

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 10 July 2013

Present:

Members of the Panel

Councillors:

Yousef Dahmash
Peter Fowler
Jenny St John
Bob Hicks
John Whitehouse
Chris Williams

Officers

Brenda Vincent, Service Manager - Safeguarding
Janet Purcell, Democratic Services Manager

1. Appointment of Chair

Councillor Peter Fowler proposed that Councillor Chris Williams be appointed Chair of the Panel and was seconded by Councillor Yousef Dahmash.

Councillor Bob Hicks proposed that Councillor John Whitehouse be appointed Chair of the Panel and was seconded by Councillor Jenny St John.

The proposal that Councillor Williams be appointed Chair was put to the vote and was agreed 3 votes for, 2 against and one abstention from Councillor Whitehouse.

Resolved

That Councillor Chris Williams be appointed Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

2. General

(1) Apologies

None

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 8 April 2013

The minutes were agreed as a correct record and the following points were discussed:

Minute 1.3 - Charter for Care Leavers and related issues

Brenda Vincent reported that the CiCC elections had taken place, with all those in care over 8 years being eligible to vote, and the new members were undergoing induction. The membership is a mixture of care leavers and those still in care (with an age range of around 16-21). The Panel was invited to consider how they wished to link with the CiCC.

Brenda reported progress on the points listed:

- The Charter had been displayed in Group Rooms
- Dates of CiCC meetings had been circulated but would be re-circulated to this Panel, given the new membership.
- The results of the young people's questionnaire will be brought to the Panel in full but to date the key issues have focussed on employment; the transition on leaving school/care and having someone who will listen.
- The previous Panel had agreed that there be a leaflet to promote the purpose of the Corporate Parenting Panel but this had been kept on hold until after the county council elections. The Panel's views were now sought on the content and approach to this.
- Corporate Parenting awareness training had been included in the induction programme for new members (in September).
- The CiCC had been invited to attend a full Council meeting (this will probably be the December meeting).

The Panel agreed the following:

CiCC – dates and details of meetings to be circulated to the Panel.

The Panel confirmed that it would welcome regular contact with the CiCC including attendance at some of its meetings.

Corporate Parenting Panel Leaflet:

The leaflet should be accessible to young people and clearly communicates the purpose of the panel, identifies the members of the Panel (including photos), and could include what particular issues the Panel will focus on (in the light of what young people have raised as concerns). The leaflet/information should also be accessible on the Council's website and distributed to both young people and carers. It could include a tear off response slip to encourage young people to raise issues.

The Panel agreed that a draft leaflet be developed and could form the basis of a workshop between the Panel and the CiCC.

Young People's Questionnaire – key findings

The results of the questionnaire will be brought to the Panel. The Panel welcomed the offer of information on the destinations of those leaving care and in particular the apprenticeship scheme. (Colleagues who are involved with the Tiffin Club which is involved with the apprenticeship scheme will be invited to attend a future meeting).

In relation to school issues and, in particular the virtual school, the Panel was advised that a new head had now been appointed (Steve Pendleton) following retirement of Anne Hawker. Each district has an area lead from the Virtual School who focuses on education for looked after children and every looked after child has a personal education plan.

Corporate Parenting - Member Induction

Councillor Jenny St John proposed that thought be given to an alternative approach to member induction other than providing a seminar for all members.

The Panel agreed that officers provide smaller group sessions (possibly by area of the county) that would allow members to have discussions, including involving young people.

Charter for Care Leavers

It was envisaged that this will be put to full Council for adoption. The Panel agreed that the Charter could be a focus for the Panel's engagement with CiCC.

Minute 2 – Advocacy Services

The Panel noted that there was a proposal to have representatives of Barnardo's (who operate the Advocacy service) to attend with the CiCC representatives when they attend the Panel – if required.

Minute 4 – The Dartington Project

Brenda Vincent explained that this project arose from national analysis that showed that there is not a strong correlation between high deprivation factors and the numbers of children in care and that, in fact, there is little evidence of 'what work' from a research basis in terms of looked after children. Warwickshire had been chosen (alongside South Gloucestershire and Sandwell) to look at alternatives to placing children into care. Analysis in 2010 revealed that out of 100 children, the largest group (40%) were teenagers. The project has looked at commissioning alternative service that will divert young people from care where this is safe and appropriate. One is through the 'Triple P' parenting programme, which focuses on one to one work and another was through commissioning functional family therapy. The approach requires a meeting of all relevant agencies/parties

to determine immediately whether there is an alternative to care. Some of these children may have already been identified as being in a priority family for intervention. Brenda explained that there is a lot of processes and procedures to follow when a child/young person enters care, as determined by the Regulations, and it is difficult to focus on the family at that time. This new approach requires a cultural change and, although it requires a high level of early intervention (and cost up-front), it is envisaged that it will be more cost effective in the long run.

Minute 4 – children who experience three or more placements

The previous Panel had noted that this is around 12% in Warwickshire, slightly higher than the national target Brenda Vincent tabled a paper that set out some analysis of Warwickshire's figures at March 2013. This showed that the highest level was in Nuneaton and Bedworth area (18.1%) and lowest in Warwick (6.9%). The Panel was advised that the number of moves was the same as the previous year (87 out of 681) but proportionately the number of moves of children saw a slight decrease. The moves also covered all types of moves, including move to adoption. Teenage boys make up the largest single cohort of three or more placements and this can be due to a range of causes, including placement breakdown. Brenda explained that although there is a large fostering service that works well, there is not a lot of placement choice. Warwickshire was developing new approaches – such as the solo placement scheme to provide enhanced levels of support. Discussions were taking place with an independent fostering agency to have a scheme, similar to the Barnado's approved scheme. Some carers also provide emergency placement.

The Panel noted that of the 87 children, 30 placements had been with a local authority foster carer and 21 placed with agency or other non Warwickshire approved carer/voluntary agency.

It was noted that every effort is made to keep a child at the same school, regardless of changes in their placement, particularly at Key Stage 4, but there would be some cases where circumstances meant a child changed school.

The Panel requested further benchmarking information that would enable the Panel to see how Warwickshire stood in comparison to other local authorities and also a breakdown of placement types by district area.

3. Terms of Reference of the Panel

The Panel's Terms of Reference, as set out in the report considered and agreed by the County Council in July 2012, were noted. The main points of this would be summarised in the leaflet for young people as referred to in minute 2 above.

4. Corporate Parenting and the Voice of the Child

The Panel noted a recent letter from Edward Timpson MP, Under Secretary of State for Children and Families highlighting the importance of embedding the voice of the child in local practice.

CiCCs and communication

The letter highlighted the importance of lead members and Directors of Children's Services holding regular meetings with their CiCC and also to regularly review and improve information given to children in care so that they are aware of their legal entitlements. Brenda Vincent assured the Panel that regular meetings were held and that there was a range of information given through various methods – including packs of playing cards that include contacts such as the NSPCC helpline. Carers are engaging with the We-Learn platform which will provide another opportunity of passing information to looked after children through their carers. The Panel agreed that information should be included there (including information on the Panel).

Role of Independent Review Officers

The letter also referred to the role of Independent Review Officers and Brenda outlined how these operate in Warwickshire to meet the aspects of good service promoted in the letter. Every child in care is assigned an IRO who is a qualified social worker to a standard required for this role. They are in a team that is separate from the care managers. They meet the child regularly, chair reviews and ensure the care plan is appropriate, safe and is progressed. A traffic light rating system on action is used (red alerts would be escalated to Brenda or another on her level to deal with). The IRO will also check that the child has been given information on their rights in care.

'Freezing' of decision whilst a complaint is investigated

Brenda explained that it was a requirement to freeze a decision if a child objects to a decision, whilst the objection is investigated. Every effort is made for this process to take place quickly to avoid a child being 'in limbo'.

5A Improving Outcomes for Care Leavers

The Panel noted a letter that had been sent by Edward Timpson in 2012 during Care Leavers Week that highlighted a number of areas local authorities should be addressing. The Panel was advised that these areas were being addressed as follows:

- Charter for Leaving Care – developed and publicised as mentioned above.
- information packs for those leaving care
- Employment – this is an area that is being progressed (as referred to above a report will come back to the Panel).
- 'Staying Put' – support to help those at 18 stay with their foster carers (Warwickshire piloted and maintain this development).

- Financial Support - The Government promote the provision of a leaving care grant of around £2000 but Warwickshire operate a scheme whereby long term savings are accrued. Plans are being made for this to be deducted from foster carers allowances at and twice a year will put into Junior ISAs so that savings are built up. There will be more choice when the young person is 16yrs on how to use this element of the allowance (e.g. for driving lessons, to buy a PC for education/work purposes). This has been found helpful in developing the habit of saving and provides money for them to make the move to independence. In addition the authority works to an essential equipment list when a young person sets up independent living. The Panel welcomed this innovative approach although it may have to be reviewed if there is insistence in future that the Council go down the grant line described in the letter.

5b Looked after Children – Flowchart -Care Planning Regulations and Guidance

Brenda Vincent referred to the flowchart in the papers and explained each of the main stages of assessment, placing options and review required for looked after children.

40-50% of looked after children fall under, voluntarily care where the parent retains all parental responsibility. Asylum seekers are included in this category. The other 50-60% fall under Section 31 where an interim or full care order has been issued and parental responsibility is shared with the local authority.

Since 1 July section 31 orders have to be processed within 26 weeks which has compressed the assessment process into 8 weeks. This should be better in terms of getting long term plans for the child secured sooner but is putting pressure on teams. It also means that assessments need to be done before going to court which means increased costs up front for local authorities. For example courts may ask for a psychological assessment that may be joint-funded between the local authority and other parties, but undertaking assessments prior to court requires payment by the local authority up front, and that may not be recouped. There may, however, be less legal and care costs with the reduced court timescale.

5c 10 Questions to ask if you are scrutinising services for looked after children.

The Panel noted the guidance from LG Improvement and Development/ Cap's on what to ask when scrutinising services for looked after children. The Panel recognised that there would be some information that would come to the Panel and to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that the Panel may sometimes wish to ask the Committee to look in detail at a particular area. The Panel agreed it was important not to duplicate effort and keep a watch on the programme of work to ensure this did not happen.

Brenda Vincent reminded members that the key question to keep in mind was always 'is this good enough for my child?'

6 Looked After Children – Dataset

The Panel noted the data as at May 2013. Figures over the six months from December showed a decrease in the total number of looked after children. There were, however, increases in some individual team areas. The Panel was reminded that there were some family groups within these figures, for example 6 siblings were in care from one family.

The number of asylum seekers had reduced from 60 to 40. Warwickshire had received its first from Syria. Brenda Vincent explained the funding was provided by Government for direct costs (accommodation, food) and indirect support (including team costs) subject to a ceiling. For 0-15 year olds the allocation was £95 maximum a day but this reduced at 16-17 to £71. This stops at 18 although there are on-going costs for the Local Authority in terms of leaving care responsibilities up to the age of 21.

Warwickshire has claimed back £1.7m for 2012/13 but this will reduce as the numbers drop.

Janet Purcell undertook to circulate a colour version of the data.

7 Actions and Work Programme

The following points will be taken forward from this meeting:

Information to circulate:

- (1) Dates and venues of meetings
- (2) LAC Dataset in colour
- (3) Playing Card packs for new members

Information to go to next/future meeting

- (4) Benchmarking information (against other local authorities) on look after children with three or more placements and a breakdown by area of placement types.
- (5) Full results of young people's questionnaire.

Actions

- (6) Member induction – investigate sessions with groups of members, perhaps by district area, and involving young people in care/ representatives
- (7) Develop a draft leaflet – the panel to be invited to work on this with representatives.
- (8) Leaving Care Charter – to be adopted by Council in December?

(9) Representatives of to be invited to attend with representatives when they attend future meeting?

Items to include in Work Programme

The following items have also been mentioned at this or previous meetings:

Corporate Parenting Strategy – to be updated reviewed with the Adoption Services Annual Report (for next meeting)
Introduction to the Complaints Service (for next meeting)
Report of the Independent Reviewing Officers

8 Dates of future meetings

The Panel agreed to meet at 10.00 am on:

11 September 2013

Adoption Services Annual Report
Complaints Service
Young Peoples Questionnaire
First draft leaflet?

30 October 2013 – proposed date for workshop with the CiCC to be look at drafting leaflets and/or consider the Corporate Parenting Strategy?

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Chair

The meeting closed at 11.45 am