

Corporate Parenting Panel

Wednesday 12 October 2022

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Chair)

Councillor Peter Gilbert

Councillor Caroline Phillips

Officers

Ian Donnachie, Children in Care 14-18 years Apprentice

Marie Dionisi, Family Support Worker

Matiullah Hotak, Fostering Team Apprentice

Alisha Howe, Fostering Team Apprentice

Deborah McGarvey, Non Social Work Operational Team Leader

Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head

Isabelle Moorhouse, Democratic Services Officer

Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting Service

Umar Teerab, Family Support Worker

Others Present

Carla Elliot, Designated Nurse – Children in Care

Angela Richardson, Designated Nurse – Children in Care

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

Councillor Marian Humphreys

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record.

2. Children in Care Council - Update

Refugee Celebration Week

Marie Dionisi informed the group that the celebration took part on the 20th June and it involved over 118 asylum seekers, young people, staff members and foster carers. There was a celebratory meal and awards ceremony and they learnt about a film being done on the asylum experience.

Deborah McGarvey said that on the 22nd June there was a film event for professionals; three films for WCC and its young people seeking asylum called “My experience of arriving in the UK”, “My experience of the support I have received” and “My experiences settling into life in the UK”. These were all shown to the group of professionals at the event, and they were put onto YouTube. They are available for staff training, and they were shared with the Home Office who said they would use them as part of their training resources. Sharon Shaw noted that these films were done with money from the West Midlands Migration Bid and these films are available for all West Midlands authorities and any others who want to use them.

The Chair said that he would like all members to watch these videos.

Staff Conference

Ian Donnachie informed the group that on the 15th July there was a staff conference and Voice Influence Change (VIC) had a slot; some who spoke from the team were care experienced members of staff. Liss Philipps and Alisha Howe spoke about young people in care, leaving care and some of the activities that they were doing. They spoke about how they were engaging and responding/listening to young people's voices. Umar Tareeb did crowd interaction around about being an asylum seeker, talking about refugees and things they were doing in that area. Ian Donnachie presented a video where he interviewed nine young people who were care experienced in Warwickshire and they gave some of their opinions like what could be improved in work practice and things that were done well. He spoke on what they were doing in VIC to help support young people. Ian Donnachie spoke on his personal experiences too. After showing a video they had two representatives from the Youth Council give a speech. Ian Donnachie praised everyone who took part in the event.

In response to the Chair, Ian Donnachie said that improvements were being made around engaging with the Children in Care Council. Sharon Shaw added that WCC's local offer paid for winter bills which was essential in this current climate with uncertainty around electricity and gas.

The video around participation shown at the conference was presented to the group

Bournemouth Trip

Marie Dionisi informed the group that on the 31st May there was a day trip to Bournemouth with 12 families, children and foster carers. The children were aged between 5-14; families and staff made sandcastles together and some young people went in the sea and played cricket on the beach. They had fish & chips and ice cream after.

Refugee Football Team

Umar Teerab informed the group that the football team met every Sunday, and it went well. Football was a universal sport so this helped everyone engage with each other even if they spoke little English. Covid-19 halted this, but this has since continued. They played against Warwickshire Police, and it went well so they are organising another match with them. They have a three-match set against Milton Keynes; Warwickshire won the first one and the second match will take place on the 16th October. Warwickshire came 2nd in a football tournament against other authorities; next year's tournament will take place in Northampton. Other authorities started doing football teams after Warwickshire started it and they have between 38-43 young people attending their meetups. Sharon Shaw added that pre-Covid-19 they had 5-aside teams playing other authorities and to continue this they were looking at supported accommodation for teams to use to make it easier for people to travel to Warwickshire and join local teams.

Housing Related Support

Alisha Howe informed the group that she was contacted by commissioning about coming up with mentimeter surveys for floating support/housing related support. This was for certain supported accommodations for young people to fill out. They attended one accommodation, spoke to parents and they potentially have a forth accommodation to attend. Alicia Howe was asked recently to contact more young people because more of them came forward about housing related support.

Care Leavers Forum

Liss Philipps informed the group that all the care leavers forum meetings were now face-to-face. They were looking to have them somewhere with a bigger kitchen than Myton to reduce costs with takeaways. They spoke about the options of life up to 25 and how this works in the process of leaving care and what support they receive during that time. They had young people come forward to say what would help them, what their transition out of support WCCs gives will be and their independence. In July 2022 they had mental health discussions which was popular as it is always a hot topic; showing support for mental health was important and they were told what support there was. Liss Philipps did her own research and formatted a leaflet that included all provided services. The forum was asked what could be done to improve services and these were taken back to the SLT to action. In September there was a welcome back social and Ian Donnachie did an activity which got them to look for clues to get sweets and they had fish & chips and games. They were now planning their Christmas events to boost attendance.

BBQ and Mental Health Training

Matiullah 'Matty' Hotak informed the group that the BBQ and mental health training took place on the 9th August. The BBQ was held for WCC's young people seeking asylum who live in the select care accommodation in Birmingham. Around 440 people attended the BBQ and after, 22 people attended the mental health support session focusing on achieving good quality sleep. This was important because some asylum seekers suffered trauma and had difficult journeys to the UK, so this session was to help them overcome this.

Harry Potter Studios

Deborah McGarvey informed the group that they had two group trips to the Harry Potter Studios on the 31st August and 2nd September. The 31st trip was for younger children in care; they took 16 young people aged 10-15. On the 2nd September they took 12 care experienced young people aged 16-25. Both trips went well, and they tried to target children that might have siblings they do not live with, so there were a few sibling groups together. It was a good bonding experience between staff and children in care.

Jamie's Farm

Sharon Shaw informed the group that within the safeguarding support and children in care team, there were three residential trips in the summer for the children. Staff went away with young people on three occasions to Jamie's Farm which is a therapeutic farm where children do farm work and work with animals etc. Other things done were zip wiring and wall climbing. The children who went were aged 12-17.

Resolved:

- 1.1 That the Panel note the work of the Children in Care Council (CiCC), Care Leavers Forum (CLF) and the Voice, Influence and Change Team (Participation).

1.2 That the Panel acknowledge the work that continues to take place with young people.

3. Performance Data (to include update from SWFT)

Sharon Shaw informed the group that there were now 819 children in care and central government recently told local authorities that everyone had to increase the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. Therefore, WCC had to take on an extra 30 unaccompanied asylum seekers, so Warwickshire now has 110. They were coping with this increase by bringing in more staff, especially with the new supported accommodation in Leamington.

Not including the number of asylum-seeking young people, WCC had the lowest number of children in care since November 2021. This was because of the early interventions in place and the wrap around support to get children back home was working well. All the data was on Power BI and it showed there was a drop in young people entering care but there were a few teenagers entering it. One of the reasons for this was children being placed on SGOs (special guardianship order) instead of going into care. Refugee families waiting in hotels was a strain on the health and education services. The number of young males in care in Warwickshire was likely to rise because of the increase of unaccompanied asylum seekers. 26.4% of children in care are in minority ethnic groups, this was also increasing because of the asylum seekers. Most young people in care were aged between 10-15 followed by 17-16-year-olds. They were working on short-term placement stability after five teenagers had to keep being moved because they did not have any placements; this was a national issue. Cambian informed WCC that they will be closing a lot of their residential units because they were not financially viable.

In response to Councillor Caroline Philipps, Sharon Shaw said that the unaccompanied asylum seekers were coming from Sudan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Albania. All of them are placed in hotels because there is no other accommodation available. It was believed that there was an increase from children from Albania because they were being trafficked because they disappear from the hotels they are in.

Deena Moorey noted that the virtual school was taking in more unaccompanied asylum seekers because finding school places was difficult; some were having to travel out of their borough to go to school. There was a long waiting list for these young people to enrol onto courses that taught English as a second language.

In response to the Chair, Sharon Shaw said that short-term placements was a problem in Warwickshire because there were a shortage of placements and children would need one as soon as they were put into care. If one young person was being challenging in a placement, then they could be made the leave by the place holder and another child would move in immediately. This was a problem in Warwickshire because they did not have their own children's homes before, so they were always relying on commissioned services. Some carers struggled to meet the young people's needs due to criminal exploitation.

Following another question from the Chair, Sharon Shaw said that 30% of Warwickshire's care leavers were not in education, employment, or training (EET) compared to the 42% national average. She agreed to double check this figure as it did not match the report's number.

Following a supplementary from Councillor Phillips, Sharon Shaw said that ideally all care leavers should be in EET however, some of them would be disabled, sick or pregnant etc. so it would be more difficult for them to be in EET. They had drop-in groups every week in Birmingham, Coventry, Nuneaton, and South Warwickshire for these young people to support them to get back into EET.

In response to the Chair, Sharon Shaw said that Warwickshire was inline with its regional neighbours regarding missing episodes of children in care. A missing episode would be counted even if a child was missing for a couple of hours. 19/32 children had multiple missing episodes, they are normally young males who were or had been involved in criminal activity. Others were unaccompanied asylum seekers, but WCC would try and find them if they were paced in Warwickshire. They improved the system that was in place for these, and this reduced the length of periods of time children would go missing for.

Following a supplementary from Councillor Phillips, Sharon Shaw said that if a child purposely went missing in Warwickshire and then something happened then this would need a case review. All protocols would be followed with CSE and the other teams, but teenagers who wanted to leave a care placement could not be physically restrained to stop them leaving. They would need to be placed somewhere where trust could be built, and they would want to stay. Last choice scenario would be secure placements but there were no available placements in the country.

4. Warwickshire Adoption Report & ACE Report

Sharon Shaw informed the group that in Warwickshire, the number of children who were adopted increased to 34. However, the number of children who been placed with adopters decreased from 28 to 18 so this implied that there would be a lot less children adopted next year. There were no adoption disruptions and there were 22 placement orders in the last year; this number was decreasing each year. This was because there were more SGOs, or children placed with connected persons. 2016-17 had the most adoptions with 70 and there were 26 SGOs; in 2022 there were 46 SGOs. The number of placement order in 2016-17 was 49. This decrease in numbers was not bad because it showed that children were being placed with their families and adoption was not right for the child.

All but three adoption cases were placed with ACE adopters, two of these were for sibling groups. Most children adopted were boys aged between 1-4 and White British. They focused on 'foster to adoption' which is when children who are fostered become adopted by their foster parents; this happened in six occasions in 2021.

Next year they intended to focus on the time gap between a child being placed in care and adoption orders being granted. They will also focus on family time work with adopters (making sure they have clear plans if siblings are being separated or if parents or grandparents want to and can see the child that they do). Life story improvement was also planned so the children would know why/how they were adopted and they wanted to increase fostering to adoption.

In response to the Chair, Sharon Shaw stated that they were falling behind on when a child came into care to the adoption order being granted. This was caused by the courts being closed during the pandemic, but these were now progressing through as courts reopened. There were difficulties in some cases where it took three years for the adoption order to be granted.

In response to Councillor Philipps, Sharon Shaw clarified that a disruption was when after a child formally moved in and their placement fell apart or did not work before the adoption order was granted. This meant the child being placed back into care. If this happens after the order is granted, then it classifies as a family breakdown.

Following a question from the Chair, Sharon Shaw said that some local authorities had longer timescales than WCC and this impacted ACE's figures but not Warwickshire's. Warwickshire had a good adoption service before joining ACE.

5. Warwickshire Children in Care Health Service

Carla Elliot informed the group that she started her role in August 2021, and it was a difficult period. There was a complete turnover of nursing, administrative and senior management staff. This created a backlog of health assessments being offered and this was exacerbated by Covid-19.

Carla Elliot wrote a recovery plan, and this was worked through to get staffing levels to increase after a recruitment drive and team building.

They were able to meet the needs of the children's health assessments and achieving their KPIS by doing them in 20 working days. They were continuing to do allocation meetings whereby they risk assess and RAG rating all their HRO requests into to book them in priority order. They continued reviewing audit health assessments that were done by other professionals and out of area. They now had Angela Richardson from the CCG as the Designated Children in Care Nurse and they would continue to develop and support the team with the recruitment plan because they were looking at developmental roles within the team. They want to assist the ICB with updating the service specification because it was last written in 2019. The Health and Looked After Children (HELAC) Operational Group started up again which will enable networking and collaborative working.

They were planning on updating and auditing the RAG rating service they used. They were also relooking at the KPI data they shared on the health assessments and the data they collected and triangulating as part of that health assessment and social care. They wanted to look at care leavers health passports for their future health needs, with up-to-date signposting and services. They were planning for this to be bespoke for each child and for them to have leaving care summaries and considering the different vulnerabilities of the different children.

In response to the Chair, Carla Elliott clarified that the 20 working days were from when they received the paperwork to the request from social care. The first step was to ensure the child gets the health assessment in a timely manner and the relevant paperwork needed to be completed by the local authority before they could proceed. They then need to book the appointment and there might be reasons why that is declined or there might be lots of different pathways they need to go through. This deadline was being met but two members of staff were off long-term sick which caused other things to be pushed back as health assessments needed to be prioritised.

Angela Richardson added that she would like to bring a report to the panel on governance on what they were doing in health. They had strategic HELAC and operational HELAC and they wanted to ensure it was reported to the panel appropriately. From a compliance point of view, everything needed to be as robust as possible.

6. Development of the Work Programme for 2022/2023

Governance for Child in Care – Angela Richardson to be added onto the work programme
Virtual School Autumn Report 2022 - Deena Moorey

7. Good News Stories

Leisure Centres

In response to Councillor Philipps, Sharon Shaw informed the group that most the gyms in Warwickshire were run by Everyone Active. Everyone Active were now providing free gym and swim membership to all children in care and all care leavers.

8. Any Other Business

None.

9. Date of Next Meeting

28th November 2022 at 9:30am