

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 7 July 2014

Present:

Members of the Panel

Councillors:

Peter Fowler

Bob Hicks

Clive Rickhards

Dave Shilton

Jenny St John

Chris Williams (Chair)

Officers

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Practice Leader - Participation

Wendy Fabbro, Strategic Director

Ann Mawdsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Karen Smith, Customer Relations Manager

Brenda Vincent, Service Manager - South

Children in Care Council

Sara Donkin

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Bob Stevens.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 2 May 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 May 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising from Previous Meeting(s)

None.

3. Children in Care Council (CiCC) updates

Notes from the CiCC meetings held on 1 May 2014 and 3 June 2014 were tabled.

Councillor Jenny St. John – 3 June

Councillor St. John noted that the networking before the meetings with CiCC, VOX and the Young Parliamentarians was useful as Councillors were able to talk informally to the young people attending. She suggested that a sheet of names and photos would be helpful for Councillors.

The panel session had covered a lot of wide-ranging questions, including:

- Housing
- Finding employment
- The importance of grades or life skills, and whether or not the Barnardo's Life Skills course was delivering what young people wanted
- Pupil Premiums and Pupil Premium Plus
- HS2
- The size of classes at Warwickshire College, and the new fees introduced, which impacted on all young people
- The cut in budget for the CiCC
- The usefulness of the playing cards being available on the website, which meant that the information provided was up-to-date.

It was agreed that although schools were required to publish how this Pupil Premium money was spent, that this was not always clear and it was important that Councillors were asking the right questions when visiting schools. The Chair highlighted the need for this to be cascaded down to all councillors, and Councillor St. John undertook to suggest this be included in the member training she was helping CiCC to prepare.

Shinderpaul Bhangal noted that following this meeting there some work being done around the budget, life skills training and supported housing. He undertook to report back to the Panel on the outcomes of these meeting, specifically the meeting with Gina de Marco on supported housing and the new offers into the market place within the context of supporting people within the recommissioning of services.

Councillor Peter Fowler – 1 July 2014

Councillor Fowler noted that the CiCC had received an excellent presentation from Jenny Packee on private fostering and from Andy Hoak on youth justice. Shinderpaul Bhangal noted that the Youth Justice Service were engaging young people over a strategy revision and undertook to ensure that copies of the hand-outs were shared with the Panel and published on the website. Brenda Vincent noted that there a low number of LAC known to the Youth Justice Team when compared with national averages.

There was also a good discussion about the Virtual School. Shinderpaul Bhangal noted that he was looking to set up a consultation with LAC around the Virtual School and made reference to the Virtual School Awards Ceremony to be held at Coventry University on 12 November 2014.

There was a discussion around the purchasing of goods when going into independent living and that it would be useful to have somewhere young people could go to do their shopping that they knew was safe and reliable. Wendy Fabbro noted that each young person going into independent living had their own pathway plan, and that different young people needed different levels of support.

Councillor Fowler reported that the CiCC had broken into groups to consider the draft 'Being in Care' booklet. Their feedback on this would be shared with the Panel.

Sarah Donkin noted that Laura Dodds had stepped down as Chair of the CiCC and that Mia Westbury was standing in as Chair until Laura's formal resignation had been received.

The Chair reminded members of the Panel that their attendance at CiCC meetings was in an observatory capacity. Wendy Fabbro added that discussions would be held to put some structure around these meetings, with the possibility of a slot on the agenda for Councillors to give feedback.

Future dates were discussed and the following rota of attendance was agreed:

9 September 2014	Councillor Bob Hicks
7 October 2014	Councillor Chris Williams
4 November 2014	Councillor Peter Fowler
December 2014 (date to be confirmed)	Councillor Clive Rickhards.

3. Update from Strategic Lead

Brenda Vincent gave an update on the 'Being in Care' booklet, which sat alongside the playing cards and gave information about being in care, different issues for LAC and useful contact numbers.

She reported that Government had produced a new set of regulations for children placed out of area in residential care, in particular around the issue of children going missing from residential care, and the need for improved communication and tightened arrangements around vulnerable children. She noted that as a Local Authority there was a need to ensure that both Warwickshire and other areas where our children may be resident, were compliant. This involved the unpicking of the regulations to ensure that there were systems and processes in place around the regulations. She undertook to update the Panel at a future meeting. Wendy Fabbro added that a single, national database containing all the relevant information would address many

of the issues, and the amount of red tape that currently existed needed to be challenged.

Brenda Vincent and Councillor Chris Williams would be attending a training event on Improving the Outcomes of Looked After Children the week beginning 14 July 2014 and would give feedback on this to the next meeting.

Following requests at previous meetings for comparative data, Brenda noted that she had come across some new comparative information on fostering and performance produced by Sufficiency Organisation UK, based on information received from 144 fostering services. She would be considering this in terms of how best it could be used to measure against, and agreed to forward the information to the Panel.

4. Performance Dataset

Brenda Vincent presented the performance dataset.

During the discussion that followed, the following points were made:

1. Ofsted had focussed on missing children. It was noted that Warwickshire had very low numbers compared with other areas, and where children did go missing it was usually older children, and often asylum seekers, who faced difficult options at this age.
2. There had been an increase in the number of foster parents, which was positive.
3. In response to a query regarding the low attainment levels in KS2, Brenda Vincent reported that she had sought clarification on this, and Steve Pendleton, Head of the Virtual School, had noted that out of the 39 children in this cohort, 22 had statements of special educational need.
4. Attainment levels of LAC were compared against general attainment levels annually and included in the Virtual School Report, considered by the Panel each year.
5. Remaining within their own family was always preferred, but where this was not in the interests of the child, keeping children and young people within their own communities where they were able to maintain their own networks and contacts helped LAC not to feel 'rootless' when leaving care. Residential care was considered a stepping stone only, and all choices were made to ensure the best outcomes and safety of each child.
6. It was agreed that Members would be offered another copy of the pledge, which were useful when visiting their local schools, highlighting the questions Members needed to be asking.
7. The Children and Family Act 2014 had a number of implications for Warwickshire. A report had been taken to the Health and Wellbeing Board, copies of which were tabled.
8. The SEND local offer applied to all statemented and/or disabled children, and involved a suite of documents, duties and requirements that would need to be discussed with families.

Wendy Fabbro noted that the Tiffin Club AGM was taking place on Thursday, 10 July in the Northgate House Conference Room. She added that Councillor

Heather Timms had stepped down as Trustee and a volunteer was needed. Councillors Williams and St. John agreed to attend, and an invitation was extended to all Members.

The Chair thanked Wendy Fabbro and Brenda Vincent for their contributions.

4. Warwickshire County Council Children's Social Care – Compliments and Complaints

Karen Smith introduced this item, setting out the work that had been done to ensure that:

- Where young people had problems these were sorted out as quickly as possible and as close to the problem as possible.
- Warwickshire County Council was listening.
- There was a range of ways young people could access help.
- There was always a place to go for anyone not comfortable talking to people around them.

She added that Warwickshire had a culture of engaging young people and finding conciliation and a way forward. There was a dedicated officer working with children and young people, who ensured that if complaints did come to the Council, that young people knew they were a high priority.

Members of the Panel made the following comments:

1. There was no formal national or regional benchmarking done. Karen Smith noted that this was a concern and she was looking to use the CIPFA family group to see what could be done to rectify this.
2. Warwickshire was different to other authorities as there was no direct residential provision. Having a high number of foster placements made this sort of process more fragmented and isolated, and therefore more difficult to discuss and share.
3. Complaints about foster placements often came once the child or young person had left the placement, as there may be a concern that a complaint could damage their placement.
4. Karen Smith was involved in the preparation of the Being in Care booklet, which would include information on what it was like to be unhappy and what children and young people could do about it, including complaints.
5. The service made every effort to respond to young people within 24 hours. There was then often a need to 'unpick' the complaint, and it was important that children and young people were given reasonable expectations about what to expect and when.
6. Safeguarding issues were flagged with designated officers/services for immediate action.
7. There had not been enough engagement with young people themselves and there were plans and discussions taking place to address this.

Shinderpaul Bhangal noted that it was not uncommon for young people to shy away from complaints, as they questioned whether it would make a

difference, so what was the point? He added that where there were issues, he would be surprised if the relevant case worker was not aware of these, and there were also a number of people LAC had regular contact with or access to.

The Chair thanked Karen Smith for her report.

6. Warwickshire Fostering Services

Brenda Vincent introduced the report setting out the current situation in Warwickshire regarding fostering children and young people.

During the discussion that ensued the following points were made:

1. In response to a query regarding Warwickshire's ability to cope with the move to 'fostering with a view to adopt', it was noted that while this did take people out of fostering, this was not a new approach. There was a risk in this approach however in that children put into a foster placement would not necessarily get 'approval' for adoption through the court process. In light of this Warwickshire was developing a scheme that included some risk assessment, and would have to be dealt with cautiously until it had been tested out.
2. The last quarter had shown a decline around the timeliness of fostering placements, but this was due to the placements of older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities. Warwickshire was still better than the national average in this regard.
3. Warwickshire had piloted, adapted and extended the age for fostering in line with new guidance. On turning 18, young people were no longer considered to be a foster child, and while Warwickshire did continue to pay allowances, these were at a lower rate. It was noted that some foster carers continued to care for and support young people well into adulthood.
4. Brenda Vincent undertook to let Members of the Panel have a briefing note on the different types of advertising used for fostering and adoption, including the work being done with the corporate Communications Team.
5. Communication and support with foster carers continued to improve, including the provision and quality of information provided to foster carers.
6. As part of the initial assessment, the support system surrounding potential foster carers was considered, to ensure they could access support and help. This was important in terms of assessing the individual needs of individual children.

7. In response to a query regarding the quality of lives of children and young people, Brenda Vincent outlined the different aspects of the Fostering Network Allowances and how the allowances can be used to support the needs of children and young people placed. There are also other grant and award monies that were available for young people to access.

The Chair thanked Brenda Vincent for her report.

7. Work Programme

The work programme was agreed, including an update from Councillor Jenny St. John on the work she was doing with the CiCC on developing Member training.

8. Any Other Business

None.

Future meeting dates

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 4:20 pm