

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 10 February 2014

Present:

Members of the Panel

Councillors:

Yousef Dahmash

Peter Fowler

Bob Hicks

Jenny St John

John Whitehouse

Chris Williams (Chair)

Officers

Wendy Fabbro, Strategic Director

Ann Mawdsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Steve Pendleton, Virtual Head

Brenda Vincent, Service Manager - South

[These minutes follow the order of the agenda and not the order of items considered at the meeting.]

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Heather Timms and Shinderpaul Bhangal.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

Councillor John Whitehouse declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Governor at St. John's Primary School, Kenilworth.

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2014 were agreed as a correct record with the following correction:

Minute 2. - Young People's Questionnaire

The final paragraph should read 10 February 2014.

Matters Arising from Previous Meeting(s)

1. Report on Housing-related issues

Councillor John Whitehouse noted this did not appear on the agenda, and emphasised the importance the Panel placed on this.

2. Playing Cards

Councillor John Whitehouse asked whether Hugh Disley had been approached to consider the possibility of using the playing cards for young people more generally. Wendy Fabbro undertook to do this.

3. Risk Analysis for Adoption Services

Brenda Vincent noted that this information was included in a fuller report to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 April 2014.

4. Report of the Complaints Service

It was agreed that this should be scheduled in the work programme.

5. Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service

Councillor Bob Hicks reported that a report had been considered by the Children and Young People OSC. Wendy Fabbro noted that was an HR job evaluation process that needed to be followed in these instances, and this service was in that process.

3. Children in Care Council updates

Ann Mawdsley introduced the report seeking agreement from the Panel for one Member to attend each Children in Care Council (CiCC) meeting as an observer and then to give a verbal update to the next Panel meeting, outlining key topics from these meetings and any concerns raised.

The Panel agreed the following dates:

Tuesday 18 February 2014	Wendy Fabbro
Tuesday 4 March 2014	Councillor John Whitehouse
Tuesday 1 April 2014	Councillor Bob Hicks
Tuesday 6 May 2014	Councillor Yousef Dahmash
Tuesday 3 June 2014	Councillor Jenny St.John
Tuesday 1 July 2014	Councillor Peter Fowler.

Wendy Fabbro reported back to the Committee on issues raised at the CiCC meeting held on 7 January 2014. She added that there had been a number of officer presentations given and the meeting had been very business-like. The following issues were raised:

- a. The proposed changes for service redesign around “Getting Ready for Adult Life”, where Barnados, who were contracted to help young people settle independently, would work more closely with social workers to ensure better liaison between advisors and social workers would have better control of cases. The CiCC had a useful discussion and welcomed having more control themselves. This discussion would inform the service redesign.
- b. A discussion had taken place about Foster Carers attending at case reviews. There was no consensus around the room and it was agreed that in terms of policy change this would be decided on a case-by-case basis. It was agreed however that while the review was for the child, foster parents were trusted to take control of their foster child’s life, and it was important their input was included, even if this was via a different route.

4. Update from Strategic Lead

Brenda Vincent tabled the Adoption Panel Report, which was the scorecard published in January relating to the previous year as a result of a national survey. She noted that Warwickshire continued to perform well nationally and people interested in adopting were able to look at the scorecard and compare different authorities. She made the following points:

1. Warwickshire tracks performance on a quarterly basis.
2. Children were tracked from the time they were taken into care until they either returned home or were adopted. The Adoption Service was aware from an early stage if children were likely to need to be adopted and in these cases, got involved at an early stage.
3. Warwickshire participated in national exchange days, as well as working closely with Coventry and Solihull. There was also a national register for adopters, so Warwickshire could make contact with appropriate prospective parents, for instance those who were willing to take sibling groups, which were rare.
4. The Service worked closely with children to understand what was happening and to hear their views.
5. Court procedures were working more quickly.
6. A big area for development this year would be adoption support, and work was being done with Coventry and Solihull on this.

5. Performance Update

Wendy Fabbro tabled a dashboard of performance data for the Panel to consider. The Panel requested the following inclusions in the Quarterly performance dashboards:

1. Exception reporting to highlight areas of concern.
2. Benchmarking against statistical neighbours and the national average.
3. Data to be presented, where appropriate in graph form, showing trends over a longer period of time, including previous year performance where there were seasonal shifts.
4. Contextual comments to explain the data.

As well as the information already included, the Panel requested the following be added to the dashboard:

- Expected progress at school for LAC
- Adoption tracking.

Wendy Fabbro reported that in response to the requests made at the December training sessions, confidential lists of the numbers of LAC per school and per division had been compiled. These would be shared with Councillors to ensure that they were aware of their roles as corporate parents, and that they had specific responsibilities towards LAC in their areas. They would also receive, as part of a package, a list of questions they may wish to ask schools in their divisions that had LAC as pupils.

Wendy Fabbro reported that her staff was prepared for an Ofsted Inspection, which would be announced at short notice if Warwickshire was selected to be inspected, and a briefing note would be sent to all Members if this happened. She noted that the last inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children's Services had taken place in November 2011 and there had also been an inspection of Fostering Services in August 2011. At that time there had been a dedicated team of 4-5 staff to manage the inspection, which was no longer possible. The level of inspection was also much more difficult now than in 2011, with a focus on case file audits and accompanying Social Workers on visits. She added that the current style of inspection was light in terms of leadership and the only Members who could expect to be interviewed were the Portfolio Holder, Overview and Scrutiny Chair and Chair of Corporate Parenting.

6. Warwickshire County Council: Sufficiency Duty 2013 – 2016 Placement Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children, Young People and those on the 'Edge of Care' and Custody

Wendy Fabbro noted that this document was a work in progress, and this was an early opportunity for the Panel to feed into the Strategy.

Members of the Panel made the following comments:

1. The style of the document was very easy to read.
2. The number of LAC with special educational needs was high.

3. Members welcomed the summary of key issues, and the evidence that LAC were being listened to.
4. Warwickshire had an upward growth of LAC, which was in conflict with statistical neighbours and nationally. The reason for this was not clear, but could be the result of being risk-averse in the past. It was agreed however, that there needed to be culture shift and a tightening of management, with greater investment in early intervention.
5. It was crucial that when commissioning specialist services for children and young people, the focus needed to remain on the needs of the child, and this was difficult when negotiating with large firms. Brenda Vincent added that whilst they needed to continue to manage the front door of the service, there needed to be an ongoing focus on the care plans of those children and young people in care, to get them back home or into adoption as quickly as possible.
6. The Daniel Pelka case in Coventry was expected to increase the number of referrals for younger children.
7. There were a number of social workers and foster carers trained in Triple P (the power of Positive Parenting, raising confident and competent children, and raising resilient children), and family learning was one of the top three priorities for the People Group.

Wendy Fabbro highlighted the business-critical conditions that this document needed to form the basis of, as it would set the scene for how the Council commissioned foster services in the future, as well as the volume of these services. There would either need to be robust safeguarding in place as in-house services were reduced, or a significant investment in in-house services. It was noted that this was essentially a commissioning document which would be taken through Overview and Scrutiny and then agreed by the Cabinet.

7. Annual Report – The Health of Warwickshire’s Looked After Children and Young People (1st April 2012- 31st March 2013)

Brenda Vincent introduced the Annual Report, which was prepared by a designated health team who worked across the sector to ensure the health needs of LAC were promoted. She noted that all LAC had an annual health assessment and LAC under the age of five had two each year.

The Chair noted that at a previous CiCC meeting the point had been raised that young people were not being welcomed by GP surgeries and were having difficulty engaging with the medical profession. Brenda Vincent acknowledged that this had been an issue for the CiCC, and more generally how to encourage young people to engage in their own health assessments. Wendy Fabbro reported that there were various strategic avenues to change this and he had raised this issue at the Health and Wellbeing Board for the CCGs to respond to. She added that she saw this as a matter of principle to ensure this issue was recognised and dealt with.

Brenda Vincent undertook to arrange for Rachel Webster to provide an update to the Panel in relation to each of the Future Plans set out on page 18 of the report.

8. **Annual Report of the Head of Virtual School for Looked After Children taken with**
9. **Virtual School for Children in Care – Exam outcomes summer 2013 for Year 6 and Year 11**

Steve Pendleton, Head of the Warwickshire Virtual School for Looked After Children, presented his reports together, giving an overview of the work undertaken in 2013, the exam results for Year 6 and Year 11 and plans for improvement. He made the following points:

- i. It was important to remember the small numbers involved.
- ii. There was some encouragement with GCSE results, with more looked after children gaining 5 or more GCSEs than before. Warwickshire children have performed better than statistical neighbours.
- iii. Despite the fact that more looked after children (LAC) were getting good qualifications than before, the gap between the outcomes of LAC and other children remained too big, even when taking into account the high number of special needs of many LAC.
- iv. Every effort would be made to reduce this gap, including working with schools in a more coherent way.
- v. The results for LAC in Year 6 compared quite favourably with the general population, with almost three quarters reaching the expected achievement of Level 4 or higher. These results also compared favourably with similar authorities and nationally. While this set of results was a good base for this cohort moving forward, it was acknowledged that out of the 23 LAC in this age group, only three had special educational needs. The average was usually 25% with SEN.

During the discussion that followed these points were made:

1. The numbers of LAC were small, and geographical comparisons within Warwickshire were not made. It was acknowledged however, that looking at the population in general, there would still be a significant gap between LAC and other children, even if comparisons were made on a geographical basis.
2. There was a strong link between what was happening in a children's home life and outcomes at school. While schools were getting better at trying to compromise in these circumstances, the real challenge remained with long-term fostering placements, where the gap should be narrowing. Wendy Fabbro noted that the current position where all LAC were put 'in one pot' needed to be changed and the differences teased out.
3. Government were very supportive of trying to improve outcomes for LAC, including free nursery care for LAC and adopted children. It was noted that for the 2014-15 financial year, that the Pupil Premium for LAC would increase to £1,900. Councillor John Whitehouse noted that schools had to demonstrate that they were using Pupil Premiums to the benefit of that cohort. There was however an issue around attention to detail at schools and tracking performance over time, and an additional challenge to schools where LAC were doing well. Schools were required to publish information on Pupil Premiums, but this was currently done in different ways and there was statutory guidance expected on this in March.

Wendy Fabbro added that it was also difficult to get clarity about the use of these monies as schools had control of their own funding. Steve Pendleton noted that schools were also not all clear about this, and Judith Humphries was doing a piece of work to compile a list of best practice to be shared with schools. Wendy Fabbro also made reference to the confidential information on LAC by school and division, tabled at the meeting, which would be shared with all councillors, together with a set of questions they may wish to put to their local schools.

4. Members agreed that there should be some LAC going on to top universities, and to aim to achieve average was not enough.
5. It was difficult to provide trend data for Year 6 as the Key Stage 2 tests had changed this year, so it was not possible to make true comparisons yet.
6. Steve Pendleton noted that he also worked with excluded children and while there had been no exclusions in Warwickshire last year, there had been two permanent exclusions this year. Every effort was made across the county to avoid exclusions.
7. The Head of the Virtual School also monitors the extent to which looked after children are not being educated. On 20 January 2014 there were eight in Warwickshire – half were awaiting placements due to moving and the others were not in school because of mental health reasons. Steve Pendleton's team supported the Social Worker teams to get Personal Education Plans in place for all of these children, and for these to be monitored.
8. All young people falling within any of these groups were rated on whether they were making expected progress or not on an ongoing basis.
9. In response to a query regarding the budget savings line in relation to the support for the Virtual Head, Wendy Fabbro reported that there had been a commitment to maintain the Virtual Head post and as part of the redesign of the Learning and Achievement team, this role would cover other services as well, and receive support on that basis.

The Panel agreed that data on LAC, excluded children and children not in education should be included in the performance report, on an exception basis.

10. Fostering Services Annual Report – April 2012-March 2013

Brenda Vincent tabled the full version of this report, which reflected back, looked at current issues and set out proposals for the way forward for Fostering Services.

During the discussion that followed these points were raised:

1. In response to a query about whether geographical differences influenced decisions, Brenda Vincent stated that there were a number of important factors to consider before making decisions, and each one was made on a case-by-case basis. She added that there were regulations against a young person changing schools in Years 10 and 11 (except in very exceptional circumstances). Further, that the Virtual School has a useful role in facilitating transfers where this is appropriate.

2. Members noted that the report contained old information, and did not contain any benchmarking information. Brenda Vincent noted that there were certain benchmarked indicators that the County was banded within, including LAC who had had three or more placements and the duration in the same placement. Warwickshire was banded as good.
3. There was concern raised at the pressure to keep approving new foster carers, and it was not possible to continue to increase the number of placements and maintain a stable numbers of foster carers. The service therefore constantly strives to at least maintain, if not increase, its number of approved fostering households.
4. The challenging nature of fostering was acknowledged.
5. There was good intelligence about the service and how it was working, including the availability of carers.
6. Members noted the need to promote education opportunities, health and contributions to be made by LAC into the wider picture. Brenda Vincent noted that at the review of LAC, consideration was also given to the support they were receiving, and there was a new duty in terms of delegated responsibility, which meant there was clarity about who was responsible for each area of the child's life.
7. Warwickshire worked with other authorities across the sub-region to work better together, particularly around training and support.
8. Foster carers leaving the system were interviewed and lessons learnt to enhance the service and support to carers.

The Chair emphasised the importance of foster carers to the Corporate Parenting Panel. It was agreed that data collected for the annual report should be included in the performance data that would be reported to the Panel on a quarterly basis, again on an exception basis.

11. Work Programme

The work programme was updated.

12. Any Other Business

None.

Future meeting dates

14 April 2014 at 10:00 am

7 July 2014 at 2.00 pm

8 September 2014 at 10.00 am

27 October 2014 at 10.00 am

9 December 2014 at 10.00 am

9 February 2015 at 10.00 am

14 April 2015 at 10.00 am

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Chair

The meeting closed at 12:12 pm