

**Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting
4 December 2012, 2.00pm**

Present:

Members

Cllr Appleton (Chair)
Cllr Fowler
Cllr Hicks
Cllr Rickhards
Cllr Robbins
Cllr Williams

Officers

Jo Davies, OM Leaving Care
Lesley Malley, OM Fostering
Brenda Vincent, Service Manager - Safeguarding
Richard Maybey, Democratic Services Officer

1.1 Apologies for absence

None

1.2 Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None

1.3 Minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2012

Agreed

1.4 Chair's Announcements

None

2 Introduction to the Fostering Service

Lesley Malley circulated the Fostering Service's "Statement of Purpose" and provided an overview of its operations:

- a) As a Local Authority (LA), Warwickshire does not run residential children's homes, but invests in a fostering service that provides care in a family setting
- b) Looked After Children (LAC) in foster care range from 0-18 years
- c) The LA provides support beyond the age of 18 via "staying put" and supported lodgings
- d) There are different types of foster placement – respite, short-term, long-term – all with the goal of leading to a permanent arrangement for the child
- e) Foster carers are expected to look after children in the same way they would their own. Carers must recognise and embrace the child's history and existing family; promote contact with the child's family; work with a range of professionals; and encourage integration with the carer's own family
- f) Carers are classed as self-employed, and receive an allowance from the LA. They may receive additional "payment for skills" payments if they reach certain standards and demonstrate their fostering competencies
- g) Prospective carers go through a thorough process comprising: initial informal conversation; receipt of information pack; first visit; signing of consent form for background checks; attendance at preparation groups; family assessment (including reference checks); drafting of report; presented to the Fostering Panel for a recommendation to the Head of Service as to whether they are suitable to foster; if successful, a placement is then sought

Questions from members:

Q. Does the LA make placements in out-of-county residential homes?

A. Yes, if a needs assessment suggests that is the best approach. There are currently 26 residential placements

Q. Does demand for foster carers exceed supply?

A. Yes. The LA is recruiting carers faster than before (although this is slightly offset by existing carers retiring) but does not match the demand. The excess demand is met via external fostering agencies, kinship arrangements (children living with their extended families) and through adoption

Q. What is the allowance rate for foster carers?

A. The LA follows the Fostering Network's recommended minimum allowances, which range from £134 to £232 per week dependent on the age of the child. The Fostering Network is proposing a 2% increase for 2013/14

Q. What are the financial support arrangements from central government in relation to Looked After Children – is it based on a formula, is it a historic amount, is it reviewed in line with changing LAC population?

A. Officers were unable to confirm precise arrangements, so it was agreed that Richard Maybey would request a briefing note from finance

Resolved

- The Action Plan to address concerns raised by Ofsted, and the report of the Safeguarding Improvement Task & Finish Group monitoring its implementation, to be circulated to members ***[Richard Maybey]***
- A briefing note explaining the finance arrangements between central and local government for Looked After Children to be circulated to members ***[Richard Maybey]***
- Lesley Malley to attend a future meeting (approximately 6 months) to field any further questions ***[Invite to be issued when dates have been set]***

3 Looked After Children – Action Plan

Brenda Vincent explained how the colour-coded action plan shows that there are no red (incomplete) items, and the orange items are issues that are in development, often with moving targets or data that is not available until March.

Questions from members:

Q. What practical steps are being taken to improve the assessment completion rate?

A. There are processes in place to ensure the right response is made to prospective carers swiftly – and a clear milestone plan for the assessment procedure. Warwickshire works to a maximum assessment period of 6 months, compared to the national minimum standard of 8 months, but there will always be external factors that prevent applications from being completed (such as the outcome of reference checks or carers dropping out).

Resolved

Members were satisfied with progress against the action plan so far

4 **Get Ready for Adult Life (Leaving Care) – Action Plan**

Jo Davies delivered a presentation about the Leaving Care service, explaining that it had recently been renamed by care leavers to Get Ready for Adult Life (GRfAL) and outlining the structure of the service:

- a) There are children's teams in each of the 5 districts/boroughs, all of which have a GRfAL team to support young people in that area
- b) This works well, as it provides consistent and locally-based support
- c) Jo works centrally as the Operations Manager, providing consistency across the 5 districts/boroughs
- d) This arrangement is funded centrally by the county, but provision is organised locally to seek the best outcomes in each area
- e) There is a separate team for unaccompanied asylum seekers, who have very specialist needs
- f) Contact with care leavers is maintained by the service until they reach 21, with support offered to help them into work/education/training. They all have a Pathway Plan for needs assessment, signposting of further information and personal progression
- g) Guidance notes are issued to workers to help support care leavers (provided to members as part of the agenda)
- h) The LA has created around 11 apprenticeships recently, none of which have been filled by LAC. While LAC are entitled to an interview, there is no guarantee of them being successful
- i) A formal Charter for Care Leavers has been issued by the Department for Education, which was developed by care leavers themselves. Members were asked if and how the LA should formally adopt this

Resolved

- More needs to be done to encourage LAC to apply for apprenticeships [**no action identified**]
- Local businesses need to be encouraged to offer more apprenticeship opportunities [**no action identified**]
- The LEP should be asked to promote the support available to businesses who do offer apprenticeships, e.g., the set-up grant and payment of training fees [**no action identified**]
- Members to consider the Charter for Care Leavers at the next meeting, along with the accompanying video, and agree if and how the LA should formally adopt it. A care leaver and worker to be invited to the next meeting for questions [**Jo Davies to arrange**]
- Members to be sent the "Your Pathway" needs assessment/pathway plan and Henrietta Bond book order form [**Richard Maybey**]

5 **Performance Data**

Brenda Vincent circulated the latest data set, which included benchmarking information against other local authorities as requested. This showed that Warwickshire has improved its ranking in all categories.

6 Other business

The next meeting date was confirmed as 11 February 2012, 10am.

Agenda items:

- Update on Dartington project – Phil Sawbridge
- Charter for Care Leavers – Jo Davies

The subsequent meeting in April (date to be confirmed) would be reserved for an introduction to the Advocacy and Complaints Service for LAC, plus one further item (if needed) to be agreed in February.

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Chair

The meeting closed at 4.00pm