

Corporate Parenting Panel

Monday 25 March 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

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

Officers

Leah Adams, Head of Early Years and School Effectiveness
Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
John Coleman, Assistant Director - Children and Families
Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People
Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting
Umar Teerab, Family Support Worker
Jody Toone, Senior Education Advisor

Others Present

Anne-Marie Kennedy, Clinical Lead in School Nursing

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse.

Apologies were also received from Valerie Corcoran, Designated Nurse Children in Care and Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes from the meeting on the 15th January 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

The Chair requested an update be circulated to the panel in relation to county lines, and the information that was requested at the last meeting.

It was confirmed that the report on Missing Episodes, scheduled to be presented at the meeting in September 2024 would include information clarifying which missing episodes were for (example) ten minutes, and those which were (for example) 2 days.

There were no other matters arising.

2. Voice, Influence & Change Team - Updates

Deborah McGarvey, Team Manager - Voice, Influence & Change, presented the report to the panel, highlighted several significant events from the past few months.

On 28th February, the launch of the [Hey Foster Carer](#) booklet took place at Old Shire Hall in Warwick. The booklet aims to promote fostering across Warwickshire and demonstrate that all voices are being heard. The booklet gives an insight into fostering from all sides. Children in care spoke at the launch event and spoke about their experiences.

Umar Teerab, Family Support Worker, updated the panel on the recent Warwickshire Youth Council elections. 66 young people stood for election and the voting was held on line between the 1st and 28th of February 2024. The target had been to get 1000 votes; the final count was 1314 votes. Two videos were shown to the panel – one with out-going youth councillors giving feedback on their experiences and what they were all most proud of. The second video showed newly elected youth councillors talking about what they were most looking forward to.

[Outgoing Youth Councillors](#)

[New Youth Councillors](#)

Marie Dionisi, Family Support Worker updated the panel in relation to the “Wrong Size Fits All” film launch on the 5th March. The film highlights the experiences children and young people with SEND face within educational settings and aims to promote an understanding of their needs. The panel noted that the key message of the film was that if you don’t feel safe at school how can you be expected to learn. The film was also shown at the recent Head Teachers Conference and the SEND Conference and was very well received. It was noted that the film has had over 21 thousand views and that Cambridge City Council has requested permission to share the film on their website. The panel noted that the film could also be used to highlight the needs of children in care or children with trauma experience.

[Wrong Size Fits All](#)

Councillor Marian Humphreys confirmed that some schools within Warwickshire were also using the film as an additional support to their staff and asked how Warwickshire Councillors could make sure that the film was seen by all schools and as many people as possible? Marie Dionisi confirmed that the best way would be to keep talking about it, keep showing at as many events as possible. It was noted that it had only premiered on the 5th March 2024, but that it already spreading quickly, and positively. The young people in the film had expressed an interest in going into schools to talk about the film and their experience but it was noted that this may not be logistically possible; especially given that exam season is approaching.

Anne-Marie Kennedy, Clinical Lead in School Nursing, asked if the School Nursing Team had been made aware of the film and if they were on board. Leah Adams, Head of Early Years & School Effectiveness confirmed that work was already taking place with early years teams and that moving forward this will include the nursing teams.

Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting, confirmed to the panel that an event was being held on the 13th April 2024 in relation to Siblings Day. Brothers and sisters in care, and those who may not be in care, are all invited to the event being held at Myton Park, Warwick, as well as all foster families and their children. It was agreed that the flyer would be circulated to the panel.

[Brothers and Sisters Event](#)

3. Performance Data

Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting, presented the most recent performance information to the panel, with the following highlights –

The number of Children in Care was 798; the number has remained static with minimal variation. It was noted that there had been an increase between November and December 2023 but that numbers were now levelling out. The number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) was noted as increasing; with the majority coming through the national transfer scheme.

The Chair stated that it was encouraging to see stability in an area where officers don't have much control and it is reactive to outside influences.

23 children have been placed for adoption. This is an increase of four since January 2024 and the number of adoptions so far in 2024 is already higher than the total number in 2023.

There has been an increase in the number of agencies foster placements.

There has been a decrease in the number of children in residential homes or supported accommodation.

34 Children in care were recorded as having missing episodes. It was noted that the number has remained static. There are significantly more males than females with recorded missing episodes. This is impacted by UASC who are nearly all male.

In relation to short term and long-term placement stability, it was noted that there is still a lot of work to do although it has been relatively stable lately. There has been a slight increase due to some children with significant and complex needs. The panel noted that there has been an increase in teenagers coming into care which can affect the placement stability information. It was confirmed that 77 children have been placed back with parents or are waiting for an adoption order. This can confuse the data; – the move is a positive move but still counts as a placement move.

Following a question from Councillor Caroline Phillips, clarification was given in relation to certain orders -

An interim care order is generally a short-term order which is granted while care proceedings are completed. A placement order is an application to court to place a child for adoption.

4. Report from the Virtual School Head

Jody Toone, Senior Education Adviser gave a presentation to the panel – “How the Virtual School Promotes Understanding of the Children Behind the Data” starting with the following highlights –

- Children in Care start with the disadvantage of their pre-care experiences and, often, have special educational needs.
- May have been at risk of, or have suffered, physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect.
- Data tells us that Children in Care are much more likely to experience frequent transitions, including moving home or school and experience changes in the professionals that are supporting them and their families.
- These experiences can affect attendance, learning, behaviour and wellbeing

It was confirmed that everyone has the same three basic responses to stress – fight, flight or freeze. Those who have experienced trauma may have bigger responses and struggle to regulate their behaviours. Someone who has adapted to survive may have a greater risk of mental health issues, problems with memory and find it harder to trust new people, in new social situations.

Taking into account the impact of trauma and latent vulnerability that a lot of children in care deal with, a lot of the work done by the virtual school is directly with the school staff to help improve educational attainment and progress. If increased stability can be found in a school setting, there is a great chance of better results.

It was confirmed that the Virtual School training offer is for designated teachers, as well as the rest of the school and other professionals who may be working with children in care.

The training includes the following –

- Annual training for designated teachers
- Termly network meetings
- In-school support for self-evaluation
- Specific topics such as domestic abuse and, self-harm
- Webinars on key topics for the whole school
- Child focussed support

It was confirmed that every school in Warwickshire who has a child in care will receive a monitoring visit every year. All Warwickshire schools are offered the opportunity to access [the AC education courses](#) including sessions on [impulsive behaviour, self-harming behaviour and the road to recovery; returning to school.](#)

Members of the panel were invited to attend an event focusing on Understanding Children in the Social Care System facilitated by the virtual school. The event is a development opportunity for all those working with children in the social care system.

The following video was shared –

[I Wonder If You See Me - A Spoken Word Poem About Childhood Trauma](#)

It was confirmed that all training information can be found on the website - [Warwickshire Virtual School – Warwickshire County Council](#).

Following a question from John Coleman, Director of Children & Families Service in relation to persistent absences, it was confirmed that social workers and virtual school officers meet with schools to review all cases of persistent absenteeism. It was noted that a large proportion of these cases is children who have struggled to return to school after covid. The panel noted that officers consider this area of work to be an absolute priority. It was further confirmed that officers across education services are working at reducing suspensions and exclusions which are especially high with children who have SEND needs. Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell asked if any work was carried out with the police in relation to attendance issues. John Coleman confirmed that there is a family and adolescent support team who work closely with the children in care social workers and the police where appropriate.

The panel noted that children who go missing are more likely to be exploited in some way. It is about making sure that the children are back at school or in some other meaningful activity. Officers have good links with The Princes Trust which is more suitable for older children.

It was confirmed that if a child has an EHC plan in place, then they may be attending an alternative setting. Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting, confirmed that Warwickshire has employed speech and language specialist, specifically for young children in care. It was confirmed that 28 children have returned to school after working with additional support workers; the programme has been very successful.

It was confirmed that all children in care have a social worker and a Personal education plan (PEP). A PEP is put in place to support any child struggling in school. A social worker can share additional information and work can start with all appropriate agencies to avoid suspension.

The Chair thanked Jody for the report, and for sharing the video. It had been a very powerful presentation for the panel.

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

It was confirmed that a report in relation to county lines is due to be presented at the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2024.

It was agreed that the Work Force Strategy report, scheduled to be presented at the next panel meeting in July 2024 would focus on the stability of workers, and the impact on children and young people of changes of workers.

It was agreed that a verbal update on the Warwickshire Children's Homes would become a standing item at all future meetings of the panel.

It was agreed that the Siblings Strategy report would be presented at the panel meeting on the 30th September 2024.

The updated work programme was agreed by the Panel.

6. Any Other Business

None.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Monday, 1st July 2024 at 10.00 am

The meeting rose at 11.27

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Chair