

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: 15 July 2020

Time: 4.00-5.55pm

Venue: Meeting held remotely in accordance with The Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Meetings) (England) Regulations 2020

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

Apologies: Councillor A Costello (substituted by Cllr Goldsack)

143. NOTIFICATION OF CHAIRMAN/WOMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN/WOMAN

The Clerk reported that the Children and Young People Committee had been pleased to re-appoint Councillor Lis Every as Chair of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee and Councillor Anne Hay as Vice Chair for the municipal year 2020/21 at its meeting on 26 May 2020.

143. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Adela Costello, substituted by Councillor Mark Goldsack.

144. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

145. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 15 JANUARY 2020

The minutes of the meeting on 20 July 2020 were approved as an accurate record. A paper copy would be signed by the Chairman when possible.

146. ACTION LOG

The action log was reviewed and the following update noted:

Minute 141: Children in Care Not in Education, Employment and Training – A report on this had been considered by the Children and Young People Committee on 7 July 2020. Both the report and a recording of the meeting were available to view at:

https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/ccs_live/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1369/Committee/4/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx

The Chairwoman commented that a number of actions had been outstanding for some time and asked that they should be cleared before the next meeting.

(Action: Assistant Director for Children's Services)

147. PETITIONS AND PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No petitions or public questions were received.

148. PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE ENGAGEMENT WITH CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS AND THE FORMAT OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE

Members considered proposals for revised arrangements for future engagement with children in care and care leavers and the format of future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee. The two young people who had been co-opted to the Sub-Committee had made a great contribution to its work, but the time commitment involved was significant and it had not been possible to identify anyone willing to take this role on going forward. A focused visit by Ofsted in February 2020 had provided positive feedback, finding that the Council had made significant progress following feedback given following an inspection in January 2019. It was vital that the voice of children in care and care leavers continued to inform the Sub-Committee's work so revised arrangements were proposed which would ensure that this remained the case. It was proposed that the Sub-Committee would continue to meet six times a year. Three of these meetings would remain formal meetings open to the public. These would alternate with three informal meetings held in private with children in care and care leavers to enable direct conversations to take place. The meetings would be based on the themes of Health, Education and Placement. The informal meetings would be based around case studies to provide Members with an insight into the lived experience of the children and young people within the Council's care and enable them to satisfy themselves about the provision on offer and provide challenge to officers where necessary. Subject to the Sub-Committee's approval, this would be complimented by revised performance reporting arrangements designed to focus on the Sub-Committee's areas of responsibility and to provide clear comparative data over time (minute 151 below also refers).

If the proposed arrangements were approved there would be less formal meetings each year. In order to ensure that Sub-Committee members were kept fully informed on relevant issues between formal meetings it was proposed that briefing notes would be circulated when appropriate. A briefing form had been produced which would be circulated as appropriate when issues about which Members needed to be informed arose between formal Committees. The Chairwoman welcomed this proposal and asked that she should be copied into any briefing requests.

The timeliness and processes around health assessments were recognised as being an area of particular concern to the Sub-Committee. A working group had been set up with health service partners to look at ways of addressing this which had resulted in strong working relationships being forged. The introduction of the LiquidLogic case management system in January 2020 had also improved the process. Following some initial teething problems this was now working well and performance was improving within Cambridgeshire. There were still issues in relation to health assessments for those children and young people accommodated outside of the county which reflected the national position.

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

- Thanked the Chairwoman for advance notice of the proposals and for involving Members in the discussion.
- Welcomed the proposals which they described as both promising and refreshing.
- Welcomed the proposed informal meetings with children and young people and asked that these should be made as accessible and inviting as possible to encourage maximum attendance. Members were clear that the time, format and location of meetings should be based on the needs and preferences of the children and young people involved and that Members would fit in with this.
- Acknowledged that it would take time to build the relationships that would be necessary for the informal meetings to play a full part in the Sub-Committee's work. An important part of this would be providing feedback on what action had been taken in the formal decision-making process in response to any issues raised during the informal meetings.
- Commended the continued inclusion of the plain language summaries at the top of all formal Sub-Committee reports to make them as widely accessible as possible. Another Member commented that they would like to see these used across all published committee reports.
- Asked how the Children in Care Council (CiCC) would be involved in this process. The Assistant Director for Children's Services stated that Cambridgeshire's children in care population was quite widely dispersed geographically which had made it difficult to ensure that everyone had an equal opportunity to take part. Work was underway to re-build the CiCC to enable wider virtual participation. The CiCC was a space specifically for children and young people and would continue to be respected as such. The informal engagement meetings with members of the Sub-Committee would work in parallel to this.
- Asked about the role of foster carers in the new arrangements and what was proposed to ensure that their voice was heard. The Assistant Director for Children's Services stated that a later report on the agenda proposed that the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association (CFCA) should be invited to submit a report, via officers, to each of the Sub-Committee's public meetings and that the Chair of the CFCA should be invited to attend those meetings as an observer (minute 150 refers).
- Asked whether initial health assessments included dental checks. Officers stated that this was not the case, but that information about dental checks, optician checks and vaccinations were picked up as part of the health assessment process and that any overdue checks would be flagged with foster carers. There were though sometimes problems getting a child registered with a dentist.
- The Chairwoman suggested it would be helpful for Members to have some training in preparation for the informal meetings with children and young people. This should include clear parameters around behaviours and expectations for the meetings. The Assistant Director for Children's Services suggested that a workshop should be arranged to address this with herself, the Head of Corporate Parenting, the Lead Practice Improvement Manager and other relevant officers.

(Action: Head of Corporate Parenting)

Summing up, the Chairwoman stated that she welcomed the proposals and that the key outcome would be to achieve and evidence children and young people having a voice at the centre of the Sub-Committee's work. She wished to place on record her thanks to the Head of Corporate Parenting and her team in relation to their work in relation to health assessments.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the information within the report relating to the Participation Offer.
- b) Agree the proposed meeting changes to facilitate increasingly effective engagement with Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- c) Agree the new reporting format of a Corporate Parenting Scorecard

149. PARTICIPATION REPORT

The Participation Report provided a summary of the participation events prior to the Covid-19 lockdown together with details of the revised offer. Officers had moved quickly to provide a virtual participation offer during lockdown which included fortnightly interactive newsletters including health and wellbeing resources and competitions designed for different age groups. Children in Care Council meetings had been moved to a virtual platform with sub-groups meeting virtually on a fortnightly basis. The Covid-19 lockdown had been used as an opportunity to reset and reframe conversations with young people through looking at the Promises which the Council made to those in its care. This included looking at how adults and corporate parents could support children and young people in the transition to the new normal.

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

- Welcomed the detail provided and the ideas reported.
- Highlighted the importance of all Members being aware of their role and responsibilities as corporate parents.
- Noted that children in secure foster care placements tended to engage with Participation events less as they no longer identified with being children in care. Officers stated that they took a pragmatic approach to participation and that opportunities to engage on a one to one basis were offered for those who preferred this to group activities.

Summing up, the Chairwoman expressed her thanks to the Lead Practice Improvement Manager and her team for the tremendous amount of work which had gone into reshaping and delivering a revised participation offer in the light of Covid-19. The Cambridge University Science and Policy Exchange would be conducting a research project on care leavers as part on its 2020 work programme and this information could usefully be fed into that.

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.

150. FOSTER CARER REPORTING TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE

The Sub-Committee considered proposals to invite the Cambridgeshire Foster Carer's Association (CFCA) to submit a report, via officers, to public meetings of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee and for the Chair of the CFCA or their representative to attend public meetings as an observer. They would be invited to contribute during meetings at the absolute discretion of the Chair and would have no voting rights. If agreed, this would enable foster carers to contribute to the Sub-Committee's business and allow Members to hear their views direct.

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

- Commented that there had already been very positive informal interactions with the Chair of the CFCA and welcomed the proposal to place this on a more formal footing.
- The Chairwoman welcomed the proposal to make foster carers an integral part of the Sub-Committee's work.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the attendance of the Cambridgeshire Foster Care Association chairperson or their representative at Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee meetings as an observer. They will be invited to make a contribution at the absolute discretion of the Chair.
- b) Agree to accept a report from the Cambridgeshire Foster Care Association at each of its meetings.

151. CORPORATE PARENTING PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Sub-Committee considered proposals for revised performance reporting arrangements. If approved, Members would continue to receive basic performance information with the option of looking at performance in relation to particular cohorts in future if that would be helpful. This would be presented in a more concise and visual format to allow key data to be easily identified and to allow trends to be readily identified over time.

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

- Welcomed the concise digest of information, but expressed some reservations at the loss of some interpretive and narrative detail. Officers suggested that this might be usefully explored as part of the proposed workshop in advance of the introduction of the new format of Sub-Committee meetings.
(Action: Head of Corporate Parenting)
- Asked that officers look again at navigation around the diagrams so that it was clear what narrative was associated with each table.
(Action: Assistant Director for Children's Services)

It was resolved to:

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

152. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is a statutory role which sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance team. Every child in care had an IRO who assessed the quality and consistency of their child in care plan. Reviews were conducted in accordance with statutory timescales and additional reviews could be carried out by the IRO as required. The IRO had an independent relationship with each child which was separate to that which the child had with their social worker. The service was delivered by a stable and experienced staff team. During 2019/20 IROs carried out 2275 reviews and the timeliness of these remained good. The escalation protocol provided a key tool in the IRO's role in making sure care plans were progressing. This was delivered through standardised communications between IROs and the social care service regarding any concerns which were identified. As anticipated, there had been more escalations and alerts than during the previous year which was attributed to the system becoming embedded and improving responses from social care. The Assistant Director for Children's Services commented that the IRO Service had moved on significantly and discharged a valuable function.

During 2019/20 55% of children and young people attended their reviews in person. IROs would like to see this number increase and were working to make review sessions as inviting as possible. However, there could be sensitive or difficult issues to discuss so it was accepted that not all children would want to attend. IROs also discharged an important function in tracking permanence. This was defined as a child being in a settled and stable placement with a legal order in place. Good progress on this had been seen over the period covered by the report and the overall picture was an improvement on the previous year. Looking forward, the aim was to improve the way feedback on the IRO service was obtained.

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

- Expressed thanks to the IRO team for their hard work in support of the county's children and young people in care.
- Noted that the number of escalations in the period equated to an average of more than one per child. Officers confirmed that this was correct. An escalation could relate to quite a wide variety of issues so there might be several escalations, some of which could be very minor, relating to a single child.
- Asked for more information about the caseload figures in the report. The Independent Reviewing Service Manager stated that caseloads for IROs were higher for IROs than for social workers and this reflected their different roles. National guidance suggested a caseload of between 50-70 cases and the average in Cambridgeshire during the period was 60 cases.

- Asked for more information about the reduction in the number of children in care. The Assistant Director for Children's Services stated that this reflected a reduction in the number of children coming into care during the period. This was due in part to more work being done around supporting families so that children did not need to be taken into care. There had also been greater emphasis on rehabilitating children back into their families where this was appropriate and had been risk assessed. Unaccompanied asylum seeking children tended to come into care at an older age and move through the care system more quickly which also impacted on overall numbers.
- Asked for more information about advocacy. The Independent Reviewing Service Manager stated that the IRO Service worked with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) who provided advocates for children in care. Anyone could make a referral to the NYAS, including the child themselves, but an advocate would only work with a child if they agreed to this.

Summing up, the Chairwoman commented that Independent Reviewing Officers played an important role and that it was good to see things improving.

It was resolved to note and comment on the report.

153. SUB-COMMITTEE WORKSHOP AND TRAINING PLAN

The Sub-Committee reviewed its workshop and training plan. In relation to Item 10, a proposed briefing session on the role of the personal advisor and update on the Local Offer, the Chairwoman stated that she had been delighted by the progress that had been made in relation to identifying business mentors for young people during the Covid-19 lockdown. Ten young people had been allocated a mentor to date and the mentors included Councillor Simon Bywater, Chairman of the Children and Young People Committee. Work was already underway to identify the next ten mentors.

Individual Members raised the following issues in relation to the workshop and training plan:

- Asked that Substitute members of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee should be invited to attend future training sessions.
(Action: Head of Corporate Parenting)
- Discussed whether the Members' Seminar briefing on care leavers which had been planned for 12 June 2020 and postponed due to Covid-19 could be delivered virtually. The Members' Seminar programme had been put on hold following the Covid-19 lockdown and Members felt it would be timely to take the views of Group Leaders on whether this should re-start or if a stand-alone seminar on care leavers could be offered.
(Action: Democratic Services Officer)
- The Assistant Director for Children's Services undertook to review and revise the workshop and training plan in consultation with the Chairwoman so that it would reflect the new themes and working practices agreed by the Sub-Committee earlier in the meeting (minute 148 above refers). This would include arranging a workshop to discuss what training was needed during the next 12 months to upskills members and substitute members of the Corporate Parenting Sub-

Committee and to ensure that all councillors were fully aware of their role and responsibilities as corporate parents and to identify any relevant skills or expertise they might be able to offer. The Chairwoman would also want to work specifically with the Chairs and Vice Chairs of all of the Council's policy and Service Committees to ensure that the Council's responsibilities in relation to children in care and care leavers was taken into account across the full range of Council business.

(Action: Assistant Director of Children's Services/ Head of Corporate Parenting)

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

154. AGENDA PLAN

The Chairwoman expressed her thanks to officers for their work in response to Covid-19. She noted that, whilst the Sub-Committee had not met since January 2020, the Children and Young People Committee had been meeting monthly and had received a report at each meeting providing an update on the Council's response to Covid-19 in relation to children's services and education.

Members agreed that the next meeting on 9 September 2020 should remain a public meeting with the new practice of alternating public meetings with private informal meetings with children and young people in care coming into effect after that.

It was resolved to note the agenda plan.

Chairman
(date)