

Corporate Parenting Panel

Monday 15 January 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Sue Markham (Chair)
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell
Councillor Caroline Phillips
Councillor Brett Beetham

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People
Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting Service
Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head
Leah Adams, Head of Early Years and School Effectiveness
Davinder Shergill, Development Officer
Umar Teerab, Family Support Worker
Liss Phillips, Family Support Worker
Johnny Kyriacou, Director of Education

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse.

Apologies were also received from John Coleman, Director of Children & Families Service and Debs McGarvey, Team Manager - Voice, Influence & Change.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on the 13th November 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

2. Voice, Influence & Change Team - Updates

Liss Phillips, Family Support Worker, introduced the report and provided feedback from the latest Care Leavers Forum. A range of speakers were invited to attend the forum on a variety of topics, including accommodation. Members of the forum were given the chance to provide feedback on the range of accommodation.

Other highlights from the forum meetings included –

- Representatives from Compass attended to talk to the forum about the services they provide. Young people were asked for the views on what they thought should be included in the new mental health support boxes that are being developed.
- Discussions were held in relation to the possible redesign of the Local Offer for care leavers.
- It was confirmed that officers are looking at neighbouring authorities in relation to care leavers access to their records.
- A summary of events was presented to the panel. These included a Vietnamese meal to celebrate families, a Halloween party and an event to celebrate the achievements of care leavers that included getting places at universities.
- Umar Teerab, Family Support Worker, confirmed that the football team is still going strong. They have competed in two recent tournaments, coming second in one, and first in another. More matches are being planned, including one against council officers.
- Work is ongoing to ensure that young people are involved in the apprenticeship programme and that their voices are embedded in the training. Communication between young people and their social workers was also highlighted as a key focus of the programme. Councillor Marian Humphreys requested more information in relation to the numbers of care leavers taking up apprenticeships and the path taken through programme.
- The panel learnt that Relationship and Sex Education training is delivered to newly arrived young asylum-seeking children to give them an opportunity to learn about the culture and range of relationships. It is an important message to get across, especially to young girls. Umar Teerab confirmed that he has been working with those involved, and it has been positively received.
- The Grandmentors scheme has recently received a grant of £107k which will allow the scheme to continue for another two years. The scheme has a positive impact on the young people who take part – with many choosing to stay in touch with their Grandmentor after they leave care.

- The end of 2023 Christmas party saw 100 young people attend – the biggest and best Christmas party so far. A gaming company from Leamington Spa donated £5k to be used for prizes which was very much appreciated and received!
- Norma's traditional Christmas hampers were delivered to 250 young people. The panel noted that more council support is needed at the moment due to the cost-of-living crisis but both Morrisons and Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service gave donations.

The Chair thanked all involved for a very positive report, adding that the panel really appreciate the updates, giving the panel a chance to see all the hard work done by those involved.

3. Performance Data

Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting presented the report to the panel with the following highlights –

- There was an increase in the number of Children in Care during November and December 2023, to 804. It was noted that this figure has now reduced to 794 and that there had been a reduction in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). 15.4% of Children in Care are UASC.
- The panel noted that there are still challenges in finding placements for children and that in December 2023, four children had to be placed out of county.
- The panel was pleased to note that there have already been more adoptions in 2024 than in the whole of 2023.
- Work continues to improve placement stability which is still a challenge. It was noted that the impact of emergency placements contributes to the data.
- It was noted that health assessments continue to be delayed if a child/ren is/are placed out of county. This was contributed to the fact that authorities are likely to prioritise children from their area before those who come from other areas. The panel was asked to note that the data in relation to out of county placements does include children who may be living with family members.

It was confirmed that officers will be asked to come to a future meeting to present information in relation to missing episodes.

4. Update on Warwickshire County Council's Children's homes

Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting presented an update to the panel in relation to Warwickshire Children's Homes.

Cherry Tree House has been up and running since March 2023. It can house up to four young people but as yet, has not been fully occupied. It was noted that Cherry Tree House was used to

bring back one young person who had been housed out of the county. The young person is now back with family members but built excellent relationships with the neighbours to Cherry Tree House.

Officers continue to review the placements out of county and look at who could benefit from a placement in Cherry Tree House. The primary aim was confirmed as rehabilitation with the family (or back to a foster placement); it is a step-down home.

It was noted that recruiting staff in the south of the county has been challenging. There is a lot of competition from private providers who often offer higher salaries.

It was confirmed that Acorn Lodge and Oak Tree House are homes for children with emotional and behavioural needs. Building work on both homes is now complete, and both are furnished. OFSTED registration is still outstanding, but it is expected to be completed soon. There is still a need for a registered manager for both homes, and it was confirmed that recruitment has been difficult. It was also confirmed that Beechwood House in the north of the county, a one bedroom house, is also ready to go once the OFSTED paperwork is completed.

In relation to the Silver Birch home in Nuneaton, it was confirmed that building work has now started. There have been some delays, including the need for a survey in relation to newts that may have been in the pond in the garden. There is already a registered manager in place at Silver Birch and most of the staff have been recruited.

In relation to supporting children with mental health issues and autism, Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People stated that he had recently visited the Hope Service which provides an excellent service for children with additional needs and from whom Warwickshire could learn a lot from.

To finish, it was acknowledged that there are many challenges that face the council. It was noted that there are more children's homes opening and many are privately run and therefore can offer higher salaries; it is a very competitive market. It is vital that registered managers are right for each placement.

Members of the panel received an extended invitation to visit any of the Warwickshire Children's Homes.

The Chair thanked all the officers involved for the extremely positive report.

5. Development of the Work Programme and Items on the Forward Plan

The updated work programme was agreed by the Panel.

It was agreed that George Shipman, Head of Safeguarding Communities, would be contacted in relation to providing an update on County Lines.

It was agreed that Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting, would look at the possibility of adding information relating to the number of siblings in care to the performance information presented at each panel meeting.

6. Any Other Business

None

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 25th March 2024 at 10am.

The meeting will be held in Shire Hall, Warwick.

The meeting rose at 11:06

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Chair