

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 21 January 2019

Present:

Councillors:

Jeff Morgan (Chair), Andy Sargeant and Pam Williams

Officers:

Helen Barnsley – Democratic Services Officer
Shinderpaul Bhangal, Practice Leader - Children's Participation
John Coleman, Assistant Director – Children and Families
Nigel Minns, Strategic Director
Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head
Sharon Shaw, Service Manager, Corporate Parenting
Brenda Vincent, Lead Manager for ACE

Other attendees:

Jackie Channell, Strategic Lead (Looked After Group, NHS)

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies had been received from Councillors Caroline Phillips, Jerry Roodhouse and Yousef Dahmash.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Chris Williams who was replaced by Councillor Andy Sargeant.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None

(3) Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

Matters Arising

With reference to Item 3 (17 September 2018), an update was provided regarding the unknown gender of two Children Looked After (CLA). Sharon Shaw, Service Manager, Corporate Parenting confirmed that the information had not been recorded at the time the report was written. The correct gender has now been recorded.

2. Performance Data

The Panel received a summary report detailing the performance in relation to CLA up to December 2018.

The Panel noted an increase in the number of CLA in December. John Coleman, Assistant Director – Children and Families confirmed that historically there has always been an increase at Christmas time; it is a period when a lot of families can struggle and issues come to a head. The trend is reflected across the West Midlands.

Confirmation was given that the total number of CLA in Warwickshire today (21.01.2019) was 726 (from 728 in December); the number has not reduced as much as planned. There are weekly demand management meetings. The service performs at between 700 and 730, struggling to get below 700 CLA.

It was noted that there was a current backlog of cases at the family court which is resulting in a delay in cases being heard. The reason for the backlog was attributed to a reduction in the number of Judges and Magistrates. Nigel Minns, Strategic Director (People Group) is meeting with Judges in February 2019 to discuss the issues raised by the backlog; the Chair suggested a letter is sent outlining the concerns of the Panel.

Confirmation was given that 276 CLA came into the care system in the last four months. There is a new Permanency Panel in place which monitors all CLA who have been in care for over four months. The Permanency Panel ensures that there is a plan in place.

Following a question from Councillor Pam Williams regarding the use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO), Sharon Shaw confirmed that teams are making it a priority to use SGO's earlier than before.

Looking at the age breakdown of CLA, Councillor Andy Sargeant requested further information relating to the largest group (10-15 years old). It was noted that the teenage years, for any child, can be the period that has most risks associated to it. Situations can often come to a head if things are not right at home, or at school. It was noted that not all CLA in this age range will be new; some will have been in long term care.

The discussion moved on to CLA leaving care and the Panel noted that preparing for independent living is something that is offered. Consideration was given to whether this had been offered to CLA early enough in the past. The programme is now offered to 14 year olds.

With regard to missing CLA and following a question from Councillor Pam Williams it was noted that in some cases the location of the child is known. Drugs and mental health issues are common factors. Contact is often still made with social workers. The Chair stated that the Panel will continue to monitor CLA who are noted as missing.

Jackie Channell, Strategic Lead (Looked After Group, NHS) raised concerns about the number of multiple admissions to hospital and stated that more data should be made available on this issue. It was noted that Ward 14 provide daily reports to the MASH but there was some uncertainty on where more detailed data was kept. It was agreed that a briefing note would be provided to the panel.

The following points were also noted by the Panel –

- i. The Edge of Care Programme will be launched on 1 March 2019 which will ensure that right support is given to families on the edge of crisis.
- ii. Following a question regarding how unaccompanied asylum seekers get into Warwickshire, it was confirmed that the most common route is via HGVs that stop at the Warwick Services on the M40.

Resolved

The Panel noted the report and would continue to monitor all aspect of Looked after Children's performance data on a regular basis.

3. Update on Children in Care Council (CiCC)

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Practice Leader - Children's Participation represented the Children in Care Council and provided the Panel with an extensive update on the activities that the CiCC had been involved with recently.

The update included the following items: -

- There are now seven apprentices at WCC working in Children and Families. There are also discussions regarding appointing apprentices in Commissioning. Confirmation was given that apprentices are now paid £7.38 per hour.
- WCC now offers MAX discount card to foster families offering discounts on days out such as Alton Towers, Warwick Castle and ten pin bowling.
 - A leaflet about the Local Offer for Care Leavers has been co-produced with young people and is currently at the printers. The leaflet ensures a standard approach across the county and will be reviewed and updated annually. A leaflet provided additional accommodation guidance has also been produced giving details and information for young people.
- With reference to the Home Furnishing Grant – a plan has been provided by young people for with guidance for service users.
- Interviews are being held relating to the participation and engagement strategy. The interviews are for positions that will directly impact young people.

- 15 February 2019 – an event is being held at Old Shire Hall, Warwick where three young people will be speaking about apprentices. Business have been invited to attend to offer ideas on how they can further support young people in Warwickshire
- A training session is being developed for WCC officers on working with CiCC in order to raise awareness of corporate responsibility and the CiCC. It was noted that the session would also be useful for elected members.
- A new mentoring scheme for 16 to 25 year olds is due to be launched in April 2019. Participants will be mentored on specific issues, supported by people who have been through the care system and would like to give something back.

Resolved:

The Corporate Parenting Panel thanked Shin for the update. A request was made that future reports are not just verbal but accompanied by written details.

A request was made for a further detailed update on the apprenticeship placements

4. Virtual School Governing Body

Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head presented the highlights of the report to the Panel. The Panel noted that the performance in progress in educational attainment was in-line, or above, CLA nationally but for 'all children' the performance is significantly lower. The full data has not yet been made available but should be released week commencing 28 January 2019.

The panel noted that the gap between 'all children' and CLA increases as key stages progress but is particularly noticeable at Key Stage 4.

Following a question from the Panel, confirmation was received that work-based learning and practical learning certificates are offered as an alternative to 'traditional learning' but there are no performance measures in place.

There was a discussion about the achievements of CLA who were in long term care in comparison to those who were new to care. It was confirmed that this had been reviewed in the past and no patterns had been identified but it was agreed that this would be re-visited.

The discussion moved onto attendance; the information in the report mainly related to short term exclusion for persistent low level disruption. Sharon Shaw asked if the Panel could be confident that all exclusions are correct. The Panel were assured that the virtual school always follow up when notified of a CLA being excluded. There are patterns in the schools which will exclude; and that tend to be persistent excluders. These schools tend to have a zero tolerance approach. There are other schools who will avoid exclusion at all costs choosing to work with the child. It was noted that the virtual school will always challenge exclusion incidents.

The Panel requested more information on the schools which exclude and the situations which lead up to an expulsion as well as the average number of exclusions episodes per child.

Resolved

The Panel noted the report and agreed that it should remain on the work programme as a standing item to monitor the performance going forward. The Panel also requested a report to come to the March with further information relating to exclusions.

5. The Placement Strategy

Sharon Shaw highlighted the report to the Panel drawing attention in particular to the graph on page two which shows the types of placement available to CLA – adoption is not the only option.

Placement stability is improving but there is still a lot of work to be done. It was noted that there is a small cohort with multiple placements; and a need to identify what CLA need but also what carers need. A request was made for information relating to the average number of placements per CLA.

Resolved:

The Panel noted the report and thanked Sharon Shaw for the update.

6. Adoption Central England (ACE)

Brenda Vincent, Lead Manager for ACE presented the report to the Panel confirming that this is the first report since the establishment of the regional adoption agency on 1 February 2018. The report provides an overview of ACE and information on the structure.

The report contains performance which will be regularly reviewed. The Panel noted that nationally and regionally adoption figures have fallen but there has been an increase in special guardianship orders.

The report confirms that the fostering-to-adoption placements are on target. The target for approving adopters within four months is 90%. This was not achieved in December 2018 as a result of staffing levels and some initial difficulties in the transfer of prospective adoptive families from the constituent local authorities.

It was noted that between 2014 and 2017 the average timescale from entering care to being adopted was 451 days; the timescale from receiving an adoption court order to adoption was 149 days. For 59% of children the whole process took 14 months.

In the last quarter of 2018 the average timescale for the whole process has fallen to 367 days; from court order to adoption fell to 119 days and for 67% of children the process took 14 months. Based on those figures the prediction for the end of 2017/18 will retain WCC in the top performing quartile of England.

Resolved:

The Panel noted the report and thanked Brenda Vincent for the update

7. Criminal Prosecutions for CLA and care leavers

John Coleman, Assistant Director – Children and Families presented the report highlighting to the Panel that Warwickshire has a lower level of CLA in the justice system than in other parts of England and Wales. As of today (21.01.2019) there is one CLA in custody; a 12-month sentence after becoming involved in county line drugs. There are seven care leavers in custody who are tracked and monitored to ensure the right support is in place for them on their release.

Confirmation was given that comparison data will be provided with other neighbouring statistical local authorities.

It was agreed that regular updates will be provided to the Panel.

Resolved:

The Panel noted the report and thanked John Coleman for the update

8. Updated on the CLA and Asylum Seekers Football team

Verbal confirmation was given that the first training session is due to take place on Sunday 27 January 2019. 35 children have expressed an interest. It was also noted that 3 young people will be undertaking coach training.

9. Good News Stories

- The drop in Christmas party was a great success
- The foster carers party had received excellent feedback from all those who attended. A summer event is now being planned.
- There is a music group being set up and the plan is for them to come and perform for the Panel.
- A drop in centre in the north of the county is due to be launched soon. An invitation was extended to all members of the Panel.

10. Any other Business

None

Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel has been scheduled for 18 March 2019 at 10.00am in Committee Room 4, Shire Hall, Warwick.

The meeting closed at 11.55 am

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Chair