

## **CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE: MINUTES**

**Date:** Wednesday 20 November 2019

**Time:** 4.00pm – 6.35pm

**Venue:** Room 128, Shire Hall, Cambridge

**Present:** Councillors L Every (Chairman), A Hay (Vice Chairman), A Bradnam, A Costello and E Meschini

Co-opted Member: S Day

### **THEME: STABILITY AND PERMANENCE**

#### **121. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no apologies for absence or declarations of interest.

#### **122. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2019**

The minutes of the meeting on 18 September 2019 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **123. ACTION LOG**

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

- i. Minute 92: A session on the emotional health and wellbeing of children in care to be included in a Members' Seminar in the new year.
- ii. Minute 113: A formal process to feedback on Members' work with relevant bodies and organisations was considered overly bureaucratic. Instead, Members would continue to provide informal feedback on relevant issues as these arose.

It was resolved to note the action log.

#### **124. YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

The Participation Service was now fully staffed and a variety of participation events was on offer during the coming months. Attendance at the last 'Just Us' group had been low, but had provided some good ideas for work going forward. The first two care leavers' forums had been run in Wisbech and Cambridge.

The Chairman welcomed the energy and cohesion across the range of participation events which was now evident. She reiterated the importance of placing children in care and care leavers at the heart of the Council's business. All elected members were corporate parents with responsibilities towards each and every one of the children and young people in the Council's care. Closer working arrangements with Peterborough City Council's Corporate Parenting Committee would support the sharing of learning

and best practice. The recent Foster Carer Awards 2019 event had been a great success and Members had learned a lot from speaking to the foster carers who had attended.

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

- Whether local members were notified about 'Just Us' events in their divisions. Officers stated that this was not the case as these events were solely for children and officers from the Participation Team. Sub-Committee members were advised of events and activities which were open to a wider audience and their attendance at these events was warmly welcomed;
- The reasons for low attendance rates at some participation events. Officers stated that children and young people led busy lives with many calls on their time. Whilst actively working to encourage higher attendance the events still offered a positive experience to those who did attend and allowed officers to build relationships with these young people in a relaxed environment;
- The Co-opted member expressed the wish to encourage more young people to attend the Care Leavers' Forum. The Chairman stated that the Council would welcome any ideas he might have on encouraging higher attendance;
- The Co-opted member commented that he now had a personal advisor rather than a social worker. He welcomed this more informal approach which continued to provide support whenever it was needed

It was resolved to comment and provide feedback on the range of consultation events and activities the Participation Service provide for children in care and care leavers.

## **125. PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Members reviewed the performance data and noted that as of 20 November 2019 there were 755 children in care. This represented a reduction of 13 since the report was published and reflected the continuing drive to support children to return home where this was appropriate and to find a permanent placement for them where it was not.

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

- More detail was requested in relation to the number of children and young people who had gone missing in the period. Officers stated that the figures reflected every occasion on which a child was reported as missing, so more than one report might relate to a single child. Very tight procedures were in place to monitor every incident of a child going missing. This included an independent person seeing every child on their return in addition to visits by their own social worker to explore the causes. The MACE reporting process was in place to review the situation of any child who was considered to be at risk of exploitation. All absences, including times when they might be late getting home, were treated as cases of the child being missing. This created higher figures, but ensured that all absences were systematically recorded, monitored and addressed. Unauthorised absences from school were an educational matter and would be followed up by the school as an education welfare issue.

The Head of the Corporate Parenting Service stated that Dave Sergeant, a police officer who worked closely with council officers in this area, had offered to attend a future Members' Seminar to explore this issue further.

- Where the figures relating to adoptions came from. These were provided by the Adoption Service which was now delivered in-house by the Council. The process for approving a prospective adopter was quite long so this allowed forecasts for future numbers to be produced;
- Officers clarified that the six children who had been matched and were waiting for introductions and the 17 who had been linked and booked into the matching panel were in addition to the 26 children who had been placed for adoption in the period covered by the report.

The Chairman stated that the format and content of the performance report continued to improve. The numbers of children moving through the adoption process and the continuing programme to recruit more in-house foster carers demonstrated a positive momentum and real progress.

It was resolved to review performance for Children in Care and comment on the themes and trends identified in the report.

## **126. EDUCATION TRANSPORT FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS**

The Chairman stated that the Sub-Committee was looking at all services provided by the Council and beyond to see how they catered for and impacted upon children in care and care leavers. The report on arrangements for education transport should be seen in that context.

Children in care aged under 16 were entitled to the same transport assistance as all under 16s. Post 16 children in care were eligible for free transport provided that the student was resident in Cambridgeshire, attended their nearest Post 16 provider and that this provider was located more than three miles from their home address. They would not be eligible for transport assistance if they chose to attend a provider more than three miles from home when a comparable course was offered closer to where they lived. This provision was not available to 16-18 year olds who were not in the Council's care and so represented an enhanced level of provision. The Council's policy did not currently extend to those beyond the age of 18 and the data available for this cohort was not yet robust enough to accurately cost such provision.

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

- Welcomed the fact that Cambridgeshire County Council was already providing greater support to its 16-18 year old children in care with regards to education transport assistance than many local authorities;
- Asked whether the transport assistance to 16-18 year olds applied to those living outside of Cambridgeshire. Officers stated that this was not the case as those young people would be subject to the transport policy of the local authority in whose area they were resident;

- Asked whether a dialogue had been established with other local authorities with a view to establishing greater synergy and reciprocity of arrangements. Officers stated that enquiries had been made via the regional network and that none of the authorities contacted made provision for children previously in care. Pressures on education transport budgets meant that most authorities offered only statutory provision;
- Officers stated that individual circumstances were considered on a case by case basis for over 18s and that bus passes could be funded by the social care team where this was deemed appropriate;
- The Chairman stated that Members did not want any young person leaving care to be disadvantaged by transport costs. However, they also wanted to avoid additional work to officers which would not produce any further meaningful information. On this basis she asked how much work would be involved to cost out Post 18 education transport provision and whether this additional work would deliver any meaningful information. The Head of the Corporate Parenting Service suggested that whilst it would probably not be possible to extract the necessary information from existing data it should be possible to start collecting that information now to inform future decision-making. She proposed meeting with the Strategic Education Place Planning Manager and the Lead Corporate Parenting Manager to discuss how this should be taken forward.  
(**Action:** Head of Corporate Parenting)

It was resolved to:

- a) note the arrangements for the provision of transport assistance for children in care and care leavers;
- b) note that the Council does not currently collect comprehensive data on children/ students who have previously been in care and, therefore, it is not possible to quantify the indicative cost if the transport assistance currently available to post-16 students who are in care/ care leavers, was to be extended to those who have previously been children in care.

## **127. CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL GUIDE TO CORPORATE PARENTING FOR ELECTED MEMBERS**

The Guide to Corporate Parenting for Elected Members had been produced to set out in a single document councillors' responsibilities in relation to the county's children in care and care leavers. If approved, it was intended to distribute it electronically to all Members in addition to producing a small number of hard copies

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

- Welcomed the guide as a useful tool for Members and in particular for clearly setting out the Council's commitments to children in care and care leavers;
- Welcomed the clear guidance on how and when contact was appropriate;

- The Chairman asked that officers made sure that Members were informed about any events or celebrations they could attend in their role as corporate parents to raise the profile of their role.  
(**Action:** Head of the Corporate Parenting Service)
- Asked whether the guide could signpost Members to the right officer to speak to if constituents raised queries with them about specific cases. The Head of Corporate Parenting stated that there was a clear process around enquiries received from councillors or MPs and that she would reflect on how best this might be presented in the guide.  
(**Action:** Head of the Corporate Parenting Service)

It was resolved to:

- a) review the content of the guide;
- b) endorse the content of the guide;
- c) support distribution of the guide.

## **128. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19**

The Sub-Committee reviewed the Independent Reviewing Officer's statutory annual report for 2018/19 which covered the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. During the period there were 16 Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in Cambridgeshire. Their role was to ensure purpose and progress with care plans for children in care and to ensure that the local authority gave due consideration to the views expressed by the child within the care planning process. During the period covered by the report 2022 child in care reviews were held and the timeliness of reviews continued to be assessed as very good. Children's participation in their reviews remained good, but it was judged that there was still room for improvement. The IRO's Escalation Protocol provided a mechanism to progress any issues raised within the review process. This Protocol had been reviewed in November 2018 and the new arrangements were becoming embedded. Staffing within the IRO team was stable which enabled them to offer a consistent figure of support to the children and young people with whom they worked and to build relationships with them over time.

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

- Following the revision of the Escalation Protocol the number of escalations had doubled from the previous year. The reasons behind this were sought. Officers stated that the new Escalation Protocol simplified the process for escalating concerns and also allowed for a wider range of issues to be escalated. This had led to an increase in reporting. It was anticipated that the figures would continue to increase during the 2019/20 reporting period as the new arrangements continued to be embedded. The number of escalations was reviewed on a monthly and quarterly basis to ensure that the issues raised were being addressed. However, until the new arrangements became fully embedded it would not be possible to judge what would be an appropriate level of escalations as there was not enough comparative data to inform a meaningful analysis;

- The Co-opted Member described the example of an IRO's letter included in the report as really good as it was clear and informative without providing excessive detail. Members welcomed this endorsement;
- The Chairman stated that placing the voice of the child at the heart of care planning remained key. She asked for more information about why some children did not engage with the review process and what could be done to encourage and support them to do so. Officers stated that some young people were non-verbal so their views were sought through alternative methods of communication or through their advocates. Some older children and teenagers were reluctant to engage, so work was going into ways of showing the positive support which the IRO team was able to offer. Language could be a barrier to some children understanding the role of the IRO and the support which they could offer. Ways of addressing this were being considered within the service;
- The Chairman asked what IRO support was offered to children and young people accommodated outside of Cambridgeshire. Officers stated that IROs would travel to meet with them. They also used FaceTime or Skype to keep in touch where appropriate, but this did not replace face to face meetings;

Summing up, the Chairman stated that it was good to see evidence of the checks and balances in place. She welcomed the work which was being done to build lasting and secure relationships with young people over time and thanked the IRO team for the good work which they were doing.

It was resolved to note the report.

## **129. SIBLINGS FOREVER**

The Siblings Forever project was established in 2013 and was designed to bring together brothers and sisters who had been separated through at least one of them being taken into care. The children were brought together for a short residential trip of two or three nights at Grafham Water activity centre. Ten trips had been arranged since 2013 and a total of 97 children had participated so far. This included children accommodated outside of the county and those with additional needs. Some children had attended more than one trip and almost all of them had asked to go again. 2019 saw the establishment of a team of volunteers to staff the project on site. This comprised Cambridgeshire County Council staff including social workers, a team manager, a clinician and a child practitioner. Feedback from the children involved was both positive and moving. The project had initially been funded through the Troubled Families initiative and as this funding wound down it would continue to be funded through the Corporate Parenting budget.

The Chairman commended the great work being done by officers and volunteers in support of this project. She suggested that it might be possible to attract some external funding for such valuable and inspirational work. If it could be made sustainable through external funding this would free up funds within the Corporate Parenting Service budget for other purposes in support of the Council's children in care.

It was resolved to note the report.

## 130. FOSTERING SERVICE UPDATE

Work to attract more in-house foster carers was continuing, financed through the successful Transformation Bid approved by the General Purposes Committee in 2018. Eleven new fostering households had been approved in the first six months of the year offering up to 15 new fostering places with a further 22 households currently in assessment.

The Chairman invited John Priest, Chair of Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association, to join the discussion of this report.

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

- Asked what elements of the foster carers' recruitment campaign had been most successful and what was being done to capitalise on this. Officers stated that the highest response rate had been to social media and web-based advertising. The Council's Communications Team were providing professional support to the marketing campaign. Tools used included search engine optimisation, corporate campaign partners including information and links on their own websites and officers including links to information on their corporate correspondence;
- The Chairman asked about the requirements for potential foster caring couples in relation to work and whether there was any requirement that one partner should not be in employment. Officers stated that this had been the case at one time, but that it was no longer required provided that the couple were able to respond during the working day in the case of an emergency. If there was a need for an adult carer to be available throughout the day to respond to a particular child's needs this would be addressed during the place planning process. Officers would not expect this to be a consideration when prospective foster carers were assessed at the Fostering Panel;
- Asked whether there was any right of appeal to prospective foster carers' whose applications were turned down by the Fostering Panel. Officers stated that there was an open and honest dialogue with prospective foster carers throughout the recruitment process. This included being honest in cases where they were not considered suitable. If an applicant was turned down by the Fostering Panel they had the right to go back to the Panel to request a further review or to take their case through the Independent Review mechanism. The Independent Review would make recommendations to the Fostering Panel and the local authority and, whilst they were not obliged to change their decision, they were required to take the Independent Review recommendations into account in reaching a decision;
- During the period since the last report no in-house foster carers had left to join independent fostering agencies, but some independent fostering households had joined the local authority team;
- Mr Priest explained that the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association had been running for about a year. It was open to all foster carers and currently had around 120-130 members. The Association was working in partnership with the Council's Foster Carers Service and wished to be considered as fellow professionals. The Chairman stated that members of the Sub-Committee represented all of the districts in Cambridgeshire and would be happy to be involved in events or activities arranged by the Association if requested. Officers would also be happy to help

publicise the meet ups being arranged for single foster carers in Huntingdon and March;

**(Action:** Consultant Lead Manager – Fostering)

It was resolved to note the report.

### 131. LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS

A new post of Local Offer Lead had been financed through the Transformation Fund and an officer had been appointed. There were also now three specialist Personal Advisors to offer enhanced support and advice to any young people needing this in their transition to Post 16 services. A pilot mentorship programme for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) was being run with a focus on those young people who would benefit from some additional support as they entered employment. The Reablement Service was also involved in a pilot project.

The Chairman offered her congratulations to those care leavers who were already realising their potential through further and higher education and employment and welcomed the new momentum which was being established around the Local Offer. Changes in service structure were already beginning to demonstrate results and placed the Council in a strong position in comparison to some local authorities. There was already much to be proud of, but the aspiration remained to become a beacon authority for support to care leavers. This would be achieved in part by building relationships with those authorities already delivering exceptional support to care leavers and learning from their experience.

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

- The Co-opted Member commented that he felt that there had been a real step forward in the offer to care leavers and that the Local Offer now clearly set out what was available;
- What elected Members could do to become more involved in championing the offer to Cambridgeshire's care leavers. Officers stated that the planned Members' Seminar on the role of corporate parents would provide a good starting point. This could be followed by looking at ways in which Members could get involved in raising the profile of care leavers within their divisions, districts and the many local organisations with which they were involved. Elected Members could also help support efforts to make the Council more 'care aware' by taking account of the impact on care leavers across its entire portfolio of business;
- Asked what the Council currently did in its role as an employer to support care leavers and what more could potentially be done in the future. Members also wanted to know the Council's current policy in relation to employing care leavers and what allowances, if any, were or could properly be made in relation to employing care leavers who might not hold comparable formal qualifications to their peers. Officers undertook to consult the Human Resources team and report back.

**(Action:** Senior Learning and Development Adviser)

It was resolved to:

- a) note the implementation and development of Cambridgeshire's Local Offer to Care Leavers and support awareness and implementation of the offer within and with the partners of the Council;
- b) consider how Elected Members might wish to be involved and/or champion the offer for Cambridgeshire's care leavers;
- c) encourage partners to continue to engage with the development and implementation of Cambridgeshire's Local Offer to Care Leavers.

## 132. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Work was continuing to support workforce development across the range of children's services. This included the re-alignment of Assistant Director roles across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and a closer working relationship with Peterborough City Council to support the sharing of learning and good practice. New training was being developed to support the introduction of the Family Safeguarding model and this would be made available to officers outside of the delivery team to enhance understanding and buy-in. A learning and development pathway within corporate parenting was being considered and officers were involved in a national group looking at the potential for creating a personal adviser apprenticeship.

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

- Asked for more information about the Liquid Logic project. Officers stated that this was a new social care database which would be introduced in January 2020. The current model was no longer fit for purpose and Liquid Logic would provide a more intuitive database and allow easier extraction of data. It was already used by Peterborough City Council's children's services. Adult social care would continue to use the Mosaic system and, as the two systems did not interact, young people would be transferred to the Mosaic system Post-18;
- City College, Peterborough was offering free training to level 1 as part of its health and care academy and had just been approved to deliver training to level 2. The Chairman undertook to share details with officers.  
(**Action:** Chairman)

The Chairman stated that this was the most encouraging report on workforce development to date and welcomed the energy and enthusiasm being shown.

It was resolved to note and comment on the report.

## 133. AGENDA PLAN

The agenda plan was reviewed. The Chairman noted that the Sub-Committee would be receiving a report on Emotional Health and Wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers in January and stated that she would want to see this include details of the support available to those young people with emotional and mental health issues as well as what could be done to prevent such issues developing. She was sorry that Pam

Parker, Clinical Lead for Psychology, would be leaving and emphasised the need to ensure that the existing level and quality of support on offer was maintained.

(**Action:** Assistant Director, Children and Safeguarding)

It was resolved to review and comment on the agenda plan.

### **131. WORKSHOP/ TRAINING PLAN**

The workshop and training plan was reviewed and possible future training dates were discussed.

It was resolved to note the report.

Chairman  
(date)