

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 1 September 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Elizabeth Rigby (Chair), Steve Liddiard (Vice-Chair), Abbie Akinbohun, Daniel Chukwu, Barry Johnson, Sue Hooper and Sue Shinnick

Rafael Antunes, Chair, Children in Care Council
Christopher Bennett, Vice Chair, Children in Care Council
Annie Guidotti, Thurrock Open Door
Sharon Smith, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Jenny Josling, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

In attendance: Councillor Joy Resell, Previous Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee
Michael Addo-Boateng, Interim Developmental Role (DNLAC) & Safeguarding Children Specialist Nurse (Lead for CDR)
Jane Foster- Taylor – NHS and Thurrock CCG
Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Mandy Moore, Strategic Lead - Business Intelligence
Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Joseph Tynan, Interim Assistant Director of Children's Services
Kenna-Victoria Healey, 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.

11. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 2 June 2020 was approved as a true and correct record.

12. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

13. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

14. Children's Social Care Performance

The Strategic Lead for Business Intelligence introduced the report, and in doing so Members heard how the data within the report referred to Quarter 1

2020-20 with comparisons to the same quarter in the previous year. Statistical neighbour and England averages had been made wherever possible.

She continued to inform the Committee how the data presented was obtained from the “At a Glance” monthly performance reporting, regional benchmarking data and national data sets and was presented and discussed with the Social Care Senior Management Team.

Members were then provided with a summary of Children’s Social Care performance and taken through the report, where it was explained the report described the current activity levels and performance of Children’s Social Care services in responding to the needs of vulnerable children.

The Chair of the Committee thanked Officers for the report and asked Members if they had any questions. The Vice-Chair of the Children In Care Council enquired as to why they were more males than females within foster care. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children commented that as a receiving local authority of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, there happened to be more males than females, in turn this contributed to the number of looked after children in the borough.

Members queried care leavers accommodation, as to whether this was shared or their own. Officers explained that a report had been taken to the Health and Well-Being board, which explained that care leaver’s accommodation depended on the needs of the care leaver. There were different types of accommodation which included, staying on with foster carers, renting their own property, or even living with other care leavers. It was further confirmed during discussions that support required by care leavers was given as much as possible.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That members noted areas of improvement in Children’s Social Care and work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services**
- 2. For any specific areas of interest to be flagged for inclusion/expansion within the next report.**

15. Fostering Statement of Purpose

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children introduced to report and doing so, explained that the fostering service was registered with OFSTED and complied with the relevant legislation. She continued to inform Members that the statement of purpose was an annual report which set out the aims and objective of the service as a whole.

Members heard how statement related to the fostering service which was provided by a number of teams such as placement support team and the placement assessment team.

Councillor Johnson thank Officers for their report and sought as the report was an annual report, if Officers could highlight any changes or amendments. It was explained the changes from last year included the structure of the service which had increased to 4 teams this included a new recruitment team and a team to complete events. Officers explain that any changes had been made to meet the needs of the service and the young children they supported.

Ms Foster-Taylor the representative for the NHS and Thurrock CCG observed that as two out of three children were placed outside of the borough it was sometimes difficult to manage placements if children were not placed inside of the borough. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children explained as much as possible children were placed either with a family member or within the Thurrock boundary, this was confirmed by the Director of Children's Services.

The Chair of the Foster Carer Association commented that the service received by foster carers was good and support was always given when required.

RESOLVED:

That members of the Committee are informed and aware of the Council's Fostering Statement of Purpose.

16. Adoption Statement of Purpose

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After introduce the report and in doing so, explained that the adoption service had been brought back in house to the Council just over a year ago.

Members were advised that the council was part of Adopt East which was an alliance adoption services which included areas such as Essex, Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Southend, Norfolk and Bedfordshire. By being part of Adopt East enabled children being adopted to be matched to families without a delay, as well as ensuring that all decisions regarding placements were made in the best interest of the child.

Councillor Redsell sought confirmation that the service had been brought back into the Council. Officers confirmed that it was, to which Councillor Redsell commented this was good to see and thanked the Officer for her report.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock Council's Adoption Statement of Purpose.

17. Children in Care Council Update

The representative of the Children in Care Council and Opendoor presented the report on behalf of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children in Care

Council, in doing so, she explained meetings had been held via zoom and had been successful with the Children in Care Council inviting different people to join in with discussions on many different topics which were of high importance to young people.

Members heard how some of the people invited to join the Children in Care Council's meetings included managers of Thurrock Council as well as the Portfolio Holder Education and the Director of Children's Services. It was commented that the Children in Care Council wanted to invite more people and to increase their members.

Councillor Redsell enquired as to whether the Children in Care Council had thought to invite Elected Members to their meeting, as Corporate Parents it was important for them to hear from young people within Care.

The Vice-Chair of the Children in Care Council commented that the more people contributed to their meetings, it meant different viewpoints could be discussed and this could overall assist the Children in Care Council when discussing their own experiences.

The Chair of the Children in Care Council informed the committee that the next meeting they were discussing the OFSTED inspection and would be happy to take any feedback back to members their members. Councillor Johnson advised both members of the Children in Care Council there were nine Cabinet Members who each looked after a specific service of the Council, should they wish to invite them he was sure they would be more than happy to attend a meeting, for example he was the Portfolio Holder for Housing and he was always more than happy to attend a meeting.

The Director of Children's Services stated it was important for Members and Officers on the Corporate Parenting Committee to hear of any issues or concerns that young people may have and for them to ask questions was positive, as it gave officers the chance to provide the answers they were looking for and if necessary improve the service offered to young people.

Councillors Liddiard and Redsell confirmed that it was not only important for portfolio holders to be involved but also for young people to know their local councillor of which very few did and although Portfolio Holders had a specific role there were other members who sat on Committees who could also ask questions on behalf of the young people

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the work carried out by the Children in Care Council, the purpose and the role of the Children in Care Council, and to establish what corporate parents need to do to help the Children in Care Council achieve their aims and objectives

18. Initial Health Assessments

The report was introduced by the Strategic Lead for Looked After Children during which she commented on the OFSTED inspection from November 2019, which highlighted the delay in timely initial health assessments. It was commented that since November changes had been made and referrals were to be made within five days and health assessments completed within 20 working days.

Members were advised that weekly meetings took place where officers looked at health assessment data and tried to streamline the service in order to meet the needs of children coming into their care, an example of this was parents being asked to sign a section 20 when a child came into the care of the Council.

During discussions the Committee heard in for April 2020/2020 there had been a slight dip in performance of initial health assessments being completed and also for April 2020 referrals, however it was believed this was contributed by COVID-19. Members then heard how for June and July 2020 improvements had been made for referrals and assessments to be completed.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee are informed about the efforts made by Health and Children's Services to improve the timeliness of Initial Assessments for Children Looked After.

19. Looked After Children Health Report

The representative for the NHS and Thurrock CCG introduced the report and in doing accepted the point made of children being placed miles away from their local area, however to place children within the Essex footprint was difficult. Members heard how Covid-19 had impacted on the resources for the NHS this included the re-deployment of staff, who hopefully would be coming back in house in the coming weeks.

Members queried as to the risks identified within the report and questioned they were in fact a failing rather than a risk. It was commented that there was a problem nationally, however it was agreed that officers needed to do better and this was being looked into with Council Officers and other health providers.

It was queried as to why there were so many people needing to be involved within health assessments for Looked after Children and commented that if the system was streamlined improvements and deadlines could be better met.

The Chair of the Foster Carer Association agreed that the health assessments ran lot better previously, it was also important that officers not only for the

Council but within the health services understood it was not always possible for a Foster Carer to ensure their young people attend an assessment on a particular date, as some Foster Carers were looking after more than one young person. It would therefore help if there was more flexibility.

During the discussions the Director of Children's Services welcomed joint working with health professionals and confirmed their assistance if required was always available.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee are informed about how the above duties are being met.

20. Corporate Parenting Committee Strategy 2020 - 2022

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After, addressed the Committee firstly explaining, the term 'corporate parent' was broadly understood in relation to how local authorities should approach their responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers. However, it was vital that all parts of a local authority beyond those directly responsible for care and pathway planning recognise they have a key role too.

Members were notified the corporate parenting principles were intended to secure a better approach to fulfilling existing functions in relation to looked after children and care leavers and for the local authority to facilitate as far as possible secure, nurturing, and positive experiences for looked after children and young people and enable positive outcomes for them.

It was discussed how during 2019 the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed that training should be given to all elected members to help develop their knowledge of being a corporate parent.

The key priorities which included children remaining cared for within the family where is safe to do so, young people staying within the foster placement until they're ready to leave I feel that they are prepared to live independently and involve children and young people in decisions that affect their lives as maximise the opportunity for them to make their own choice, were explained to the Committee.

Councillor Liddiard commented on consultations with counsellors in that he still felt that regardless of training mini elected members did not understand their role when it came to being a corporate parent. He suggested they needed to be a change of communications for elected members such as short videos or soundbites which could be sent either via email or other forms such as text message. Cancel red-cell agreed in the members needed to be involved more however she also prize offices for her farm for me to have come since it started.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note their responsibilities as Corporate Parents.

21. Corporate Parenting Committee - Annual Report 2019/2020

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which highlighted the work of the Committee over the last year and asked that Member's refer the report to Full Council for all Members to see the work of the Committee.

Members heard how the report included an overview to being a Corporate Parent, key points to improving the outcomes for Looked After Children and what makes Corporate Parenting effective.

Councillor Redsell, the Chair of the Committee for 2019-2020, commented that she welcomed the report and the hard work which had been undertaken over the years. She continued to state that it was important to share the work of the Committee with all Elected Members.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019/2020 be noted.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Annual Report be referred to Full Council, to share the work of Committee and their main achievements for 2019/2020 municipal year.**

22. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2020/2021

The Committee discussed the work programme, and agreed to a number of reports being included on the Work Programme including:

- Health Assessment Review
- Report on the way to communicate with Elected Members and Advertising

The Chair of the Committee took the opportunity to thank Councillor Resell for all of her hard work as the previous Chair of the Committee.

Councillor Redsell thanked the Chair and wished her the best of luck as the new Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee, she also thanked all of the officers for their hard work.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed for the Work Programme to be updated and include the reports discussed throughout the meeting.

The meeting finished at 8.57 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**