

Corporate Parenting Panel

Monday 13 June 2022

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Chair)
Councillor Caroline Phillips
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

Officers

Shinderpaul Bhangal, Corporate Parenting (Team Leader - Participation)
John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families
Nigel Minns, Strategic Director for People
Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting Service
Chris Baird, Interim AD for Education
Andy Carswell, Democratic Services Officer
Liss Phillips, Family Support Worker
Ian Donnachie, Children in Care 14-18 years Apprentice
Alisha Howe, Fostering Team Apprentice
Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head
Umar Teerab, Family Support Worker
Marie Dionisi, Family Support Worker
Melissa Rose, Operations Manager – Safeguarding
Deborah McGarvey, Non Social Work Operational Team Leader

Others Present

Jackie Channell, Head of Safeguarding – Warwickshire
Angela Richardson, Designated Nurse – Children in Care

1. General

(1) Apologies

There were none.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

There were none.

2. Children in Care Council - Update

Ian Donnachie told members the Warwickshire Youth Conference was held on 21 April, with many workshops and activities taking place. It was noted there was a lower number of attendees from Nuneaton and Bedworth. Shinderpaul Bhangal said 26 young people had already registered to attend before the information on attendees was collected in greater detail. There had been a focus on promoting the event in North Warwickshire, and there were eight young people from this region who had planned to attend but had to drop out late on.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse said he had attended a meeting recently where the Youth Conference had been mentioned, but people were unaware of the feedback from the event. Shinderpaul Bhangal said a report was being drafted and would be circulated in due course. It contained a number of recommendations that had been proposed by the young people who had attended. John Coleman the team who had arranged the Youth Conference deserved praise and congratulations for the amount of work that had taken place to organise such a successful event. He said it had been led by young people for other young people. It had been the first in-person conference to have taken place for a few years.

Alisha Howe provided an update on the young inspectors. She reminded the Panel that in September the team had viewed 12 accommodations around the county and a report on their findings was created. One of the properties was not up to standard, and since the report was completed the kitchen had been refurbished and improved. A new inspection of the 12 accommodations that had been looked at was planned to take place 18 months after the first one. Sharon Shaw added that properties were inspected by the quality assurance team on a regular basis, and the young inspectors carried out additional checks on top of these.

Liss Phillips told the Panel about the brothers and sisters event that took place at the Myton Park offices on 12 April. This had been arranged after feedback from the Children in Care Council meetings, where siblings who were not in the same placement had asked why they had not been placed together. The event was arranged so the siblings could see each other. Around 50 young people with foster carers attended for a range of activities and games, and also a barbecue. Barnardo's had attended and officers promoted the work of the charity. A survey was sent out to those who attended who had a sibling they had been separated from, and the feedback would be reviewed and discussed at the August Senior Leadership Team meeting. Initial feedback said the young people would like this to become an annual event.

Responding to a question from the Chair, Liss Phillips said the team was trying to find out from the feedback how many young people were in a sibling group that had been split up. It was agreed this information would be circulated to members once known.

Councillor Caroline Phillips asked if, historically, the Council had tried to keep sibling groups together. She said she was aware of a situation where five children had been taken into care, but the children had not been allowed to return home after the mother had rehabilitated herself. Sharon Shaw said there was a commitment to keeping children within their family and as many options as possible would be explored, such as care being provided by a member of their extended family. Social workers had to have regard for the children's circumstances and needs changing over the years. In cases where siblings were separated, an assessment would be undertaken to make sure it was the right thing to do. With larger sibling groups it was difficult to find a placement for them all together; however Sharon Shaw said a placement had recently been

found for a group of five siblings. When it came to returning home from care, the child's wishes needed to be taken into consideration. Sharon Shaw said there were instances of children saying they did not wish to return to their family home, and if there were clear reasons then this viewpoint needed to be respected. Councillor Marian Humphreys said she was aware of a case where a successful adopter had also adopted a younger sibling who had been born during the adoption process. She mentioned this to highlight there was a desire to keep siblings together as much as possible.

Liss Phillips provided an update on 'Watch Your Words', which was a booklet that promoted more positive language relating to children in care, explained acronyms and jargon, and contained a section on victim blaming. It was to help children in care understand the language used in their files, and to help them understand what was happening in their care meetings so they could ask the right questions. The booklet had now been completed after six months of work and would be launched on 27 June. It would be shared with schools, police and other stakeholders. John Coleman said the contents had been reviewed by him and members of the Senior Leadership Team, and it was intended for a copy to be available to every member of staff. There was a communications plan regarding sharing it amongst the police, NHS and partner agencies.

Marie Dionisi said the barbecue evenings had been relaunched at Myton to coincide with the monthly Youth Forum and Children in Care Council meetings. They took place on the second Thursday of each month. Allotments had been created at Myton and young people attending the meetings were being encouraged to use them and do some gardening. The possibility of further allotments being developed at the Old Mayor's House, with a view to them being used by young people at the weekend, was being explored.

Liss Phillips said Easter egg hampers and meals were distributed to children in care during April, following help from Stacey Bains from the Churches Across Warwickshire group and donations from businesses.

Liss Phillips said she and Umar Teerab had been invited to a police scrutiny panel meeting at the headquarters at Leek Wootton. They had viewed bodycam footage of police interactions with people. Liss Phillips explained she was given options of which footage she would like to view and she generally chose interactions involving people under the age of 25, and those taking place in North Warwickshire and Rugby. Feedback would be provided on how the situations were handled and this would be fed into the training for the individual officer involved and the police force generally. Opportunities were available for people to go on patrols with officers. Liss Phillips said the intention was to involve young people who did not have a good experience with the police, in the hope it would provide them with a better relationship. Responding to a question from Councillor Humphreys, Liss Phillips said the intention was to try and set up a scrutiny panel for each district of Warwickshire. Councillor Humphreys said she would like to attend the scrutiny panel meetings.

Regarding apprenticeships, Shinderpaul Bhangal reminded the Panel that Warwickshire was represented in a regional participation network. The network had agreed to create a guide for care experience apprentices for those aged 16 and over. The Warwickshire representatives had taken the lead in a subgroup that was created to prepare the guidebook. A 16-page document outlining good practice for creating apprenticeships had been produced and endorsed by the network, and was now being shared across the 14 local authorities involved with a view to being used as a way of benchmarking good practice in promoting opportunities for care leavers.

Marie Dionisi said the Connect and Go team had successfully applied for a grant through the Department of Transport. The grant would be used to supply an electric-powered nine-seater minibus to be used across Coventry and Warwickshire, and a small vehicle to be used in the Nuneaton area, as part of a pilot scheme aimed at tackling a vulnerability and loneliness. It would help young people attend events they might not otherwise be able to get to. It was explained the minibus would be used in Coventry as some of Warwickshire's children in care lived there.

Liss Phillips said the April meeting of the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum had been attended by Kim Evans from Barnardo's and a representative of the Children's Commissioner, to highlight the work they did. Feedback from the meeting suggesting transport and connectivity for young people was an issue, and improvements could be made to the drop-in sessions. Recent meetings had also explained about what life would be like for care leavers after the age of 25. Feedback on this had been sought and the findings would be presented to the Senior Leadership Team in due course. Liss Phillips said consideration was being given to separating the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum to make it easier to do age appropriate activities, with a view to increasing participation.

Umar Teerab said workshops had taken place for foster carers, who were shown videos taken by young people outlining what they considered a good foster carer to be and what was not.

Sharon Shaw said there was a refugee celebration event on 22 June at the Heart of England. A series of films that had been made by children in care would be shown on 22 and 23 June at Northgate House. These had been funded through the West Midlands Migration money. Trips to Bournemouth and Blackpool had taken place, and future visits to Wembley and Snowdon were planned.

The Chair thanked officers for everything that had been happening, saying they should be proud of the work they were doing for Warwickshire.

3. Virtual School Head Report

The item was introduced by Deena Moorey. She said last September offers had been made to all those in Years 11, 12 and 13 who had applied. However not everyone had been able to sustain the offer they had been made. Deena Moorey said an increased amount of work was taking place with the various education settings to see what could be done to ensure the young people kept on with their placements. One theory was youngsters were seeing adults working from home and would rather do that than have to travel into a setting, or be working and earning money instead of attending college. Improving dropout rates was a focus because it had been noticed it was a trend.

The university explorers and artwork across West Midlands projects had both been going well. There had also been a project for the designated teachers, allowing them to develop and promote their leadership skills with a view to improving outcomes for vulnerable learners. Three well-attended sessions had already taken place and a further three were planned. Conferences looking at the child in need agenda would take place in October, aimed at the designated teachers and safeguarding leads. A sports leadership course took place over Easter with the help of Coventry City Football Club, which had resulted in all but one of the attendees earning a qualification.

Regarding attainment, Deena Moorey said it was anticipated there would be gaps in the foundation stage for children who would be finishing Reception class due to learning time lost as a result of

Covid-19. This was in line with what was expected nationally, although it was expected that the gap would not be as prominent in later year groups. An update on attainment levels would be provided in the autumn term once the SATS and GCSE data had been validated and was available.

Attendance at training sessions had improved now that they were returning to being done face to face. There had been a lot of changes to who was the designated teacher within the various schools over the previous two years, and now all of them had had access to the training programmes. Deena Moorey highlighted that Warwickshire's pupils were above the national average in terms of the number who were attending schools with a good or outstanding Ofsted rating. Attendance levels were over 90 per cent in most year groups, but some concerns remained over attendance rates of children in Years 9, 10 and 11.

Councillor Roodhouse said he would be raising the issue of school attendance at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the following day. He said he had been on a national call recently and it had been suggested some children had not returned to school and were continuing to be home schooled. Deena Moorey said new statutory guidance on attendance would be introduced from September 2023 but Warwickshire County Council was already working on implementing the changes.

Councillor Marian Humphreys said complaints from residents suggested that some children had actively sought to get suspended from school. She also said there were insufficient resources in schools to provide enough support to children who needed it. She said she was aware of a case where an eight-year-old had been sent home from school as there was no provision to deal with them. Chris Baird said schools would try a range of approaches, including bringing in additional support. However much of the funding for this type of support came from the high needs block, and there was national pressure to provide for this and a number of local authorities were overspending on provision. Chris Baird said there were some emerging issues around emotional wellbeing and mental health and programmes of support were being worked on, some of which had a specific element aimed at preventing exclusions. Deena Moorey said there were two secondary schools that had recently experienced a large number of suspensions and meetings with headteachers were planned with an aim at providing a resolution. Members were told that the schools were in Nuneaton and Leamington. Councillor Humphreys said the parents who had raised concerns with her were parents of primary school children. Deena Moorey said it was for schools to provide positive solutions to the situation and ensure appropriate allocation of resources, while acknowledging that funding levels were tight. Training and development was available to schools to help. Members were told primary schools would not be allowed to suspend pupils by 2030.

Councillor Humphreys stated her belief the situation arose partially because primary schools only employed one SENCO, and that all teachers should be given training on special educational needs. She said if the SENCO was unavailable then issues would not be resolved. Councillor Phillips stated her belief some schools had poor practice in place relating to special educational needs, with some using what amounted to punishment rooms. Deena Moorey stated there was little of this taking place in Warwickshire.

Deena Moorey explained two additional funding allocations had been in place for pupil premium plus this year, one for tuition and the other for general education recovery. She said the Virtual School had combined the two revenue streams and, rather than allocate the amount given,

enabled schools to ask for the exact amount they needed. Much of this had been used for supporting young people's social, emotional and mental health. Many children in care did receive some additional tuition, but Deena Moorey said this figure was lower than the Department for Education would have liked. She explained that for the 2022-23 school year the Virtual School would be operating an opt out rather than an opt in model for tuition to ensure it reached more children.

Deena Moorey added that completion rates of personal education plans remained high.

Warwickshire had not been successful in its application for funding from the post-16 pupil premium pilot. Birmingham, Worcester and Staffordshire had all been successful in their applications.

4. Briefing on Boys In Care

Sharon Shaw said a question had been asked about why there was a disproportionately high number of boys in care. The data had been analysed and it was found that 85 of the boys were unaccompanied asylum seekers, which made up 10.4 per cent of the total children in care population. If this group was not included in the figures then the percentage of boys in care was lower than statistical neighbours.

Councillor Phillips asked if any Warwickshire-based asylum-seeking children would be getting sent to Rwanda, and if this could be objected to. John Coleman said this was not something the Council had any control over. Although it was intended to send some families to Rwanda, there was no indication that there were any plans to send unaccompanied children. Warwickshire had recently agreed to house six unaccompanied asylum seekers who had been held at hotels in Kent.

5. Update on Children's Homes

Sharon Shaw told members that the first children's home had been built and an open day launch for neighbouring residents had taken place. Once registered with Ofsted the home was scheduled to open by the end of September. It would be a home for four young people between the ages of eight and 12. Staff were looking to identify young people out of area who could move back to Warwickshire to the home.

The process of setting up the second home was now underway. This would be in the Leamington area and comprise of two buildings, which would be for young people aged 12 and over. Sharon Shaw said one of the buildings would be used as an emergency provision for two young people, which would avoid young people having to go to emergency duty carers. An offer had been accepted on a third property in Nuneaton, which was intended to be used by children with social and emotional health needs, while the planned fourth new home would be for children with disabilities.

Sharon Shaw said part of the process of setting up the new homes entailed engagement with social and care workers, borough and district councils, and people living in the locality. She said it was important to have neighbours onside from the outset as that could result in people looking to find fault with the new homes.

6. Update on District and Borough Care Leaver Pledge

John Coleman drew members' attention to the end of the report in the agenda pack, which contained the wording of a pledge that the Council had asked all districts and boroughs to sign up to. The report and pledge were due to be agreed by the chief executives of the districts and boroughs at a meeting on 26 April but there was insufficient time to discuss the item. but at the last on the day they found they didn't have any time to talk about this item. The item was then moved to a meeting on 9 June but members said they wanted to discuss the pledge in private. John Coleman said he felt this meant not everyone agreed with all of the elements of the pledge. He asked if anyone had any comments on the pledge, and encouraged members to contact their district or borough council on the subject. John Coleman reminded members that each council had a statutory requirement to publish a local offer, and agreeing the pledge would enable the districts and boroughs to be compliant with this. He said the pledge applied to all care experienced young people, not just those who lived in Warwickshire.

Responding to a point raised by Councillor Phillips, John Coleman said the report had been co-written by Jane Grant, the head of housing at Nuneaton and Bedworth Council, who had been supportive and believed the contents of the report was achievable. Councillor Roodhouse said he had been trying to find out information from Rugby Borough Council but nobody had responded to him.

John Coleman said he had held a number of meetings with all the heads of leisure but stated his belief they had not been productive. He said the exception had been with North Warwickshire Council, who had agreed to provide 17 free leisure passes. He said it had been proposed that the County Council would pay for the Council Tax element and the districts and boroughs had been asked to pay for the leisure passes. He stated his belief this was not unreasonable and highlighted that in Hertfordshire the ten district and borough councils were paying for the council tax and leisure passes.

7. Performance Data

Sharon Shaw drew members' attention to the fact the number of children in care was continuing to decrease as the courts were now working post-Covid and were able to process cases. Additionally support could now be better provided through the family group and conference workers, which enabled staff to either reunite or keep children remaining at home, and the stay team that worked with adolescents to encourage them to stay home. There had been a decrease in the use of using agency foster carers. Sharon Shaw drew members' attention to the fact that more than 60 per cent of children in care were aged ten or over.

Sharon Shaw said there had been an increase in the number of initial health assessments taking place. However the most recent data available came from March. Sharon Shaw said there were 11 episodes of missing children. Many of these children went missing on a very frequent basis, whereas others were a one-off. Angela Richardson said she was working on improving pathways for information sharing and hoped that in future data could be supplied between the CCG and care providers in a more timely manner.

Responding to a question from the Chair, Sharon Shaw said Section 20 Order related to providing voluntary accommodation for teenagers, and this would often be given at the request of parents while an interim care order was produced. A full Care Order would give shared parental responsibility between the local authority and the family. In some instances the Council could still place a child back at home in a placement with their parents but more likely they would be put into

a foster placement. Additionally there was a Placement Order, which allowed the Council to place a child up for adoption.

Regarding the frequently missing children, Sharon Shaw said regular multi-agency meetings with the police, health and education services took place to share information and try to draw up plans. Sometimes it was necessary to obtain an order that allowed the Council to remove the child from where they were. For example there was a young person who was believed to frequently go to a traveller's site and an order would be required to remove them from that site.

8. Forward Plan

John Coleman said a report on special guardianship orders was ready to be discussed at the next scheduled meeting on 6 July. It was agreed the next meeting would focus solely on this topic.

Sharon Shaw said the report from ACE and the Warwickshire adoption report would be ready for a meeting in September and Angela Richardson said the SWIFT annual report for health should also be ready. John Coleman said a report on timescales for mental health assessments, particularly for those over the age of 16, would also be ready for a September meeting.

Councillor Roodhouse asked if more time could be spent discussing episodes of missing children and the processes involved, to give reassurance to members that they were working. Sharon Shaw suggested inviting a representative of the police to join the discussion after Councillor Roodhouse said it could tie in with exploring child exploitation.

9. Good News Stories

Angela Richardson told the Panel she was now the designated nurse for children in care, which was a role that had not previously existed as a separate entity. Her work would cover Coventry and Warwickshire and would mean there was an increased capacity to carry out work relating to children in care. The Chair said the Council was looking forward to working with her in the future.

10. Any Other Business

There were no other items to discuss.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 6 July.

The meeting rose at 11.37am

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Chair