

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 4 September 2014 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), James Halden (Vice-Chair), Sue Gray, Susan Little and Joycelyn Redsell

Jackie Howell, Thurrock One Team Foster Care Association
Sharon Smith, Thurrock One Team Foster Care Association

Apologies: Councillors Jan Baker, Charles Curtis
Natalie Carter (Co-opted Member)

In attendance: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services
Nicky Pace, Interim Head of Service for Care and Targeted Outcomes
Roland Minto, Service Manager (Placement Support)
Keeley Pullen – Head Teacher for Virtual School
Jan Natynczyk, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

8. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 July, 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

Members requested that the appendices referred to in minute 7, in relation to the Children's Placement Review Report, be circulated to the Committee.

9. Declaration of Interests

None.

10. Improving outcomes for looked after children: Implementing Electronic Personal Education Plans and Pupil Premium Plus Grant

Members were informed that the Virtual School was implementing a new process structure and ICT system through Electronic Personal Education Plans (EPEP) to enable a more robust and cost Effective Personal Education Plan (PEP) System.

The overall aim was to improve the outcomes of Looked After Children by ensuring that schools and the Local Authority target the best support for every individual pupil.

Members asked questions/commented as follows:

- Accountability

Concern was expressed about the accountability of schools in relation to Looked After children.

Officers replied that all Looked After Children, under Thurrock's remit, were monitored and schools were subject to accountability.

- Access to Electronic Personal Education Plans

Some concerns were raised about restrictions on accessibility to plans.

Officers replied that any issues would be easily rectified once the system was introduced.

- Monitoring of Looked After Children in out of Borough Schools

Members questioned if the introduction of the system would lead to a reduction in monitoring with regard to out of Borough schools.

It was noted that the introduction of the system would not replace face to face visits and would not be detrimental.

- Payment of Pupil Premium

Members felt that payment should be made on a monthly basis, to cover the issue of any Looked After Children moving from one school to another, after a short period of time.

Officers replied that Thurrock had currently moved to a payment twice yearly, as schools needed time to adapt.

Most Council's either concurred with this or paid one or three payments annually.

Thurrock's position could be reviewed, at a later date, to ascertain if the twice yearly payment was the most suitable.

- Sanctions

Members asked if sanctions were in place if insufficient /inaccurate data was supplied by schools.

It was noted that provision of insufficient or inaccurate data would lead to a review and funds being withheld if required.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the progress on the Electronic Personal Education Plans to improve educational outcomes for children and young people be noted;**
- 2. That the progress made in implementing statutory requirements around the allocation and administration of Pupil Plus Premium be noted.**

11. Adoption Report Outlining Process and Performance

Members were informed that this report outlined the process and performance with regard to adoption, in line with the requirements of 25.6 of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011.

Since the report was written, an Interim Adoption Team Manager had been appointed. Things were progressing well, whilst alternative management arrangements were being investigated.

Attention was also drawn to the Quarterly Adoption Survey which showed that Thurrock compared favourably with other authorities.

Members asked questions/commented as follows:

- Partnership Working

Members asked for an update on partnership working.

It was noted that following Havering's decision to leave, a partnership arrangement was still in place with Southend. However, both Council's were pursuing alternative options, possibly joining a larger consortium together or different consortiums.

- Adoption Panels

Members were concerned that there had been payment issues with regard to the Panel. It was also felt that paperwork needed to be streamlined.

The Director of Children's Services gave an assurance that the problem relating to payments would be resolved as a matter of urgency.

Streamlining of paperwork was also being investigated, with a paperless option a possibility.

Panel Members completed an annual satisfaction service anyway, but issues that needed to be addressed urgently, would be.

- Relinquished Child Process

It was requested that Officers send Members a copy of the Relinquished Child Process.

RESOLVED: That the report and Members comments, as detailed above, be noted.

12. Information on Recent External Placements for young people

This report updated Members on a range of issues regarding the placement choices made for looked after children.

Attention was drawn to a report from the Audit Commission on costs of Looked After Children nationally.

It was requested that this document be circulated to all Members of Council for information.

It was pointed out that in 2012/13 6.9 Billion pounds was spent on Children's social care nationally, with nearly fifty percent of total expenditure on Looked After Children.

The growth of the independent sector was also highlighted with an increase of 342 percent nationally between the years 2000-2013.

Members asked the following questions/commented as follows:

- External Placements

Members queried how many external placements the Authority was making through choice.

Officers replied that it was difficult to give exact figures, but given the choice, the Council would prefer in-house placements if there was the capacity.

Officers also reported on the measures being taken with regard to an aggressive local recruitment campaign and it was agreed that further details of this would be incorporated in the next report to Committee.

- Asylum Seekers

Members asked if the Authority were responsible for all the costs for Looked After Asylum Seeker Children.

Officers replied that the Council was able to recoup a proportion of the cost from the Home Office and that claiming back funds came under the jurisdiction of the Council's Finance Department. It should also be noted that the Authority was in receipt of the all the funds it was entitled to in this respect.

Officers also clarified the health check procedure for children from this group.

- Budget

Members requested that the next report to the Committee includes a budget item, explaining controllable pressures and uncontrollable pressures.

RESOLVED: That the efforts made by Officers to choose appropriate resources for looked after children, including some of the more difficult to place children, be noted and report backs be submitted to the next meeting on the budget pressures and local recruitment campaign.

13. Work Programme

Members' attention was drawn to the Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted, with the addition of a report on joint working arrangements to be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

The meeting finished at 8.52 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk