

Corporate Parenting Panel

Monday 18 November 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

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

Councillor Jeff Clarke – virtual attendance
Councillor Jeff Morgan – virtual attendance
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse – virtual attendance

Officers

Vicki Barnes, Service Manager - UASC & Leaving Care Team
Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Eliza Deng Apprentice Young Advisor
Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People
Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head
Dav Shergill Development Officer
Jo Smith, Service Manager - Fostering & Alternative Carers Support Team

Johnny Kyriacou, Director of Education – virtual attendance
Santosh Dosanjh, Service Manager - UASC & Leaving Care Team – virtual attendance

Others Present

Valerie Corcoran, Designated Nurse Children in Care
Louise Hathaway, Service Manager (ACE)

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Sharon Shaw, Head of Service- Corporate Parenting and Brenda Vincent - Head of Adoption Central England.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

Councillor Marian Humphreys asked for it to be noted that she is a member of the Adoption Panel (in relation to Item 7)

(3) Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes from the meeting held on the 12th September 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record. There were no matters arising.

2. Voice, Influence & Change Team

Melissa Phillips Family Support Worker, Dav Shergill Development Officer and Eliza Deng Apprentice Young Advisor presented the report to the panel highlighting some of the work of the Children in Care Council (CiCC), Care Leavers Forum (CLF) and the Voice, Influence and Change Team (Participation).

Highlights included the following –

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) had guest speakers to talk about the development of some brothers and sisters worksheets that will be used as part of life story work. The CiCC also had discussions around what their key messages would be regarding their education. It was agreed this would be explored further at a future meeting.

The CiCC also discussed family time arrangements, the design of the CiCC website and drug and alcohol awareness.

At the meeting on the 16th October 2024, Andre Russell, Youth Justice Participation Officer spoke to the council about the Police and Crime Plan and how it could be more child friendly. The council will be putting together information to present at the December SLT meeting.

The Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) football team continues to grow and represent Warwickshire proudly with attendance of up to 40 players each week – they may need a second pitch!

In relation to Training Opportunities with Young People Involvement the Voice, Influence and Change team put together a half day training for foster carers allowing them an opportunity to hear from children and young people about what is important to them. The team also ran a workshop at the Foster Carer Conference where foster carers were able to look at examples of memory boxes.

At a Home Office Board Event in October, six young people seeking asylum in Warwickshire attended an event organised by the Home Office in London, alongside other Local Authorities. The Home Office has produced a series of reports from the event including developing new system for Asylum seeking Children and a new report on assessing age.

Over the last 7 months, young people have been involved in interviews in connection with the implementation of the Families First for Pathfinder. Interviews where a young person was invited to sit in on main interviews include Service Manager for Children's Safeguarding Partnership, Safeguarding Nurse and Service Manager for Children with Disabilities.

3. Warwickshire Children's Homes

Sharon Shaw, Head of Service, Corporate Parenting was unable to attend the meeting so this item has been postponed until the next meeting which will be held on 20th January 2025.

It was noted that Warwickshire's new home in the north of the county, Silver Birch will be having a registration inspection on the 27th November 2024.

4. Stability for Children in Care

Sharon Shaw, Head of Service, Corporate Parenting was unable to attend the meeting so this item has been postponed until the next meeting which will be held on 20th January 2025.

5. Performance Data

Nigel Minns, Executive Director for Children and Young People gave an overview of the performance report in the absence of Sharon Shaw, Head of Services, Corporate Parenting Panel, who was unable to attend the meeting.

It was noted by the Panel that the decline in the number of Children in Care in Warwickshire has stopped and that the national trend for this has also stabilised. The total number of children in care on the 18th November 2024 was 643. It was noted that two thirds of the children in care are over ten years old.

In relation to Placement Distance, it was confirmed that there has been a recent report about national concerns that a third of children in care are placed outside their area. The figure for Warwickshire is 20.8%; this figure is much lower than the national figure but there is still room for improvement.

Following a question from Councillor Jerry Roodhouse in relation to the number of missing episodes for children in care, it was confirmed that this number has also reduced recently. There will be a detailed presentation on this topic at the next meeting which will be held on the 20th January 2025.

Councillor Justin Kerridge raised concerns that performance was based around targets which seemed unusual. Nigel Minns agreed that perhaps using benching marking information would be a better option. It would allow Warwickshire to measure performance against statistical neighbours and would flag up any areas that Warwickshire needed to improve in.

6. Report from the Virtual School Head

Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head presented the report to the panel confirming that it covered the Autumn 2024 term.

The following points were highlighted to the panels –

- In relation to formal Kinship Duties, it was confirmed that planning and preparation have been successfully completed, and the Virtual School service is set to implement the additional formal kinship duties soon.
- It was further confirmed that many schools are now on board with the attachment and trauma training offered to them. The Panel noted that this was a very positive step and would benefit a range of children, not just children in care.
- The Enrichment programme at Coventry University ended abruptly in the summer term because of funding and staffing reductions at the university. However, work is already underway planning a replacement programme. The University of Warwick is keen to remain a partner, and the group of Birmingham universities has extended their outreach to include Warwickshire Children in Care.
- Following a question from Councillor Penny-Anne O'Donnell, it was confirmed that drop out rates for post-16 training placements tend to be available around October/November but had not yet been circulated. It was confirmed that as soon as the information is available, it will be shared with the panel.
- In relation to Education, Health and Care plans (EHCP) it was confirmed that the current delay is around finding suitable provision. There is a national shortage of placements. There isn't a delay in completing an EHCP, just in actioning the placement, especially if there is a need to change the plan. The delay is currently 12-24 weeks.

The reported outcomes for Warwickshire Children in Care were highlighted as follows –

- All foundation results are improving and are 10% higher than last year.
- Results for SEND/EHCP children are currently higher than the national figure.
- The results for Key Stage 2 students have been reported as the most stable cohort over the last 12 months and are performing above the national average.
- It was noted that there was no Key Stage 1 data for the above cohort and their attendance due to Covid.

The Chair asked for further information in relation to the 27 children identified as not currently working on a GCSE curriculum. It was confirmed that these children tend to be asylum seeking children or those in special placement schools. Each case will be dependent on the individual's education plan.

In relation to the 2 students who did not sit any GCSE exams over the summer, it was confirmed that one was pregnant and was not attending school. The second student had attended school but did not attend exams.

Following a question from Councillor Caroline Phillips, it was confirmed that the data in relation to NEETs was from the summer period, which can cause the data to look worse than it is due to the summer holidays. Some of the cohort were also Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who wouldn't have been in a position to take up a college course at the time of the report.

It was noted that the number of NEET young people is slowing increasing again after Covid. It was agreed that there would be a deep dive into this and that a report will be brought to a future panel meeting.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report stating that it has been a positive report and a chance to celebrate the success of the children.

7. Adoption Annual Report

Louise Hathaway, Service Manager for Adoption Central England (ACE) presented the report to the panel and confirmed that, currently, there is a very stable workforce.

In relation to the recertification of the DDP awards, it was confirmed that the team has met the first round of requirements and is waiting to hear back on part two. An update will be provided to the panel once the information is available.

The panel was pleased to note that ACE is the best performing adoption agency in the UK. It was also noted that the drop in potential adopters coming forward to adopt is not happening in this area.

The rate of adoption is lower for a variety of reasons, such as being able to keep children within the family. There has been a slight fall in the number of Black and Asian adopters coming forward but this will be a key piece of work for the team.

There is now a therapeutic team in place which the agency is able to generate an income from which has proved helpful and is very cost effective. There are an additional 50 therapeutic providers in place. Work is underway in relation to up-skilling the team so that in the future we can reduce the spend on outside providers.

In relation to the Birth Connection Service, it was noted that there are three staff in place and there are 380 families being supported. This is significant work and has a huge mental health impact. The increase in the use of Special Guardianship Order's has also had an impact on the number of adoptions.

The Chair thanked Louise for the report adding that it is really good to see everything that you do and how much you go above and beyond.

8. Fostering and Alternative Carers Support Team Annual Report

Jo Smith, Service Manager - Fostering & Alternative Carers Support Team presented the report to the team for the period 2023/2024.

It was confirmed that there is recognised national shortage in mainstream foster carer recruitment. However, there is an increase, nationally, in Connected Person Foster Carers (now known as Fostering Kinships). Kinship assessments have also increased.

In relation to Special Guardianship Order's, 22 have been granted over the last 12 months this is comparable to the previous year, showing stability.

It was noted by the panel that there has been an increase in the number of complaints received. This is a positive thing as it shows that people are more aware of the process and confident in raising complaints. Exemption placements are increasing and there is a lot of work behind the scenes in this area. This has led to an increase in using foster carers more where possible.

The panel was pleased to note that there is now a full-time family support worker within the recruitment team. In addition, there has been an increase in the recruitment of flexible foster carers. This is very positive and shows that the new scheme is working. The change in the recording of new recruitment won't reflect in the data until next year but it will be presented to the panel when ready.

It was noted that there has been an increase in private fostering in relation to previous years, this shows that cases are being picked up early and that the professionals are confident in notifying the right people.

To finish, it was confirmed that the team is always trying to think of different approaches, and who we can work with moving forward. It is a challenging climate, and we are doing all that we can. There are financial implications that we need to consider and there is a lot of work at how we can manage financial demand moving forward.

9. Care Leavers Offer and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Offer

Vicki Barnes, Service Manager - UASC & Leaving Care Team and Santosh Dosanjh, Service Manager - UASC & Leaving Care Team presented the report to the panel with the following highlights –

The Local Offer for Warwickshire has been reviewed in partnership with the regional networks. This was a very positive exercise and showed that Warwickshire is currently performing well.

There is a new initiative with Severn Trent water that offers a 70% discount to care experience young people. There are currently 145 care experienced young people living within a Severn Trent area who are now benefiting from this.

Following a question from Valerie Corcoran, Designated Nurse Children in Care it was confirmed that there has been no progress in negotiating with the main energy companies for support similar to that offered by Severn Trent.

The Ongoing support with Employment, Education and training has supported 10 care leavers in starting university this year. This is an increase on last year and the highest number yet. It was noted that one of the university students is currently studying Law in America. The panel wished it to be noted that this was a real credit to the team.

Following information in relation to support with driving lessons, Councillor Marian Humphreys asked how many care experienced young people took the offer of 10 lessons and then went on to pass their driving test. It was noted by the panel that 10 lessons aren't normally enough to pass. The information in relation to Councillor Humphreys question will be circulated to the panel. Santosh Dosanjh confirmed that each case is reviewed individually and if driving would be beneficial to their employment or continuing education, alternative sourcing for additional lessons would be sought.

The panel agreed that the report would be an annual presentation at the panel. Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer, will ensure it is added to the work programme.

The Chair thanked the officers for the report and for attending the meeting. There is a lot of great support in place from the team and is obviously needed.

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

It was confirmed that the following items will be added to the work programme for the panel –

A deep dive into NEET performance – scheduled for 24th March 2025

Nigel Minns Executive Director for Children and Young People confirmed that an extension of the corporate parenting responsibilities is likely to be confirmed today and that this is something that we will need to monitor. It was therefore agreed that the implications of potential reform will be presented at the meeting on the 20th January 2025

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 20th January 2025 at 10am.

Meetings are not webcast and are not open to the public.

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Chair