

MINUTES of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 5 September 2013 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), James Halden, Mike Revell, Joy Redsell, Victoria Holloway (Substituting for Charles Curtis), Angie Gaywood, Lynn Worrall (left at 8.25pm) and Sue Gray.

K Crawford – Foster Carer/ One Team
J Howell – Foster Carer/ One Team
S. Tuttle – CICC Chair Person

Apologies: Councillor Charles Curtis

In attendance: P. Coke – Service Manager (Children & Families)
B. Foster – Head of Children’s Social Care
R. Minto – Service Manager (Placement Support)
C. Littleton- Director of Children’s Services
M. Boulter- Democratic Services Officer

7. MINUTES

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 13th June 2013 were approved as a correct record.

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Gaywood declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to item 5 by virtue that she was a member of the Adoption Panel.

9. ADDITIONAL ITEMS – FOSTERING RECRUITMENT STRATEGY AND PEER REVIEW

The Chair informed the committee that she had requested an additional item relating to fostering recruitment. Officers informed Members that they had refreshed the recruitment strategy to include a number of new initiatives including additional smaller open evenings in different localities, new posters and radio advertising.

The Committee were largely impressed with the strategy and endorsed it. Some Members raised a concern that the plan was vague in parts and that the financial implications did not detail the full impact of using agency foster carers. Officers confirmed that agency carers cost around £100 more a week than Council foster carers and that the Council was regularly audited by an

organisation that benchmarked the Council's costs with others. Thurrock's costs were not at odds with many other local authorities. In relation to the strategy itself, officers assured Members that they worked collaboratively with the Council's communications team and they had been impressed with the level of understanding of their communications colleagues.

The Committee learnt that existing foster carers got involved in recruitment by attending open evenings. They felt that the increase in payments would help attract more potential carers and that existing carers were reasonable happy with the increase.

The Committee discussed how the Council measured the success of certain campaigns and it was explained that the service tried numerous different campaigns throughout the year and were able to monitor their success through the origin of serious enquiries. It was added that potential foster carers often engaged with a number of different agencies and campaigns before they decided to become a carer.

RESOLVED That the Committee support the work undertaken to recruit new foster carers for the Authority.

The Committee also received an update on the potential Southend led peer review. Unfortunately, the officer willing to undertake the review was leaving their post at Southend. It was planned that another qualified officer would be sought to head the team of Southend councillors to undertake the review.

10. ADOPTION REPORT OUTLINING PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE

Central government had given adoption a very high profile and it was possible that a separate national body would be created to deal with adoptions. The Council had been able to make speedier and more decisive action in relation to adoption cases. However, it was the case that the number of adopters available was not increasing significantly.

Councillor Gaywood, in her position as a member of the Adoption Panel, highlighted that she had seen an increase in people wanting to be adopters and being approved. Officers added that special guardianship orders were also being used to remove children from the care system and into a home.

Officers confirmed that all adopters were offered an adoption support plan, which sometimes included financial assistance depending on the needs of the child. The plans were also important if the courts had ruled that a child had to maintain contact with their birth families.

It was clarified that there were no national targets for adoption.

RESOLVED that the Committee is satisfied with the criteria on management, outcomes and conditions of registration.

11. PARTICIPATION AND THE VOICE OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Committee was informed that the Children in Care Council had made their comments on the pledge that informed the service's ethos. A check of birth certificates and passports had been made and found that just under 50% of looked after children had these documents. This was affected by the number of asylum seekers who were in care and who had arrived in the UK without documentation. The role of checking documentation would be down to the independent reviewing officers and it was planned to involve young people in the future recruitment of these officers.

The Committee discussed the level of children leaving care and going on to benefits. It was recognised that the culture of claiming benefits was ingrained in some of the children's lives and it was the duty of the service to ensure they accessed the benefits system, like any other person, if they found it difficult to find work. This was highly likely in some cases where the child had behavioural difficulties.

There was a care package for any child that went on to higher education.

RESOLVED that:

- I) Further work be undertaken with team managers and Independent Review Officers in ensuring children and young people have their documentation such as birth certificates and passports.**
- II) The work of the Participation and Engagement Champion's Group be developed further.**
- III) All staff are aware of the new Ofsted inspection framework for looked after children and care leavers.**

12. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the current work programme.

13. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That the meeting go into exempt session to consider the following report.

14. INFORMATION ON RECENT EXTERNAL PLACEMENTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Members welcomed the report stating that it helped them understand the reality and reasons behind placements. All agreed that instead of noting the

name of the companies, it would be better to use the government categories of type of care so that the Committee could understand what care was being provided within the placement.

Members briefly discussed the robustness required to choose placements and officers stressed that sometimes they only had one option to house a child in a relevant placement. It was added that the Council was audited on the quality of the placements they made and if they placed a child in a placement that was low performing, the council would receive a low performing status also.

The Council did not encourage placement providers to establish themselves in Thurrock as this would lead to an influx of other children into the area, which would become the council's responsibility and be a significant financial burden to the service.

The Members looked at a number of the highlighted cases and learnt that all cases were reviewed regularly and there was every chance a child could return to Thurrock, although each case was complex and beholden to a variety of factors. It was important to maintain stability with the placement as this often improved the child's chances of progress.

If a child was not happy with their placement for legitimate reasons a discussion would take place to try and resolve this and seek an alternative placement. If a child was in danger they would be removed from a placement immediately.

The meeting finished at 9.07pm.

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIRMAN

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Matthew Boulter, telephone (01375) 652082,
or alternatively e-mail mboulter@thurrock.gov.uk**