

Thurrock: A place of opportunity, enterprise and excellence, where
individuals, communities and businesses flourish

Corporate Parenting Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **3 July 2014** in **Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL**

Membership:

Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), James Halden (Vice-Chair), Jan Baker, Charles Curtis, Sue Gray, Susan Little and Joycelyn Redsell and 1 vacancy

Natalie Carter, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Jackie Howell, Thurrock One Team Foster Care Association (Chair)
Sharon Smith, Thurrock One Team Foster Care Association (Vice-Chair)

Substitutes:

Councillors Tunde Ojetola, Maggie O'Keeffe-Ray and Maureen Pearce and 5 vacancies

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

| | Page |
|---|----------------|
| 1 Apologies for Absence | |
| 2 Minutes | 5 - 14 |
| To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 6 March 2014. | |
| 3 Items of Urgent Business | |
| To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972. | |
| 4 Declaration of Interests | |
| 5 Looked After Children and Care Leavers | 15 - 22 |

6 Work Programme

23 - 24

Exclusion of the Public and Press

Members are asked to consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of an agenda item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 or it being confidential for the purposes of Section 100A(2) of that Act.

In each case, Members are asked to decide whether, in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption (and discussing the matter in private) outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

7 Information on Recent External Placements for Young People 25 - 32

8 Children's Placement Review Report 33 - 40

Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Jan Natynczyk, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to direct.democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **25 June 2014**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;
- Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and
- leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Thurrock: A place of opportunity, enterprise and excellence, where individuals, communities and businesses flourish

To achieve our vision, we have identified five strategic priorities:

1. Create a great place for learning and opportunity

- Ensure that every place of learning is rated “Good” or better
- Raise levels of aspirations and attainment so that local residents can take advantage of job opportunities in the local area
- Support families to give children the best possible start in life

2. Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity

- Provide the infrastructure to promote and sustain growth and prosperity
- Support local businesses and develop the skilled workforce they will require
- Work with communities to regenerate Thurrock’s physical environment

3. Build pride, responsibility and respect to create safer communities

- Create safer welcoming communities who value diversity and respect cultural heritage
- Involve communities in shaping where they live and their quality of life
- Reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and safeguard the vulnerable

4. Improve health and well-being

- Ensure people stay healthy longer, adding years to life and life to years
- Reduce inequalities in health and well-being
- Empower communities to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing

5. Protect and promote our clean and green environment

- Enhance access to Thurrock’s river frontage, cultural assets and leisure opportunities
- Promote Thurrock’s natural environment and biodiversity
- Ensure Thurrock’s streets and parks and open spaces are clean and well maintained

MINUTES of the meeting of Corporate Parenting Committee held on 6 March 2014 at 7:00pm.

Present: Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), Sue Gray, James Halden, Andrew Roast, Phil Smith (substitute for Charles Curtis).

Apologies: Councillors Charles Curtis, Angie Gaywood and Joy Redsell.

S. Tuttle – CiCC Chair Person
N. Carter – Open Door

In attendance: W. Caswell – Acting Vice Chair of the One Team / Foster Carer Representative
P. Coke – Service Manager (Children & Families)
B. Foster – Head of Care & Targeted Outcomes
J. Howell – Chair person of the One Team / Foster Carer Representative
R. Minto – Service Manager (Placement Support)
G. Page – Operational School for Looked After Children
D. Peplow – Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board
T. Perolls – Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, Thurrock Clinical Commission Group (CCG)
K. Pullen – Head of Virtual School
J. Waud – Strategic Lead, YOS, Adolescent Services, Troubled Families (left after item 7)
S. Young – Senior Democratic Services Officer

The Chair informed those present that the meeting was being recorded and that the recording would be made available on the Council’s website.

24. MINUTES

A Member asked for an update on the audit of care packages (agreed in 2013 budget) and the peer review, and was particularly concerned with the time that had elapsed in order for these matters to be progressed.

Officers reported that Peer advice had been sought in relation to an audit of the cost of Looked After Placements, and that regular updates on the cost of placements had been provided to the Committee. Members were informed that the Peer Reviewer had made several suggestions which the team had put into operation, which included:

- Revised administrative arrangements for payments being made;
- Reviewed the older cohort of children;
- Established a Joint Funding Panel with Health, Education and Social Care working together in order to fund placements.

Officers explained that they had unfortunately not had the capacity to draw together a report on this work and the Chair proposed that this should be re-visited in the work plan.

It was further reported that a reviewer had not been successfully obtained for the peer review due to staffing changes at Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, who it had been hoped that Thurrock could partner with. However, a new volunteer had since been identified at Suffolk Council who had agreed to conduct a peer view in principle although this had not happened yet.

Officers apologised for the delay in reporting the Peer Review and audit of care packages. The Member was concerned with the amount of time that had elapsed to undertake these investigations and called for this to be included and prioritised on the work programme.

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 5 December 2013 were approved as a correct record, subject to adding Councillor Gray to the list of apologies.

25. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

a) Interests

No interests were declared.

b) Whipping

No interests were declared.

The Chair informed the Committee that she would like to change the order of business so that item 7 'Report on actions arising from the Mock Ofsted Inspection' was taken first and then followed by reports as they appeared on the agenda paper. This was agreed by the Committee.

27. REPORT ON ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE MOCK OFSTED INSPECTION

Officers introduced the report which provided an update on the findings from the recent mock inspection. It was reported that at the last Ofsted

inspection in 2012 a 'good' rating had been achieved, however there is now a new framework for future inspections which emphasises the voice of the child and how this was heard and incorporated into the plans so it must realistically be expected to feature more prominently in future.

A Member asked for clarification on how a clear distinction between political, strategic and operational roles can be demonstrated. Officers stated that actions as to how the authority manages and provides for the looked after children are underpinned by a strategic direction and that the political part is emphasised strongly in Ofsted inspections. It was reported that there is an expectation that Members are aware of the experiences of children and young people and that their voices are heard, and that officer views are not solely relied upon.

The Chair informed the Committee that she had been interviewed during the mock inspection and that one of the questions that had been asked was how members were informed about the experiences of looked after children.

Members were informed that the Chair and Vice-Chair intended to shadow a social worker on two separate visits to child or young person in care. It was felt that by taking a true sample, they would be able to see firsthand what was being done to help Thurrock's looked after children. Following which observations could be shared with the Committee. Officers confirmed that these two visits with social workers would be scheduled.

The foster carer and one team representative explained to Members that the voices of children were heard in many ways, which included through social workers, the Children in Care Council, Oaktree, House Visits and the ePEP (Personal Education Plan) among others. She was confident that children in care knew how they could express their views and complaints and that they had greater opportunities for their voice to be heard, not just through social workers.

The Independent Chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) informed the Committee that the meeting of 17 March would be themed on the "voice of the child" and that a number of partners were due to attend, which included the Police, Educational Partners and the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee.

An officer felt that in answer to the Members original question, the distinction in roles was also assisted by the targeted work and selective reporting back to the committee which demonstrated leadership and accountability.

The Head of Care & Targeted Outcomes explained how Ofsted inspectors examined documents in the public domain in order to

identify a golden thread and that the reports submitted to Members were important in order to identify different trends.

Members welcomed the reporting mechanism, but it was questioned whether this meant that there was information that the Committee were not examining in terms of the mock inspection which could be considered more accurately.

In response officers explained that the mock inspection did not attempt to predict an Ofsted grading as a mock inspection only engaged with two mock Ofsted inspectors for one week, whereas the actual mock inspection would likely take place over a one month period with 14 inspectors.

Officers stated that it was desirable to undertake another mock inspection should the real inspection not take place within one year in order to refresh learning, which was welcomed by the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the contents of the report.

28. ADOPTION REPORT OUTLINING PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE

Officers introduced the report which provided an update on the Adoption service fulfilling obligations under the National Minimum Standards.

It was explained that the Adoption Scorecard report did not make good reading, but that this related to cases of children who were in the care system 4-5 years ago. Therefore it was observed that the published figures did not reflect current or more recent performance which was significantly better than what the scorecard report indicated.

A Member questioned whether Thurrock initiated more or less care orders through the court than its consortium partners in Havering and Southend, to which it was confirmed that Thurrock was around the middle of its statistical neighbours in terms of total numbers of children being looked after. It was reported that it was best practice to initiate court orders as this underpinned a child's plan and increased security and stability.

It was further reported that there had been a shift in more care orders being initiated through the court; especially for younger children and that this gave them better chance of being adopted. As a result it was expected that many of the Borough's looked after children would have subjected to a care order.

Members questioned why Essex was not part of the consortium, to which the committee were informed that the arrangements had been

agreed several years ago and that Thurrock is well served to partner with smaller local authorities such as Havering and Southend.

A Member asked for assurances that the selection process for potential adopters was not being negatively affected by targets, and that it was more desirable for a child to be placed in the right home for them rather than being placed in a situation which could break down.

Officers agreed that the best interests of the child were of utmost importance although targets could not be ignored. Officers were confident that the process of finding a suitable home for looked after children was working well and assured Members that shortcuts were not being taken.

The Committee were informed that children were meticulously matched to prospective adopters and that the recruitment process for adopters was both thorough and honest.

A Member drew particular attention to the report which explained that a temporary member of staff had been recruited because the workload had been unmanageable, and questioned what would happen to the department once the temporary post came to an end.

Officers explained that the post in question was to provide full time support to a colleague, who was also new to their post of Adoption Panel Administrator, and it was hoped that funding could be sought to allow this support to be continued.

A Member asked what fees were associated with the Ofsted inspection and whether there were any direct contributions made to cover the cost of inspectors. Officers believed that a direct contribution was not made but confirmed that this would be clarified outside of the meeting. It was reported that there were fees to pay Ofsted on behalf of the fostering and adoption service and these were estimated to be approximately £1500.

Addendum:

Following the meeting it was confirmed that the correct figures were £1,161.75 for Local Authority Adoption Services and £1,815.75 for Local Authority Fostering Services.

A Member cited a publicised case where the council's proposals had been changed by the courts and questioned whether this was an issue that over local authorities faced. It was confirmed by officers that it was not unusual for the court to reach a different decision than that which the local authority had proposed.

There was a brief discussion on the ideal number of adopters Thurrock needed to meet demand, during which the committee were informed

that the consortium arrangements required Thurrock to recruit 10 adopters every year and that further adopters in addition to this number could be utilised by the consortium or other local authorities for a national fee. Members were advised that Thurrock placed between 8-12 children per year with adopters.

The Committee confirmed that they were satisfied with the report as a reporting tool but that they would like to see the following details included in future reports:

- An 'at a glance' table included within the report in order to summarise the narrative and performance indicators.
- Further comparative data in order to compare Thurrock with the consortium partners, statistical neighbours and local neighbours.

The Committee were advised that a National Adoption Scorecard database existed online that would enable Members to make an informed comparison between Thurrock and the performance of other local authorities around the Country. Officers agreed to circulate the link to the database following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- 1. Note the contents of the report.**
- 2. Note their satisfaction with the report as a monitoring mechanism, subject to an 'at a glance' table and comparative data with consortium, statistical and local neighbours being included in future.**
- 3. Note their satisfaction with the above criteria on management, outcomes and conditions of registration.**

29. EDUCATION RESULTS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Head of the Virtual School introduced the report which outlined the educational outcomes of Looked After Children.

Members welcomed the report and recognised that due the problem of the small numbers of the cohort the figures could be skewed significantly on the performance of one child. With this in mind it was questioned why out of borough schooling appeared to consistently indicate a higher pass rate.

The Head of the Virtual School stated that she had illustrated this point because in previous years data had not been collected that distinguished between children educated in Borough and out of Borough. It was reported that a high level of looked after children with

special education needs were also educated in Borough and this could also explain the figures. It was hoped that for the forthcoming year these figures could be obtained and interrogated to examine if there was a distinction.

Members welcomed the introduction of the ePEP (Personal Education Plan) and were surprised that this information had not existed in an online format before. It was explained to Members that the data was collected on a personal level before, but that as ePEP was now a well established system it was thought that this would improve reporting.

A Member asked whether the authority provided one-to-one tuition support to looked after children to help them in their education. The Head of the Virtual School stated that schools should assist looked after children with any additional tuition that may be required, however there was also a Personal Education Allowance that could be drawn upon.

The foster carer representatives felt that schools differed significantly in their attitudes and the support that they offered to looked after children. It was felt some schools were not performing as well as they could in spending the money that they were allocated and that improvements could be made in the level of support and tuition. It was further noted that the schools should be more transparent in how the money is spent and that a breakdown should be provided.

The Head of the Virtual School confirmed that schools should evidence how they spend the Pupil Place Premium on their website, but that this was also data that the virtual school were keen to obtain and challenge in order to increase accountability.

Members questioned whether this feedback was obtained regularly from foster carers, to which officers confirmed that they did receive such feedback through social workers and that they were keen to hear about these issues so that they could be addressed.

A Member asked whether it was worthwhile for the Committee to receive a further report on schools in order to distinguish which children were doing well and not so well and the schools they attended so that a comparison could be made. Officers stated that it was not as easily identifiable as some schools offered excellent support but had lower performance and vice versa. It was noted that the best way to manage progress was to evaluate performance against age related expectations.

The Head of the Virtual School explained that she was happy to provide a follow up report in six months time to update Members on progress. It was felt that a report in September and an update in March would be valuable to the Committee, as GCSE data was not calculated until September.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the educational outcomes for LAC in Key Stage 2 and 4 in 2012/13 and the measures in place for 2014/15 to further support the education of LAC.

30. HEALTH OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Officers introduced the report which provided an update to Members on the performance of health checks for looked after children. It was felt that the authority was perhaps not as good as it could be at accurately recording and representing the data. It was believed that the team were under recording those aspects that had been completed, for example that Health and Social Care maintained two different electronic systems that recorded immunisations but these did not talk to each other.

Members were informed that the authority recorded the percentage of under two year olds who had dental checks on record, however most dentists would not see a child until after they were two. This had the effect of skewing the developmental checks data. As a result officers planned to undertake a data cleansing exercise to ensure that figures accurately represented reality.

Members asked whether the authority was clear on the health problems looked after children faced in Thurrock. In response it was reported that looked after children tended to be under-immunised or missed out on health promotions, however all had a health plan to identify what action was required. It was felt that the data contained within the health plans could be audited to provide a more accurate picture.

Officers explained that obesity was a problem generally for Thurrock children, but this did not seem to be an issue for children becoming looked after and if anything some children tended to be undernourished on the point of entry into the care system.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the contents of the report, and support officers in rectifying some of the problems identified.

31. WORK PROGRAMME

Officers explained that the meeting dates for the new municipal year had not been released yet but invited officers to discuss any items that they would like included on the work programme for 2014/15.

Following an open discussion, it was agreed that the following items would be included on the work programme:

- An update on the audit of the care packages and the outcomes of the Peer Review.
- Health of Looked After Children (to be scheduled around March 2015).
- Education Results of Looked After Children (September) and a further update in March.
- Further information on the ePEP and outcomes.
- A report on Care Leavers and their progress, to be incorporated into the annual Looked After Children Strategy.
- A report from the Children in Care Council and the voice of the child.
- Housing for Looked After Children
- A report on 'Achieving Permanence.'

The Head of Care & Targeted Outcomes stated that she would refer to the categories used in the Ofsted inspection process to see if there would be any suitable topics that could be of interest to the Committee and reported back on.

32. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee was recommended to pass the following recommendation in relation to the following items:-

"That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business, on the grounds that they could involve the possible disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 (information relating to any individual) for exclusion from Chapter 8 of the Constitution of Schedule 12A of that Act".

RESOLVED:

That the meeting go into exempt session to consider the following report.

33. INFORMATION ON RECENT EXTERNAL PLACEMENTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Officers introduced the report which provided an update on recent external placements for Thurrock's Looked after Children.

The Committee were informed that it was hoped that the balance of in house and external provision of foster carers could be readdressed, as it was desirable to have a greater percentage of in house foster carers.

Members questioned whether the balance had altered because of the increased numbers of children entering the Thurrock care system, or whether the ability to attract foster carers had decreased.

Officers stated that the numbers of children entering the care system had increased but that there had also been an increase in the numbers of foster carers in Thurrock. It was reported that increased numbers had been placed outside of the Borough because it was preferred that sibling groups were kept together.

Officers explained the importance of the Southwark judgement which set out the local authority's duty to provide accommodation to looked after children who were homeless.

A discussion took place on the importance of taking a balanced approach to foster care for young people aged 17 years and over, and the opportunity for young people to stay in foster placements until age 21 following the recent change in legislation.

The Committee felt the report served its purpose but it was requested that case studies be included in future exempt meetings.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate resources for looked after children, including some of Thurrock's more difficult to place children.

The meeting finished at 9:15pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Stephanie Young, telephone (01375) 652831,
or alternatively e-mail syoung@thurrock.gov.uk**

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 3 July 2014 | ITEM: 5 |
| Corporate Parenting Committee | |
| Looked After Children and Care Leavers | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Non-Key |
| Report of: Paul Coke, Service Manager, Through Care Services | |
| Accountable Head of Service: Nicky Pace, Interim Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes | |
| Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children’s Services | |
| This report is To provide the Committee with an overview of the services for looked after children and care leavers, and provide information as to the statutory and legislative changes that may have an impact on the service | |

Executive Summary

This report provides information about Thurrock’s looked after children and care leavers.

It also provides details of the current statutory and legislative changes that will have an impact on the service, and data that is required by Government in respect to Thurrock’s performance on looked after children.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 Corporate Parenting Committee to consider how best to address the review of the Pledge, the Looked After Children Strategy and new ways of working that will provide challenge to the Committee, CiCC and Officers.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1.1 Children who come into care of the local authority are those who are the most vulnerable and at risk of harm when all other interventions have been unable to generate sufficient positive change in their immediate and wider family.
- 2.1.2 Wherever possible, children who come into care are placed with their own relatives if parents are unable to provide a home. This approach is expected by all legislation and court processes.

2.1.3 There is no single reason for children being in care. Disabled children may be looked after because their disability requires such a high level of support that their needs can only be met in a highly specialised residential resource. Otherwise, a range of social problems including poverty, poor parenting, poor mental health, drug and alcohol misuse and unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children are common background features.

2.2 Legislation

2.2.1 Children and Families Act 2014

- This deals with changes to court proceedings such as completion of proceedings within 26 weeks
- The use of expert reports
- Private proceedings and the role of family mediation
- Adoption and contact
- The role and responsibilities of The Children’s Commissioner
- ‘Staying Put’ – Arrangements for young people to remain with their foster carers up to 21

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013

- This deals with the responsibility of the Director or nominated person to authorise placements of children placed outside of the borough
- The ‘home’ authority must notify the authority where the child will be living and provide them with a copy of the care plan.

2.3 Thurrock’s Looked After Children and Care Leavers

2.3.1

| Year | Number of LAC | Age | Gender | Legal Status |
|------------------|---------------|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| June 2013 | 272 | 0 - 4: 59 (22%) 5 -11: 75 (28%) 12 – 16: 111 (41%) 17: 27 (10%) | Male: 159 (58%) Female: 113 (42%) | ICO: 87 (32%) CO: 108 (40%) S.20: 76 (28%) |
| June 2014 | 297 | 0 -4: 53 (18%) 5 – 11: 86 (29%) 12 – 16: 121 (41%) 17: 37 (12%) | Male: 179 (60%) Female: 118 (40%) | ICO: 54 (18%) CO: 154 (52%) S.20 86 (29%) Other: 3 (1%) |

2.3.2 As you can see from the figures in respect to our looked after population (ie 0-17), the numbers have continued to increase. The increase in the numbers has been within the adolescent age group 11 onwards.

2.3.3 Nationally, the majority of looked after children, 62% in 2013, were provided with services due to abuse or neglect.

2.3.4 The reason for children becoming looked after in Thurrock in 2012-13 were due to abuse and neglect (65%), families in acute distress (12%), family dysfunction (7%) and absent parenting (9%).

2.3.5 Stability of Placements, 3+

2.3.6 This reflects the number of placements children/young people have had within the year.

- Year 13/14 – Provisional figure: 8
- Current as at May 2014 – No young people on 3+ placements
- National Average 12/13: 11.07
- Statistical Neighbours 12/13: 11.44
- Thurrock 12/13: 13.64

2.3.7 This statistic reflects well for our looked after population in terms of stability for the period 13/14, despite the fact the numbers of looked after children have increased. The data for 13/14 is due to be sent to the DFE by June 2014, with the data being published around November 2014.

2.3.8 Care Leavers

- June 2013 – 108 cases
- June 2014 – 98 cases : there is also a further 10 cases to be transferred into the team from the Through Care and Adolescent Services

2.3.9 Suitable Accommodation

19th Birthday – Cohort: 23

- 19 – Suitable Accommodation
- 3 – Not recorded as we are not in touch with the young people
- 1 – Unsuitable accommodation

20th Birthday – Cohort: 15

- 14 – Suitable accommodation
- 1 – Not recorded

21st Birthday – Cohort: 7

- 6 – Suitable accommodation
- 1 – Not recorded

2.3.10 Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

19th Birthday – Cohort: 23

- 1 – Full time Higher Education
- 3 – Full time Education
- 5 – Full time Training or Employment
- 8 – NEET
- 1 – NEET due to illness
- 1 – Part time Education
- 3 – Not Recorded

20th Birthday – Cohort: 15

- 1 – Full time Higher Education
- 6 – Full time Education
- 1 – Full time training or employment
- 6 – NEET
- 1 – Not Recorded

21st Birthday – Cohort: 7

- 2 – Full time Education
- 2 – Full time training or employment
- 2 – NEET
- 1 – Not Recorded

2.3.11 Comparative Data – Year 2012/13

Suitable Accommodation

- National Average: 88.0
- Statistical Neighbours: 89.0
- Thurrock: 72.0
- Provisional Thurrock 13/14: 81.8

NEET

- National Average: 58.0
- Statistical Neighbours: 53.3
- Thurrock: 38.0
- Provisional Thurrock 13/14: 31.8

- 2.3.12 The comparative data is for those young people aged 19 only as the data for 19, 20 and 21 will be submitted end of June 2014, the first time all this information has been required by the DFE.
- 2.3.13 The data referred to in this report is from the year 13/14, which is due to be submitted to the DFE by the end of June 2014.
- 2.3.14 In summary the Department's performance in respect to the provision of suitable accommodation is improving.
- 2.3.15 In terms of our performance for NEET, we clearly need to improve dramatically in this area. Funding has been approved to continue the Diversity in Apprenticeship scheme, we have a worker in the After Care Team that spends a proportion of his time working on the area of employment, but we also need to build our relationships with key partner agencies who have access to work opportunities, both within the Council and in the community, plus working with our young people at an earlier age, through the schools etc.
- 2.3.16 Within the Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme more detailed reports will be available on specific topics such as health, adoption, housing, education and the Children in Care Council.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Issues

- 3.1.1 The Department is aware of the budgetary constraints within the Council as a whole and the need to continue to find ways of reducing our spend within Children's Services, which includes looked after children.
- 3.1.2 Senior managers have met to discuss this challenge and recognise the need to reduce the numbers of looked after children and address the issue of placements.
- 3.1.3 Along with the Interim Head of Service, senior managers will be reviewing the residential placements, focusing on specific areas, reviewing cases to see if there are children that can return home to their families or extended family members and working with our front line services to embed the Early Offer of Help so that children and families receive the help and support needed, in order to prevent things escalating to either court proceedings and/or eventually children becoming looked after.
- 3.1.4 Open Door continue to run the Advocacy Service for our looked after children and now also arrange and co-ordinate activities for our looked after children during the school breaks.
- 3.1.5 The CiCC will be reviewing the Pledge within their work plan, and it maybe useful for the Committee to consider how this links in with the Looked After

Children Strategy and possible new ways of working that can provide challenge to both the Committee and the CiCC.

- 3.1.6 The Welfare Reforms continue to progress, but there is currently no start date for the implementation of Universal Credit. The predicted start date is 2016. The Welfare Reform Working Group is addressing all issues in respect to the changes and working closely with key partners such as the DWP especially around vulnerable groups such as care leavers.
- 3.1.7 It has been agreed that care leavers can now complete their application for JSA or IS six weeks prior to their 18th birthday.
- 3.1.8 The After Care Team and the DWP need to develop its relationship in order for this to be maximised.
- 3.1.9 As mentioned 'staying put' is now part of legislation. The DFE are developing statutory guidance and have mentioned that it will provide £40m to cover the first three years
- 3.1.10 The Department will need to develop a policy that addresses this area, as it is quite complex in terms of what this means financially for foster carers and placements for the Department being filled with young people post 18.
- 3.1.11 The Department continues to prepare for the Ofsted Single Inspection. Meetings are taking place on a weekly basis to ensure we are as ready as possible when the time comes.
- 3.1.12 Ofsted have informed all local authorities of the process, which will be a telephone call to the Director of Children's Services on the following dates:
 - 24 June 2014
 - 1 July 2014
 - 9 September 2014
 - 30 September 2014

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The reason for the recommendation is that as a corporate parent we understand the needs of our looked after children, and that there is challenge for all involved in ensuring the provision of services is moving in the right direction.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 None

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The Council's responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers are unique and sit at the heart of all priorities.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
01375 652466
kgoodacre@btinternet.com

The Department is aware along with the Council as a whole to reduce its spending in order to meet the budgetary requirements.

The Department is aware of the additional money put into the children's placement budget, and the continual rise of looked after children over the past year which again will have an impact on the budget situation.

Senior Managers within the service are meeting to discuss plans on how the service can meet the challenge of our budgetary requirements for this year and the years ahead.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor For Children's Safeguarding.

The implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014, makes it a requirement to have a 'staying put' policy that sets out the way the Local Authority will support young people to stay in their foster placement post 18, up to 21. This may have an impact on foster placements and finance for the carers.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Teresa Evans**
Equalities and Cohesion Officer
tevans@thurrock.gov.uk

Looked after children and care leavers by their very nature are a vulnerable group which also within it has children and young people who are from different cultures, races, some with disabilities, English will not be their first language and sexuality may be an issue. The protected characteristics (Equality Act 2010) of the individual children will be monitored ensuring the best outcomes are achieved for all groups.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- Not applicable

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Not Applicable

9. Appendices to the report

- Not Applicable

Report Author:

Paul Coke

Service Manager

Care and Targeted Outcomes

**Corporate Parenting Committee
Work Programme
2014/15**

Dates of Meetings: 3rd July 2014, 4th September 2014, 4th December 2014, 12th March 2015.

Standing Item: Exempt Session on Placements (Roland Minto)

| Topic | Lead Officer | Date |
|--|---------------------------|--|
| Update on the outcomes of the Peer Review and Audit of Care Packages | Nicky Pace | 3 rd July 2014 |
| Care Leavers Progress, to be incorporated into the annual Looked After Children Strategy | Paul Coke | 3 rd July 2014 |
| Update on ePEP and outcomes | Nicky Pace, Keeley Pullen | 4 th September 2014 |
| Achieving Permanence/Adoption Report | Roland Minto | 4 th September 2014 - 12 th March 2015 |
| Housing for Looked After Children | Richard Head (Havering) | 4 th December 2014 |
| Education Results of Looked After Children | Keeley Pullen | 4 th December 2014 |
| Health of Looked After Children | Roland Minto | 12 th March 2015 |
| Children in Care Council and the voice of the child. | Opendoor/CIC Council | 12 th March 2015 |

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|--|--|
| 3 July 2014 | ITEM: 8 |
| Corporate Parenting Committee | |
| Children's Placement review report | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Not Applicable |
| Report of: Barbara Foster, Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes | |
| Accountable Head of Service: Nicky Pace, interim Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes | |
| Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Service's | |
| This report is Confidential | |
| <i>If the report, or a part of this, has been classified as being either confidential or exempt by reference to the descriptions in Schedule 12A, Paragraph 3, of the Local Government Act 1972, it is hereby marked as being not for publication. The press and public are likely to be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any confidential or exempt items of business to which the report relates.</i> | |
| Date of notice given of exempt or confidential report: N/A | |

Executive Summary

1. To examine all budget and payment arrangements in order to ensure that maximum efficiency and future planning is being brought to bear on this volatile and high cost area of service provision.
2. To examine all commissioning and procurement arrangements in order to ensure that best value is being achieved through effective use of resources and management of the market.
3. To establish that there are effective exit strategies which are age appropriate for those children who may be able to return home, be adopted or move into independence.
4. To examine that appropriate joint commissioning is undertaken for those children and young people who require placements to meet their specialist health and special education.
5. To appraise the development of the council's own fostering service and how it can contribute to future planning.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 To note review and actions taken

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 On March 7th 2013, the Corporate Parenting Committee minuted under Miscellaneous Items that “The Chair also raised that Councillor Halden had represented an additional report on placements and this would be received at a reconvened meeting in the near future”.

On 15th April 2013, a further meeting dealt with placement expenditure as a single item. The minutes are attached as Appendix 1 and the report as Appendix 2. The main change introduced by this meeting was for each subsequent meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee to include a standing agenda item on exempt business as to care placements made since the previous meeting.

The minutes decisions were recorded as in being the proposal set out in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.7. (In fact, these paragraph numbers and the minutes do not cover these actual paragraphs which were the relevant paragraph numbers for the previous draft of the report. There is no Paragraph 3.7 and paragraphs 4.1 to 4.7 cover the main discussion item). The report being considered by the committee had been written by the Shadow Lead Member for Children and included a reference to Full Council having agreed “a sum of £5000 for an independent audit of our care placements. At the start of the new municipal year (2013/2014) officers will bring a paper forward with a suggested audit for members to consider. In addition, the committee will take a report in the new municipal year where we will compare our profile and spend with other authorities”.

Therefore after this meeting there were decisions to:

- a) Update each Corporate Parenting Committee meeting with anonymised information on all new placement purchases.
- b) Act on the Full Council decisions for an external audit.
- c) From the minutes but use the agreed actions, to use CIPFA data.

At this point, we went into the new municipal year with changes or membership or the Corporate Parenting Panel. The June meeting minuted under the heading of New Placement Review that “The Director of Commissioning at Peterborough Council has agreed to review this issue in Thurrock. It was planned that they would meet with Members of the Committee to understand their viewpoints.

The September meeting of the Committee did not minute any discussion of the matter and the December meeting minutes state that:

A Member requested an update on the audit of care packages and the peer view which was discussed at the meeting on 5 September 2013. Officers responded that both pieces of work were ongoing; the audit of care packages had required the

examination of the packages of older young people in children's homes and the more expensive placements, once further progress had been made an update report would be provided to the Committee.

Draft minutes of the March 2014 meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee are as follows:

“Officers reported that Peer advice had been sought in relation to an audit of the cost of Looked After Placements, and that regular updates on the cost of placements had been provided to the Committee. Members were informed that the Peer Reviewer had made several suggestions which the team had put into operation, which included:

- Revised administrative arrangements for payments being made;
- Reviewed the older cohort of children;
- Established a Joint Funding Panel with Health, Education and Social Care working together in order to fund placements. Officers explained that they had unfortunately not had the capacity to draw together a report on this work and the Chair proposed that this should be re-visited in the work plan.”

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 In August 2013, Terms of Reference for the Placement Review were agreed with Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, the Peterborough colleague who had agreed to undertake the work with us. Her post title is actually Assistant Director for Strategy, Commissioning and Prevention. The Terms of Reference are attached as Appendix 3 and are described individually below. We also provided the breakdown of our placement expenditure and she advised that we should consider the reallocation of the DSG in order to increase the proportion used for placement purchasing and reviewing all the residential placements, with particular emphasis on the older young people.

The work undertaken so far is described under each element of the Terms of Reference as follows.

2.1 Examine all the budget and payout arrangements in order to ensure that maximum efficiency and future planning in being brought to bear.

a) The impetus of rising needs and costs has strengthened the resolve to undertake this review and colleagues in the Finance Team have completely reviewed their recording and spreadsheets in order to increase clarity and efficiency. (Attached as Appendix 4).

Colleagues in SERCO have worked with us to implement some improvements which were suggested by the SW Adviser on the Use of Resources which have simplified the payment arrangement so that only one post holder records and arranges all payments and all suggested changes to payments. This has increased confidence in the accuracy of payments, which now widely regarded as being efficient and high quality but no immediate savings can be identified from this.

b) We have continued to subscribe to CIPFA so as to be as well informed as possible on comparison with other councils. We are aware that we have some high residential cost which we attribute to the high proportion of children which we maintain in foster care, especially in house.

2.2. Examine all commissioning and procurement arrangements in order to ensure that best value is achieved through effective use of resources and management of the market.

a) Since the budget planning for the year beginning April 2012, the service has been challenged by Members to reduce the expenditure on placements by inviting in an "Invest to Save" post. This post was created as the Social Work Adviser on Resources (referred to above) and the post holder started work in August of that year. Unfortunately, the Team Manager for Fostering Support was taken ill shortly after her arrival so the Social Work Adviser covered those duties in what sadly became an unexpected long period of serious illness. This has impacted on the time available to concentrate on purchasing but the post holder has established herself as a source of specialist advice to social workers, thus avoiding any uninformed placement searches, and has also been directly involved in as much purchasing as possible. Examples include that she begins price negotiation in comparison with London Care Placements (formerly Pan London) costs. This is despite our not being a formal member of this commissioning network. Examples of cost reductions she has achieved are attached as Appendix 5.

b) These successes demonstrate the value of specialist staffing resource to work on this budget. At present, the daily duty system for placement searches is staffed by the duty Social Workers in the Fostering Service and, when possible, by the provider Partnership Officer from Commissioning Team, plus the Social Worker Adviser herself. All of these staff are required to leave the office in order to fulfil their duties and the Fostering Social Workers do not have any specialist knowledge of residential care, which is the most expensive of the service provisions. The whole of the CATD service has worked together to create a new additional post from within existing resources in order to have a specialist duty worker reporting to the Social Worker Adviser. The team for Disabled Children has transferred their shared care Foster Carers to the Foster Service, who have become their supervising Social Workers, thus freeing up sufficient funds for the new post which will, of course reduce the duty responsibilities of the Fostering Team. This is ready to go to Matching Panel

c) Thurrock is already a Council which attracts the London Fostering Market from both Councils and the independent sector. There are more Looked After Children from other Councils in Thurrock schools than there are Thurrock's own Looked After Children- this being 93 children from other Councils at the time of writing. There is only one independent children's home in the Borough. Newly opened and offering placements for disabled children. 3 placements have been purchased, thus enabling these 3 young people to continue attending the Councils own special schools. There is no agreed strategy to encourage other residential care provider into the borough as our small size informs staff to reflect on the difficulties previously experienced in matching Thurrock children into the Councils children's home in previous years when the resource was under-used and eventually closed. Obviously, there is no desire to purposely encourage other Councils Looked After Children into the Borough,

especially as we already have the experience of there being a remand fostering provision from an outside provider which is creating an increased work for Youth Offending Service. However, we do believe that there is scope for further Commissioning and Procurement work which could assist. As of today, the only existing group contracts is the ER4 Fostering Provision which reduces the costs of existing long term placements.

3. Establish that there are effective exit strategies which are age appropriate for those children who may be able to return home, be adopted or more into independence.

In addition to the work of the Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer teams, we hold a weekly Placement Panel which is chaired by either the Service Manager for Placements or the Service Manager for Through Care (Case holding) Teams. In order to give increase prominence and emphasis to the Panels, the Head of Service has chaired them personally and has also called additional panels to scrutinise the Residential Care Placements. This exercise has already been undertaken previously and has not resulted in any dramatic cost reduction although it has given increased profile to a small number of cases where young people were already in the process of returning home. In our normal practice, special Panel meetings are held for Care leavers so as to Plan their transition.

Adoption work is now scrutinised closely through the governments Adoption Scorecard which latterly shows some increased average time scale for Thurrock due to adoption being achieved for 4 children who had been hard to place and had been in care for some time. This resulted in a visit from the Civil Service who were satisfied by our explanation. Although small, numbers of children being adopted have increased.

We have also used our Troubled Families team in order to assist, where possible, in restoring children to their own families. This remains a small element of the total care population but they have assisted 4 children to return home.

Another source of savings is being presented currently with a new project to organise local assessments (Community Based Assessments) instead of residential mother and baby placements.

4. Examine appropriate joint commissioning for those children or young people who require placements to meet their specialist health or specialist education needs.

We have established a new Joint Funding Panel, which has now met twice, chaired by the Head of Service. In 2 cases, additional funding was supplied from Education but unfortunately health representatives withdrew funding from 2 cases where placements was no longer meeting specific health needs.

5. Appraise the development of the councils own Fostering Service and how it can contribute to further planning.

The development of the Fostering Service has been assisted by increase financial support for Thurrock Foster Carers which was very much needed as payments had

begun to compare unfavourably with other Councils. This is particularly important as the Borough is attracting so much recruitment activity from competitors. The Fostering Service is very well developed with a therapeutic Fostering Team offering multi-disciplinary support to very hard to place children and a "One Team" Foster Carers' association which includes membership across the Service. The allocation of the increased financial support was planned with the full involvement of existing Foster Carers and the highest paid very generously advocated that new funds should be concentrated on encouraging entrants to the Service.

This is beginning to show some encouraging signs of an improved response to the recruitment activities after a very disappointing period when we received feedback that enquires were withdrawing after comparing our Thurrock financial support with that of competitors.

The Lead Member requested a paper to the Corporate Parenting Panel in September 2013 which fully described the service activity, including refreshed recruitment images from the Communication Team.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to note the contents and actions above

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 Reducing cost through better commissioning, placement mix and tighter gatekeeping will impact positively on the services available to children and families in Thurrock

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

- 7.2 The Cost of Children's placements continue to be the most significant pressure on the council's budget and managing demand and use of resource will remain a priority.

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
01375 652466
kgoodacre@thurrock.gov.uk

7.3 Legal

Ensuring that children come into care through the most appropriate legal route, are supported to remain at home is a legal requirement of the authority through the Children Act and other legislation.

Implications verified by: **Christine Ifediora**
Solicitor
Christine.Ifediora@BDTLegal.org.uk

7.4 Diversity and Equality

7.5 Ensuring that children with diverse needs have their needs met in the most appropriate way and have a choice of placement if required. Monitoring of outcomes/ success of placements for different equalities groups(Equality Act 2010) will take place.

Implications verified by: **Teresa Evans**
Equalities and Cohesion Officer
TEvans@thurrock.gov.uk

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

7.5 The impact of the changes to legislation making authorities responsible for the costs of Remand placements and also increasing the responsibility for young people from 17 who have been remanded to have Looked after children's status has impact on the placement costs.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

9. **Appendices to the report**

Report Author:

Barbara Foster

Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes
Children's Services