

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 26 October 2015

Present:

Councillors:

Peter Fowler
Dave Parsons
Clive Rickhards
Dave Shilton
Chris Williams (Chair)

Officers

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Practice Leader, Participation and Service Development
Sarah Bradwell, Post 16 Learning and Skills Manager
Ben Patel-Sadler, Democratic Services Officer
Steve Pendleton, Head of Vulnerable Groups and Virtual School
Brenda Vincent, Services Manager (Safeguarding)
Beate Wagner, Head of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillor Jenny St. John and Hugh Disley.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2015

In relation to agenda item 7 (Any Other Business), Brenda Vincent, Services Manager (Safeguarding) circulated a briefing note to Members on the bursary fund for Looked After Children going on to further education that had been allocated in the 2015 budget. Members noted that an officer had been in post since July 2015 who was responsible for managing the funding. The response from young people had been positive, although Members expressed a view that the funding should be utilised effectively. Brenda Vincent informed the Panel that the Leaving Care Service and the Virtual School were responsible for allocating and distributing this funding. Members noted that the bursaries provided from this funding stream amounted to an average of around £1000 per student which helped them with living costs whilst

studying. This specific funding covered any post 16 education – sixth form, college, university, etc.

Members noted that details around asylum seeking children applying for educational funding were being finalised. At the present time, the Council's Children's Services department assessed the needs of asylum seeking children.

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

None.

2. Update on the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Corporate Parenting Development Group

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Practice Leader, Participation and Service Development introduced the report and informed Members that there had been more interest from professionals wanting to attend CiCC meetings. There had also been an increased number of children expressing an interest in becoming involved with the CiCC. Shinderpaul Bhangal believed that the increasing levels of interest had arisen due to the wider promotion of the CiCC via the newsletter which was now being sent out to professionals and foster carers. Members noted that the CiCC were currently working with the Council's IT department and the TIFFIN Club to produce a stand-alone website. The website would provide young people with a wealth of useful information and would be a 'one stop shop' where they would be able to find information on bursaries, apprenticeships, etc.

Members were informed that the Virtual School Awards were being held on 10th November 2015.

Members noted that the CiCC art project had now been completed and was being displayed in Warwick museum – Councillor Jenny St. John had attended the launch night.

Shinderpaul Bhangal informed the Panel that the CiCC and officers were exploring the possibility of arranging joint workshops to cater for children leaving care and children seeking asylum. These workshops were going to be held three to four times a year. Once these workshops had been established, officers would report back to the Panel on their progress.

During the ensuing discussion, the following points were raised by Members:

- Following the Member and officer visit to the Corporate Parenting Panel meeting held by Oxfordshire County Council on 19th October 2015, the Chair informed the Panel that the Oxfordshire CiCC representatives were proud of being recognised as children in care.

- Members were pleased that care leavers were given priority when applying for authority housing in Warwickshire. However, the Panel expressed a view that it was crucial for care leavers to be supported by being taught how to live independently successfully. Members would be receiving an update at the next Panel meeting on children leaving care which would cover this area of business.
- Members noted that an increasing number of young people were choosing to remain living with their foster carers for longer.

Members noted the rota for future CiCC meetings.

3. Improvement Plan for Looked After Children

Brenda Vincent, Services Manager (Safeguarding) introduced the report, drawing Members' attention to the following points:

- A proportion of foster fees were deposited into a savings account for each child in foster care. This money was held until children left foster care, where they could then access the money to help with initial living costs. Warwickshire was currently ranked as the best performing authority in the country for ensuring that these funds were deposited into the savings accounts of children in foster care.
- At the present time there were 70 children placed with their prospective adopters, but who had not yet been formally adopted. Children needed to be placed with foster carers for 12 weeks before an application could be made to formally adopt them.
- The number of children being placed for adoption was decreasing, partly due to the fact that children were now being looked after by relatives and not foster carers.
- Since the inauguration of the Adoption Support Fund in May 2015, Warwickshire had made 29 successful applications, securing £94k in funding for these families. The Fund was available, subject to assessment, to support a range of therapeutic interventions for adopted children and their families.
- There were currently plans to increase the size of the regional adoption service – Beate Wagner, Head of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding would be chairing the sub-regional adoption service.

Members agreed that neighbouring adoption service providers should notify Warwickshire when adopted children were moving into the county. The Panel were pleased that the work of the Adoption Panel would move to a paperless format. Members hoped that this would lead to a streamlined approach, avoiding the need for paper duplication. Members noted that officers were currently identifying best practice from other local authorities who were currently using a paperless method of working.

4. Update from Strategic Lead and Performance Set

Brenda Vincent summarised the performance dataset included in the report.

Members noted that at the present time there were two confirmed missing children – teenage brothers who went missing frequently who were known to Children’s Services. Members were informed that even if asylum seeking children who have only been in Warwickshire for a short time go missing – this is recorded. Many children who went missing had mental health issues – there was a designated service to help these children.

Members noted that ‘Journeys’ was a service which was performing very well.

5. Ofsted Inspections

This item was a verbal update provided by Brenda Vincent, Services Manager (Safeguarding). Members noted that the Council was continuing to prepare for an Ofsted visit (the last Ofsted visit had taken place four years ago) – a PowerPoint presentation had been prepared which outlined the Council’s performance around securing better outcomes for Looked After Children, young people and care leavers. Data around Looked After Children was being produced and analysed on a weekly basis. Members noted that the Corporate Parenting Panel in its current form had been established following a recommendation made by Ofsted during the visit which took place four years previously – it was anticipated that the work of the Panel would be thoroughly scrutinised during the next Ofsted visit. Brenda Vincent would arrange an informal briefing for Members to discuss the role of corporate parents. Beate Wagner, Head of Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding suggested that a single headline sheet for Members might be helpful which would outline the key facts Members needed to know for Ofsted.

6. Annual Report of the Head of Virtual School for Looked After Children

Steve Pendleton, Head of Vulnerable Groups and Virtual School introduced the report and informed members that there was a desire for the Head of Vulnerable Groups and Virtual School to be held to account. Steve Pendleton informed the Panel that the dialogue between him and the Panel at each Corporate Parenting Panel meeting adequately provided this governance function. Members noted that the Virtual School held training sessions on their work throughout the year.

Whilst summarising the report, Steve Pendleton informed Members that the Virtual School was held to account by the government. Members noted that the aim of the Virtual School was to enable LAC, children from troubled backgrounds and children with SEND to achieve the best possible examination results. The Virtual School also sought to help to assist young people realise their potential, with many children having experienced a

troubled past before entering the care system. An electronic PEP (ePEP) system was in place which helped to identify the best support for all looked after children. Members noted that the Virtual School supported and challenged schools and teachers who catered for children under the Virtual School umbrella so that they could realise their full potential. Steve Pendleton explained to the Panel that if schools were not using the Pupil Premium effectively to support the appropriate children then the Council could, in principle, withhold this money. Members noted that schools were often using Pupil Premium funding to employ specialist staff who were able to assist the most vulnerable children who required the most support.

Members noted that the new electronic ePEP system sought to provide easy access to a wealth of information. The ePEP system was able to show how Pupil Premium funding was being allocated and also monitored any children who were being educated out of county.

Steve Pendleton informed Members that the Virtual School held meetings with schools to ensure that the educational needs of children under the Virtual School were being met.

Steve Pendleton would undertake some work to look at a potential mechanism for informing elected Members about Virtual School children receiving their education at schools within their areas.

Following discussion, Members were informed that the authority always sought to minimise school moves – especially children undertaking their GCSE's. For children and young people in transition between foster placements who were not being educated – most of these individuals were only not receiving education for around three weeks.

Members noted that carers of children were offered training on how to assist their children to achieve their full potential.

7. Closing the Gap Project Board Update

Steve Pendleton, Head of Vulnerable Groups and Virtual School introduced the report and informed Members that the Closing the Gap Project Board was established to address the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Since the project was established in January 2015, officers believed that schools who had an existing structure of strong support and offered encouragement to all pupils provided the best setting to provide disadvantaged pupils with an environment in which to succeed in. Steve Pendleton informed Members that some schools were training staff to help close the gap, whilst others were not. Members requested that Steve Pendleton attend a future meeting after collating feedback from school governors to update them on how effectively staff were being trained in schools. Members noted that the Council offered governor training packages to schools.

8. TIFFIN Club Achievements

John Scouller, Honorary Chair of the TIFFIN Club introduced the report and provided the Panel with an overview of how the TIFFIN Club operated. Members noted that the charity primarily catered for and sought to assist young people who were transitioning from young people in care to care leavers. Funding covered children in care and care leavers up to the age of 25. The TIFFIN Club officially became a charity in March 2013 – trustees were not directly associated with the Council, although Councillor Chris Williams was on the Board of Trustees. The Club worked with the Virtual School and was also currently working with the CiCC on ideas for a new name for the charity.

The funding secured from the TIFFIN Club was used to provide young people in care with mentoring, work experience and tuition – the overall aim of the TIFFIN Club was to enable young people to follow their dreams. The Club also supported young people in becoming self-employed. John Scouller informed Members that funding for the charity was currently obtained from the Heart of England Community Fund and via applications made to various trusts. At the present time, 14 grants had been approved this year.

Members noted that the number of young people approaching the TIFFIN Club for funding was increasing. John Scouller was pleased to report that an increasing number of young people were interested in undertaking further education – the funding was helping certain troubled children to achieve qualifications and to enter into employment. The charity had recruited a coordinator who was responsible for progressing and processing received applications.

John Scouller informed the Panel that the TIFFIN Club was advertised through social workers, the Virtual School, the CiCC and via social media. At the present time, the charity was developing its own website which would also help to promote the work of the TIFFIN Club. The charity was also hosting its own awards ceremony this year. It was agreed that information on the TIFFIN Club could be included in the foster care newsletter.

The Chair commended the work of the TIFFIN Club and thanked John Scouller for presenting the report to the Panel.

9. Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs)

Sarah Bradwell, Post 16 Learning and Skills Manager introduced the report and informed Members that Looked After Children and care leavers were tracked up until the age of 21 in relation to their post-16 destinations. The Panel noted that the NEET data was submitted to the DfE on a monthly basis.

Sarah Bradwell informed the Panel that a great deal of work was being undertaken to address the issue of reducing the number of NEET young people whose situation was 'not known'. A new tender would be shortly be

offered out to providers which would place a requirement on the winning bidder to track young people up to the age of 21. Members noted that in some instances it was difficult to track NEET young people due to a change in their circumstances – if they had moved away without informing anyone for example. There was also a reliance placed upon education providers to produce information on the children attending their institution (so that the young person could be tracked effectively). Sarah Bradwell informed Members that three careers advisers had been employed in an attempt to reduce the number of NEETs. Members noted that all young people receive an action plan upon leaving school where follow up work is then undertaken to track their post-16 destination

10. Work Programme 2015/16

Members spoke about what observations they had made when attending the Oxfordshire Corporate Parenting Panel on 19th October 2015:

- There were many people from a variety of organisations who provided an input to the meeting – teachers, NHS staff, Council staff, CiCC members, etc.
- The input from the CiCC members was useful.
- Managers from each service area were present at the meeting to provide an analysis on their respective area of business – this was seen as being extremely beneficial.
- Arrangements were currently being made for Members to observe the Corporate Parenting Panel meetings at Staffordshire and Worcestershire County Councils respectively.

Brenda Vincent would undertake some work around looking into the treatment of LAC at doctors surgeries – Members had been made aware of allegations that LAC were not treated as equally as other patients when attending surgeries.

Brenda Vincent updated Members around health assessments. At the present time, only 12% of children had not received an initial health assessment. Reasons for this included certain children being in an out of county placement and children simply waiting to attend an already confirmed appointment.

The following points were agreed by Members following discussion:

- The data set provided at the December 2015 meeting would contain a summary in relation to each aspect of it.
- A further update report around the progress of the Closing the Gap project would be added to the agenda for the February 2016 meeting.

- A verbal update would be provided at the December 2015 meeting in relation to the Virtual School Awards taking place in November 2015.
- A report would be tabled at the December 2015 meeting to summarise what had been observed at the Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel meeting held on 20th November 2015.

The work programme was agreed with the additional reports requested at this meeting.

11. Any other business

None

12. Date of Next Meeting

The future meeting dates set out in the agenda were agreed.

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Chair

The meeting closed at 12.40 pm