

**Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel
held on 14 December 2015**

Present:

Councillors:

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

Officers:

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Practice Leader, Participation and Service Development
Jo Davies, Operations Manager (Safeguarding)
Mary Eccleston, Children's Reviewing Manager
Sarah Gallagher, Children's Liaison Manager
Ben Patel-Sadler, Democratic Services Officer
Brenda Vincent, Services Manager (Safeguarding)
Beate Wagner, Head of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding

1. General

(1) Apologies

No apologies for absence had been received.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2015

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 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 the Panel that an apprentice would be appointed in January 2016 to assist in the facilitation of the CiCC meetings.

Members acknowledged that they were receiving electronic copies of the CiCC newsletters – the next edition was scheduled to be circulated in January 2016.

Shinderpaul Bhangal informed the Panel that the last two meetings of the CiCC had been extremely interesting. At these meetings, young people had been consulted by the commissioners of care services on what they felt would be helpful for them when entering the care system and what additional work could be undertaken by the commissioners to fill any gaps that existed in the care system. Members noted that additional conversations had taken place at these meetings around how young people could be better supported when leaving the care system and transitioning into independent living. Members noted that the commissioners were exploring a number of options around how young people could be better supported as they transition from care to independent living – members expressed a view that it would be important to involve District and Borough members in any discussions that took place around this area of business so that they could influence any potential decisions at a local level.

Councillor Jenny St. John addressed the meeting, sharing the following observations from a recent CiCC meeting which she had attended:

- A young person present at the meeting felt it had not been properly explained to him why he had been taken into care.
- Some young people present at this meeting felt others had low expectations of them because they were in care.
- Some young people present at this meeting felt that it was difficult to obtain the relevant permissions from their social workers to undertake certain activities.
- The provision of accommodation for young people transitioning from care into independent living was seen to be an issue. A young person present at this meeting had described how she lived in a hostel which was noisy, where other residents took drugs and where arguments and sometimes physical violence occurred – this place did not feel like a home to her. Other issues for this young person included the shared accommodation always being untidy and instances where her food had been stolen – the young person felt as though the staff managing the accommodation did not adequately understand the mental health issues which some of the residents were dealing with.

Members discussed the possibility of young people inspecting shared living facilities, with their findings then being shared with the commissioners of these services.

Beate Wagner, Head of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding would ensure that the issues raised by the young person with respect to the accommodation in which she lived would be looked into at the earliest possible opportunity.

It was agreed that Jo Davies, Operations Manager (Safeguarding) would provide the panel with an update report on the types of accommodation which were provided to young people leaving care, highlighting any current issues which the panel needed to be made aware of.

Shinderpaul Bhangal expressed a view that it would be beneficial for the Corporate Parenting Panel to be addressed by representatives of the CiCC twice a year. Representatives of the CiCC would provide the Corporate Parenting Panel with a presentation on the work which they had undertaken.

Members would be provided with a schedule of future CiCC meetings and when they were expected to attend.

3. Improvement Plan for Looked After Children

The Corporate Parenting Panel noted the Improvement Plan for Looked After Children.

4. Update from Strategic Lead and Performance Set

Brenda Vincent, Services Manager (Safeguarding) introduced the report and informed members that the data therein had been presented in the way in which the Panel had requested at the previous meeting. Members noted that additional information around fostering and adoption trends could be found in the report. Members agreed that the data should continue to be presented in the current format at future meetings.

The Chair addressed the Panel, believing it was important for all members to have thoroughly read and digested the information contained in these reports before each meeting – only then could members be able to ask meaningful questions in relation to the data presented in the report. Brenda Vincent informed the panel that officers also found it useful for the data to be presented in the new format – trends could be identified much more quickly.

Brenda Vincent drew the Panel's attention to the most significant content of the report with members noting that:

- There had been an increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers entering the county – the majority of these children were teenagers.
- Younger children were entering care due to safeguarding concerns being raised.
- There were approximately 747 Looked After Children in Warwickshire – this compared to figures of around 950 in Staffordshire and 1200 in Oxfordshire.

Members noted that the number of Looked After Children missing or away from placement without authorisation changed on an almost daily basis. However, Brenda Vincent assured the Panel that effective tracking systems were in place to ensure that missing children could be found as soon as possible.

In relation to fostering, the Panel noted that an increasing number of foster carers were retiring or resigning, although the number of carers leaving the service had slowed slightly in 2015.

Beate Wagner, Head of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding informed the Panel that work was being undertaken in early 2016 to identify how the Council could become more competitive with other, private adoption providers. Members noted that private adoption providers were regulated by Ofsted and children under their care were also visited by social workers.

Brenda Vincent informed the Panel that officers were looking into the possibility of hosting a District Based Corporate Parenting Event for County and District Councillors. The purpose of this event would be to provide an informal learning opportunity that would allow County and District councillors to understand their responsibilities as corporate parents and how they can assist and promote better outcomes for children and young people who are looked after by Warwickshire County Council. Members noted that a group of officers would be allocated to undertake the work required for this event – funding options for the event were also being analysed. It was hoped that the event would take place in February 2016. Members thanked Brenda Vincent and her team for all of the work they had undertaken so far in planning for this event – the Panel expressed a view that they would be happy to assist in raising awareness of this event at a local level. Members also believed it would be important to publicise the shortage of foster carers in Warwickshire in the hope that more people would be willing to undertake the role.

5. Leaving Care

Jo Davies, Operations Manager (Safeguarding) introduced the report and highlighted the following points to the Panel:

- There were currently 130 young people who were asylum seekers. 90% were from Afghanistan, with the rest of the cohort predominately made up of Eritreans and Vietnamese who had mostly arrived in Warwickshire after arriving in the UK via France. Around 10% of these young people go missing after arriving in the UK. The Panel noted that the vast majority of these young asylum seekers did not speak English and so special provisions had to be made to assist them with their education. Jo Davies informed the Panel that there were currently ten supported houses in Warwickshire which housed some of these young people – the Council aimed to house these young people with others who were from the same country and of the same age and religion as to assist them in settling as quickly as possible. Members noted that although some asylum seekers appeared over the age of 18, if they chose to give their age as under this then they were automatically treated as a young person until an assessment was completed to determine their true age.
- There were currently 115 Warwickshire looked after young people aged 16 and 17 years.
- 233 young adults had left care.

Members noted that the Pathway Plan was used to assess all aspects of a young person's life (career progression, health and wellbeing, support networks, living

arrangements and finances) when ensuring they were prepared for leaving care and living independently. The Panel was informed that a Pathway Review was undertaken with a young person within three months of their 16th birthday – the young person's designated social worker was responsible for conducting the review. Members noted that the Council encouraged younger adults (particularly those aged between 16 and 17) to stay on with their foster carers for longer (if the carers and young people were happy to continue the arrangement). If any issues were identified around young people leaving care at Children in Care Council meetings, Shinderpaul Bhangal, Practice Leader, Participation and Service Development would inform Jo Davies.

The Panel expressed a view that it might be useful for young people leaving care to be provided with a booklet containing useful information as they began to live an independent life. Jo Davies informed members that a mobile app was currently being developed so that young people leaving care would have easy access to the information which they required in one place. At the present time, all young people leaving care were provided with the telephone number for the emergency duty team and their designated social worker.

6. Missing Children

Sarah Gallagher, Children's Liaison Manager introduced the report and informed the Panel that the majority of missing children were running away from their family home – these children were not in care.

Members noted that a return to home interview should be undertaken by an independent person and completed within 72 hours of the young person arriving back at home – it was important to build up a good rapport with the young person(s) and their families, carer(s) to understand what had caused the young person to go missing. At this point in time, members noted that there was one member of staff who was responsible for undertaking this work across the entire county. Members noted that a significant number of missing episodes were created by the same young person, i.e. that they went missing on several occasions as opposed to many different children going missing on one occasion.

Members noted that all agencies become involved when a young person goes missing (including agencies from across borders). All instances of missing children were reported to the Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Board.

Sarah Gallagher informed members that return to home interviews were sometimes difficult to complete. This was because some young people declined an interview (some children had autism and other behavioural difficulties) and some parents also refused permission for an interview to be undertaken.

7. Annual Report for the IRO Service

Mary Eccleston, Children's Reviewing Manager introduced the report and highlighted the following points to the panel:

- There were currently 11 established IRO posts within the service. There had been historical difficulties in recruiting to the posts as salary levels were not competitive with neighbouring authorities. Recent strategies with HR and senior managers had resulted in all posts being recruited to. The service had good staff retention figures – staff who had been with the organisation for some time had an excellent understanding of the young people they were working with.
- The location and types of placements of young people (for example young people placed outside of the county) posed challenges in terms of differing reviewing frequencies and significant time spent on travelling.
- The current workloads of IROs had improved, but still remained above regional averages – each IRO currently had a caseload of 106 children as opposed to the recommended levels of 50-70 children/young people. On this point, the Panel expressed a view that the amount of cases per IRO needed to be reduced further.
- Performance in key areas remained good.
- All IRO services are required to have robust systems for challenging any concerns arising within planning processes for looked after children. The service can evidence oversight and judgements made on each case. Examples were provided of cases escalated on the basis of concerns. Senior managers responded to these issues to ensure issues were resolved. Around one third of cases had incomplete documentation presented to reviews. This was an area requiring improvement and new information storage systems should support improvement.
- The overall IRO service was able to evidence continuing good performance and development in key areas.

8. Work Programme 2015-16

Members agreed that contact would be made with Coventry City Council to find out if it would be acceptable to attend and observe a future meeting of a Cabinet Member (Children and Young People).

Brenda Vincent would make the necessary amendments to the Corporate Parenting Panel leaflet.

9. Any other business

None

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel had been scheduled for 15th February 2016, commencing 10.00 a.m. in Committee Room 3, Shire Hall, Warwick

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

The meeting closed at 12.25pm

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Chair