

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 18 June 2015 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Susan Little (Chair), Bukky Okunade (Vice-Chair), Leslie Gamester, Steve Liddiard and Joycelyn Redsell
- Christina Day, Children in Care Council
Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Patricia Perolls, Designated Nurse
Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
- Apologies:** Councillor James Halden
Natalie Carter, Thurrock Open Door Representative
- In attendance:** Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care
Paul Coke, Service Manager (Children & Families)
Simon Shardlow, Interim Service Manager
Matthew Boulter, Principal Democratic Services Officer
Jenny Shade, 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.

The Chair observed that Councillors James Baker and Clare Baldwin were absent.

The Chair thanked past and present Committee members for their contributions.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee, held on 12 March 2015, 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. Information on Recent External Placements for Young People

Paul Coke introduced the report which set out a range of issues regarding the placement choices made for Looked After Children and information on external placements.

With particular reference to the budget forecast the officer reported to the committee that the budget for 2015/16 for external placements was £7.8 million. Plus an additional payment of £500,000 would be received from the Primary Care Trust.

Members asked for further explanation on Connected Carers, the officer clarified that this is when a child is placed with either a family member or friend. It was also noted that Connected Carers were assessed exactly the same way as a foster carer would be.

Andrew Carter further clarified that the budget overspends of £590,259 did not take into account the monies still to be received from Central Government for asylum seekers which totalled £450,000. The Chair asked for clarification of whether monies received from government covered the full cost of the placement. Andrew Carter confirmed that the government only paid a proportion of the costs depending on the age of the child and this would not cover the whole cost of placements.

Councillor Redsell asked for clarification on what 16 years of age and above semi-independent placements meant. The officer clarified that this was not a foster placement but where the child could live in their own rented property with the support of the Agency, the young person would work independently or be trained with the view of moving into independency. The young person placements were staffed which meant that the child would not be left alone at any time whilst in placement alone.

The Chair asked for clarification on ratings used for residential placement providers. Andrew Carter confirmed that the ratings followed the Ofsted framework and were categorised as Outstanding, Good, Adequate or Requiring Improving.

Councillor Okunade asked for the total number of recruited approved foster carers in Thurrock. The officer confirmed that this information is available and also the number of potential foster carers in assessment. The officer recommended that these figures be referred back to the Corporate Parenting Committee in September 2015.

RESOLVED

That the members of the Committee scrutinize the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate resources for Looked After Children, including our more difficult to place children.

6. Care Leavers Progress

Paul Coke introduced the report to Members which set out the information on the progress of care leavers, the new initiatives put in place to address some key issues and data that gave an overview of Thurrock's performance against Thurrock's statistical neighbours and the national average.

The members asked the officer for clarification on the "Staying Put" an arrangement which came into force on 1 April 2014; the officer stated that this was an arrangement which enabled care leavers to remain with their former foster carers after they turn 18 years of age.

The Chair asked for clarification on the development of Clarence Road. The officer confirmed that this was a new project which had acquired four beds (units) to be used specifically for care leavers who were supported by aftercare support workers and Family Mosaic. The officer clarified that the length of stay was assessed individually but the average stay would be six months to a year. The Committee recommended that this item be brought back to the Corporate Parenting Committee in December 2015 for review.

Councillor Redsell asked for clarification on when care leavers moved from their placements where they moved to. The officer stated that the expectation would be to move them into social housing or council accommodation with fully independent living. The care leavers would be given priority with a Band 3 but would still be required to follow the established bidding and application processes.

Councillor Redsell asked for further clarification on Universal Credit. The officer confirmed that this was introduced in March 2015; applications would be received from young people leaving care who were currently seeking employment. The officer confirmed that work was in hand with the housing benefit to get the rent element of the payment to be paid directly to the landlords. The amount paid will be based on individual circumstances.

All members recognised that to ensure homelessness the emphasis must be on children getting employment and having the support of corporate parenting.

Christina Day asked for clarification on the difference of payments for those care leavers going to university and those undertaking an apprenticeship. Andrew Carter will report back on the payment process and advise the committee at the next Corporate Parenting Committee.

Andrew Carter stated that Thurrock were one of the top local authorities for care leavers being in employment. The 30% figure of those care leavers not in employment included those who have a disability which enables them to work or train.

RESOLVED:

- 1. Imbed the new ways of working such as the senior practitioner within the After Care Team and the Employment Worker, plus the development of new partnerships (see 2.2.3, 2.2.4 and 2.2.5).**
- 2. Monitor and review the staying put arrangements and the development of Clarence Road (2.2.14).**
- 3. Monitor the effects and impact of Universal Credit on our care leavers.**
- 4. Ensure the new Pathway Plan is incorporated within Local Children Safeguard and used by all staff within the next 3 months.**

7. Child Sexual Exploitation & Missing Children

Andrew Carter introduced the report to Members which provided information on the actions currently being taken to identify and support victims of child sexual exploitation and also disrupt the activities of those seeking to exploit children. He also thanked the members for bringing this high priority topic back to committee and updated the members on the number of recorded missing children. A discussion took place that concentrated on internet safety.

The Chair asked the co-optee members for their feedback. Jackie Howell referred to the Digital Parenting publication and stated how important it was for the looked after child to know who to trust.

Sharon Smith stated that they had received some excellent training from Essex Police.

Jackie and Sharon both confirmed that they have undertaken the child exploitation training and the committee agreed that children were more computer savvy than the adults.

Councillor Liddiard asked the officers if social media could be used to spread the word about safety. The officer stated that the council have actioned the recommendations from Children in Care Council and discussed with social workers the link to 'This Is Abuse' which could be found on the Local Safeguarding Children's Board web site.

Councillor Redsell asked the officer what the schools were doing to raise e-safety and awareness rising campaigns. The officer confirmed that schools in Thurrock were embracing this well with organised parent events but it was noted that not all parents want this intervention.

The Youth Safeguarding Ambassadors through Andrew Carter asked the members if they would like to visit a school and see what is involved in their role.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Corporate Parenting Committee will continue to review the actions of the council to address Child Sexual Exploitation and Children Missing from Care.**
- 2. Scrutinise the implementation and development of targeted preventative and self-protection programme on child sexual exploitation for looked after children.**
- 3. Consider the learning from the Jay report, Casey report and LGA, Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: A Resource Pack for Councils and ensure that Thurrock Council effectively discharges its function as a corporate parent.**

8. Children In Care Pledge Update Report

Paul Coke introduced the report which set out the current proposals and recommendations in respect of the Pledge. The Officer also thanked the Children in Care Council for all the work carried out on this Pledge.

The Members were referred to the amendments made and confirmed how necessary it is for social workers to work in partnership with young people.

The Chair asked for clarification on how the monitoring was carried out of young people having their own bank accounts and passports. The officer stated that monitoring was currently undertaken and feedback on figures will be referred back to the Corporate Parenting at the December 2015 committee.

A particular reference was made about the importance of memory books and how these are used for children in care.

Officers recommended that the Pledge be referred back to the Corporate Parenting Committee for an update in March 2016.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That members will support the amended proposals to the Pledge.**
- 2. That members will support the development of the Pledge leaflet in a suitable style that can be given to all looked after children and young people and that it is available for those that become looked after in the future.**
- 3. That members will agree that the Pledge is monitored and reviewed by the Children in Case Council (CCG) on a yearly basis.**
- 4. That members will support the publicising of the Pledge through the Council's website and the Looked After Children's website.**

9. Work Programme

Councillor Liddiard asked for an item to be added to the work programme on the cost of children's social care services in comparison with other authorities. The Chair agreed that this would be a good idea and asked for agreement to have it included onto the work programme. Councillor Okunade questioned what the use of this would be to the committee. Councillor Liddiard confirmed that although he knew the services he did not know the costs and having this comparison would help with the understanding of service spends. Members of the committee were in agreement to this and the topic would be added to the September 2015 work programme.

Councillor Gamester also raised his concerns that no Budget costings were present and agreed that a comparison with other authorities would be informative.

Democratic Services advised that since the publication of the agenda a number of amendments to the work programme had been proposed, which along with the amendments agreed earlier in the meeting, included:

- That an update on Children Services Budget in comparison with other Boroughs be added to the work programme for September 2015.
- That an update on Looked after Children those that currently having Bank Account and Passports for December 2015.
- That an update on Clarence Road be included in the Housing for Care Leavers topic on the work programme for December 2015.
- That an update on the Children in Care Pledge be referred to the Committee in March 2016 for review.

Members were in agreement with the proposed changes to the work programme, following which the Chair requested that an updated work programme be circulated to the Committee and officers following the meeting.

All members and officers agreed that the use of acronyms would not be used in reports or minutes.

The Chair advised members that she would not accept any reports in future for items to note in order for elected members to drive forward the improvement of the service.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted, subject to the amendments detailed above.

The meeting finished at 8.37 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**