

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee: Minutes

Date: Wednesday 13 January 2021

Time: 4.04pm – 6.32pm

Venue: Virtual Meeting

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

Non-voting observer:

K Arrowsmith – Chairwoman, Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association

Meeting theme: Education

167. Chairwoman's Announcements

The Chairwoman welcomed Kevin Arrowsmith to the meeting as a non-voting observer following his appointment as the Chair of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (CFCA) in November 2020. She also placed on record the Sub-Committee's thanks to the previous Chair of the CFCA, John Priest.

It had been intended that members of the Sub-Committee would meet with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) in November 2020. However, due to Covid-19 it was not possible for this meeting to be held in person. It had been felt that it was not appropriate for this first informal meeting to be held virtually, so it had been postponed. The CiCC had though been provided with photos and pen portraits of the Sub-Committee members as a preliminary introduction.

168. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

There were no apologies for absence or declarations of interest.

169. Minutes – 9 September 2020 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020 were approved as an accurate record and would be signed by the Chairwoman when the Council returned to its offices. The action log was noted.

A Member raised a query on the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2020. The Democratic Services Officer advised that the minutes of that meeting had been approved as an accurate record at the Sub-Committee meeting on 25 March 2020 and could not be amended. However, the issue of clinical service provision to which the query related could be raised later in the meeting when the agenda plan was discussed (minute 178 below refers).

170. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

171. Participation Report

The report set out the events and activities which had taken place during the summer and autumn. In response to Covid-19, this had included a successful programme of virtual events during the summer. Officers had also sought feedback from children and young people on their experience of Covid-19 and lockdown and how this was impacting on them. Officers were keen to get back to offering face to face events as soon as it was safe and practical to do so, but the online offer which had been developed in response to Covid had proved popular and would be incorporated into the wider participation offer. There would also be a re-launch of the 'Mind of my Own' app in the coming months.

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

- Noted that children in general were spending more time online due to Covid. Children in care were recognised as being particularly vulnerable to exploitation and they asked what measures were in place to protect children and young people in care from coercive and inappropriate interactions online. Officers stated that online exploitation was unfortunately not a new issue and addressing it remained the subject of careful thinking and planning. All foster carers received training and support on this and the potential risk to each child was evaluated on an individual basis and a response planned accordingly. Foster carers could also raise any concerns with social workers and appropriate support would be put in place. The Chairman of the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association commented that there was lots of training on this for foster carers and that each fostering household would have a safety plan in place covering all IT within that household. This often included keeping devices downstairs overnight.
- Congratulated officers on the work which had been done to maintain contact with children in care and care leavers in the difficult circumstances created by Covid.
- Highlighted the insightful comments from a young person that had been included in a recent newsletter and expressed the hope that the virtual art exhibition would remain part of the events' programme post-Covid as this offered an excellent opportunity to showcase this work.
- Noted that the enhanced digital engagement offer during Covid had suited some young people better than more traditional forms of engagement and had enabled some Personal Advisors to have more contact with young people.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Comment or provide feedback on the range of consultation events and activities the Participation Service provide for children in care and care leavers.

172. Report from Cambridgeshire Foster Carer's Association

The Head of Service for Fostering stated that the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (CFCA) and Fostering Service had worked in collaboration with the Virtual School to seek foster carers' views on their experience of education. This included working with schools, the support offered by the Virtual School and the personal education plan (PEP) process. Thirty eight responses had been received which was considered a good response level and these were presented in the appendix to the report.

The Chair of the CFCA commented that this was the second survey which the Association had conducted so far. Respondents had identified a number of areas of strength including:

- i. A good number of schools understood the needs of children and young people in care.
- ii. The STEPS approach to behaviour management in schools was felt to have worked well.
- iii. Some schools had good communication with carers.
- iv. The Virtual School (VS) had provided excellent support for some carers during lockdown. However, some respondents had been unsure about what support was available for the VS and it was felt that there was a need to manage expectations around what the VS could do.
- v. The new VS model of supporting schools outside of PEP's had allowed more focus on the schools' training needs.
- vi. The VS would be continuing to work in partnership with the CFCA to empower Foster Carers to advocate for the children in their care at PEP meetings through the provision of training and advice.

The survey had also identified a number of areas for development. These included:

- i. Some foster carers were not receiving completed PEP paperwork following the review.
- ii. It was felt that some schools could benefit from additional training and greater awareness to improve their support of children with attachment difficulties.
- iii. More training was needed for schools on trauma and its impact on children accessing education.
- iv. A child's potential should be placed at the forefront of the process, rather than just measuring their progress.
- v. It took a long time for education, health and care plans (EHCPs) to be completed and approved and it was requested that consideration be given to a fast-track system for Children in Care.
- vi. Some carers felt that there could be more support from the Virtual School in PEP meetings.
- vii. Support to develop a better understanding of the roles of different professionals within the PEP meetings, specifically that of the foster carer and child's social worker.
- viii. The process of transitioning and transferring between schools required additional focus to ensure that this was managed smoothly for Children in Care.

As foster carers became more aware of the Virtual School offer the hope was that this could help bridge any gap with schools and support a more joined-up approach. The CFCA intended to conduct surveys on other topics going forward and also to hold question and answer sessions to inform future reports. It was hoped to align these with the Sub-Committee's meeting themes.

The Head teacher of the Virtual School (VS) expressed her thanks to the CFCA for their work on this. From her perspective, the key would be to enhancing the relationship with the Chair of the CFCA and foster carers and ensuring effective communication about the support available to them from the VS now that it no longer attended PEP meetings. A working group was being established to support this work going forward and would comprise representatives of the VS, the CFCA and the PEP provider. Some officer time had also been freed up within the VS to focus on work with the CFCA. The Head of the Fostering Service echoed the view that communication was key and stated that the Fostering Service would work closely with both the CFCA and the VS to ensure that the right information was communicated in the right way to all of the County's foster carers.

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

- Expressed concern that a small proportion of respondents felt that their school or early years setting had little or no understanding of the need of traumatised children. The Head of the Virtual School stated that there was an extensive training offer available on this at no cost to settings. A number of virtual reality headsets had also been purchased to support adults' understanding of the lived experience of the child and these would be available when face to face training was able to resume. Videos were being incorporated into the webinar training offer which was being rolled out whilst face to face training was not an option.
- Asked whether teachers had time to undertake training at present, given the demands placed on them by Covid. They were concerned that this should not become an additional burden. The Head of the Virtual School stated that the training on trauma and attachment would take a couple of hours to complete, but most VS webinars were about 15 minutes long in recognition of how busy teaching staff were. These could be accessed at a time convenient to them and contained links to additional information which they could follow up if required.

The Chairwoman thanked the CFCA for a substantial piece of work which had been extremely valuable to the members of the Sub-Committee.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the comments from foster carers in regards to their views and experiences of the education provided to the children in care they look after.
- b) Note the comments from foster carers in regards to their interactions with and support from the Virtual School.

- c) Note the continuing collaborative work from children's services, foster carers and the Virtual School to improve educational outcomes for children in care.

173. Virtual School Report

Since the report was written, England and Wales had entered into a further period of lockdown due to Covid-19. In response to this, the VS's first priority had been to liaise with the Service Director for Education and Social Care colleagues to confirm advice on school attendance and ensure that this was communicated to all concerned. Decisions on school attendance for children in care were being made on an individual basis and the VS was available to offer support if any challenges arose around access to school or remote access to learning, including suitable IT kit and internet access. A support line had been set up by the VS's educational psychologist with input from the clinical services team to provide a trauma-informed response and the Covid PEP process had been re-started. During the first week of lockdown, around 36% of the VS cohort were attending school in person. Conversations around attainment and progress were due to take place with schools during January and this was being reviewed on an individual basis. The previous year's figures were included in the report for information, but due to Covid there would be no direct correlation.

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

- The Chairwoman asked how unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) were assimilated into Post-16 support. Officers stated that most UASC arrived in the UK around the age of 16. There were currently 8 or 9 UASC of school age, with the majority receiving Post-16 support. Unfortunately, most 16-18 year old newly arrived UASC did not have the English language skills needed to access vocational courses so the focus was on developing their language skills to a level which would enable them to do so. Officers were happy with the support being provided with this by local colleges and also used Beats Learning English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as this provision had the flexibility to accept young people at any point in the academic year. Officers worked closely with the Post-18 support team on the transition arrangements for all UASC and children in care to Post-18 support.
- Asked whether there was any difference between the services provided to accompanied asylum seeking children in the community and UASC. Officers stated that, in addition to the agencies involved with accompanied asylum seeking children, unaccompanied asylum seeking children also had all of the services for children in care, including a designated teacher. Officers also worked with the Cambridge Refugee Resettlement Campaign which provided a valuable mechanism for ensuring that the information held by the Council was consistent with that provided by other agencies.
- The Chairwoman commented that the Sub-Committee was always concerned about the attainment of children and young people in care and asked whether Covid was expected to impact negatively on their outcomes and life chances. The Head of the VS stated that it was difficult to assess the impact while the pandemic was still on-going. However, all Year 11 students in the last academic year been able to access their courses of choice. In addition, a number of VS

students who experienced issues with anxiety had found the move to online learning had enabled them to flourish.

- Noted the potential impact of digital learning on social interactions skills. Officers acknowledged this concern, although much online learning was being delivered through Teams or Google Classroom and was still group-based working requiring social interaction skills. The Head of the VS stated that schools had learned a lot about the delivery of digital education during the first lockdown and were now well equipped to deliver learning through a combination of live lessons, tutorials, webinars and quizzes which also supported social engagement.
- The Chairwoman noted the importance of employability and life skills in addition to academic skills and asked whether there were any plans to address these within Post-16 provision. Officers stated that they were currently setting up an 'Aspirations Project' to look at the careers advice and guidance offer for all children from Key Stages 1 and 2 onwards. A new member of staff who had worked previously for Cambridge Regional College would be taking this forward, including looking at the services schools were currently buying in and the work being done through libraries. A grant funding application for this post had been unsuccessful so it was being funded on a fixed term basis until the summer through retained pupil premium funding. An app aimed at boosting children's skills sets and which would hopefully link to CV platforms was also being explored.
- Commented that there were significant differences in the learning offer from different schools. The Head of the VS stated that Department for Education guidance encouraged a blended approach to learning including both live learning and other formats as the most successful approach. However, should any foster carers have concerns about the education offer during lockdown they could raise this with the VS.
- Commented that they had spent two sessions with the Head of the VS and other key partners conducting quality assurance checks on PEPs and that they had been impressed by the professionalism and commitment of all involved. They had also looked at some of the VS's training webinars which were available to view on YouTube which they judged to be excellent.

It was resolved unanimously to:

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

174. University experience for our Care Leavers in relation to the impact of Covid-19 and update on the Local Offer

The university experience of care leavers during lockdown contained a mixture of positive and negative experiences. Officers had been in regular contact with care leavers at university during this period and had also worked with universities to put

support in place where appropriate. The report also set out the new approach being taken to the Local Offer for Care Leavers to support care leavers in their transition to independence. Examples were included of where the Council was providing levels of support above statutory requirements, including through a pilot mentoring scheme. During lockdown, rapid measures had been taken to ensure there was no breakdown in university placements due to digital poverty. Ensuring that care leavers were not digitally disadvantaged remained a priority and action to date included the re-purposing of un-used county council laptops.

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

- The Chairwoman welcomed the report, commenting that she was aware that a lot of work had gone into the Local Offer for the county's care leavers. She asked whether any steps were being taken to capture information on young people's experiences during Covid and to learn from these. Officers confirmed that they would be reflecting on how to capture that experience. The Assistant Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that information about the positive impacts of Personal Advisor interactions was being collected to inform a pre and post Covid comparison. Lots of feedback had been obtained which was being collated by officers and she would arrange for some examples to be included in the next Participation Report. **Action required**
- The Chairwoman asked about accommodation issues for students during the pandemic. Officers stated that many care leavers went to university at a slightly older age than their peers which meant they tended to have settled accommodation before starting their courses with relatively low numbers living in halls of residence. Universities had also generally recognised the needs of care leavers and overseas students who couldn't necessarily return home during lockdown and become more proactive in offering them support.
- Welcomed the provision of un-used county council laptops to those young people who needed them and asked whether these would need to be returned. Officers stated that an allocation of laptops and tablets had been received from the Department for Education which they believed had been provided on a loan basis. The re-purposed County Council laptops would be for the young people to keep, as would a number of other laptops which were purchased using grant funding.
- Welcomed news that that there had not been an increase in the number of care leavers not in education, training or employment (NEET) during Covid.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the work being carried out to support our Care Leavers at University during Covid-19 and the innovative approach of the Local Offer for Care Leavers.

175. Health Update January 2021

The Sub-Committee received a report from Catherine York, the new Designated Nurse for Children in Care at Cambridgeshire Community Services (CCS) NHS Trust. John Peberdy, Service Director for Children and Young People's Health Services at CCS, was also in attendance. All parts of the Health Service had been impacted by Covid-19 and services remained under huge pressure, but there were robust systems in place to monitor performance. Meetings between health and social care practitioners representing the whole of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough had been taking place since the start of the pandemic in order to consider the challenges being faced and to identify ways to embed national guidance into local practice. These meetings were continuing on a fortnightly basis.

Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) were a statutory requirement and as such 100% compliance was expected. However, some young people declined their assessments and additional challenges existed within the process which meant that a compliance rate of 95% would be considered acceptable by the CCS. During Covid, most IHAs and health reviews had been conducted virtually, but in cases where it was judged that a child or young person should be seen face to face this had been arranged. Feedback on the virtual health assessment process had been good with some young people choosing to engage with this process who had not previously done so. The Designated Nurse would carry out a quality audit of health assessments by the end of March 2021 which would cover both children placed within the county and those placed outside. Some issues had been identified in relation to access to dental services for children in care which had been raised with NHS England and Public Health England, but this was a national issue.

The Chairwoman thanked the Designated Nurse for her report. However, whilst recognising that she was still relatively new in post she wanted to make clear that the Sub-Committee had, in its monitoring role, expressed concerns about IHAs, health reviews and the provision of dental services prior to the Covid pandemic. The Service Director for Children and Young People's Health Services (CCS) stated that CCS was committed to addressing the timeliness of IHAs and that the planned audit would also be looking at the quality of assessments. This was an important piece of work and it would be brought back to the Sub-Committee. **Action required.** Work was continuing with the Social Care team to address issues around consent for assessments and performance was better in relation to children placed within the county, but the overall the performance should be better.

A Member expressed dismay that the post of Designated Nurse for Children in Care had been vacant for eight months and asked the new post holder about any areas of concern to her during the period the post was vacant. She further asked whether any additional reliance had been placed on foster carers to manage their children's health and dental needs whilst the post was vacant. The Designated Nurse explained that her role was strategic and that during the gap between appointees the role had been covered by the Head of Safeguarding at CCS, supported by the Children in Care Health Care Team. This had ensured that day to day business had been managed appropriately and progressed. Since her appointment she had begun looking at IHA and health assessment review performance, and whilst this work had not stopped while no Designated Nurse was in post she acknowledged that it might not have progressed as would be wished. There was always a role for foster carers to play in managing the

health needs of the children in their care, but this should not have increased when the Designated Nurse role was vacant.

The Assistant Director for Children and Safeguarding commented that the previous Designated Nurse had been excellent and the difference had been felt during the period the post was vacant, but the Head of Safeguarding at the CCS had stepped in to help bridge the gap and they were continuing to meet fortnightly at present. The Designated Nurse was a strategic role, with the needs of individual children being managed by their foster carers and social workers. IHAs and health review meetings were continuing to happen, even if not always within statutory timescales, and the new Designated Nurse was already working closely with the Heads of the Corporate Parenting and Fostering Services to move this work forward. She did not want there to be any misapprehension that individual children's needs were not being met in the period the Designated Nurse role had been vacant.

It was resolved unanimously to:

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

176. Corporate Parenting Scorecard

The Sub-Committee was advised that there had been a slight increase in the numbers of children in care in recent months, but that the overall trend remained downwards. Social worker caseloads were a little high and the new Head of the Corporate Parenting Service would be working with social care colleagues on this. Statutory visits were being delivered through a hybrid approach combining both virtual and physical visits as appropriate. Initially the data management system had not recognised virtual visits which had led to a drop in the number of visits recorded, but this information would be captured going forward. The new Regional Adoption Agency had gone live on 1 December 2020 so there would be a more tailored focus on adoption statistics in future reports.

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

- Commented that the section of the scorecard referring to legal status was presented as blue text on a blue background. This made it difficult to read, particularly in hard copy. Officers undertook to revise this in the next report.
Action Required
- Endorsed the use of the dashboard to condense a lot of information.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note and comment on the Corporate Parenting Scorecard.

177. Sub-Committee Workshop/ Training Plan

The Chairwoman commended the workshop on the Sub-Committee's new format and working practices which had taken place in January 2021 and welcomed the offer of an introductory meeting with the new Head of the Corporate Parenting Service for Sub-Committee members. **Action required.** Going forwards, the Heads of both the Corporate Parenting Service and the Fostering Service would work across the whole of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Dates were being canvassed for an online Members' Seminar to brief councillors on the Council's progress with the Local Offer for care leavers and the work taking place to ensure that young people leaving care were able to access education, employment and training and appropriate accommodation.

It was hoped that an informal meeting between elected members of the Sub-Committee and members of the Children in Care Council could be arranged during the next few months. There was a strong wish for this to happen from both councillors and the young people and officers would pursue this outside of the meeting.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the Sub-Committee workshop and training plan.

178. Sub-Committee Agenda Plan

A Member asked that a regular report on health issues should be added to the agenda plan. The Assistant Director for Children and Safeguarding stated that a health-themed meeting would be included in the Sub-Committee's programme of work.

A Member commented that the minutes of the Sub-Committee meeting on 15 January 2020 stated that the Professional Lead for Psychology had recently left the Council to take up a new post. However, her understanding was that this was not the case and that the former post holder had not moved to another post. The Sub-Committee had not received any further reports on emotional and mental health issues relating to children in care and care leavers since that meeting. She understood that there had been a restructuring of the clinical services team and a number of resignations and that a consultation process was about to conclude. The Member expressed surprise that this issue had not been drawn to the Sub-Committee's attention and asked for a briefing note setting out the position. The Assistant Director of Children and Safeguarding stated that a lot of work had been taking place in relation to the review of clinical services. This was separate to the introduction of the Family Safeguarding Model which had taken place a year ago. A staff consultation on clinical service provision was currently taking place which was why it had not been reported to the Sub-Committee before now. She acknowledged that there were differences of opinion on the proposals, but believed that once the arrangements were embedded the service would provide the necessary support. The biggest change would be the delivery of services by the Council rather than by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust (CPFT). She undertook to ask the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Quality

Assurance to bring a report on this to the Sub-Committee's next meeting in June 2021. The Chairwoman asked that a briefing note should also be provided for Members in advance of that report. **Action required**

It was resolved to note the agenda plan.

The Chairwoman stated that it was reassuring to hear that the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's children in care and care leavers had been limited as far as possible, and that in some cases positive outcomes had been achieved from the Covid response.

(Chairwoman)