

Corporate Parenting Panel

Monday 16 August 2021

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Chair)

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Democratic Services Officer

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Qualifications and Credit Framework Assessor

John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families

Andrea Donkin, Fostering Team Apprentice

Nigel Minns, Strategic Director for People

Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head

Liss Phillips, Family Support Worker

Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting Service

Umar Teerab, Family Support Worker

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Pete Gilbert, Councillor Marian Humphries, Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell and Councillor Caroline Phillips.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 22 March 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

2. Children in Care Council - Update

Shinderpaul Bhangal – Children & Families Social Work Operational Team Leader, Andrea Donkin – Fostering Team Apprentice, Liss Phillips - Family Support Worker and Umar Teerab - Family Support Worker presented the update in relation to Children in Care, highlighting the following points –

- Over the Easter School Holidays, 71 young people participated in online activities including “Guess what’s in the egg”, and “How many eggs are in the jar”.
- 36 young people attended online workshops on human rights and citizenships which were held in four different languages. The feedback from those involved was very positive and the sessions were helpful and informative. Following a question from The Chair, it was confirmed that there is a network available for the council to access for different interpreters.
- There are now ten care experienced young people working for the council following successful apprenticeships.
- The allotment project is now fully underway following delays due to covid restrictions. Young people are very engaged and enjoy the physical aspect of the work. Work is underway to build a further three beds. Councillor Jerry Roodhouse suggested that perhaps there was an opportunity for young people to join in with other local groups such as environmental groups.
- 13 young people from Warwickshire have expressed an interest in attending the Home Office Forum which is a national project aiming to engage with children and young people on issues that directly affect them.
- Three young people have supported it the following interview panels within the Council;
 - Deputy Registered Manager for the Residential Home
 - NHS Looked After Nurse
 - Recruitment to Initial Response
 - Recruitment to Children’s Social Work Teams
- The Chair welcomed the experience that young people can bring to an interview acknowledging that they will have had contact with many professionals since entering the care system. Umar added that having a young person on the panel gives a strong impression to those who are being interviewed. It was noted that other local authorities also have young people on interview panels but perhaps not at the same level as Warwickshire.

The Chair thanked the team for the information and noted that there are a lot of positive things happening. The Panel was in agreement and are very impressed with everything. It was requested that the presentation is given at a future full council meeting, John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children & Families will arrange this.

3. Performance Data

The Panel discussed the performance data as per the report presented at the meeting and noted the following points –

- There was an increase of eight young people coming into care in June 2021.
- As at the 16 August 2021, there were 874 children and young people in care.
- Warwickshire County Council has a 91.9% contact rate with care leavers up to the age of 21.
- The current figure for NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) was 47.7%; but it was noted that it is that time of year where the figures are higher given the gap between finishing school/college and starting university/new roles.
- There was a slight decrease in the number of children in care placed out of county. The Panel was asked to note that some children and young people are placed with parents/family or friends but this may be out of area. It was noted that a future report is due to be presented to the panel.

Officers are working on the issue of placement stability and projects are underway; including a wraparound service for foster carers with a reactive support programme. All programmes aim to increase the stability of all placements. John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children & Families added that there are issues with some residential providers and them asking young people to leave; but the solution will be when the county has its own residential homes for children and young people.

The Chair raised concerns in relation to the information about children missing from care. Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting confirmed that some children are “missing/away from placement” despite returning home and being with the family. Some children are known to be with other young people in care; officers know where they are but they are officially “missing/away from placement”.

4. Private Fostering Report

Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting presented the report to the Panel and confirmed that there has been a small increase in the number of enquiries in relation to fostering during 2020/2021 (compared with 2019/2020).

A private fostering arrangement is one made privately for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more. Private foster carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt. The Panel noted that any placements in relation to language schools also count as a private fostering arrangement. It was noted that there has been a decrease in language school placements as expected during the pandemic.

There is now more information available on private fostering arrangements for all Warwickshire County Council colleagues.

The Panel noted that there has been an increase in the time between a placement and the time the council is informed; this is possibly due to the impact of covid; for example, the reduction in home visits. It was confirmed that virtual visits have continued throughout the pandemic, (every 6 weeks for the first year of the placement).

It was confirmed that the following projects are underway within the council –

- Private Fostering Training to become mandatory throughout Children’s services induction
- Review of placement pack for carers.
- Continued promotion of private fostering to increase awareness.
- Private fostering files will be included in the audit process moving forward.

5. Report from the Virtual School Head

Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head presented the report to the committee which focused on the previous school year.

The Panel noted that the post-16 NEET rate (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) had decreased with 56% of young people staying on in education. It was confirmed that there has been a decrease in those looking into apprenticeships, but an increase in those looking at training placements with support that would enable them to start an apprenticeship at a later date.

The completion rate for PEP (Personal Education Plans) was 100% for the school year from April 2020 to March 2021. The current rate has dipped slightly as a result of the pandemic.

It was confirmed that in-year school moves decrease for the second year in a row. The pandemic has helped stability with school places; schools are more willing to offer support such as remote learning or additional technology in order to keep a child in school.

Fixed Term Exclusions (FTE) have increased and are currently at 7.7% (up from 7.1% on 30 April 2021). The Panel noted that exclusions remain higher in Nuneaton and that 15% of children in care attend Nuneaton schools and 40% of exclusions are from schools across Nuneaton (the bulk of which are from secondary schools). It was noted that the last reported data, before the pandemic, was in 2019 and the exclusion rate was 8.5% so there has been some overall improvement. It was confirmed that Warwickshire County Council Officers are working closely with those schools with a high rate of exclusions and looking into reasons why the rates are so much higher across Nuneaton. The impact of the pandemic and the stress levels on children and staff, as well as the absence of staff due to isolation undoubtedly increased issues that were already present.

It was agreed that the issue of exclusions should be taken to the Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Chair & Spokes meeting for further discussion and request that the committee look at more than just the performance figures in relation to the issue.

6. Development of the Work Programme for 2020/2021

It was agreed by the Panel that the Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing (IRO) Service would be circulated to members. If there were any questions/issues to be raised, Panel members were asked to submit them to the Chair or Helen Barnsley (Democratic Services Officer).

It was agreed that an additional meeting would be scheduled for November/December in order for the SGO policy impact report to be presented.

The updated work programme was agreed by the Panel.

7. Good News Stories

The Panel noted the following good news stories –

Two Warwickshire County Council Apprentices have completed working at the House Project and will be starting university in September 2021. The Chair asked that the Panel's congratulations are passed on.

Liss Phillips, Family Support Worker, continues to promote the successful Baby Box Project and recently gave a presentation at the Home Office to Michael Gove Children's Commissioner and Education Secretary.

A young man from Warwickshire, who has also appeared on Britain's Got Talent has secured a Scholarship at the National Ballet School.

A young person requested a place at a boarding school and after officers visited the school, along with a social worker. Following a formal interview, the young man has a place and will be starting in September 2021. Warwickshire County Council Officers will continue to offer support.

8. Any Other Business

John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children & Families provided an update to the Panel in relation to a letter sent to the District and Borough Councils in relation to collaborative working to help children and young people in care reach their full potential.

Three responses have been received, at this point although there is still some time for the other two to get back to us. The three that have replied are positive and looking forward to the meeting in October.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 20 September 2021 at 10am. The meeting will be held via Microsoft Teams.

The meeting rose at 11:29

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Chair