

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMITTEE: MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 30 January 2019

Time: 4.00pm – 7:15pm

Venue: Room 128, Shire Hall, Cambridge

Present: Councillors L Every (Chairman), A Hay (Vice Chairman), A Bradnam, M Goldsack (substitute for Councillor A Costello) and C Richards

Co-opted Member: S Day

Apologies: Councillor A Costello

Co-opted Member: P Asker

73. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman apologised for the change in the meeting's location and informed the Sub-Committee that the meeting on 20th March was likely to be held in Ely.

74. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were reported as recorded above.

No declarations of interest were made.

75. MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 21 NOVEMBER 2018

The minutes of the meeting on 21 November 2018 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

76. ACTION LOG

The action log was reviewed and verbal updates noted.

77. PARTICIPATION REPORT

The Chairman asked the Co-opted Sub-Committee member present to share how he viewed his experience since joining the Sub-Committee.

Mr Day commented that he had enjoyed the six months and that he felt listened to in a way that he had not felt when interacting with other services. He stated that he felt privileged to be able to put across the views of children in care, as most were not afforded such an opportunity.

Elected Members of the Sub-Committee expressed their enthusiasm for the Co-opted members' participation, remarking that it allowed greater understanding of the effects of the work carried out by the Sub-Committee. They also expressed the hope that that, while they were inspired by the words and thoughts of Mr Day, he was also inspired to see the Council in action and the passion that elected Members and officers had for their roles.

In discussing the report, Sub-Committee members:

- Considered extending the invitation to more young people to attend as observers to provide them with insight into the process as well offering them the chance to learn about how they could take advantage of opportunities open to them and who to contact. Many may not be aware of the possibility that they could attend meetings. It was suggested that despite report summaries providing simpler reading of the reports, some of the issues discussed may have appeared quite complex for young children to understand, as well as the fact that meetings often lasted a few hours and it would be hard to engage the children for such extended periods. Officers committed to consulting other young people in order to assess interest and how to make it constructive and meaningful.

(Action: Participation Services Managers)

- Suggested that the time of Sub-Committee meetings made it hard for many young people to attend, especially those who lived further from where the meeting was being held. One Member proposed holding one meeting specifically aimed towards encouraging the attendance and participation of young people. Another Member informed colleagues and officers of a taxi service that provided voluntary transport to young people, undertaking to explore this further and advise the Assistant Service Director.

(Action: Councillor Goldsack)

- Were informed of progress being made over reciprocal arrangements with other local authorities across the region, allowing for the offer to be extended to children outside the county, with all the necessary safeguards in place.
- Noted that not all young people wanted to be involved in the activities offered by the Participation Service and that they had alternative arrangements through schools, groups and other organisations. However, it was important for the service to establish good communication with them in order to let them know that opportunities were available if they were interested.
- Established that funding would be likely to continue when the 16-month contract expired.

It was resolved to:

Provide feedback on the range of consultation events and activities the Participation Service provided for looked after children.

78. VIRTUAL SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

The Sub-Committee received an update on the priorities for development of the Virtual School over the next two terms. In presenting the report, the Interim Head of the Virtual School noted that she had used information from the external review, as well as her knowledge and experience from looking at other Virtual Schools in the region in order to find out how to make their successes fit into the Cambridgeshire plan. It was noted that efforts were being made to develop a relationship with the Peterborough Virtual School.

Attention was drawn to the four main priorities listed in the report. Improving how data was collected, analysed and used would improve setting the direction of work, including the need to increase capacity, while officers stated that there were two types of

databases; one on individual pupils and the other on a school level. Creating a school improvement approach to improving outcomes would focus on the school level data and would lead to a unified, empowering approach, with a focus on making information on the children available to the schools and developing a coherent communications strategy to make it clear what the Council was doing and why it was doing it. The new model would not provide for a worker to be assigned individually to each child, meaning that it would be important to ensure people were not omitted or left behind, which would depend heavily on data.

The Sub-Committee was informed about the possibility of funding an educational psychologist that would make access easier for service users although it was noted that this would supplement current processes rather than replace them. It was also noted that in Cambridgeshire set funding was given to schools on a per-pupil basis with the option to apply for more if necessary, whereas other local authorities distributed funds according to what schools considered necessary.

In discussing the report, Members:

- Agreed that an educational psychologist would be a key part of the process, which they praised for its thorough research while expressing their eagerness to provide support. It was agreed to take the request to the Children and Young People Committee.
(Action: Chairman/ Assistant Service Director)
- Expressed concern over the allocation process of Designated Teachers, noting the already high workload of teachers and that it would be important to ensure consistency in any relationship between Designated Teachers and pupils. Acknowledging this concern, officers identified the need to involve head teachers in the discussion to ensure that designated teachers were afforded the necessary support and capacity to fulfil their role.
- Discussed the effectiveness of one to one training and the necessity for Designated Teachers to be able to join into small groups if deemed appropriate for the pupils.
- Expressed their appreciation for the report and the work of officers on the issue while noting their agreement that basing everything around relationships and communication was the correct approach.

It was resolved to:

- a) Note the direction the Virtual School is moving in.
- b) Offer support and challenge as appropriate.

79. PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Sub-Committee was informed that there was an error in the published report's figures, stemming from the use of figures relating to all Cambridgeshire children rather than solely Children in Care and that the correct data had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. It was also noted that much of the information in the charts was difficult to read in black and white because they were colour-coded and officers were requested to try to avoid using colours in the future. Some of the information in the

charts appeared to be in conflict with the accompanying commentaries and officers undertook to ensure greater accuracy and clarity in future papers.

(Action: Service Manager – Corporate Parenting)

While discussing the report, Members:

- Were advised that it had been difficult to produce accurate figures, but that improvements were constantly being made. It was to be expected that other local authorities prioritised their own children and conversations were held continually over improving the quantity and quality of available information, which was made all the more difficult to analyse due to issues extrapolating the data from health assessments without a mechanism to do so. Data often changed over time and required repeated manual checking.
- Various methods were being taken to improve the situation, including the processes for recording information and rating performances, as well as reconvening a service improvement panel within the Corporate Parenting Service, subject to resources.
- Queried how they could provide assistance to officers. They were advised that bringing children and young people within Corporate Parenting, as opposed to being located across the services as before, had already been of great benefit. Further planning would be necessary to ensure the right assistance was requested.
- Expressed concern over the apparent increase in missing incidents, missing children and child sexual exploitation, as indicated in the tables on pages 56-57 of the report, as well as the issue of county lines. It was noted that more context would be provided in a report at the meeting on 20 March 2019 and Members were assured that a lot of work was being done on the issue. Maintaining good relationships with other local authorities was considered fundamental in overcoming the problems.

It was resolved to:

- a) Review performance for Looked after Children.
- b) Comment on the themes and trends identified in the report.

80. CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

The Sub-Committee was asked to review and endorse the Corporate Parenting Strategy, a draft document that had gone through extensive consultation as well as other committees. Members were informed that it was largely based on a Bright Spots survey of 140 young people, which meant that it was designed around what children and young people in care felt was necessary instead of the previous corporate-based strategy. It was noted that measurement areas had been reconsidered to reflect this, with an example being that more focus was given on achievements out of the academic curriculum to reflect the wider issues that were important to young people. Working groups would continue to monitor each area to ensure that key players were able to fulfil action points.

While discussing the strategy, Members:

- Appreciated that a more accessible version had been created alongside the detailed one, although it was noted that the summary version had omitted 'rights' as one of the key areas. Officers suggested that the issue of rights ran through the document and should perhaps be treated as a global consideration, rather than identifying them as a separate area.
- Expressed concern that some of the areas might be hard to monitor, proposing that more information could be included on how they would be monitored. Officers acknowledged the concerns, noting that they were keen to use the areas identified in the strategy because they had been selected by young people. Members were advised that service managers were likely to each take control of an area and internal monitoring would be carried out.
- Considered the importance of recovery and how officers and social workers could play a part, noting that the word recovery could be construed as meaning that the young people had a problem. It was also suggested that recovery was something that could be completed when it was in fact an ongoing process, which led officers to propose changing the wording to indicate that the necessary support would be provided. Officers undertook to consult young people over the wording and how they would prefer to see it written.
(**Action: Service Manager – Corporate Parenting**)
- Praised the content of the document and the effectiveness of presenting the strategy in an easily understandable and informative way.

It was resolved to:

Review and endorse the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-2021 prior to its launch with children, their families, their carers and designated officers.

81. SUPPORT TO CARE LEAVERS (INCLUDING STAYING PUT) AND THE ROLE OF THE PERSONAL ADVISER

When presenting this report on the support given to care leavers and the role of the personal advisor, it was noted that the next item on the agenda (Minute 82 – Local Offer for Care Leavers refers) involved the same issues and that the discussion would therefore consider both reports. Officers advised that the role of Personal Adviser was key during the transition of leaving care, although it was noted that it was hard to know when the right time was for transitions, leading to constantly changing cohort lines. One of the benefits of having a 14-25 sector was identified as being able to follow young people from a young age, which allowed time to prepare them and teach them the necessary skills depending on their individual needs.

It was emphasised that the local authority only represented one aspect in the life of young people in care and that the local offer had to consider other parties as well, including schools and the family or home life situation. The ideal situation would be for the local authority to not be needed at all. Members were advised that young people continued to receive support on a more infrequent level until they were 25 as it was important to maintain the relationship and be available to provide help if needed. Some young people did not want further help after turning 18, but the local authority felt responsible for care leavers and would not cease contact unless specifically requested by the young person. It was noted that national performance indicators showed that the

Council was in touch with 94% of its care leavers, which was above statistical neighbours.

There were already 23 Personal Advisers in higher education and the aim was to have more. One of the main areas of focus was identifying children at a young age and ensuring that help continued on into university and apprenticeships. Care leavers were starting to be mapped in order to maintain a rough picture of where they were geographically and what they were doing, as well as being able to map housing options. A new finance panel was working to make it clear what funding would be available for each young person.

The Co-opted Member present shared his experience of how becoming an adult was affecting his care provision and wider life. During a review six months before turning 18, he had received a care leavers' pack with information. A week before his birthday, he was told that he would not be eligible for Universal Credit and that all his financial agreements, such as his tenancy agreement, would be changing. He expressed concern that being in full time education as well as holding down a job meant that he would no longer receive sufficient benefits to cover his needs and noted that other people in his situation often had even greater complications. He expressed gratitude for the assistance and support given by his Personal Adviser and noted that she was well prepared, although he also suggested that all Personal Advisers should receive training on how to manage Universal Credit, while more information should be provided in advance to care leavers in order for them to prepare.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Clarified that the role of Personal Advisers was not new and that the Council currently had 18, as well as a specialist Personal Adviser. Funding was potentially going to allow for another specialist dedicated to homelessness and rough sleeping, as meeting basic needs was considered fundamental.
- Expressed concern that the cut-off point was on a young person's 18th birthday, meaning that some may go through their whole final year of high school without funding. Noting that there was a strong correlation between how much work young people did and how well they did, it was suggested that this represented a significant disadvantage and that it might be fairer and more pragmatic to make the transition at the end of the school year.
- Established that in the Staying Put arrangement, the relationship was between the local authority and the foster carer, instead of with the individual service or external agency. It was noted that each situation was different and that it was difficult to formulate an approach that would be of benefit to all young people.
- Emphasised the need to retain highly trained and specialist staff after investing in developing their skills and knowledge, noting that it was common practice for businesses to have such strategies in place. The Sub-Committee was told that staff benefited from excellent working conditions and career development prospects, with attention given to assigning responsibility and lead roles. Members requested a future report on skill protection and staff retention and recommended that the Children and Young People Committee might consider the issue.
(**Action:** Chairman/ Assistant Director for Children's Services)

It was resolved to:

Note the services and support being provided to Care Leavers.

82. LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Sub-Committee considered an update report on the implementation of the 'local offer' for care leavers. Attention was drawn to the need to secure funding as well as the request for Members to consider championing key areas. It was noted that the case for funding would be helped by the Sub-Committee's endorsement of the plan.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Expressed willingness to take on further roles championing key areas contained in the local offer, but sought further clarification on what such roles would entail. Specifically, this included whether it was a question of general oversight, or attending other meetings, or speaking out on behalf of the issues. They were advised that further to Section 2.4 of the report, it was hoped that Members would be able to provide guidance, support and networking, as well as offering fresh approaches. Members were encouraged to identify areas in which they were well-informed or already active and that the requirements of the role would differ according to the individual circumstances. One Member suggested that trying to assign Members to individual areas would be of detriment to the overall coherence of the Sub-Committee's work. There was discussion over the potential for the Council's Community Champions to become involved but this was discarded due to the Community Champions being area based as well as the fact that there were areas of the County not represented by a Community Champion. Officers offered to host a session at a Member Seminar in order to reach a wider spectrum of Members in the call for champions.
(Action: Chairman/ Lead Manager – Corporate Parenting/ Democratic Services Officer)
- Contemplated the possibility of working with other local authorities across the region to put a case to the Government saying that there would be no charge for care across the region, taking the example of the 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester as inspiration for organising reciprocal arrangements. It was noted that working with other authorities had been informative and new ideas had arisen as a result of the consultations.

It was resolved to:

- a) Continue to encourage partners to engage with the development of the Local Offer.
- b) Note the progress in the development of the local offer and Elected Members continue raising awareness of the offer within the Council.
- c) Reflect on Members' networks and contacts and identify areas in which they might be able to support the creation of opportunities for our care leaves.
- d) Consider Elected Members to champion one of the key areas contained in the Local Offer.

83. SUB-COMMITTEE WORKSHOP AND TRAINING PLAN

The Sub-Committee reviewed its workshop and training plan. A request was made for a date to be set for the proposed training day on fostering.

(Action: Service Manager – Corporate Parenting/ Head of Foster Care)

It was suggested that some form of training might also be considered regarding the use of correct terminology.

A request was made for training on the issue of how access to Universal Credit and benefits in general affected care leavers. It was suggested that involving a Personal Adviser or the Personal Adviser Coordinator would be of benefit.

(Action: Lead Manager- Corporate Parenting)

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on the Sub-Committee's workshop and training plan.

84. AGENDA PLAN

While reviewing the Agenda Plan, the following issues were considered:

- The Workforce Development report (20th March) would be renamed Recruitment Retention and Training.
- The Sub-Committee meeting to be held on 20th March would be themed around health issues, with the subsequent meeting on 22nd May themed around education issues. As a result, the 'Refreshed NEET Strategy' report was moved from 20th March to 22nd May, as was the 'Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee: Draft First Annual Report to the Children and Young Person Committee (CYP)' report.
- The 'Early Permanence' report (20th March) would be combined with the 'Fostering Service Annual Report 2018/19' on May 22nd.
- It was agreed that a brief update on the Local Offer would be given to the Sub-Committee at every other meeting, starting on May 22nd.
- Members expressed frustration that a large proportion of the recommendations in papers coming to the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee asked only for the report to be noted or commented on. There was a request for stronger recommendations, including for the Sub-Committee to recommend actions to the Children and Young People Committee (CYP). It was suggested that the Chairman might discuss this with the Chairman of CYP.

It was resolved to:

Note and comment on the Sub-Committee's agenda plan.

Chairman
(date)