

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 6 December 2017 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Bukky Okunade (Vice-Chair), Martin Kerin, Joycelyn Redsell and Aaron Watkins
- Natalie Carter, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Care Association
Joseph Kaley, Children in Care Council
Sharon Smith, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
- Apologies:** Councillors Sue MacPherson (Chair), Chris Baker, Jan Baker, Leslie Gamester, Christina Day and Paula Gregory
- In attendance:** Councillor James Halden, Portfolio Holder for Health and Education
Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Care and Targeted Outcomes
Adriana Cimpean, Interim Service Manager for the Through Care Service
Michele Lucas, Strategic Lead Learning & Skills
Andrew Osei, Service Manager for Placements
Keeley Pullen, Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After
Kenna-Victoria Martin, 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.

8. Minutes

The Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on the 6 September 2017 were approved as a correct record.

9. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

10. Declaration of Interests

There were no interests declared.

11. Children in Care Council Update

Joseph Kaley of the Children in Care Council provided a verbal update from the Children in Care Council, during which the Committee were notified:

- Elections for the Vice-Chair had been taken and it was hoped the new Vice-Chair would be able to attend future meetings;
- The consultation for the pledge was due to take place in March 2018;
- The Children in Care Council had given a presentation on their role to the CCG and had begun commissioning the new Health Passport. This would include any medical records and medication a child required attached to their passport. This would include consulting with Foster Carers; and
- Nominations had been sent out to Foster Carers, ahead of the awards evening on the 23 March 2018.

The Corporate Director for Children's Services stated that the CCG had been very impressed with the presentation given by Joseph at their meeting. He continued to advise the Committee a report would be presented to the Health and Well-Being Board, as they also had an interest in Looked After Children in the borough.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the update.

12. Children's Social Care Performance

The Assistant Director of Care and Targeted Outcome presented the report highlighting the following points:

- There had been a reduction in the number of contacts being converted into referrals; this eased the pressure of children becoming looked after and children being placed on a child protection plan;
- The number of unaccompanied asylum seekers had reduced to 33, it was believed that this figure would further reduce next year to be in line with the Eastern Region protocol;
- 93% of Looked after Children Reviews had been completed on time or within timescales allocated;
- At the end of September 2017 there were 6 cases of children going missing from their placement;
- The number of children on a Child Protection Plan was slowly reducing, although Thurrock was still currently higher than the national average; and
- Six children had been placed with adopters and it was expected that the families would complete the adoption process by the end of the financial year. Furthermore, three children had been matched with prospective adopters, however were waiting to move in with their permanent families due to legal challenges.

Members enquired as to the reduction in the % of care leavers in Education Employment or Training which was currently 67%. Officers explained that it

was not surprising the figures had reduced during September, as some young people may have changed courses after deciding it wasn't for them. The Committee heard that officers worked hard with colleges and the young people to offer assistance during the transition period.

The Committee sought additional information into the number of missing children. The Assistant Director of Care and Targeted Outcome notified Members the missing young people were looked after children and were usually found the same day or after a few days.

Officers assured Members that any report of a missing child, or children, was taken extremely seriously and daily reports were completed as to any missing looked after child.

RESOLVED:

- 1. Corporate Parenting Committee noted a newly introduced performance management framework by the Director of Children Services following Ofsted's recommendation.**
- 2. Corporate Parenting Committee noted:**
 - Areas of improvement in Children's social care.**
 - Work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services.**
 - Highlight areas of further investigation for deep dive studies.**

The Chair of the Committee agreed to move Item 7, to allow time for the Portfolio Holder to arrive.

13. Children Looked After Placement Commissioning

The Corporate Director for Children's Services presented the report to Members explaining the provision of quality care through safe and stable placements for children and young people who were looked after was a key statutory function of all Local Authorities.

He continued to state that in Thurrock this accommodation and associated support was provided through a range of providers on differing contractual arrangements and officers felt there was an opportunity to simplify this to continue to improve the outcomes for children and young people while improving value for money.

Members heard the current annual commitment for placement provision was £9.5million. This expenditure was across a range of providers including Independent Fostering Agencies, residential placements and supported accommodation. In addition the number of care placements fluctuates daily due to children and young people entering and leaving the care system

however there were currently 326 children and young people aged 0-18 years requiring placement provision.

Councillor Kerin enquired as to the in-house recruitment and monitoring undertaken by the department. Officers informed the Committee, the Council was currently in the middle of a recruitment drive and hoped this would succeed in increasing the number of Foster Carers in the Borough. It was further explained that monitoring had also been increased with the Commissioning Team now completing visiting and offering further support to Social Workers.

During discussions the Committee mentioned the work of Foster Carers in the borough and were informed that the Give a Gift scheme currently running at Lakeside, was also assisting with the recruit of new Foster Carers, as it encouraged people to talk to the council about becoming carers.

RESOLVED:

That Members considered the proposal to simplify and improve the commissioning of placement provision, in particular to withdraw from the current Eastern Regional contract when it ends in 2018.

That Members comment on the proposals for officers to proceed to Cabinet approval to commence a procurement exercise.

Councillor Halden arrived at 7.50pm

14. Pilot Development of Head Start Housing for Care Leavers & Vulnerable Young People

The Portfolio Holder for Education and Health, Councillor Halden, presented the report which outlined how Thurrock Council would support young people in finding suitable housing accommodation once they had left care. A pilot scheme had been developed, Head Start Housing for Care Leavers, which was in partnership with Inspire to address the housing issues that young care leavers faced. Two further developments were also created which were house of multiple occupancy (HMOs).

This pilot scheme had already helped to save £84,000 and would avoid spot placements which often happened when leaving care and were costly. The safety of young care leavers was paramount and aimed to be as flexible as possible to all young care leavers. Criminal offenders would not be eligible for the scheme. The scheme would run for 24 months with reviews taking place within the 6th, 12th and 18th month which would also discuss other plans such as debt management or education.

Councillor Halden felt the scheme was positive and praised the Children's and Housing Services department for their work on care leaver housing issues.

During discussions Members queried as to why the Council Tax exception was only until the young people were 21 years old, when the scheme itself was 18 to 25 years. The Portfolio Holder for Education and Health explained the scheme was to assist with encouraging independence for young people leaving care. He continued to advise that there was an exemption policy in place which could be used, at the relevant director's discretion.

It was queried whether, if a care leaver had gained a place at university, if the Council Tax exemption would still apply, when they came home. Councillor Halden explained that if a university student were to commute to and from their university then they could still meet the Eligibility Criteria for assistance with accommodation.

Officers confirmed they would offer support to any young person who had left care coming home after completing university. This would include working with them and supporting their new path.

RESOLVED:

- 1. To note and provide comments on the pilot HMO and support the ongoing development of the programme to enable more properties to be available for the scheme**
- 2. To support the development of a transitional housing scheme and would provide personalised support for young people as they enter the aftercare service.**
- 3. To note and make comments on a more joint working approach between Social Care and Housing to improve the offer to care leavers.**

15. Information on Recent External Placements for Young People

The Corporate Director for Children's Services addressed Members to inform them placements were discussed within the performance item. He passed over to the Service Manager for Placements, who explained the report gave an overview of placement activities since July 2017, including information on new external placements made and comments provided on a number of the presenting issues which influence decision making.

He continued by stating that the report detailed the numbers of looked after children in Thurrock, with 310 children currently in care. It was commented that officers worked with Foster Carers to support older children up to 18 years to stay within a family unit.

RESOLVED:

That the members of the Committee reviewed the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate placement resources for looked after children.

16. Annual Fostering Report April 2016 - March 2017

The Service Manager for Placements notified the Committee that the item was a 'Good News' report, informing them the period between April 2016 and March 2017 had been a transitional year for the Fostering Service.

He continued to advise that it was the year that the Fostering, Placement, Adoption and Children Contact Centre had been redesigned as a one-hub Family Placement Service. It is also included the Fostering Recruitment and Support Services in collaboration with IMPOWER.

Members heard how the Family Contact Centre (OAK Tree) was well managed and supported by an experienced social work manager and well trained contact supervisors. In addition, as of April 2017, there were 158 active carers from 92 households. The Committee was advised, due to the diversity of the Thurrock Carer population, it was essential to meet the individual needs of children and who may look after them.

The Chair thanked the Service Manager for Placements for his report and offered her thanks to all Foster Carers in the Borough.

Councillor Watkins asked why the Council provided funding for posters and did not simply rely on word of mouth to promote the work of Foster Carers and the recruitment drive.

Officers assured the Committee image advertising was just as important as word of mouth.

Members of the Foster Carer Association mentioned they were included within the recruitment drive and wanted advertisements to appeal to other Foster Carers. By having visual adverts they felt it encouraged people to come forward, even if only seeking information.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the report.

17. The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After - Academic Year 2016-2017

The Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After introduced the report which highlighted that raising achievement in all areas of education for Children Looked After remained a key priority for the Council.

Members heard the Virtual School monitored and supported the educational progress and outcomes for children looked after, irrespective of whether they were placed in or out of borough. In addition the Virtual School was responsible for pupils aged between 3 and 18 years and this included those who had left care during an academic year.

The Chair suggested that the Committee suspend standing orders to complete the agenda. This was agreed by the Committee.

Members thanked the Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After for her report and hard work with the looked after children.

Councillor Watkins enquired as to Key Priority 2, improving the attendance of children looked after to maximise educational outcomes. It was explained that officers were aiming to reduce fixed-term exclusions and were putting key actions and documentation in place in response to these all 6 priorities.

In addition they were working with the school and child in question as to why they were not attending school.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Committee notes the non-validated DFE outcomes of the summer**
- 2. 2017 tests and examinations and commends the pupils, their schools and parents/carers on their achievements.**
- 3. That the Committee recognises that the cohorts of pupils are small and that this should be considered when comparing year on year data.**
- 4. That the Committee recognises that the length of time in care can affect the progress and outcomes of the pupils.**
- 5. The Committee approves the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for the academic year 2016-2017 and uses this information to acknowledge, evaluate and if appropriate, challenge the services that are provided for all CLA.**

18. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme

The Committee discussed the work programme for the municipal year.

RESOLVED:

That the following items be included on the work programme:

- IRO Annual Report – March 2018**
- That the performance report and placement reports be reported as one item at future meetings.**

The meeting finished at 9.35 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**