

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 6 November 2017

Present:

Councillors:

Jeff Morgan (Chair), Jerry Roodhouse and Chris Williams

Officers:

Peter Berridge, Team Manager, Asylum and Leaving Care Team
Nigel Minns, Strategic Director, People Group
Steve Pendleton, Head of Vulnerable Groups and Virtual School
Michelle Pitchford, Team Manager, Asylum and Leaving Care Team
Sharon Shaw, Service Manager, Corporate Parenting
Brenda Vincent, Service Manager (Central)
Beate Wagner, Head of Children and Families
Paul Williams, Democratic Services Team Leader

Other attendees:

None

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Yousef Dahmash and Councillor Caroline Phillips.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

None

2. Care Leavers and their Life Chances

Beginning with a quote from Edward Timpson (Previous Minister of State for Children and Families) regarding the roles and responsibilities of Corporate Parents, Peter Berridge (Team Manager, Asylum and Leaving Care Team) gave a presentation on care leavers and their life chances. From the 2015 National Audit Office report, "Care Leavers Transition to Adulthood" report the following were highlighted.

- 18 - age at which young people must leave local authority care
- 22 - age at which 50% of young adults in the UK still lived with their parents in 2013
- 33% of young people aged 16 or over that left care in 2013-14 did so before their 18th birthday
- 41% of care leavers were not in education, employment or training in 2013-14 compared with 15% of all 19-year-olds
- 6% of care leavers were in higher education in 2013-14 compared with around one-third of all 19-year-olds
- 93% of care leavers were living in suitable accommodation in 2013-14

Regarding the life chances of carers it was stated that:

- In 2008, 49% of young men under the age of 21 who had come into contact with the criminal justice system had a care experience;
- In 2010, 25% of those who were homeless had been in care at some point in their lives;
- In 2012, it was reported that looked-after children and care leavers were between four and five times more likely to self-harm in adulthood
- In 2013/14, 41% of 19-year-old care leavers were not in education, employment or training (NEET) compared with 15% for all 19-year-olds
- In 2014, 22% of female care leavers became teenage parents
- 6% of care leavers were in higher education compared with one-third of all 19-year-olds

The meeting was informed of the support available for care leavers in Warwickshire and some of the outcomes for those people. It was stated that:

- In 2014/15 39% of former relevant young people aged 18-21 were in education, employment or training and 44% in 2015/16.
- 21 Young People are currently studying at university. Each young person receives a bursary of £1000 per year of study from the Asylum and Leaving Care Team.
- Up to the ages of 17 all young people can have access to a careers advisor through Prospects. We have two careers advisors based in the north and south of the county to deliver this support.
- Elected members have provided an Education Employment and Training Fund for our Young People. This is vital to provide the support for our Care leavers and we use this fund for a variety of options including: clothing for interviews, tools and transport. The EET fund is also going to be used to fund a careers advisor for those aged 18 and over.
- There are a number of partner agencies that can offer support to ensure Young People are in some form of Employment Education and Training such as Prospects and PET-XI.

A range of types of accommodation is available to care leavers. These include supported accommodation, supported lodgings, the ability to remain with foster carers (stay put) and own tenancy. In response to a question from the chair it was confirmed that generally the cost of accommodation is covered by housing benefit. Of the alternatives available own tenancy often sees poor outcomes. This is

available for care leavers from the age of 18. Experience has shown that at that age few young care leavers are able to manage to live independently.

The meeting was informed that the number of young people choosing to remain with foster carers in Warwickshire is 21, those in supported accommodation number 18 (there being 18 units) and there are only a handful that have their own tenancy. Of all forms of housing supported accommodation is that preferred.

Health assessments are available although the take up these is variable despite incentives being offered.

The maximum age for support for all carers has recently been raised to 25. This has implications for the Council as more advisers are now required to meet demand. It is also recognised that the financial implications of not obtaining positive outcome for care leavers are significant. The estimated cost of having 140 NEETs care leavers is around £7m over their lifetime.

Efforts are being made to improve communication with care leavers. These include the provision of drop in hubs, the possible use of the proposed community hubs, a mobile phone "app" and a Facebook page.

Some partners are working with the County Council to offer support for care leavers. For example, discussions have been held with Warwick District Council with a view to whether Council Tax payments can be waived. (There remains an issue of whether the cut off for this should be 21 or 25). Another area where partner councils can assist care leavers is by providing them with gym and leisure passes.

Members discussed the use of "WhatsApp". This is popular with young people as a means of keeping in touch but its encrypted nature means that it is not suitable for use by the County Council.

Following the presentation the meeting moved to a wider discussion. Councillor Chris Williams observed that one of the keys to obtaining successful outcomes for care leavers is to address any issues of concern early on in their lives. This was acknowledged as was the observation that in some instances a lack of employment or poor housing can tip the balance with negative results.

Members agreed that it is important to work with partner agencies especially district and borough councils. They have a key role as they are the housing authorities as well as being responsible for leisure and amenities. Meetings are held with the district and borough councils but it needs to be acknowledged that they are not necessarily masters of their agenda. There is a county-wide housing forum but ultimately the ability to provide accommodation relies on the availability of property.

Universal Credit is a concern. Issues regarding the length of time it is taking to process applications have already been identified. Members cited cases where young people are receiving letters from housing departments when rents have not been paid despite it not being the fault of the tenant. Calls to the Universal Credit helpline often do not get through adding to stress and worry.

Councillor Jeff Morgan suggested that in appropriate circumstances a letter of support from the Council might assist to expedite matters. This suggestion was

welcomed. In addition it was suggested that the matter be picked up at the Housing Forum remembering that district and borough councils also have a responsibility as corporate parents.

Nigel Minns (Strategic Director – People Group) informed the meeting that the government has recently launched a consultation exercise based around the document, “Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Care and Pathway Planning - Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities”. The value of this document is that it highlights what the government considers local authorities should be doing in support of their care leavers. Members requested that a copy of this document be circulated. It was agreed that when considering its work programme the panel consider how it will fill any gaps in support.

Steve Pendleton (Head of Vulnerable Groups and Virtual School) observed that NEETs present a complicated picture. Young people become NEETs at different times of the year and for different reasons. In addition it is not known where some young people have ended up. In addition unaccompanied asylum seekers often disappear from the system of support. The Chair suggested that more should be done to ensure the Council knows where all young people are. The meeting was informed that Prospects works with NEETs to obtain positive outcomes.

Having been informed that the records and data management system, Mosaic cannot currently provide data on all aspects of care leaver destinations the Panel requested that where possible a data set be provided with an indication of where young people are ending up.

Sharon Shaw cited Trafford Council as an exemplar of services for Care Leavers. She was requested to provide more information on their work to the panel.

Brenda Vincent (Service Manager - Central) referenced the action plan resulting from a recent OFSTED inspection into services for Care leavers. Members asked her to share the action plan and progress against it with them.

Regarding unaccompanied asylum seekers the panel was informed that 85% of those in Warwickshire are engaged in education.

In conclusion the panel agreed that it wished to review the following in more detail.

1. Collaborative work with district and borough councils particularly in terms of housing.
2. NEETs and apprenticeships
3. Training for Independent living

In doing so it wishes to have regard to

1. The services provided by Trafford Council deemed to be outstanding
2. The government’s consultation exercise and the template it has provided for services for care leavers.
3. Clearer and more comprehensive data on care leavers.

3. Any Other Business

None

4. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel was scheduled to take place on 9 January 2018 at 10.00 in Committee Room 3, Shire Hall, Warwick

The meeting closed at 11.05am

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Chair