

Corporate Parenting Panel

Thursday 12 September 2024

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Sue Markham (Chair)

Councillor Marian Humphreys

Councillor Justin Kerridge

Officers

Helen Barnsley, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting

Deena Moorey, Virtual School Head

Others Present

Valerie Corcoran, Designated Nurse Children in Care

1. General

(1) Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Penny-Anne O'Donnell, Caroline Phillips and Jerry Roodhouse.

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

(3) Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes from the meeting on the 25th March 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

There were no matters arising.

2. Voice, Influence & Change Team - Update

There was no presentation at the meeting, but a full report was shared with the panel which covered the period from November 2023 to May 2024. The following points were highlighted to the panel.

- The Chair confirmed that she had attended the Brothers and Sisters Days held in April 2024 and that it had been a very worthwhile day. All the siblings had been very pleased to be able to spend time together.
- It was confirmed that the Refugee Celebration event had been held on the 19th June 2024 as part of the Refugee Celebration week. Over 60 young people attended, and it was a very important event for the young people,
- The football team continue to do well with Warwickshire young people winning the Care Experienced Week Championship Cup tournament in Walsall.
- The panel was reminded of the film production - [Wrong Size Fits All](#) and the Chair asked anyone who hasn't seen the film to please watch it.
- The Chair and Councillor Chris Mills attended the first meeting of the Warwickshire Youth Council; the first one since new members were elected. The council select topics to cover - Health and Wellbeing (including Mental Health), safety in Warwickshire, young people's experience in schools. There will be a report presented at the end of the year to this panel and the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the achievements of the council.

A full list of activities can be found in the report and the panel were pleased to note that they had all been well attended. The panel agreed it was a very positive report and great to see how many people are involved.

Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting added that it is important that the panel sees just how many things young people are involved in and how many opportunities are made available to them.

3. Warwickshire Children's Homes

Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting gave a verbal update to the panel in relation to the Warwickshire Children's Homes.

The following points were noted by the panel –

- All OFSTED inspections of the children's home went well
- Cherry House – currently there are two young people at Cherry House where the plan is to rehabilitate them to be able to go home. One young person should be home by October 2024. The panel noted that there will be ongoing support for the young person, and the family after October 2024.
- Beechwood house – it was confirmed that the home has been registered but not yet inspected. This is a home for one young person who had been housed there, returning from a residential home and saving the council £19k a week.

- New Leamington home – the council is still waiting for the final registration from OFSTED. One young person will be homed in Leamington returning from a residential placement in Liverpool. Support workers will be working with the young person to reestablish a routine. There are quite complex needs.
- Nuneaton home – it was confirmed that the building work is still to be completed but the OFSTED paper work has been submitted

Following a question from Councillor Kerridge, Sharon Shaw confirmed that the aim is to eventually have each home at full capacity and to have been able to bring children back into Warwickshire from outside the area, or from residential, costly, homes within Warwickshire.

The teams are working towards achieving an outstanding inspection report from OFSTED. The hope is that all the Warwickshire homes will be full, outstanding and cost effective. However, the panel was asked to note that in some cases the needs of an individual child may be such that a home is not a full occupancy – it is important to maintain the balance within a home.

The panel was pleased to hear that having these homes in Warwickshire provides a much better relationship for all members of the family. For example, the young person who was previously in Liverpool has been able to see family members much more easily and as a result was able to go home.

4. Performance Data

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

- The number of Children in Care has continued to decrease and is currently 736 – this is the lowest number for some time.
- The council continues to have little control over the number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) arriving in the county. Officers work directly with Kent authorities over the number of children arriving in the country.
- The current reduction in the total number of children in care is evidence that work undertaken by officers is working; there has been an increase in the number of Warwickshire foster carers and there are now fewer children with agency foster carers.
- There has been a slight reduction in the number of children in residential care and regular meetings are held to review each case and their step-down plan.
- There has been an increase in the number of teenagers coming into care, and for some, they have not previously been known to the service.
- Short term stability placements are showing a need for improvement. This is related to the increase of teenagers coming into care – they may have to go into short term emergency care in the first instance – especially if previously unknown to us.

- The long-term stability of placements is improving as is the target for initial health care assessments.
- The data shows that there were 50 episodes of missing from placement/away without authorisation. 26 children had multiple episodes. The panel was reminded that missing doesn't always mean that support workers do not know where the child is.

Following a question from Councillor Kerridge in relation to the aims for long term stability, the panel was informed that long term stability data can be hard to judge because any move is counted, even if this is when a child is adopted or goes home. These would be classed as positive moves, but they are still categorised as a placement move.

Sharon Shaw confirmed that performance review meetings are held regularly to look at each move and to understand the reason/story behind it. This information is passed on to the Department for Education.

It was confirmed that unsuitable accommodation can include prison or sofa surfing. It was further confirmed that many USAC choose to sofa surf with friends or family which is not what officers would ever class as suitable accommodation, but it is what they want to do.

Councillor Morgan asked if there was any way the presentation of the performance report could be reviewed. It is a snap shot of how the service is performing at one point in time; there is no historical information or comparison with statistical neighbours. It was agreed that Sharon would talk to Jamie Wait, Business Intelligence Service Manager (Children & Families) and ask if this additional information would be possible.

Councillor Kerridge requested that more details on individual stories were made available and it was agreed that individual reports would be brought to the panel in the future, where appropriate to address some of the issues raised around performance.

The Chair stated that the report does show that officers are doing a really good job and thanked all the officers involved.

5. Sibling Strategy

Sharon Shaw, Head of Corporate Parenting and Jamie O'Brien, Development Officer presented the report to the panel and shared information via a presentation.

Sharon Shaw provided a background to the report; officers conducted a deep dive into brother and sister relationships of children in care. This was an issue that was raised by the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and the Youth Forum. The issue lay with children and young people in care who weren't living with siblings; either in different placements, or with one staying at the family home. Young people stated that they often do not know why they are in care and do not know why they no longer live with their brothers & sisters. Young people outlined that professionals could better explain this to them, as well as how decisions were made and what work had been undertaken to support them keeping a strong relationship with their brothers and sisters

The panel acknowledged that sibling relationships are often the longest relationships in a person's life with many shared experiences; but that there is also the potential for conflict within those relationships.

The panel learnt that the first issue raised was by children and young people was that they didn't like the word sibling – so the strategy is the brother and sister strategy.

The council team worked with Shelagh Beckett, child care consultant and reviewed the following points –

- Data around siblings living together or apart in Warwickshire
- Family time between siblings
- Feedback from young people with brothers or sisters
- How sibling relationships are promoted in recruitment of foster carers

Following the review key areas were identified for focus over a six-month period. The group included Shelagh Beckett, foster carers and care experienced colleagues. The focus areas are –

- Lack of children's views in assessments
- Children's views of their sibling relationships
- Lack of evidence around explaining decisions to children
- Quality of assessments
- Quality of recording
- Other findings; including no prescribed frequency for family time between siblings, large gaps in data around sibling groups and promotion of sibling groups throughout the recruitment of foster carers.

Jamie O'Brien confirmed that the current data for children in care in Warwickshire shows that 158 children in care live with all their siblings and 138 do not live with any of their siblings

It was confirmed that following this piece of work, officers are confident and hopeful that the strategy will improve assessment, help officers make better decision about children living (or not) living together. There will also be an increase in the direct work with brothers and sisters so that they understand all that is happening. It was acknowledged that making sure that young people's voices are heard as well as supporting the carers and foster carers will be a key point moving forward.

The panel learnt that there are annual residential trips of four days away where brothers and sisters could be together. Foster carers were also invited. These are annual at the moment, but the hope is that they can be more frequent moving forward.

Councillor Humphreys acknowledged that this has been a very important piece of work. In addition, the assessment to make sure that it is right for the siblings to be mixing is essential. Councillor Humphreys confirmed that she has attended brother and sister events and seen how important it is that they have the chance to be together. It is important that the foster parents feel safe as well.

In addition, Sharon confirmed that every local authority should have their own brother and sister strategy. Officers from Warwickshire have been working with the University of East Anglia, Norwich, on the establishment of ongoing family time processes.

Councillor Kerridge thanked officers for the report and congratulated them on using real language and not jargon. Sharon Shaw confirmed that there are plans to do a similar piece of work but a child friendly version; acknowledging the different styles of appropriate language to allow children to get a full understanding of what the aims are.

The Chair concluded that the document is excellent, and it is important to keep sibling relationships going. Very well done to all involved!

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

The standing items for the next meeting were confirmed including the Autumn report from the Virtual School Head.

It was also confirmed that the meeting scheduled for January 2025 will include a report on missing episodes following the earlier discussion. It was also agreed that a stability report, including staff turnover, would be presented in January 2025.

Valerie Corcoran, Designated Nurse Children in Care will send the Philomena Protocol (Safeguarding document) to Helen Barnsley (democratic services) to circulate to the panel ahead of the next meeting in November 2024.

Valerie requested an update from the Children in Care Council and what the agreed priorities are for the year. It was agreed that the Chair would reach out to the CICC and request this information.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 18th November 2024 at 10am.

Meetings are not webcast and are not open to the public

The meeting rose at 15.13

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Chair