

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee: Minutes

Date: Wednesday 03 August 2022

Time: 4.00pm – 6:14 pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

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

Non-voting observer:

K Arrowsmith – Chair, Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (from 4.10pm)

Meeting theme: Placements

36. Notification of the appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee for 2022/23

Councillor Bradnam was appointed as Chair and Councillor Slatter as Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee by the Children and Young People Committee on 17 May 2022.

37. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mac McGuire.

There were no declarations of interest.

38. Minutes – 23 March 2022 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting on 23 March 2022 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair. The action log was noted.

39. Petitions and Public Questions

There were no petitions or public questions.

40. Annual Health Assessment Audit Report for 2021-22

The Sub-Committee received an audit report on health assessments completed between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, during pandemic pressures. Through the

period, children were seen both in person and virtually and the overall quality of cases reviewed was found to be good. Recommendations within the report included: improving carers' understanding of the Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ); ensuring availability of interpreters; signposting unaccompanied asylum seekers to relevant charities and the Refugee Council; improving access to routine dental checks; and avoiding telephony appointments when possible. The service had acted on audit recommendations, making mouth check training available to help professionals assess levels of dental need; and distributing SDQ pathway leaflets to foster carer forums countywide.

Carers now received the SDQ through secure email and a separate explanatory email listed timescales. The Chair of the CFCA suggested this change may have affected SDQ completion rates, but that existing mentoring and leafleting would assist carers to adapt to this change.

In response to the report, Sub-Committee members:

- Noted that SDQ questionnaires were scored by an external website after the questionnaire had been completed.
- Established that communication occurred predominantly through email, however, if an email address was not available a letter was sent. The service also assisted with completion of the SDQ through alternative means. The Chair of the Sub-Committee suggested deadlines within the SDQ explanatory email were highlighted in bold.
- Clarified that the small sample size was due to the impact of coronavirus but normally, and for the 2022/23 audit, the Initial Health Assessment and Review Health Assessment audit sample size would be double.
- Noted that the service used a national provider of translation and interpretation services to increase the breadth of their translation offer. Members suggested community organisations, such as local charities, might offer another resource.
- Agreed to collaborate to formulate a directory of local groups available to support young unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- Requested that, in future reports, all acronyms be written out in full the first time.
Action.

The acronym CRAFTT stood for a health screening tool designed to identify teenagers at risk of substance abuse.

It was resolved to:

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

41. Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2021-22

The Sub-Committee received a report on the activities of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in Cambridgeshire for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. A total of 1,655 Children in Care (CiC) reviews had been conducted virtually and in person. Within this, 51% of children were recorded as being in long-term foster homes and 28% were recorded to be progressing towards that. Over the year, there had been 25 foster family breakdowns (formerly placement breakdown) and 404 escalations of concern. This was a reduction from 506 escalations the previous year, with this reduction attributed mainly to practice improvements and the number of CiC reducing during the period.

Concerns raised by IROs included insufficient oversight of the service by management and delays in permanence planning. To mitigate concerns, the 2022/23 action plan included: a review of the existing mechanisms to create a constructive feedback loop between the IRO Service and Social Care; progression of the Pathway Planning Project; and strengthened IRO oversight of children missing from education or care.

In response to the report, Sub-Committee members:

- Clarified that number of children in care in March 2022 was 597, but in July 2022 was 614. This increase had been impacted by large sibling groups entering care and would continue to be monitored.
- Around a third of issues highlighted by IRO's related to accountability and record-keeping. To help address this the report template was being re-formatted to make completing it less onerous
- Recognised that the overall reduction in escalations was reflective of service improvements in particular areas.
- Suggested postcode mapping of foster carers and those under their care that specified whether the carer was in-house and/or offered specialist support. This would also give an indication of the geographic spread of foster carers. **Action**
- Noted that IROs worked in partnership with the service to deliver training in areas identified for improvement.
- Emphasised the importance of providing support to care leavers as they transitioned to adulthood.
- Noted that the contents page had been updated since publication to rectify dating on items 9 and 10.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the content of the report.

- b) Raise any queries with lead officers.

42. 'Siblings Forever' Project Report 2021-22

The Sub-Committee received a report providing an overview of the activities and impact of the Cambridgeshire Siblings Forever project 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, excluding a suspended period of activity during pandemic restrictions. One holiday for sibling groups had occurred in 2021-22 and a further two were scheduled.

In response to the report, the Chair noted how difficult separation at the end of the holiday would be for young people, but how positive the experience was overall. She asked her thanks be passed on to members of staff who had volunteered and made the event possible. **Action.**

The Cambridgeshire Siblings Forever Project was commended by the Assistant Director for Children's Services.

It was resolved to:

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

43. Participation Report

The Sub-Committee was advised that recent activities organised in collaboration with the Children in Care Council included: virtual and in-person half term activities; a music and performance skills project staged at the Junction; production of an ideal worker video which would be used for training and promotion; a 'Coming into Care' pack relaunch; the Annual Awards event; and young inspector checks. Scheduled summer activities included ice skating and farm trips.

In response to the report, Sub-Committee members:

- Commended the work of the Children in Care including the ideal worker videos and young person's inspection report.
- Asked that the proforma for a pen picture of Sub-Committee members be re-sent.

Action

- Asked whether councillors could see the Care Experience Roadshow planned in order to dispel myths and stereotypes around children in care.
- Noted that around half of children under Cambridgeshire's care were housed out of county. 10% of young people lived in Peterborough, including many older unaccompanied asylum seekers. Online groups were available if these individuals wished to engage in the Participation Team's offer.

- Expressed that young people in care could also progress hobbies through community groups.
- Commended the videos shown at the recent Virtual School Multi-Agency Conference and suggested that these should be shared with children and young people accommodated outside of the county. Officers stated that these were available on YouTube. The Chair suggested that links to these videos should also be shared with all county councillors. **Action**

The Chair stated that it was encouraging that so many young people were choosing to be part of the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers' Forum - often children and young people did not wish to be identified as being in care. She was also in discussion with officers regarding methods for increasing young people's engagement in informal Sub-Committee meetings.

It was resolved to:

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

44. Report from Cambridgeshire Fostering Service and Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association

The Sub-Committee received an update on the service's engagement and development activity with foster carers both in and outside of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer Association (CFCA). This included meetings with council chairs; a working group on carer; CFCA meetings; foster carer recruitment ambassadors; a mentoring scheme for foster carers; foster carer support groups; a New Carers event; and a training review. The report also addressed issues raised by the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association such as transport to school and contact visits; raising the profile of the CFCA; and obtaining passports for children in care, which was recognised as a national issue. Arranging routine dental appointments remained a challenge and officers were working on this with health colleagues. The CFCA had also identified issues with social workers changing, and officers acknowledged the benefits to both children in care and foster carers of consistent social worker support. The CFCA would also like to see more accredited training opportunities made available to foster carers.

The Chair welcomed the collaborative work between the CFCA and officers to produce the report and emphasised the importance of ensuring the foster carers' views were accurately represented.

The Chair of the CFCA expressed pleasure with the report and the engagement with officers in its production, commenting that the voice of foster carers came through clearly. He highlighted the section relating to the feeling of isolation which foster carers could experience as being of particular importance and stated that foster carers were keen to be involved in work around addressing transport issues. He praised the 'Siblings Forever' project, commenting that the CFCA was looking for opportunities for

potential foster carers to get involved with activities during their assessment period and suggesting this was something which might be explored.

In response to the report, Sub-Committee members:

- Emphasised the importance of supporting and retaining the county's in-house foster carers, noting that any social worker feedback that a foster carer was feeling isolated or experiencing difficulties would trigger a retention visit to offer support.
- Impressed the importance of supporting eligible young people in care with applications for a British passport. The Member suggested asking Government to consider fast-tracking passport applications for children in care. The Assistant Director for Regional Adoption and Fostering offered to take this suggestion to the Regional Group of Assistant Directors of Children's Services. He reassured councillors that officers were doing everything possible to expedite passport applications and that they would continue to champion the needs of children in care in relation to this. **Action.**
- Noted that foster carer support groups were located in Cambridge, the Fens (Wisbech and March), Huntingdonshire and Ely.

The Chair stated that she would like a report back on how the commitments and targets contained in the report were being delivered. **Action.**

It was resolved to:

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

45. Cambridgeshire Fostering Service Annual Report 2021/22

The Sub-Committee received the Fostering Service annual report for the period April 2021 to March 2022 which used data from the fostering service self-assessment and Ofsted inspection. Key aspects included: foster carer retention – in 2021/22 four caring families had left the service, in 2020/21 this number was ten; safeguarding outcomes; foster panels; campaigns and training; compliments and complaints. It also outlined service priorities for the forthcoming year which aimed to improve recruitment, retention, resilience and reputation.

In response to the report, members:

- Obtained clarification that the service was supporting foster carers to expand their offer through additional training and myth busting. This would enable carers to accommodate more young people, a wider age range and emergency care.
- Commended the recent annual Fostering Panel Training Day and shared their experience that the Fostering Panel contained a good mix of people and skills sets.

Officers stated that work was taking place around offering additional training opportunities.

- Thanked the report author for the report's inclusion of organisational changes, compliments, and evidence of robust complaint handling.
- Asked for an avenue of communication between Members and working groups.
Action.

It was resolved to:

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

46. Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee Annual Report 2021 – 2022

The Committee received a report which detailed the work of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee 2021-2022. This included a review of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire [SDQ]; a letter to NHS England advocating better access to dental services for children in care; scrutiny of out of area foster homes; and supporting the Young Inspectors' inspection of supervised contact centres. Resulting service work had led to internal audit and independent reviewing officers [IROs] noting improvements in long-lasting foster family matching, statutory visiting, the fostering service and fostering allowances. Further, corporate outcomes for the service regarding accountability, health and education had been consistent through the pandemic. The officer noted that the report scorecard listed 632 children in care in 31 March 2022, compared to the 597 referenced previously (minute 41). This was due to the figure being adjusted to correct reporting errors.

In response to the report, Sub-Committee members:

- Recognised that the Independent Care Review recommended adoption of a model similar to the Regional Adoption Agency model: It proposed creation of regional care co-operatives to increase the market and meet sufficiency. This could make residential placement matching more systematic in Cambridgeshire, but concern was expressed that this could also reduce Cambridgeshire's ability to tailor its response to meet local needs. The Assistant Director for Children's Services emphasised that these proposals had not yet been formalised and there was a need to wait and see if they were translated into tangible recommendations. He offered a briefing note on the Care Review and the potential implications for the Council.
Action.
- Welcomed the improvements in access to dental services which had been seen following representations made by the Chair, commenting that this showed the importance of raising matters at the Sub-Committee and pressing for positive change for the Council's children in care.

- Stated that the Children in Care Council preferred to avoid the use of the term 'placements'. The term 'stability at home', rather than 'stable placements', should be used where possible.

The Chair thanked foster carers and social workers and recognised their dedication and care towards the children and young people in their care.

47. Sub-Committee Workshop/ Training Plan

It was resolved to note and comment on the Sub-Committee workshop and training plan, subject to inclusion of training attendance on 7 April 2022 and 4 May 2022.

Action.

48. Sub-Committee Agenda Plan

The Chair asked that the dates and agendas of informal Sub-Committee meetings should be included on the agenda plan in future. Action

It was resolved to note and comment on the Sub-Committee agenda plan.

49. Date of next meeting

Sub Committee members would meet informally and in private on 7 September 2022. The next public meeting would be on 16 November 2022.

Chair