

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 5 July 2016 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), Leslie Gamester (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Jan Baker, Susan Little, Sue MacPherson and Joycelyn Redsell

Natalie Carter, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Christina Day, Children in Care Council
Billie Jo King, Children in Care Council
Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association (arrived at 7.10)

Apologies: Councillor Martin Kerin

In attendance: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care
Paul Coke, Service Manager (Children & Families)
Jenny Shade, 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.

Introductions were made by all attendees and the Chair stated that the Children in Care Council should feel free to speak and interact with members at this committee.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on the 3 March 2016 were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

4. Terms of Reference

The Corporate Parenting Committee Terms of Reference were noted.

5. Recent External Placements for Young People

The Officer presented the report which briefed Members on the range of issues regarding the placement choices made for looked after children for the period 1 February and 31 May 2016.

The Officer referred members to comparison data within the report which included:

- The increase in the number of the looked after children in the period 1 February and 31 May 2016.
- The increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children to 86.
- The comparative rate for Thurrock was 64.3 compared to the national rate of 60.6. The Officer stated that this figure did not include the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- The increase in the number of children under the age of one in this period.
- The launch of the Transfer Protocol with regard to unaccompanied asylum seeking children and how it was hoped will be a voluntary arrangement across the country.

Councillor Little asked what was being done to promote “fostering to adoption”. The Officer confirmed that the CORAM team were based in Thurrock and it was their role to recruit, review child protection plans and to look and investigate early options for permanency.

Councillor Little asked Officers what options would be in place to manage the complexities and capacity of working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Andrew Carter confirmed that two Through Care Teams were already established with an option of a new specific unaccompanied asylum seeking children team that would deal with assessments and care plans of those children.

The Chair asked Officers how the recruitment of in-house foster carers was progressing and what support could members offer.

Andrew Carter stated that members knew the community better and that information posters and leaflets could be made available at member surgeries. An advertising campaign was still on-going and that work with Essex Council continues as they have a surplus of foster carers.

RESOLVED

That the members of the Committee scrutinised the efforts made by Officers to choose appropriate resources for looked after children, including the more difficult to place children.

6. Bank Accounts, Passports and Birth Certificates held by Looked After Children

The Chair opened this item to Foster Carers for comment.

Jackie Howell and Sharon Smith stated the importance of getting all the relevant information and documents when a looked after child had transferred from another authority. Having this information enabled the foster carers to apply for passports and savings accounts. It was agreed that placement planning meetings would be the ideal time to undertake checks and for documents to be handed over. At looked after children reviews the question should also be asked who holds these documents and this should be recorded and minuted by the social worker.

The Officer then presented the report and updated members on the number of looked after children with bank accounts, passports and birth certificates.

An addendum to the report was presented by the Officers which provided further detailed information on the numbers of looked after children who had active bank accounts. This will be forwarded to Democratic Services for distribution to members.

Councillor Little stated she was pleased this item had been brought to committee but still had concerns over the number of looked after children who did not have their documents and hoped that the department had a tracking device on savings for looked after children so that this could be monitored.

A discussion took place between Members and Co-Opted Members on the difficulties of looked after children obtaining bank accounts and how credit ratings may affect student loan accounts.

Councillor Redsell asked Officers if permission was required for foster carers to take looked after children out of the country. Paul Coke confirmed that yes permission was required and that letters were prepared with all relevant information. This would also be the case for looked after children on care orders and that parents would need to be informed.

Councillor Redsell stated that not enough was being done in schools to educate young people on the importance of money and how to save.

The Chair asked Officers what improvements were in place to improve the identification card for looked after children. The Officer stated that the check list was vital and should be completed at the first planning meeting within 7 days of a young person coming into care. Better recording would be required to ensure that the appropriate auditing can be undertaken.

Natalie Carter stated that there should be a cut-off period for obtaining this information.

Paul Coke stated that Identification Cards for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, known as Application Registration Card (ARC), were provided by the Home Office and were reliant on them to do so.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee will monitor this area to ensure that continual improvements in partnership with officers and the children in care council are made.**
- 2. That the Addendum Report be issued to all Corporate Parenting Committee Members.**

7. Health of Looked After Children

Andrew Carter presented this report in the absence of the designated nurse and reminded members that the report only covered items that were requested from members from the March 2016 committee.

Rory Patterson stated that it was disappointing that no Clinical Commissioning Group representative was present and colleagues would be held to account and he would be taking this up with colleagues.

Members were directed to the information on vision checks which had been undertaken on looked after children living within and outside the area. It was agreed by members that a breakdown by age would have been useful and a vision checker to identify and monitor the looked after children who had or had not undertaken a vision check.

Andrew Carter stated that the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services are recording better turnaround times but without getting complacent, this still needs to get better. Councillor Little stated that every effort should be done to ensure the appropriate recording had taken place.

Councillor Redsell asked Officers if foster carers were informed of looked after children who have had Tuberculosis (TB). Andrew Carter stated that there were very few incidents in Thurrock where looked after children having TB and would initially be picked by Public Health.

RESOLVED

That the comments made by members of the Corporate Parenting Committee be used to challenge the report and drive improvements in health provision for looked after children.

8. Ofsted Inspection Report and Action Plan

Andrew Carter briefly presented the report and updated members on the outcomes of the recent Ofsted Inspection which was judged to "Require

Improvement". A Self-Assessment had been undertaken prior to the Ofsted Inspection and did not identify anything that was not already known. Members were asked to comment on the 16 recommendations on the draft Action Plan which was scheduled to be sent to Ofsted. There would be a slight delay in sending the draft Action Plan back to Ofsted to ensure that members of the Corporate Parenting Committee were given the opportunity to comment.

It was stated that the same report would be presented to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 6 July 2016.

The Chair asked Officers what improvements would be made to the offer of return home interviews to looked after children who had gone missing from home or care. Andrew Carter stated that monthly monitoring of referral rates of looked after children are undertaken to ensure that this rate increased from the 80 per cent and to improve contract monitoring that would require proactive engagement of young people by the provider. Andrew Carter stated that the contract with Open Door had only started in January 2015 and that every effort would be made to get 100 per cent offered interviews.

Councillor Redsell stated that Staying Put Policy should be made more prominent and asked what was already in place. Andrew Carter stated that 5 looked after children benefited from the Staying Put Policy and that consultations were in place with foster carers and Independent Fostering Agency providers. It was also the aim to actively promote the scheme as an option and work will be undertaken with the Eastern Region partners to improve the local and regional offer.

A discussion took place between Members, Officers and Co-Opted Members on the Staying Put Policy and it was agreed that an agreement would need to be made and that this should suit all parties.

Councillor Little stated that the post adoption support needed to be measured and monitored going forward and that communication and recording of data was a vital part of this.

Councillor MacPherson stated that Academic Reports should be an item on the Corporate Parenting work programme to ensure that these reports can be monitored and challenged.

Councillor Little asked if academic reports were prepared for children home educated. Andrew Carter stated that Thurrock had no looked after children that were home educated.

Rory Patterson stated that Thurrock will be inspected again by Ofsted in three year's time and that every year a self-assessment would be undertaken. The targets and objectives of the report would need to be incorporated and monitored going forward by a means of a Performance Dashboard. Members agreed that this item be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED

That the Corporate Parenting Committee continue to monitor the progress of the council in implementing the recommendations of the Ofsted Inspection Report particularly in relation to children looked after and care leavers.

9. Work Programme

The work programme was discussed and agreed:

- That the item on Placement Updates of Care Packages be removed from the October work programme and replaced with Improvement of iMPOWER Work.
- That the item on Annual Complaints Report be removed from the October work programme.
- That the item on Performance Dashboard be added to the October work programme.
- That the item on Education – Academic Reports be added to the October work programme.

The meeting finished at 9.15 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**