

MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 6 September 2012 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), James Halden, Angie Gaywood, Sue Gray, Andrew Roast, Joy Redsell and Charlie Curtis

Apologies: Councillors Mike Revell (Substituted by Andrew Roast) and Lynn Worrall.

In attendance: R. Minto – Service Manager (Placement Support)
P. Coke – Service Manager (Children & Families)
B. Foster – Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes
M. Boulter- Democratic Services

7. MINUTES

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 10 July 2012 were approved as a correct record subject to the addition of a sentence referring to Councillor Halden's request to have a task and finish group relating to increasing Foster Carers pay and the Chair's subsequent reply to wait until the OFSTED inspection at this meeting.

8. ADDITIONAL ITEMS

The Chair announced that he would take two additional items, one on the OFSTED Inspection for safeguarding and one on the Christmas Panto.

9. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Roast declared an interest by virtue that he owned a private day nursery.

Councillor Gaywood declared an interest in relation to 5 by virtue that she sat on the adoption panel.

10. ADOPTION REPORT OUTLINING PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE

The adoption service had received a favourable OFSTED report earlier in the year and the Council had instigated an action plan as a result. The Council also entered into a partnership with an external organisation, called Coram, that was also assessing and providing feedback on the adoption service. The issues that Coram had highlighted for the service were:

- Did the Council recruit widely enough in the community?
- Were there enough ethnic minority adoptive parents available?
- Was the council unconsciously “playing safe” by not making adoption the primary plan for children it would be more challenging to place?

The Council felt it was addressing these points appropriately.

The Committee were also reminded that there were significant legislative changes that were due in November which affected how the adoption process was managed through the court system.

Officers stated that the service tried to keep siblings together but in some cases this was not possible either because there were too many siblings or the needs and profile of the siblings was different. The process of adoption was long and although efforts were made to speed this up, there were a number of legal processes, including requests for specialist reports, which currently protracted the process.

The committee discussed the positive and negative impacts of reducing the adoption process. Officers stated that the reduction targets were government driven and that on average the process of becoming approved as an adopter took about six months from the point of accepting the formal application. Although speed was seen as desirable, Members did agree that workshops and the development side of the process enabled prospective adopters to prepare for the adoption.

The committee learnt that Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) were growing in popularity because they allowed children to enter ‘quasi-adoptions’ until they were eighteen. Children with SGOs maintained a relationship with their birth parents whilst providing them with the stability they needed during the rest of their childhood. It was clarified that 99% of all parental choices relating to a child with an SGO lay with the guardian not the birth parents.

SGOs were preferred in cases where the child was older, and this was one of the original intentions of the legislation. Performance in relation to looked after children leaving care via adoption was adversely affected by our relative success in placing under SGOs.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

11. THURROCK LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN – PROFILE

Councillor Halden requested that subsequent reports go into more explanation of the figures without revealing the identity of the children. Officers agreed to trial this at the next report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

12. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee requested that members of the Foster Carer's Association, Open Door and Children in Care Council be invited to attend the meeting.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The report on Housing for Looked After Children be deferred to March's meeting.**
- ii) The Update on the Foster Service be included in the Foster Care Charter for November's meeting.**

13. TO DECIDE WHETHER TO EXCLUDE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Councillor Halden expressed his concern that the report had been exempt. It was explained that the report had been submitted as exempt under the category for internal council business and had been published as such until clarified otherwise. Officers confirmed that performance indicators were not usually exempt and assured the Committee they would not be submitted as exempt in future.

RESOLVED:

The following report be held in public session.

14. PLEDGE PERFORMANCE REPORT INDICATORS AND DESCRIPTIONS

The OFSTED report had been very good but officers highlighted health as the one issue that had been marked as adequate. The Council had set up an action plan and steering group to improve this aspect of the service.

The reason for this performance on health was due to a number of factors, not least the changing health system. Inspectors felt the Council had not approached this fast changing environment robustly enough.

The committee discussed the pledge to increase access to libraries and officers highlighted that for some children in care, this was an

important skill/ experience to have access to. It was confirmed that children from the age of five onwards had been involved in drawing up the pledges and would be involved in the action plan for the health aspect of the service.

Councillor Halden questioned whether the pledges were realistic and was concerned that the children would be offered unachievable aims. Officers stated that there was an independent reviewing officer to ensure performance indicator sat correctly behind the pledges and also, these were the pledges of the children themselves and so only they could say if the pledges were working or not.

RESOLVED: That:

- i) The Children in Care Council provide an Annual Report as to their activities, which will also include their analysis of the pledge and the Performance Indicators.**
- ii) This report be read in conjunction with any further reports that involved Thurrock's OFSTED Report dated 27th July 2012 and the Department's Action plan.**

15. OFSTED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Officers highlighted Thurrock's performance alongside statistical and geographical neighbours. Thurrock's position was good. An action plan was in place to deliver further improvements and officers confirmed that they were aiming for outstanding in the next assessment. Officers believed that retention of staff and delivering services that the children and families specifically requested would also achieve 'Outstanding' status.

Officers stated that one area the inspection highlighted was that the service's data and records varied from very good quality to poor and this was something the service needed to improve.

Councillor Halden felt that a task and finish group to look into improving foster care was required.

RESOLVED: That

- i) The report be recommended to Cabinet with comments from this Committee to be noted.**
- ii) The staff in the service be congratulated for achieving a good inspection result.**

16. PANTOMIME

Officers briefly appraised the Committee on arrangements for the pantomime event this year. The Committee discussed whether to rent the theatre out for one showing but agreed this could be costly.

RESOLVED that officers liaise with the Thameside Theatre and Foster Carers to discuss viability of booking the theatre for one showing of the pantomime.

The meeting finished at 8.40pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
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or alternatively e-mail mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk**