

Corporate Parenting Panel

Monday 15 May 2023

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Chair)
Councillor Marian Humphreys
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse
Councillor Sue Markham

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting Service
Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head

Others Present

Angela Richardson, Designated Nurse Children in Care for Warwickshire
Norma Wilson – Warwickshire resident and former foster carer

1. General

Before the meeting started, Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting introduced Norma Wilson to the panel.

Norma was a foster carer for Warwickshire for 28 years, caring for 140 children. The panel learnt that not only had Norma been a foster carer but every year, she provides Christmas hampers for all the children in care. They have always been well received by the children but especially so during the pandemic and now, with the cost-of-living crisis. Norma has sent out over 250 hampers. In addition, the panel learnt that it was not only Christmas hampers that Norma provides, but also Easter hampers.

The Chair, on behalf of the whole panel and officers, thanked Norma for what she has done and continues to do, saying that she is incredible. The Chair added that it is important to recognise the achievement of people like Norma and extended thanks from the whole of Warwickshire County Council.

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell and Councillor Caroline Phillips.

Apologies were also received from John Coleman - Director of Children & Families Service, Nigel Minns - Executive Director People Directorate and Umar Teerab - Corporate Parenting

FSW-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 16th January 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

2. Children in Care Council - Update

Maria Dionisi, Family Support Worker - Voice, Influence & Change , confirmed that the information in the report relates to the period from 22nd November 2022 to 31st March 2023.

The following information was highlighted to the panel –

December 2022 saw a lot of Christmas activities with over 75 people in attendance. There was support for Norma and her Christmas hampers.

Liss Phillips, Family Support Worker - Voice, Influence & Change, visited ministers in London in February 2023 in relation to the Baby Box Project and received positive feedback for the work and that other authorities and groups look at what Warwickshire has done as good practice. It was confirmed that there will be a review of the content of the boxes with a view to update them over the summer 2023.

Following the work done by the young inspectors in relation to the standards of rented property, it was confirmed that many of the recommendations from the 2021 visits have been done. Following a question from the Chair, it was confirmed that the majority of landlords have taken on board the work of the young inspectors and are happy to work with them. Work will continue with further visits and updated recommendations. The panel will be kept updated.

Liss Phillips explained that some factors that are inspected can be emotive such as no visitors/curfews/not allowed to decorate rooms. Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting confirmed that there should be no curfews on supported living and that there are changes coming up over the next few months and that all supported accommodation will have to be registered and with that there will be regulations. There may well be rules in relation to overnight visitors and the safeguarding issues to consider. Family and friends should be allowed – with the right checks in place.

Every accommodation will need to be registers with Ofsted and as a result there may be closures of some accommodation that won't be able to meet the new standards or who don't want to.

3. Performance Data

Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting presented the performance information to the Panel and invited questions.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse asked in relation to children missing or away from placement if it would be possible to have a trend line in order to provide context for the current data. Sharon Shaw suggested that officers from the team for missing children are invited to a future meetings in order to provide an answer.

It was highlighted to the Panel that the term missing is used, but that does not always mean that officers do not know where a child is, just that they are not where they are supposed to be. For example, they could just be late returning home, or they could be with friends when they should be with home. It was noted by the Panel that long term missing trends tend to apply to Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers. The Chair asked for a further breakdown of the missing episodes so that Panel members could see where children were missing for ten minutes or two/three days so that they could get a better understanding of the issue.

In relation to Short Term Placements it was confirmed that there are two areas where Warwickshire County Council needs to improve. The first is regarding the number of children in care. The total number is reducing but there has been an increase in the number of teenagers entering care and finding them a foster place can be challenging.

The number of children's homes are reducing due to no longer being financially viable. As a result it can take longer to find a permanent placement which is preferable to a series of short-term placements. It was noted that this is a national issue. However, there are now children's home in Warwickshire, run by the council, with plans for an additional one in the north of the county. There are 82 children in residential care as of this meeting but only one is currently in a Warwickshire County Council owned home. The Chair confirmed that this area will continue to be monitored by the Panel.

Sharon Shaw asked the Panel to note that with a child is put into the care of a family member, which is exactly where they should be, this is counted as a placement move.

It was confirmed that 12% of children in care in the county are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers. This figure has increased and Warwickshire County Council now has the second highest number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers in the West Midlands. It was noted that the government has recently increased the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers that local authorities are expected to take in.

4. Report from the Virtual School Head

Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head presented the report which covers the period January 2023 to March 2023 and confirmed that overall, the report is positive in relation to key stage outcomes.

The highlights were as follows -

For 4- to 5-year-olds, 21% have a good level of development but that is lower than the national figure. It was noted though, that this cohort is making progress and that a lot of the issues are as a result of problems associated with the pandemic and lockdowns.

For Key Stage 1, performance is at 37.5% which is 7.5% higher than the national figure for Year 2.

For Key Stage 2, 28.6% reached expected reading and maths test which is higher than was expected for this cohort (at 25%) but still slightly lower than the national figures.

For Key Stage 4, children leaving year 11, performance is above the national figure and from the starting point they were at, the performance is higher than expected. The Panel noted that additional blocks of tuition have been offered.

Councillor Marian Humphries thanked officers for the report and asked for information in relation to pre-school education and any progress that is, or isn't, being made? It was confirmed that the virtual school starts at the age of 2-years-old and that there is work with social workers to ensure that all 2-year-olds in care are accessing nursery provision (including childcare) Service Manager - Corporate Parenting stated that asking for progress reports is something that officers can look in to.

Following a question in relation to the date from 4/5 years ago, it was confirmed that the Warwickshire outcomes are presented against the national figures. Children in care often have a lot of catching up to do educationally as well as coping with a range of challenges. In comparison to four years ago, Warwickshire County Council is performing slightly higher.

The Chair asked if it was possible for officers to build in an historical context regarding the performance of the virtual school. Deena Moorey confirmed that that would be doable but the panel was asked to note that the grading system has changed and the data was different during the Covid period. It may not be a fair picture.

5. Corporate Parenting Panel Road Shows

Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting asked the Panel for clarification on what they would like to see/achieve from the roadshows.

The Chair stated that the Panel would like to enhance relationships with the district and borough councils in relation to corporate parenting. They need to be more involved with the work of the county council's officers and members. The Panel agreed that there should be a focus on engagement and promotion of the work done at Warwickshire County Council.

It was agreed that housing is the primary area where better relationships with the district and borough councils would bring a benefit to the county council. Consideration was given to officers and members of the panel potentially attending district and borough meetings, as well as representatives from the district and borough councils attending the Corporate Parenting Panel at the county council.

In particular, attendance from departments that could support Warwickshire's Leaving Care Office, such as Sports and Leisure officers, would be an area to focus on.

Following a question in relation to the risk to the children in care if districts and boroughs don't have a full understanding of the work done by the county council, Sharon Shaw stated that officers are looking at shared responsibility, such as the provision of housing and the local offer for care leavers. It is vital that officer from across councils work together to offer an enhanced programme and that children in care or leaving care are not overlooked.

6. Placement Stability for Children in Care

Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting confirmed that placement stability is a key focus for officers in 2023. If children are able to be placed with a family member, then there will be less disruption and that is the focus.

It was agreed that the discussion in Item 3 covered this report and the minutes could reflect this.

7. Governance for Child in Care and HELAC Feedback

Angela Richardson, Designated Nurse Children in Care for Warwickshire gave a verbal update to the Panel and offered assurance that the Integrated Care Board (ICB) is the replacement for clinical commissioning groups (CCGs). Work is done in a place-based manner to offer a greater understanding of the needs of children in care.

It was confirmed that there is now a Designated nurse in Warwickshire and in Coventry for children in care.

There will be internal Quarterly reports for children in care in relation to health assessments and needs for all children in care.

The previous annual report from SWIFT that was presented to the Panel will now be from the ICB.

The work of the Health of Looked after Children (HELAC) group identified strategic and operational priorities to ensure that the right people are focused on the right priorities.

Sharon Shaw, Service Manager Corporate Parenting confirmed the performance in relation to health assessments is currently 89%. Some authorities, not Warwickshire, have issues with some health providers saying that they will not complete health assessments. There is a need to be realistic that there won't be a true change in compliance across the board – so for children placed outside Warwickshire. Officers are focused on looking at this and ensuring that it is an area that doesn't get forgotten. This is an issue that needs to be looked as a national issue as well as a regional level. 17 other authorities have raised complaints in relation to the compliance of health assessments.

8. The Vanguard Project

It was agreed that this item be moved to the next meeting (June 2023).

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

The updated work programme was agreed by the Panel.

10. Any Other Business

Following the recent Ofsted focused visit, the Panel learnt that they were extremely pleased with the work in relation to care leavers and unaccompanied asylum seekers.

The verbal report stated that the council's work with unaccompanied asylum seekers is exceptional and this was echoed in the written report.

The Panel passed on their thanks and said well done to the team, this is tremendous work. In 2017 the council was classed as required improvement and the last report was good so it is looking positive for the next report.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 19th June 2023 at 10am.

The meeting will be held in Shire Hall, Warwick.

The meeting rose at 11:26

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Chair