

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 4 October 2016 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), Chris Baker, Jan Baker, Sue MacPherson and Joycelyn Redsell
- Natalie Carter, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Christina Day, Children in Care Council
Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
- Apologies:** Councillors Leslie Gamester (Vice-Chair), Martin Kerin and Susan Little
- In attendance:** Joseph Kaley, Children in Care Council
Victoria Price, Children in Care Council
Paula Gregory, Designated Nurse
Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care
Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Neale Laurie, Safeguarding and Child Protection Coordinator & LADO
Jessica Feeney, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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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.

10. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held of the 5 July were approved as a correct record.

11. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

12. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

13. Updates from Children in Care Council

The Children in Care Council circulated a flyer for their meet and greet session. Members were also informed that the Children in Care Council had secured a seat on the Police Advisory Board.

The following questions were proposed by the Children in Care Council.

It was questioned why aftercare workers did not regularly visit children in care. The Head of Children's Services explained that aftercare workers must have 4 keep in touch days, although children under the age of 18 are required to have a keep in touch date once a month.

What was the progress on the Stay In Put Policy and when would children in care be able to see it. The Head of Children's Services confirmed that an updated version had been received from The Service Manager of Children & Families and that the Policy would be circulated in the near future. Members of the Committee also requested to receive a copy of the policy.

It was questioned what provision was put in place for children in care that became pregnant. The Head of Children's Services explained that it wasn't very often that a child in care became pregnant, although many care leavers that became pregnant received support from the Learning and Skills department to provide them with the opportunity to continue in education after their pregnancy. The Head of Children's Services asked for feedback from the Children in Care Council as to what support they felt was needed.

It was queried when children in care were required to move placement, how were they introduced to their new carer and how were belongings transported. The Head of Children's Services explained that the child would meet their new foster parents to ensure that they were aware of the child's medical history and experiences. It was explained that sometimes in cases of emergency it is not possible for the child to meet the foster parent before their placement. The Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association added that some children have been placed during the night and had arrived at the foster carers homes at midnight.

The Chair of the Committee questioned how long it took for the children to settle into their new placements. The Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association explained that if it was an emergency circumstance some children do not settle.

A Children in Care representative explained that it took him around a year to settle.

14. External Placement Survey with the Children in Care Council

Members of the committee were made aware of the conclusions from the external (outside of Thurrock) placements survey carried out by young people within the Children in Care Council.

A request was made by the Corporate Parenting Committee for the children in care council with the support of Natalie Carter from Open Door to find out about the views of young people who are placed outside of Thurrock.

The Children in Care Council met in June 2016 to formulate questions to ask those young people placed outside of Thurrock. They agreed that due to time scales it would be a telephone survey.

The Children in Care Council with support from Natalie Carter tried to make contact with 25 young people to take part in the out of borough survey. 16 young people responded and they were happy to answer all 6 questions. The longest distance a young person who took part in the survey placed in an external placement lived 150 miles away from Thurrock.

The Chair of the Committee questioned what age group the children from the survey were, it was confirmed that the ages ranged between 10 and 19.

Councillor Redsell queried as to why children who were unhappy living outside Thurrock could not be placed within Thurrock, The Head of Children's Services explained that children could not be moved due to placement availability in Thurrock.

It was queried by Councillor Redsell if the survey specifically asked do you feel safe in your placement rather than just do you feel safe. The Thurrock Open Door Representative explained that yes it was questioned if they felt safe in their placement, all telephone calls were a flowing conversation with further discussions.

As requested by the designated nurse, The Thurrock Open Door Representative agreed to include a question in the survey regarding health provision.

Councillor Macpherson and the Chair of the Committee questioned how the survey was going to address the issues raised. The Safeguarding and Child Protection Coordinator & LADO explained that IRO's (Independent Review Officers) arise any challenges if felt needed, they scrutinise care plans and develop a strong relationship with the children.

RESOLVED:

- 1. Corporate Parenting Committee would continue to monitor external placements annually through the children in care council survey.**
- 2. Young people's requests should be dealt with promptly; being placed out of the borough should not directly impact on the time taken to make decisions.**
- 3. To make young people aware that they may need to move back to Thurrock in the future especially once they turn 18 and provided appropriate advocacy and support.**

- 4. CICC to send regular newsletter /updates to those young people placed out of the borough to make them feel included within the support on offer to Thurrock looked after children.**

15. Overview of Children Looked After Placements and Demand Management

Members of the committee were informed that iMPower was commissioned to analyse demand and demand management within Thurrock Children's Social Care. The work of iMPower is focused on supporting Children's Social Care to improve quality of provision and value for money of the service.

It was explained further that part of the work with iMPower involved the department reviewing approximately 50 looked after children's cases (excluding UASC and children with disabilities), with the following finding that 49% of looked after children cases could have been avoided according to the case reviewers (reviewers were Thurrock Managers and Social Workers) – this could have been avoided through earlier and more effective interventions.

The Head of Children's Services addressed to the committee that children's services were now using the data to improve year on year concentrating on the early offer of help (EOH) service and prevention through a multi-agency approach. Members were informed that officers were looking to remodel the EOH service so that it would intervene sooner in the process to assist prevention within the family.

It was discussed how Thurrock could increase the number of foster parents within the borough, Councillor Redsell stated the residents needed to know more about fostering. The Head of Children's Services explained that he planned to send a flyer out with all resident's council tax bills, although it was highlighted that fostering must attract the correct people.

Councillor Redsell asked for clarification regarding the shortfall between the Home Office payment and the cost of placements and staffing to the department regarding UASC. The Head of Children's Services explained that anything above the bed night cost Thurrock Council compensate for. It was explained further that Thurrock Council was seeking further funds from the Home Office as some UASC had arrived through the Port of Tilbury and Purfleet.

Councillor MacPherson queried what was in place for foster Parents when there was language barriers. Members were informed that if there was not an appropriate match in language, a language line could be used for fosters and children, which was funded by Thurrock Council.

The Chair of the One Team Fostering Association explained that she knew a foster parent who had used this line and found it very helpful. It was highlighted to committee that the Fostering Association recalled a case when an UASC who appeared to be around the age of 25 was put into care with a

foster parent as it was estimated that his age was 15. It was explained to the committee that this was a very uncomfortable experience for the foster parent.

Members questioned how this happened, the Head of Children's Services explained that age assessment was very controversial subject, as the appearance of one could not be the only factor taken into account.

Councillor Baker questioned if health checks were carried out before homing UASC into foster carer's homes. The Head of Children's Services explained that in emergency cases it was not always possible but was carried out when possible. Councillor Redsell stated that this may raise concerns for many people looking to become a foster parent.

The Chair of the Committee questioned if Thurrock Council had been successful in placing UASC in other borough due to the increasing numbers in Thurrock. The Committee was informed that Luton had a shortfall therefore agreed to foster 19 UASC.

RESOLVED:

- 1. Committee members receive regular updates on the effectiveness of edge of care and prevention services.**
- 2. Committee members scrutinise the quality of placements and sufficiency of local placements.**
- 3. Committee members continue to review the value for money and effective commissioning of placements.**
- 4. Committee members continue to engage with the Children in Care Council to obtain the views of children and young people re: placements and services to prevent children and young people needing to become looked after.**

16. Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015-16

The Committee was informed that the report was the annual summary of activity undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) 2015-16 who provided Independent Scrutiny of the Department's care plans for all the Children Looked After by Thurrock Council. To provide information on the role of the Independent Review Officers and update on the Statutory Review Services activity for Children Looked After.

Councillor Redsell highlighted that there were many reviews for children under the age of 4, and requested feedback and clarification as to what goes on during the reviews.

The Chair of the Committee congratulated Children's Services on their positive Ofsted inspection which took place during the reporting period of February and March 2016.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The role of the Independent Reviewing Officers is a statutory responsibility and therefore it is recommended that The Corporate Parenting Committee continues to monitor the activity of the IROs and request any further information it requires in its scrutiny role.**
- 2. Members are asked to consider and adopt “Areas for development” contained within Section 4 of this report for continued improvement of this service.**

17. Work Programme

The Senior Democratic Services officer informed the committee that an IRO Update would be added to the work programme for January.

The Chair of the Committee requested that the Serious Case Review for James was also added to the January Committee meeting. The Senior Democratic Officer highlighted that the agenda was looking very heavy for January, it was resolved that the current placement updates for Care packages item for the January committee would be an item for noting.

The meeting finished at 8.45 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