council area and the City. This would be followed by an examination of a specific issue. Possible topics included:
 - Post 16s not in education, employment or training (NEET);
 - Post 16 extension to engage with universities;
 - Early Years, including early identification of need and support;
 - school admission requests including timescales and refusals;
 - transition from school to college, apprenticeships, work or university and building bridges with business and further and higher education providers.

It was agreed that officers would include a brief overview of each of these topics and any others which they might wish to draw to Members' attention for inclusion in a report to the next meeting. Members would then identify and prioritise those subjects for more detailed consideration.

(**Action:** Head of the Virtual School)

- Members asked for a six month update on the information contained in the report brought to the Sub-Committee's first meeting in December 2017 so that they could review the comparative data;
(**Action:** Head of the Virtual School/ Democratic Services Officer)
- Officers confirmed that transport would be provided to enable children to remain at their current school where this was needed;
- Officers acknowledged that a change in school during Years 10 to 13 could have a significant negative impact for even for the most motivated of students, and as such it would have to be approved at senior officer level within the Council. Officers worked hard to keep children in their existing school when they were taken into care, but sometimes this was just not possible. If it was not possible to get them on roll at an appropriate school the Virtual School had tutors who could provide individual support to enable them to access an appropriate curriculum.

An Observer acknowledged that providing transport could enable students to continue attending the same school following a change in living arrangements. However, a long taxi journey to and from school each day reduced home study time, access to extra-curricular activities and free time and could leave students geographically isolated from their friends.

- Members noted an Observer's comment that they did not know if there were any other Looked After young people at their school and asked if there was an appropriate way to put Looked After Young people at the same school in touch with each other if they wished. Officers advised that this happened in some schools via the Designated Teacher for Looked After Children, but not in all. They undertook to reflect this in future training for Designated Teachers;
(**Action:** Head of the Virtual School)
- Members stated that Looked After young people were their own best advocates. It was important to engage with business and further and higher education providers to make them aware of the wider skills and attributes of these young people which might not be readily apparent from a standard CV or job application.

Officers advised that all Looked After Children received careers advice, had a link person at the Virtual School, termly Personal Education Plan (PEP) reviews and transition support and that there was a Working Group with industry. They could though look again at this area to see what more could be done.

(**Action:** Head of the Virtual School)

- An Observer commented that most of their PEP reviews the previous year had been cancelled and that there seemed to be a lack of understanding at their school about who was responsible for organising the review and making sure it happened. Officers stated that PEP reviews for Post 16s had only been introduced two years previously and that there had been some problems embedding them with providers.

In the previous year only 40% of Post 16 PEP reviews had taken place, but training with providers was continuing and Pupil Premium Plus payments were now linked to the completion of PEPs. The Assistant Director stated that she received a weekly list of PEP reviews and that the position for under 16s was much more positive. Officers were though continuing to press for improvement in relation to reviews for Post 16s. Figure for PEP reviews would be included in the core data in future reports.

(**Action:** Head of the Virtual School)

16. PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chairman and Members thanked the report authors and officers in the Business Intelligence team for taking on board their comments on the content and presentation of data in the report which was now far clearer.

The following comments arose in discussion of the report and in response to questions:

- Officers confirmed that the cost of independent foster care placements was roughly double the cost of comparable in-house provision at around £800 per week, although commissioners were constantly working to negotiate the best price from providers;
- Feedback from foster carers indicated that they valued the total package of support offered by the Council and that whilst the financial element of this was significant it was not the only factor influencing their choices. Officers constantly monitored the support packages offered by independent foster care providers to make sure that the Council's offer remained competitive;
- Quite a high proportion of Cambridgeshire's unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) were accommodated in Peterborough as the city offered some services and cultural support networks which were not readily available elsewhere. The Joint Commissioning Board looked at provision across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough including opportunities for collaborative cross-border working where appropriate to ensure that placements met the particular needs of each child or young person;
- Officers confirmed that there was a good working relationship with neighbouring local authorities which supported conversations about the provision of placements when needed, but in practice most local authorities preferred to keep their Looked After Children within their own geographic borders where this was possible;
- Officers stated that all forms of potentially abusive, coercive or exploitative behaviour were badged under the heading of child sexual exploitation (CSE) for the purposes of review. This included potential risks both from peers and adults. Support was available through a variety of routes including youth workers specialising in supporting healthy and safe peer relationships;

Summing up, the Chairman asked that a Performance Report should be brought to each meeting to enable Members to build their knowledge of the data over time and to support the identification of trends.

(**Action:** Democratic Services Officer/ Head of Partnerships and Quality Assurance)

It was resolved to:

- a) review performance for Looked After Children and comment on the themes and trends identified in the report.

17. YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION: CO-OPTION OF TWO YOUNG PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVES

The Chairman thanked the three young people who had attended the meeting as Observers for their interest in getting involved in the Sub-Committee's work, either through co-option to the Sub-Committee or another form of engagement. Expressions of interest had also been received from a number of other young people and all of these would be followed up. It was essential that the voice of Looked After Children and care leavers was placed at the core of the Sub-Committee's work and that young people helped both shape and inform the business it considered.

An Observer who had attended the previous meeting commented that they found the summaries now included in each report and the data explanations contained in the performance report helpful.

It was resolved to:

- a) note that three young people would be attending the meeting as observers with a view to joining as co-opted members in April 2018.

18. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Assistant Director for Children introduced the report which provided an overview of development opportunities for social workers. This included a formal offer together with a number of additional opportunities designed to help social workers develop their practice in more depth and through a variety of learning styles. Training was also developed to address any issues raised through the Voices Matter Panel. All of the County's Looked After children had an allocated social worker, but the organisation of this support was one of the areas being explored by the current Oxford Brookes research project.

The following comments arose in discussion of the report and in response to questions:

- An Observer commented that they found that less experienced social workers could sometimes seem more involved than more experienced practitioners who might appear more relaxed;
- An Observer commented that they had been supported by lots of different social workers during a relatively short period and asked about the support that was in place for them. Officers stated that Cambridgeshire was more successful than many local authorities in retaining social workers. Some change arose from social workers moving to different roles which was good for their professional development, but it was acknowledged that the Children's Change programme had led to increased change. The offer to social workers in neighbouring counties was being considered as part of the research project being carried out by Oxford Brookes University.

It was resolved:

- a) note and comment on the report.

19. COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS AND EXEMPTIONS FOR CARE LEAVERS: UPDATE

The Chairman stated that the question of possible council tax discounts or exemptions for care leavers had originally been raised at the Voices Matter Panel. An Observer had raised this at the last Sub-committee meeting and as a result both Members and officers had been in touch informally with their counterparts in Cambridgeshire's District and City Councils to take their views.

The Head of Countywide and Looked After Children's Services stated that initial work had focused on the legal and decision making process relating to council tax discounts and exemptions. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 would come into effect in April 2018 and included a requirement for all authorities to demonstrate consideration of their corporate parenting responsibilities. Providing relief on council tax was one way in which they might evidence this. Any decision to grant relief from council tax had to be applied by the collection authority which in Cambridgeshire would mean the District and City Councils. It would be open to the County Council to consider whether to provide support to any young people living outside of Cambridgeshire or within the county in any areas where no discount or exemption was offered. East Cambridgeshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council had expressed interest in knowing more about the potential number of young people involved and the likely costs. Cambridge City Council was taking forward a proposal which would make care leavers exempt from council tax from April 2019 onward and officers thanked their counterparts at the City Council who had very helpfully shared their learning on this. A Member noted that whilst District and City Councils worked out council tax precepts and gathered payments they were only responsible for the expenditure of a small proportion of the money raised.

It was resolved to:

- a) note and comment on the report.

It was further moved by Councillor Bradnam, seconded by Councillor Cuffley to:

- b) request that the Chairman of the Children And Young People Committee and Executive Director for People and Communities consider adding this issue to the Forward Agenda Plan for the Children and Young People Committee for further consideration.

On being put to the vote the motion was passed.

20. HEALTH ASSESSMENTS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Chairman welcomed the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to the meeting and thanked her for attending and for her report.

The Designated Nurse stated that every Looked After Child under the age of five had two health assessments per year whilst over the age of five they had one health assessment per year. Every effort was made to meet the target for conducting initial

health assessments (IHAs) on children coming into care within 20 days but this remained a challenge, particularly in relation to children placed out of area. Where children lived fairly close to Cambridgeshire's borders the county's own health professionals would carry out the assessments where possible, but the position was more difficult with children accommodated further away. Obtaining the necessary consent from parents or parents and social workers to carry out IHAs could also take time and health professionals were working hard with officers to address this. Some delays occurred in relation to review health assessments when carers were unable to make the dates offered or a young person declined the offer of a review. In the latter case health professionals would try to speak to the young person by phone. Review health assessments were mainly carried out by specialist nurses and should take place annually to within 15 days of the previous review. Staffing capacity issues within the nursing team had impacted negatively on the number of review health assessments completed within this timescale, but a new Lead Nurse was now in post and an improving position was reported in the two months previously. The Lead Nurse was also reviewing arrangements going forward, including possible future work with the Peterborough team.

The following comments arose in discussion of the report and in response to questions:

- Two of the observers present commented that they personally did not find the review health assessments useful and felt that they could feel intrusive and judgemental. The Designated Nurse acknowledged these views, but commented that many younger children had issues which needed to be explored;
- Officers highlighted the need to work with children and young people to give them the confidence to access health services and noted the important role played by foster carers in developing this confidence.

It was resolved to:

- a) note and comment on the content of the report.

21. SUB-COMMITTEE WORKSHOP AND TRAINING PLAN

Members reviewed the Sub-Committee Workshop and Training Plan and commented that they would welcome a training session on foster care.

(**Action:** Interim Foster Care Manager/ Democratic Services Officer)

Officers were invited to suggest areas of training and development which they felt would be of value both to elected and co-opted members of the Sub-Committee.

(**Action:** Democratic Services Officer/ Service Development and Commissioning Manager)

It was resolved to:

- a) note and comment on the Sub-Committee workshop and training plan.

22. AGENDA PLAN

Members reviewed the Sub-Committee agenda plan and the Chairman stated that co-opted members would be invited to suggest items which they felt the Sub-Committee should be considering.

It was resolved to:

- a) note the Sub-Committee agenda plan. .

23. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Provisional dates for future bi-monthly meetings would be submitted to the Chairman for approval and circulated to all elected and co-opted members and substitute members.

Chairman
(date)