

**MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 7 March 2013 at 7.00pm**

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**Present:** Councillors Oliver Gerrish (Chair), James Halden, Mike Revell, Joy Redsell, Charles Curtis, Angie Gaywood and Sue Gray.

**Apologies:** Natalie Carter – Open Door

**In attendance:** R. Minto – Service Manager (Placement Support)  
P. Coke – Service Manager (Children & Families)  
K. Crawford – Foster Carer/ One Team  
J. Howell – Foster Carer/One Team  
S. Tuttle – CICC Chair Person  
J. Olsson – Director of People’s Services  
R. Parkin – Head of Housing  
J. Grattidge – Looked After Children’s Nurse - PCT  
M. Boulter- Democratic Services

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**25. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 6 September 2012 were approved as a correct record subject to the deletion of a sentence in item 14 as raised by the director of People’s Services.

**26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Gaywood declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to her son receiving direct disabled support from the Council, as well as her being a member of the adoption panel.

**27. ECONOMIC WELL-BEING FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS**

Officers outlined the Diversity and Apprenticeship Programme, stating that it stemmed from a national initiative called the Care to Work Project. The Programme was steered by a working group, which included cross-disciplinary officers plus the young people themselves, who met to draw up an action plan. A number of changes had been made to the Programme including the widening of the age of participants to 16-24 year olds and the widening of work experience opportunities.

The Committee welcomed the work and explored some of the categories around NEETs (Not in Employment, Education or Training). It was explained that young people with ‘no recourse to public funds’ were asylum seekers whose application to remain in the UK were declined. Officers added that they continued to try and engage with those care leavers who no longer wished to

engage in the service as it was important for the service to at least keep a track of all care leavers' pathways.

In response to a query officers clarified that the reduction in funding for life skills training was a natural method of reducing resources for a service once the initial high costs of establishing the service have been met. It was not a direct response to the budgetary pressures faced by the Council.

**RESOLVED that the Committee support the continuation of the Diversity in Apprenticeship Programme for the year 2013/14.**

## **28. LEISURE ACTIVITIES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

Officers informed the Committee of the leisure activities they offered to Looked After Children and stated that they were working with Impulse Leisure to increase these opportunities. It was planned that an outline of a partnership would be provided to Impulse Leisure for consideration within the next couple of months.

Officers and Members agreed that it was important for the young people to have a say in what activities they wished to do. Representatives from the Foster Carers Association commented that activities were popular and it was very difficult to satisfy every child's wishes but they were successful nonetheless. The representatives thought these activities provided a good opportunity for the children to mix and make friends but also, to allow the wider families a chance to get involved. However, this was an aspect they were keen to increase. The Chair Person of the Children in Care Council invited officers to attend the council's next meeting to discuss their views.

Officers clarified that there was no concessionary prices for looked after children in any leisure activities but the Council would try to obtain reduced rates.

The Committee discussed other issues and highlighted the pantomime as a successful leisure activity and the possibility of collaborating with other councils to provide other specialist leisure activities that Thurrock might not be able to offer individually.

Officers clarified that the Council could and did fund certain school trips, although this was dispensed within reason.

**RESOLVED that the reports is considered and the comments made in the discussion be noted and followed up by officers to enhance the service.**

## **29. HOUSING FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS**

The Council was responsible for reporting on the accommodation of 19 year olds and also 20 and 21 year olds from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013. The Council supported

care leavers in their choice of accommodation and they were given a silver banding status if they applied for council housing.

During debate it was felt that some care leavers would struggle to stay in accommodation and not be able to budget their resources properly. It was also raised that some leavers would not want to leave their foster homes. Officers agreed this was a challenging time for the young people but the Council could not financially afford to support the children and the service had to sympathetically explore the options with each care leaver.

The Committee discussed some of the categories that were applied to some care leavers. 'Unsuitable Accommodation' included staying on friends' sofas or staying in a bed and breakfast. Care leavers who went missing were generally asylum seekers who wished to go missing because they had no recourse to public funds or right to remain in the UK.

The Committee was informed that any care leaver applying for discretionary housing payment would be assessed fairly and in accordance with the rules that applied to everyone. The Housing Department was aware of the welfare reform and its impact and gave assurances that the Council wanted to sustain tenancies and avoid eviction until a final option.

Other issues that were clarified during debate were:

- The allowance of £1200 given to leavers when they found a new home was strictly controlled by the Council.
- The Council rented twelve private properties which were used to house care leavers as interim measures between other accommodation.
- The Essex Savers initiative should be promoted to care leavers to help them save and spend wisely and avoid lone sharks.

**RESOLVED: That:**

- i) Members support discussions to take place internally within Children's Services to discuss the prospect of raising the level of setting up home allowance.**
- ii) The report is noted.**

### **30. ADOPTION REPORT OUTLINING PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE**

Officers confirmed that the Council had been successful in obtaining the adoption improvement grant and this money would be spent on a comprehensive training programme. Officers were also confident that the performance indicators for the service would be significantly improved by the end of the year.

Committee discussed service levels and officers confirmed that there was a steady influx of adoption enquiries. There could always be more but the level of enquiry was meeting national expectations.

**RESOLVED that the Committee are satisfied with the criteria of management, outcomes and conditions of registration.**

### **31. HEALTH OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

The Committee explored the recommendations of the OFSTED board and queried whether the term 'should' was a strong enough term to use. Officers reassured the Committee that the recommendations were paramount for the services and the achievement of them were a 'must'.

Health Passports were discussed and it was stated that they were meant for the child themselves, rather than the carer, although the need for the carer to have access to health information was noted as an issue to resolve.

**RESOLVED That the report is noted.**

### **32. CO-OPTING OF ADDITIONAL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE**

Councillor Revell felt that the co-opting of members onto the committee was unconstitutional and requested that legal advice be given on this issue. The Democratic Services Officer explained that the Committee had requested the co-opting of people on the Committee and that this was permissible in the constitution as was demonstrated in the Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair put the recommendations to a vote.

Four were in favour of the recommendations, two were against and one abstained. The recommendations were carried.

**RESOLVED: That the Committee agree the following representatives to be co-opted onto the committee in accordance with the report:**

- **Chair and Vice-Chair of the Foster Carers Association**
- **Chair and/or Vice-Chair of the Children in Care Council**
- **A nominated representative from Open Door**

### **33. MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS**

The Committee accepted the Director of People's Services suggestion of partaking in a peer review to seek feedback on the Committee's performance and direction in its first year.

The Chair also raised that Councillor Halden had requested an additional report on placements and this would be received at a reconvened meeting in the near future.

**The meeting adjourned at 8.46pm.**

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](mailto:mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk)**