

Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee Minutes

Date: Wednesday 17 November 2021

Time: 16:04 – 18:17 pm.

Venue: Multi-Function Room, New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors A Bradnam (Chair), A Bulat, S Hay, P Slatter (Vice-Chair)

15. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Councillor McGuire.

No declarations of interest were received.

16. Minutes – 14 July 2021 and Action Log

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. The action log was noted.

The Chair requested the recording be reviewed to establish 'colleges' was a correct record. **Action.**

17. Petitions and Public Questions

No petitions or public questions were received.

18. Participation Report

The Sub-Committee received an update on the Participation Service's in-person and virtual offer for children and young people in care. Events for young people included a virtual art exhibition (from which cards had been developed for professional use); a team building day; an upcoming performance based opportunity developed by the Care Leavers Forum; and involvement in recruitment of a new participation officer and foster carers.

In response to Members comments, officers elaborated on the following points:

- Staff recruitment: Explained that young people could influence recruitment either by being on the interview panel with staff, or by being part of a separate young people's interview panel. Their scoring was equally weighted with staff.

Children and young people who were involved in this work received certificates, thank you letters and recognition vouchers.

In response to the report, individual Members:

- Thanked the Service for producing the Hinchbrook House fun day and the virtual art exhibition. The Chair suggested the quality of the artwork was such that it could be sold in postcard format.

Suggested the Service collaborate with the Fire Break Scheme to if this would benefit young people in care.

- Recommended, with support from the Assistant Director: Early Help and Children's Service, a supervised contact service report be added to the agenda Plan. **Action.**

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the contents of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with the lead officers.

19. Report from the Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association

The report was a joint venture between the Service and the Foster Carers' Association and provided an update on how the foster service met strategic priorities. It focussed on education, support, payments, staffing and recruitment.

The Cambridgeshire Foster Carers' Association [CFCA] had collaborated with the Virtual School on their management board; the personal education plan [PEP] audit – from which improvements had been undertaken; and Pupil Voice Working Group. The Virtual School had also provided foster carer workshops; a foster caring training brochure; and a foster carer training guide was also under development.

The officer highlighted difficulties in September 2021 with transport to school arrangements. This would be overcome for September 2022.

The Chair of the CFCA noted the Association's positive relationship with Virtual School.

In response to Members' comments, officers provided details on the following areas:

- Investigations/Allegations: During investigation foster carers retained payment and access to mentorship, advocacy and legal aid. In some circumstances, depending on consent of the social worker, the child stayed with the foster carer during the investigation.
- Training: Training occurred as e-learning, virtually, hybrid and in-person. Virtual training was received well, with the Chair of the CFCA commending the online first aid training. The benefit of face-to-face training for single and new carers was highlighted, although finding venues was difficult.

The Mentorship Framework was under review in collaboration with the chairs of the CFCA and Peterborough Foster Carer Committee. Changes to the Framework included providing access to mentors during the initial assessment period and between placements. The Chair of the CFCA also expressed the benefit of establishing mentoring as a separate role. This would allow for development within the foster service.

A review of the Foster Carer Workbook would occur in 2022.

- Transport: Securing transport arrangements was difficult, however staff had been employed in this area - start December. The Chair of the CFCA also suggested empowering foster carers to do this independently.
- In-house foster carers who could provide for children with complex needs: This was a complicated issue which officers were looking into and the need for clinical offers to support young people with specific vulnerabilities would be explored.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the content of the report
- b) Raise any queries they have with the lead officers.

20. Virtual School Head Teacher's Annual Report

The Sub-Committee received a report which detailed and evaluated the work undertaken by the Virtual School from September 2020 to August 2021 and set out the key priorities for the academic year 2021-2022. It also shared outcomes for children in care including: placement location, OFSTED school ratings, attendance, exclusions, destination data for post-16s, and information on personal education plans [PEPs].

In response to Members comments, officers explained more on the following areas:

- Recent staff recruitment:

Strategic Leadership Role – Recruitment advertisement was live.

Performance Assistant – New appointee joining Monday 15 November 2021.

- Out of area placements: Most out of area placements were in Peterborough and were frequently for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) requiring appropriate cultural and language support.
- SEND support: SEND numbers were high, but comparable to statistical neighbours. The Virtual School monitored need through the PEPs, had a qualified SENDCo, and increased the capacity for the development of SEND provision perhaps. Like all children in care, children and young people with SEND were entitled to pupil premium plus but the Virtual School was careful to ensure this funding didn't overlap with funding provided through EHCPs.

The Chair highlighted the positive statistics for children going into further education.

It was resolved unanimously to note and comment on the report.

21. Health Data Update November 2021

The Sub-Committee received a report which provided an update on the performance of initial health assessments, review health assessments and strength and difficulties questionnaires [SDQ]; and an overview of the Clinical Commissioning Group's [CCG] activities.

Initial health assessments: 83% of children placed in Cambridgeshire had an initial health assessment within 20 days. However, the Cambridgeshire Health Team did not have control over the completion of initial health assessments outside of Cambridgeshire and this had brought down the overall percentage of IHAs completed on time. When necessary, Cambridgeshire offered virtual assessments to young people placed out of county.

The Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire: Over the past three months, SDQ return rate had increased to 50%. To increase return rate further, the Service had revised the email wording and increased in face-to-face assessments. Also, it was hoped that collaboration with the CFCA and the Cambridgeshire Corporate Parenting Team would improve response rates.

In response to Members comments, officers elaborated on the following:

- Initial health assessment performance data: Children out of county were referred to the area provider. If these providers had a backlog, this affected the children in Cambridgeshire's Foster Service and consequently the Service's data.
- The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire: The Service had tried to increase return rates through follow up emails and phone calls. The Chair of the Foster Carers' Association highlighted that the low return rate may have been impacted because completion was online rather than during health assessment appointments. He also suggested providing carers with feedback from the survey, in order to establish its importance.

Other questionnaires were available to ensure assessment was holistic, including: the Carer/Parent Questionnaire, Education Questionnaire, Self-Questionnaire and EHCP.

- The Chair of the CFCA and the Designated Nurse for Children in Care agreed to discuss separately the confidentiality of questionnaires completed by the young people.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the content of the report.

b) Raise any queries with the lead officers.

22. Children in Care/ Care Leavers not in Education, Employment or Training: Action Plan

The Sub-Committee received a report on the strategies the Service deployed to support young people to remain in education, training, apprenticeships and employment. It also detailed the recently developed NEET Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough led by the Head of Think Communities.

The percentage of care leavers in EET for Cambridge was lower than in the East of England and had decreased in 2019/2020. This was caused, in part, by a change in the recording system and by a low employment market – both of which were strategic priorities with mitigation strategies in place.

In response to the report, a Member suggested collaborating with Cambridgeshire Skills to help support young people into employment or training.

It was resolved unanimously to note and comment on the report.

23. Corporate Parenting Performance Report September 2021

The Sub-Committee received a report updating Members on the numbers of children in care, care leavers and the placements in which they were placed.

The number of children placed in residential homes had increased during the pandemic.

The decline in face-to-face statutory visiting had been caused by positive COVID testing (therefore visits were completed virtually); a fault in the Liquid Logic workflow system resulting in care leavers and adopted children remaining in the system; and low data recording (despite visits taking place) as a result of high social worker caseloads. However, Independent Reviewing Officers [IROs] had confirmed that visits had occurred.

Following increased placement breakdown at the start of year as a result of the pandemic, placements had become more stable. Preventative mitigation strategies were in place including early intervention by commissioning services.

In response to Members comments, officers expanded on the following:

- Initial health assessments: For young people placed out of County, this had been affected by backlogs in counties where children were placed and by misunderstandings within the Safeguarding Team surrounding workflow process. The latter had been addressed.

The drop in the percentage of children in care whose initial health assessment was completed on time between the first and second quarter had been caused by changes in consent for young children and referrals.

- Dental assessments: The LAC Health Team had a dental surgery in Ely which were providing NHS appointments for children in care, and the annual health assessment had been used for dental screening.
- The Designated Nurse for Children in Care and Assistant Director: Children's Social Care to discuss data presentation prior to the next Committee meeting. **Action.**

Individual Members raised the following issues in relation to the report/commented that:

- Praised scorecard summary.
- Requested specific numbers in future reports. **Action.**

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the content of the report, and
- b) Raise any questions with the lead officer.

24. Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee Annual Report 2020 - 2021

The Sub-Committee received a report detailing their role and functions with a focus on missing young people, health and placement stability. The Service was collaborating with the health service, Risk Indication in Child (sexual abuse) [RIC] and Independent Reviewing Officers [IROs] to improve these outcomes. IRO learning reports and reviews of placement breakdowns were being used to improve operational delivery of placement stability through proactive measures.

In response to Members comments, officers explained the following:

- Sexual exploitation: Social workers undertook child exploitation and child sexual exploitation assessments with young people, but the figure in the report did not reflect the risk level of children/young people reviewed. All children were monitored. For those high-risk children/young people there was a Multi-Agency Child Exploitation [MACE] meeting which included Children's Social Care [CSC], Child Criminal Exploitation [CCE], Cambridgeshire County Council and the police. This was reviewed by the Service and independent reviewers who ensured recommendations were followed.
- Missing children in care: All missing children/young people were offered a return interview which informed their care plan and additional discussion regarding placement between the placement manager and social worker. For persistent occurrences, there was an additional multiagency meeting (including police involvement) to ensure the underlying cause was addressed.

The Chair of the CFCA recommended this data was used to inform to foster carers.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the content of the report, and
- b) Raise any questions with the lead officer.

25. Training Plan

The Sub-Committee noted the training plan.

Attendee details for safeguarding training would be updated. **Action.**

Members suggested further training on safeguarding, care leavers, county lines and sexual exploitation. The Assistant Director for Early Help and Children's Services stated that officers would collate a list of training options for Members to prioritise.

26. Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee Agenda Plan

The Sub-Committee resolved unanimously to note its agenda plan.

In response to queries from the Chair, the Assistant Director for Early Help and Children's Services recommended continuing with the thematic approach to meetings and looking to review this after it had been properly trialled. Briefing notes could also be provided outside of meetings to ensure the Sub-Committee was informed.

Chair