

Corporate Parenting Panel

Monday 22 March 2021

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Morgan (Chair)
Councillor Peter Gilbert
Councillor Caroline Phillips
Councillor Clive Rickhards
Councillor Pam Williams
Councillor Margaret Bell

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Democratic Services Officer
Shinderpaul Bhangal, Qualifications and Credit Framework Assessor
Andrea Donkin, Fostering Team Apprentice
Ian Donnachie, Children in Care Apprentice
Alisha Howe, Fostering Team Apprentice
Loiri Hurley, Children & Families Social Work Operational Team Leader
Nigel Jones, Child Exploitation and Missing Coordinator.
Nigel Minns, Strategic Director for People
Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head
Sharon Shaw, Service Manager - Corporate Parenting Service
Jeanette Staley, Delivery Lead Social Work Operations Manager

Others Present

Bernadette Bell – South Warwickshire CCG
Angela Richardson – Named nurse for Children in Care SWARK

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Chris Williams. Councillor Margaret Bell replaced Councillor Williams for this meeting.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 18th January 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

2. Children in Care Council - Update

Shinderpaul Bhangal, C&F Social Work Operational Team Leader, presented the update in relation to Children in Care, highlighting the following points –

Over the festive period over forty Christmas trees and decorations were given to young people.

- 41 Christmas meals plus 1 additional meal and 2 long life food hampers were provided to young people
- 18 young parents whose child was celebrating their first Christmas were given a parent and child gift bag.
- An online Santa Claus video was also created wishing young children a Happy Christmas
- 200 food hampers were prepared by a retired foster carer

The Panel noted that three care experienced apprentices undertook the Rees Foundation Fostering Panel training. Care experienced young people had also supported a workshop as part of the SEND virtual conference on co-production, sharing some good examples of where young people have influenced change within Children and Families. Feedback from the session was positive.

It was confirmed that four care experienced apprentices started with Warwickshire County Council in December 2020; and fifth apprentice started in January 2021. It was confirmed that the SEND Team have expressed an interest in supporting an apprentice. The Chair asked if there could be apprentices across the whole of WCC and it was confirmed that conversations are taking place; with a meeting planned for April 2021 to look at the best way forward. Nigel Minns, Strategic Director confirmed that WCC Corporate Board has made a commitment to ask all leaders to get involved with care experienced apprenticeships but that planned meetings had been postponed due to the pandemic. The Panel was pleased to hear that there was a lot of enthusiasm for this across the council.

Liss Phillips, Family Support Worker, was pleased to report to the Panel that the Baby Box project is continuing to develop and that other local authorities are now introducing Baby Boxes. The feedback for the project has been positive. The Panel noted that the British Baby Box project has expressed an interest in working with the WCC project and would be able to offer an element of choice. The Panel noted that this partnership could be the start of other partnerships moving forward; but was keen that the Council kept control of the project.

In relation to the services work with unaccompanied young asylum seekers, it was noted that recent sessions have been held, including “Introduction to Mental Health”, “Peer to Peer Mentoring” and “Relationship and Sex Education”. Umar Teerab, Family Support Worker, stated that there are barriers in these sessions such as the mixing of different cultures, mixing

boys and girls together – what is normal for a YUAS is not normal when they arrive here. Sharon Shaw, Service Manager, confirmed that videos are made in other languages for unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Resolved

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

That the Panel acknowledge the work that continues to take place with young people during the public health crisis.

3. Performance Data

The Panel discussed the performance data as per the report presented at the meeting and noted the following points –

- There has been a decrease in the number of Children in Care for the first time in twelve months. The Chair requested that more up to date information was provided at meetings but acknowledged that there had been some staffing issues during the pandemic. It was noted that sometimes there are issues with when information is ready, and the deadlines for publications – it was agreed that this will be reviewed.
- It was noted that the back log at Family Courts was also reducing as things start to get back on track.
- The Chair raised a question in relation to placement stability and why Warwickshire County Council was performing below the National average. It was confirmed that there had been a significant increase in 16/17year olds entering care for the first time. In particular, December and January caused difficulties problems for the service as foster carers were isolating during pandemic. It was acknowledged that officers have been working hard to address the issues from the last few months; including the support given to families from multi agency teams.
- It was noted that some long-term placements have broken down as a result of the difficulties faced during the pandemic such as home schooling and social restrictions. John Coleman, Assistant Director for Children and Families, confirmed that external fostering provision had been low and as a result had an impact on being able to keep sibling groups together.

Resolved

That the Panel note the content of the performance report.

4. Health Assessments

Angela Richardson, named nurse for Children in Care, presented the report to the Panel which gave information on the quality of the assessments, which were all checked against the benchmark of the national audit standards. The Panel noted that most assessments were reported as good quality.

It was confirmed that work was in progress to develop a teaching package for social workers aiming to work more collaboratively with partnership agencies and ensure a meaningful outcome for children. The recommendations from the recent audit would be considered.

Councillor Pam Williams stated that it was important to start much earlier with health assessments and that early engagement with social workers was key. It was suggested that a Task and Finish Group be set up for members to investigate the result of the audit as well as looking into the impact of the assessment and what actions are taken after the assessment is complete.

Following a question from Councillor Clive Rickhards, it was confirmed that officers will ensure that the recommended improvements are not only made, but also meaningful; there are many layers to the recommendations, some basic, escalating to larger issues.

It was agreed that a Task and Finish Group will be set up.

Resolved

That the Panel note the content of the report and agree to set up a Task and Finish Group to investigate the results of the audit and the actions that are needed.

5. County Lines Presentation

Nigel Jones, Child Exploitation and Missing Co-ordinator presented the report to the Panel and confirmed the definition of exploitation as follows; “when an abuser takes advantage of a young person for their own personal gain and often comes with the promise of something that they desire as a reward and without knowing that they are being exploited”. The Panel noted that one of the biggest challenges faced by officers is when a child or young person does not acknowledge that they are being exploited.

Nigel Jones confirmed that exploitation is a significant issue in Warwickshire and across the country. The increased vulnerability of Children in Care and care leavers means there is a greater threat to exploitation.

Exploitation can be categorised as follows –

- Criminal Exploitation – affecting 64% of exploited children/young people in Warwickshire (40% of the 64% are also involved in county lines)
- Sexual Exploitation – affecting 27% of exploited children/young people in Warwickshire
- Trafficking – affecting 9% of exploited children/young people in Warwickshire
- Modern Slavery – affecting 5% of exploited children/young people in Warwickshire

There has been an increase in cases of exploitation and Youth Violence across the county. It was confirmed that nationally, 22% of children and young people identified as being exploited were children in care or care leavers. It was noted that many of the categories above overlap.

Some common and interconnected vulnerabilities and risks were identified as follows –

- Seeking relationships to fulfil unmet emotional needs
- Placement instability
- Low safeguards
- Financial difficulties
- Trauma/mental health concerns

The Panel noted that simply removing a child or young person from a situation is insufficient. There is a need to identify and work on all underlying issues to resolve the causes of the exploitation.

The following information was shared with the Panel –

As of 31st December 2020;

- 9% of children in care in Warwickshire have been exploited; and account for 13% of all exploited children.
- 12% of care leavers in Warwickshire have been exploited; and account for 6% of all exploited children.
- 7% of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers in Care in Warwickshire have been exploited (UASC is a key 'at risk' group of young people and the council's team is working to identify those who are most vulnerable within this category).
- 45% of young people supported by the council's Child Exploitation and Missing Team are Children in Care.
- 31% of children in care and 60% of identified exploited children in care and care leavers were reported as not being in education; which means a higher risk of exploitation.

It was confirmed that the increase in numbers in Warwickshire is in part to the increase in officer's awareness and understanding of exploitation. Following a question from Councillor Margaret Bell, it was confirmed that there is no data on how many cases are brought to the attention of the team via a child's carer. Many of the children affected by exploitation will have been exposed to it before and training is offered to all carers on what signs to look for. Communication between carers and officers is key to raise awareness of the risk.

Following a question from Councillor Pam Williams, it was confirmed that there are cases where an exploited young person will go on to exploit other children and young people. However, officers will try to avoid unnecessarily criminalising young people who have been exploited and offer them support.

In relation to the placements for exploited children in care the following information was shared with the Panel –

- Foster – 23%
- Residential – 18%
- Supported - 32%
- In county placement – 41%
- Out of county placement – 59%

The Panel acknowledged that placing any child or young person out of county is not ideal and that there is a need to be able to provide wrap around care which can't be done if the child is out of county. Jeanette Staley, Delivery Lead Social Work Operations Manager confirmed that it can be difficult to keep a young person in the county, sometimes they will need to be placed outside of Warwickshire for their own protection.

The Panel learnt that 91% of exploited children in care and care leavers have gone missing from their placement at least once, and that this figure has increase 19% over the last twelve months as the impact of Covid increased some vulnerabilities. Supported Accommodation reported the highest frequency of missing from placement.

The Panel noted that Warwickshire County Council has introduced the Philomena Protocol which is effective national practice for young people missing from care places and allows the sharing of vital information and incidents and good practice initiatives with the aim to reduce the number of incidents.

It was highlighted that there is an Exploitation Transition Worker within the Child Exploitation and Missing Team; recognising that the risk of exploitation doesn't stop at 18 years old/leaving care placements – there is an ongoing need. The role will involve establishing signposting, advocating and supporting all involved.

Following a question from Councillor Margaret Bell, Nigel Jones confirmed that there is longevity to the work done as practitioners; and that officers could be working with young people for 12 - 18 months; working towards reachable moments; being there when they young person reached crisis and we can respond quickly.

Following a question from the Chair, Nigel Jones confirmed that there is data available in relation to performance in comparison with other authorities. Warwickshire County Council officers are confident that the rate of identification and assessment of exploitation situations is higher than the national rate. It was note that an improvement in the rate of identification and the assessment of outcomes will lead to a decline in risk. New plans for the measurement of this have been introduced but as yet, there is no data available.

The Chair drew the item to a close and stated that the Panel would takeaway the importance they need to attach to when children and young people go missing and that that is when they are at their most vulnerable. The Chair thanked the officers for report and confirmed that the Panel endorse and support it.

6. Development of the Work Programme for 2020/2021

The work programme, as attached, was agreed by the Panel.

9. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 12 April 2021 @ 10am.

The meeting will be held virtually via Microsoft Teams.

.....
Chair

This page is intentionally left blank