

## Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 7 March 2017

### **Present:**

### **Councillors:**

Patrick Davey (North Warwickshire BC), Peter Fowler, Dave Parsons, Jenny St. John, Chris Williams (Chair)

### **Officers:**

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Practice Leader – Children’s Participation  
Ben Patel-Sadler, Democratic Services Officer  
Steve Pendleton, Head of Vulnerable Groups and the Virtual School  
Brenda Vincent, Service Manager (Central)

### **Other attendees:**

Andrew Jones, Deputy Chief Executive, Warwick District Council  
Councillor Dick Madden (Member of the Peer Review Team, Essex County Council)

## **1. General**

### **(1) Apologies**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Clive Rickhards and Heather Timms.

### **(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests**

None

### **(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2017**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **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. He was joined at the meeting by two young people (Tee and Gabi).

Members noted that the CiCC had met with the Virtual School to celebrate the achievements of the CiCC participants. The Panel noted that the CiCC had fed back to the Virtual School that it would be beneficial if children in care were provided with accessible apprenticeship opportunities or with funding for further training. The CiCC

had also invited the Apprenticeship Hub to a recent meeting where the young people had tabled five actions for the Hub to provide feedback on. Members noted that these detailed actions were recorded and followed up at future meetings. The notes from all CiCC meetings and all CiCC newsletters were published on the CiCC website.

Shinderpaul Bhangal informed the Panel that the Young Inspectors Programme was progressing well. Some young people on the CiCC had undertaken paid work at Coventry University which involved assisting in the training of first year social work students. A recent conference entitled 'Hear my Voice' had taken place which had helped to capture the views of a number of children in care.

Members noted that the mobile phone application which would provide children in care with a wealth of information was still in the development phase. Shinderpaul Bhangal informed the Panel that the age demographics of the CiCC had changed. The membership of the CiCC now had a much wider age range than previously – Tee and Gabi informed the Panel that the CiCC was working well with this new age range profile.

The Panel noted that some members of the CiCC had expressed a view that they were more confident when speaking to professionals in a less formal environment.

Tee and Gabi informed the Panel that it was sometimes difficult to make contact with their social workers during the evening and at weekends. The Panel noted that children in care were provided with contact details for the duty and emergency teams – they could contact someone within the service in an emergency situation if needed. Tee and Gabi also informed the Panel that the process of leaving care should be brought forwards – it was their view that some children in the process of leaving care would have benefitted by receiving additional information at an earlier age. Members noted that some young people did not feel sufficiently prepared for life after leaving care at the age of 18.

### **3. Annual Report of the Virtual School**

Steve Pendleton, Head of Vulnerable Groups and the Virtual School introduced the report and informed the Panel that specific data in relation to children looked after would be available by the end of March 2017.

Members noted that the vast majority of children looked after in Warwickshire attended a good school. It was also an aim of the Virtual School to ensure that Warwickshire children who were in an out of county placement also attended a good school. Members noted that this was achieved through Virtual School staff meeting with the head teachers and governing bodies of these schools to ensure that any concerns in relation to children looked after were addressed and dealt with appropriately.

The Panel noted that even if a child was attending a school which required improvement, this could be good for a Virtual School child as more attention and work would be undertaken for the school to improve its overall rating. With regards to underperforming schools, the Panel noted that an electronic monitoring system enabled the Virtual School to track and monitor their progress. The Virtual School could then liaise appropriately with the school(s) if the performance of their children looked after remained poor.

Steve Pendleton informed the Panel that the culture of a school was crucial in improving the attainment of a child looked after. If a school had a positive attitude and always encouraged its pupils to achieve, it was likely that the attainment of children looked after attending that school would also improve.

In relation to primary school children, the Panel noted that a number of schools catered for pupils with SEND. Primary schools allocated a member of staff to support each child(ren) to ensure that the correct level of support was being provided to them.

It was also an aim of the Virtual School to ensure that children looked after did not have to travel excessive distances to attend a good school.

The Panel noted that in relation to children looked after, GCSE results, on the whole, were good. Members also noted that only English and mathematics were the subjects used to measure achievement – this included all asylum seeking children. Steve Pendleton informed the Panel that the academic performance of asylum seeking children was good.

Steve Pendleton informed the Panel that the attainment gap between children looked after and their peers was neither increasing nor decreasing. The Panel noted that generally, motivated children achieved better examination results.

Steven Pendleton explained to the Panel that for some children with the most complex needs, education was of secondary importance – it was more important to provide the intensive support required before focusing on educational attainment.

Members were pleased that the positive destinations table included in the report indicated that an increased number of year 11 children were moving on to employment, further education or training. Members noted that the 7% recorded as attending a negative destination included children held in secure units.

The Panel did note that a high proportion of children looked after in Warwickshire were being excluded from school. No pattern of data had been identified in relation to these fixed-term exclusions. Members noted that the Virtual School would contact the relevant school as soon as a pupil was excluded – officers would then work with the school and the child to determine the best possible outcome under the circumstances.

Steve Pendleton informed the Panel that the Virtual School did have some funding available to assist those poorly funded schools who required additional support to meet the needs of their children looked after. It was the view of Steve Pendleton that additional training and support was required to ensure that teachers and other school staff were best placed to manage and understand the behavior of children looked after who had the highest levels of need.

The Panel noted that a number of organisations/institutions offered schemes to support Warwickshire's children looked after. These included Warwick University who hosted a group of children looked after at weekends to experience university life. Steve Pendleton also spoke of the Upwards and Awards Club (formerly the Tiffin Club) which continued to provide funding for children looked after to attend extra-curricular activities and clubs.

## **Resolved:**

Andrew Jones, Deputy Chief Executive, Warwick District Council informed the Panel that he would undertake some work to determine if Warwick District Council could offer work experience to children looked after. A letter would be sent by the Chair to all District and Borough Councils to see if they too could offer this provision.

## **4. Looked After Children Development Plan**

Brenda Vincent presented the Panel with a document which highlighted any completed and outstanding actions which were shown using a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating.

With regards to foster carers, Brenda Vincent informed the Panel that this was likely to remain as an amber rating for the foreseeable future, as the authority would always be seeking to increase the number of approved foster carers.

Members noted that a strategy was being developed to better support those people who were seeking special guardianship orders. The strategy would seek to assist special guardians with their care packages, as well as assisting the young people and their special guardians when leaving care.

In relation to young people leaving care, the Panel noted that there was more work to be undertaken to provide them with suitable accommodation at the point which they left care. Ongoing work was required with regards to potential reductions in council tax for care leavers. This would have funding implications which would need to be considered.

The Panel noted that in relation to respite care, a clear policy was required to support foster carers and children in care when respite breaks were required.

## **5. Dataset Report**

Brenda Vincent, Service Manager (Central) introduced the Dataset Report where the following points were noted by the Panel:

- The Business Unit had migrated to MOSAIC from October 2016 as the electronic case records system.
- The number of children looked after was falling.
- Members considered some new data which had recently been produced. Members noted that Warwickshire compared favorably with similar sized authorities with regards to the number of missing children within its children looked after population.
- Although the number of recorded missing episodes was high, members noted that even if a child was only missing for a matter of hours – this was still recorded as a missing episode.

- Members noted that there was now a designated team working within the Warwickshire MASH which was focusing solely on missing children.
- Members noted that a small number of asylum seeking children were absconding from their placements, therefore becoming missing children.
- There had been a reduction in foster care activity – members noted that an increasing number of registered foster carers were retiring

## **6. Corporate Parenting Policy**

Brenda Vincent, Service Manager (Central) introduced the report and informed the Panel that this was a historical document which had been recently refreshed.

Members were directed to page 12 of the report where the role of the Panel was outlined. It was agreed that further work would be undertaken to define the precise roles and responsibilities of the Panel. The Policy would then be updated as appropriate.

## **7. Safeguarding Update**

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

The Panel noted that a report had recently been submitted to Cabinet which outlined the proposed regionalisation of adoption services. Members noted that it was proposed that Warwickshire hosted the Hub for the new regional service. Brenda Vincent informed the Panel that work was currently being undertaken by officers to finalise the HR, legal and property works which would support the service once it became operational.

Brenda Vincent informed the Panel that additional protocols were being developed in an attempt to ensure that unaccompanied asylum seeking children were placed at less risk of being trafficked. More robust risk assessments were being developed alongside the police who were considering taking biometric samples in an attempt to better monitor unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

## **8. Terms of Reference Review**

The Panel held a discussion around possible suggestions for the development of detailed terms of reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel. The following points were noted during the discussions:

- Members expressed a view that a Corporate Parenting Panel event be held to inform members and officers about the work of the Panel and to remind all concerned of their responsibilities as corporate parents.

- The Panel expressed a view that further discussions be held between officers and the Chair of the Panel to determine any proposed amendments to the Panel's terms of reference.

**9. Potential Future Agenda Items**

The Panel expressed a view that the next meeting should serve to facilitate discussions between members, officers and workers from the missing children's service. This discussion session would take place at the next meeting.

**10. Work Programme 2016/17**

The Panel noted the Work Programme for 2016/17.

**11. Any Other Business**

None

**12. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel had not yet been scheduled. Future meeting dates will be confirmed as soon as possible.

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

The meeting closed at 18.00 pm

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Chair