

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 18 July 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Paul Arnold (Chair), Vikki Hartstean (Vice-Chair), Adam Carter, John Cecil, Georgette Polley, Cici Manwa and Augustine Ononaji

Wendy Caswell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Jackie Enifer, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

Apologises: Laura Hall, Thurrock Open Door

In attendance: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Janet Simon, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help
Dan Jones, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead for the Youth Offending Service and Prevention
Keeley Pullen, Keeley Pullen, Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children
Ines Paris, Designated Lead Safeguarding Nurse
Liz Shields, Service Manager Adoption Service
Peter Turner, Chair of the Fostering and Adoption Panel
Tina Russel, Assistant Director SET CAMHS and Partnerships
Donna Noble, Business Support Officer, Legal and Governance

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2023 were approved as a true and correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

3. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Children's Social Care Performance 2022-23

The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care and Early Help presented the report found on pages 9 to 30 of the agenda.

Members discussions focused on the Initial Health Assessments and the timeliness of their completion for Thurrock's children and young people within care. They sought assurances that improvements continued to be made including meeting timescales for Initial Health Assessments.

Members requested that regular updates on Initial Health Assessments were presented to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That Members note improvements, challenges and areas for improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.

5. Adoption Statement of Purpose

The Strategic Lead, Looked After Children introduced the report found on pages 31 to 62 of the agenda.

Throughout discussions the following were discussed:

- The adoption team assisted with providing the support services to adoptees and adopters. Along with support for special guardians and the children placed with them, as this was a similar framework. It therefore sat within the same team and officers had access to services via a commissioned framework of service providers.
- It was explained a guardianship arrangement could be in place until the age of 18 years old and effectively within a special guardianship, your birth parents are still your parents, although you may not have lived with them for a period of time.
- An adoption was lifelong and was a full legal change within a family, and so the adopted family would become parents and grandparents to the child.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee review Thurrock's Adoption Statement of Purpose.

6. Thurrock Fostering Statement of Purpose

The Service Manager for the Fostering and Adoption Service presented the report found on pages 63 to 92 of the agenda.

Members thanked officers for the report and enquired if in the next version of the Fostering Statement of Purpose a section could be included on whistle blowing.

During discussions, the Committee heard how each child had an allocated social worker who had regular visits and as part of those visits, they have to make sure they see the child on their own, spend time with them to go through direct work with them.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and commented it showed the excellent work and underlined the hard work that went on the service, which was very much appreciated.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee review and note Thurrock's Fostering Statement of Purpose

7. Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report 2022-2023

The Chair of the Fostering and Adoption Panel Introduced the report found on pages 93 to 108 of the agenda. Members heard how within the last year the panel had strengthened the membership of the panel and the Chair of Panel was pleased to say they were a much more representative group of individuals.

Members heard how the Council worked with a registered adoption agency who were specialist in inter country adoption and should Thurrock residents wish to pursue inter country adoption, the first step was to make an initial inquiry with the adoption team and were then passed on to the specialist agency who could provide further advice.

It was explained when it came to schools and liaising with teachers, the panel would rely on documentation and information packs supplied by either the school, child's social worker or the child themselves.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee review the report of the Independent Chair of the Thurrock Fostering and Adoption panel.

8. Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Service Manager for the Fostering and Adoption Service presented the report found on pages 109 to 120 of the agenda.

During which the following was highlighted:

- The majority of Thurrock's looked after children lived in foster placements, and officers felt it was really important for children to have the opportunity to be within a family setting.
- Two households had already approved this financial year and they already had children living with them.

- There were currently eight families in assessment for become foster carers.
- Recruitment was generally through word of mouth, from current foster carers who were already fostering, speak to people within their networks. This also assisted with retainment of foster carers.
- The draft retention guide had been circulated to carers for their comments and was progressing well.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That Members are updated on the current progress in Fostering Recruitment**
- 2. That Members are aware of the key areas for improvements.**
- 3. That Members are aware of the challenges the local authority is experiencing in recruiting foster carers and what we are doing to address these.**

Members agreed to suspend standing orders to allow them to continue to the end of the agenda.

9. Joint Report on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children (Update)

The Strategic Lead, Looked After Children presented the report found on pages 121 to 130 of the agenda.

Throughout discussions the below points were raised:

- It was good to see that improvement was continuing to be made regarding Initial Health Assessments, with the last two months recording growth within performance.
- There was a higher number of children who came into care in June than usual, for the same figures previously for the number of children coming into care in a month officers would have to look at 2020 figures.
- As it was June there were 28 days to complete the IHA and for those who came in the last two weeks of the month some of their IHA were still pending, however there was still time to complete these.

RESOLVED:

- 1. Members note the improved performance in the first two months of the first quarter and the positive impact of the additional capacity provided by the ICB to NELFT**
- 2. Members are aware of the further steps being taken to improve performance**

10. Work Programme

Members discussed the work programme and asked that the following reports be included:

- Update from the Children in Care Council
- Regular updates on Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children

The meeting finished at 9.27 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**