

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 6 December 2016

Present:

Councillors:

Peter Fowler, Clive Rickhards, Jenny St. John, Heather Timms, Chris Williams (Chair)

Officers:

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Practice Leader – Children’s Participation
Ben Patel-Sadler, Democratic Services Officer
Brenda Vincent, Service Manager (Central)

1. General

(1) Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None

Matters Arising

None

2. Update on Children in Care Council (CiCC)

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Practice Leader – Children’s Participation updated the Panel on the work of the CiCC.

Members noted that the Looked After Children booklets had been taken to a meeting of the Independent Reviewing Officers where the format and content of the booklets had been agreed. Shinderpaul Bhangal informed the Panel that the booklets would be piloted in January and February 2017 – changes could still be made to the booklets through this pilot period. Members noted that the new booklets had been designed to contain more information.

In relation to the Children in Care website, Shinderpaul Bhangal informed the Panel that this would be a page where children and young people could access all of the information they required. Members noted that the website would be managed by Council IT staff. Members noted that the website would be launched during March 2017 with social care and other key staff publicising the launch up until then. The Panel noted that a mobile app was being developed which would direct children and young people directly to the website from their mobile device. Shinderpaul Bhangal informed the Panel that the IT department was currently investigating if part of the site could be secure so that children and young people could fill out their review booklets online. The Panel noted that Council IT staff could monitor the traffic on the new site.

The Panel noted that a team of young inspectors had been trained who would be undertaking visits and reviews of supported accommodation. This was a voluntary role with inspections due to commence in March 2017. Shinderpaul Bhangal informed the Committee that the reports produced by the young inspectors would be shared with the commissioning team. Members requested that completed reports were also shared with the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Members noted that looked after children and young people had recently helped to support and train students at Coventry University who were undertaking their first year of study in social work. Shinderpaul Bhangal informed the Panel that he had received positive feedback from the exercise.

Finally, the Panel noted that:

- In early 2017 it was planned for Children in Care Councils to meet on a regional basis.
- Issues identified at CiCC meetings were shared with professionals who then undertook work to address them. The CiCC recorded the progress of any issues which it had raised and communicated to professionals.
- Work would be undertaken to rota in meetings of the Corporate Parenting Panel to coincide with CiCC meetings in an attempt to make it a convenient for young people to attend Panel meetings.
- Work would be undertaken to identify how the CiCC could best report to the Panel

3. Annual Report of Warwickshire's Independent Reviewing Service

This item was considered at the 7th November 2016 meeting.

4. Summary Report – Quarter 2 Dataset

Brenda Vincent, Service Manager (Central) informed the Panel that overall there had been a decrease in the number of looked after children. Although the overall numbers were reducing, the Panel noted that there had been an increase in children entering care after safeguarding concerns had been raised.

The Panel noted it was likely that the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children arriving in Warwickshire would increase due to the government agreeing to offer asylum to a designated number of children from the dismantled Calais refugee camp.

Members noted that work was being undertaken to look at how former children who had been through the care system in Warwickshire might be interested in becoming mentors to children who were initially entering the care service.

The Panel noted that Nuneaton and Bedworth continued to make progress in reducing their CLA numbers.

Brenda Vincent explained to the Panel that children being looked after via special guardianship were generally in a less stable position than formally adopted children. The Panel noted that officers would always ensure that appropriate care arrangements were made for each child, particularly to evaluate a child's placement before a formal special guardianship order was made.

5. CLA by School and Ward of Placement

Brenda Vincent, Service Manager (Central) presented the data to the Panel.

The Panel queried why it appeared that there were significantly more looked after children in certain schools. It was agreed that further information would be sought from Steve Pendleton (Head of Vulnerable Groups and the Virtual School) to clarify how schools with high numbers of looked after children were performing overall and if they were not performing well, what strategies were in place to remedy this.

6. Safeguarding Update

Brenda Vincent, Service Manager (Central) provided the Panel with a short verbal safeguarding update.

The Panel noted that Brenda Vincent had recently attended a meeting with the chief executives of the district and borough councils. Discussions had taken place around the provision of free leisure passes for looked after children and their carers and also possible council tax exemption for care leavers. The Panel noted that no final decisions had yet been taken, but the initial conversations had been encouraging.

Members noted that follow-up correspondence would be sent in January 2017 to all those district and borough councils who had not yet responded to the Council's offer to include district and borough representation on the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Brenda Vincent provided the Panel with a brief update on the recently published Annual Adoption Panel Report. The Panel noted that the report highlighted that Warwickshire provided a good service. There had been a decrease in the number of adopters – this was a national trend. Over a three year cycle there had been a decrease in the number of children being adopted in Warwickshire. Members noted that the full report also outlined what help and support was provided to families.

During the ensuing discussion, the following points were noted:

- The Council needed to be confident in its processes – if officers believed that a family were unable to adequately care for a child, then everything should be done to find the child a suitable placement elsewhere.
- A large number of families were receiving support services, including therapeutic interventions.

- Respite care provided foster carers with a short break, however – foster children did not like having to be placed somewhere else during the respite care period.

In relation to the Regional Adoption Service, the Panel noted that it would be preferable to function as a hosted model which would mean one local authority managing the overall service, with regional hubs supporting their local areas. Brenda Vincent informed the Panel that discussions were ongoing as to which role each authority would play in the new system – it would be complex, with a great deal of legal issues yet to be resolved. Members noted that regardless of the model adopted, Warwickshire was signed up to the principle of being better than the best in terms of its adoption service.

7. Formulation of Questions for January 2017 Meeting

The Panel discussed what questions they wished to pose to the professionals scheduled to attend the January 2017 meeting. The following points were raised as potential questions:

- What was involved in their work on a daily basis and how did their current workload impact upon them?
- How do social workers listen to the views of the children they look after?
- Do they get enough opportunities to properly listen to their children and young people?
- Were social workers aware of the work of the Panel?

8. Work Programme 2016/17

The Panel noted the Work Programme for 2016/17 and agreed that;

- An item would be scheduled to summarise the performance of looked after young people in national tests.
- The Panel's current terms of reference would be reviewed at a future meeting.
- The development plan for looked after children would be considered at the March 2017 meeting.

9. Any Other Business

None

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel had been scheduled for 9 January 2017, 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 15.10 pm

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Chair