

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 17 July 2019

Time: 4.00pm – 5.50m

Venue: Room 128, Shire Hall, Cambridge

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

Co-opted Members: S Day

Apologies: Councillor A Hay (Vice Chairman)

106. CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP

The Sub-Committee noted the appointment of Councillor Meschini in place of Councillor Richards. The Chairman welcomed Councillor Meschini to the Sub-Committee and asked that her thanks should be recorded to Councillor Richards for her contribution to the Sub-Committee's work during her appointment.

107. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hay. There were no declarations of interest.

108. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 22 MAY 2019

The minutes of the meeting on 22 May 2019 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

109. ACTION LOG

The action log was reviewed and the following verbal update was noted:

- Minute 53: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Issues relating to Children in Care in Cambridgeshire. The Mental Health Task and Finish Group had completed its work and details of its activity and outcomes would be included in the Corporate Parenting Annual Report which would be finalised by the Sub-Committee in September 2019.

110. YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

The Sub-Committee reviewed the events for children in care and care leavers which had taken place since May 2019 and those planned for the school holidays.

Arising from the report, Members noted:

- A vacancy had arisen for one participation worker following the resignation of a member of staff. Interviews would be held in September 2019;
- A newsletter had been produced which included an events calendar. A copy would be circulated electronically to Sub-Committee members for information;
(**Action:** Participation Manager)

- The annual 'picnic in the park' event for children in care and their carers would take place the following week and would contain even more fun activities than previous years, including some run by partner organisations;
- Reporting tools for the 'Mind of my Own' (MOMO) app had been developed which were providing some useful data on usage. Examples were included at Appendix 1 to the report. Members noted that one response received via the MOMO app had indicated that a child felt unsafe. Officers stated that this response had been followed up to the social worker both by phone and in person who had confirmed the child's wellbeing;
- Welcomed confirmation that recruitment was already underway to fill the participation worker vacancy to maintain capacity;
- Asked whether foster carers were being made aware of the events being offered by the Participation Service. Officers confirmed that they were attending foster carer support groups to promote events and build confidence that events would run as planned. In the past a number of events had been cancelled at short notice which had undermined foster carers' trust. The current Participation Team was working hard to rebuild this trust and the increase in the number of children and young people attending recent events was encouraging;
- Noted that no feedback had been received via the MOMO app from any young people aged 17 or above. Members highlighted the importance of maintaining lines of communication with older children and young people and asked what could be done to encourage them to use the app. Officers stated that the MOMO app was promoted to all young people, but that those within this age group tended to make contact direct via text or email. Work was also underway to revamp the Care Leavers' Forum to make it more responsive to young people's needs. Workshops would be arranged to address issues identified by the young people themselves, for example CV writing or emotional support, and this would support a further channel of communication. The Co-Opted Member had also agreed to speak at a future meeting of the Care Leavers' Forum;
- Asked whether children in care and care leavers received any discounted or free access to leisure activities. Officers stated that the 'max card' offered some benefits of this type;
- The Chairman asked that officers should make the recruitment of a second co-opted member (if required) and co-opted member substitutes a priority to ensure that the voice of children in care and care leavers remained at the heart of the Sub-Committee's work.
(**Action:** Participation Service Manager)

The Chairman thanked the Participation Team for their continued hard work, the progress which was being made and the positive momentum which was being established. The Sub-Committee had been concerned at the low attendance rates at events and welcomed the improvements which had been achieved, particularly in relation to children and young people living outside of the county. The Chairman expressed her regret that one young person had missed a recent event due to the taxi which had been arranged to support their attendance not turning up.

It was resolved:

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

111. PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Chairman welcomed John Peberdy, Service Director for Children and Young People's Health Services at Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust (CCS) to the meeting. She stated that the Sub-Committee attached great importance to its links with Health Service partners and she invited Mr Peberdy to join the discussion for this item. The timely completion of initial health assessments remained an area of concern to the Sub-Committee and she welcomed the opportunity to review the position collaboratively.

Information about complaints relating to services for children in care in 2018/19 had been reviewed at the Sub-Committee meeting on 22 May 2019 in advance of this information being included in the Children's Services Annual Feedback report which was presented to the Children and Young People Committee on 9 July 2019. Members had asked for more information about the complaints which had been upheld and what measures had been taken to address the issues these raised. A summary of this information was contained at paragraph 2.7, but due to the very small number of individuals and families concerned it had been grouped under several headings to ensure that complainants' anonymity was protected. The Chairman asked whether any Member would like more detail on specific cases, in which case the meeting would need to move into closed session. No Member requested to do so.

The Lead Corporate Parenting Manager stated that conversations were continuing between officers and Health Service partners around the handling of initial health service assessments (IHAs) to improve the number carried out within statutory timescales. Amongst the causes of delay were difficulties in obtaining consents when children were taken into care at short notice or at the weekend, the submission of incomplete request forms and failures to attend for an assessment once this was arranged. Members noted that IHAs did not involve any invasive medical assessment.

Arising from the report:

- The Chairman thanked officers for their continued work to refine the content and presentation of the Performance Report to make it more informative and accessible;
- Members asked why the number of IHAs conducted within statutory timeframes had dropped from 63.6% in June 2018 to 5.7% in April 2019. Officers stated that the Children's Change programme had resulted in the loss of business support officers and changes in social workers which had impacted on timescales. The process for handling IHAs had also become over complicated. This had now been simplified and the newly appointed business support officers would include a nominated officer with responsibility for checking the IHA inbox daily and sending a report each day to the Assistant Director for Children's Services setting out the number of IHAs which remained outstanding.

Mr Peberdy stated that capacity to carry out IHAs had not been an issue to date, but that some checks had been cancelled due to delayed consent forms. Work was taking place on a national basis to look at whether individual consent was required for each IHA as was currently the case or whether this could be presumed when a child was taken into the care of the local authority. The work was also looking at whether consent could be presumed as given unless it was specifically withdrawn. The CCS now tracked the number of delayed consent forms and this data could be shared with the Council.

(Action: Service Director for Children and Young People's Health Services, CCS)

The Chairman stated that the issue of delays to IHAs would remain an area of specific focus and that the Sub-Committee would want to look at the impact of the new arrangements when the Performance Report was reviewed at the next meeting in September 2019.

- Members noted that there could be delays in arranging IHAs for children in care placed outside of the county where the assessment would be conducted by the local health service provider. The Chairman stated that this was not acceptable. She welcomed an assurance from the Service Director for Children and Young People's Health Services (CCS) that initial health assessments for children in care in Cambridgeshire were carried out according to need and that assessments for children placed in Cambridgeshire by other local authorities were not delayed in favour of children in Cambridgeshire County Council's care. She asked CCS to let officers know which local authorities were consistently slow to process health assessments for Cambridgeshire children in care placed within their areas so that the Council could take this up with them;
(Action: Service Director for Children and Young People's Health Services, CCS)
- A Member expressed surprise that 55% of Cambridgeshire's children in care were placed more than 20 miles beyond the county's borders. Their impression had been that the majority of those placed out of county were older unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) who were placed in Peterborough for social and cultural reasons. Whilst accepting that in some cases there were good reasons for children in care to be placed at a distance from their birth family they were concerned at the implications for those for whom this was not the case;
- Members noted that officers were currently aware of 337 children in the care of local authorities other than Cambridgeshire who were placed within Cambridgeshire. A Member commented that this meant that a significant number of the foster care places available in Cambridgeshire were not accommodating Cambridgeshire children;
- Officers stated that at present dental and optician appointments for children in care were recorded manually which could lead to appointments being missed. With the introduction of the new Liquid Logic system in November 2019 this data would all be captured on a single system which should eliminate this issue.

The Chairman thanked the Service Director for Children and Young People's Health Services CCS for his input and welcomed his offer to help guide the Sub-Committee through NHS structures and systems and to encourage other NHS colleagues who

might usefully be involved to come along to future meetings. She asked that he should let the Sub-Committee and officers know of any Council practices in relation to children in care and care leavers which Health service partners found unhelpful. Going forward, officers would share in advance any specific questions which Members might have so that he would be aware of these ahead of the meeting.

(**Action:** Assistant Director for Children's Services)

It was resolved to:

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

112. CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET) REDUCTION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN 2019/20

The Chairman welcomed the report and stated that the Local Offer was a priority for the Council and the NEET Reduction Strategy Action Plan was a key element of this.

Members noted that there was now a NEET Reduction Strategy in place for all young people within Cambridgeshire. Performance was generally good for 16-18 year old NEETs, but for young people in vulnerable groups such as children in care, care leavers and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) the figures were less positive. To address this the NEET Reduction Strategy had been revised and six strategic objectives set relating specifically to children in care and care leavers. These were:

1. Support pre-16 young people to get offers of learning and make successful transitions into post 16 provision.
2. Support post-16 young people to ensure that they sustain post-16 provision and achieve their qualifications or re-engage into post-16 provision.
3. Ensure the right support is provided to young people with SEND.
4. Identify and develop more provision to meet the needs of post-16 young people (including those with mental health needs).
5. Support young people to make a successful transition to employment and develop links with the Department of Work and Pensions to ensure that they are claiming suitable benefits.
6. Improve data performance/ quality assurance/ workforce development.

Arising from discussion of the report:

- Members noted that good provision was available in regional colleges and sixth forms, but that there was less capacity to deliver foundation learning courses. The Chairman stated that there was a strong focus on foundation skills for adult learners, but a gap in local provision at this level for 16-18 year olds. This was a cause for concern;
- Officers stated that the entitlement of care leavers to education transport required clarification. The Chairman stated that the Sub-Committee had not previously looked at education transport issues for children in care and care leavers and the implications of this on their access to further education, apprenticeships and employment opportunities. She asked that a report on the current position should be brought to a future meeting.
(**Action:** Lead Education Officer)

- Members noted the Combined Authority's Bus Reform Task Force was currently gathering evidence in relation to bus travel and suggested that the Council's response should include children and young people's use of buses, including children in care, and how this impacted on their access to education, employment, training and social opportunities.
(**Action:** Lead Education Officer)
- A Member asked for more detail on the reasons which lay behind the higher numbers of children in care and care leavers who were NEET. Officers stated this figure included care leavers who were experiencing mental health issues, those deemed not yet ready for education, employment or training, those who were pregnant or parents caring for children and those who were actively seeking education, employment or training. Officers judged that resources should be targeted on the latter group who were ready to engage. The Member commented that they understood the rationale for targeting resources towards this group, but commented that there were specific projects to support those with mental health issues into work so they would want to take advantage of those;
- A new contract had been awarded to TCHC via the Combined Authority who were working in partnership with NEET providers across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Officers were seeking to influence how this funding was directed, but emphasised that this related to all NEET and not just children in care and care leavers. The Chairman stated that she was a member of the Combined Authority Skills Committee and would pursue the issue through that forum. She would also be happy to write to providers to ask about their offer to children in care and care leavers if officers supplied the necessary information.
(**Action:** Lead Corporate Care Manager)

The Chairman thanked officers for their report and asked that a further report should be brought to the Committee in six months' time to keep the Sub-Committee informed of developments, or sooner if officers judged that it was needed.

It was resolved to note and comment on the report.

113. SUB-COMMITTEE WORKSHOP AND TRAINING PLAN

The Sub-Committee workshop and training plan was reviewed and provisional dates agreed for future workshop and training sessions. These would include a single session based on case studies looking at the wraparound care provided to children in care and two sessions to shape the Annual Corporate Parenting Report which would be presented to the Children and Young People Committee in October 2019. The Chairman stated that this would enable the Sub-Committee to play a central role in shaping its content and presentation. Members endorsed this approach. Officers would send out meeting invitations confirming the dates and venues.

(**Action:** Head of Service – Corporate Parenting)

The Chairman noted that several members of the Sub-Committee also held appointments to groups and bodies which were directly relevant to its work. She asked that a process be established to receive feedback on the work of those groups which related to children in care and care leavers and to open lines of communication.

(**Action:** Democratic Services Officer)

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

Chairman
(date)