

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 10 January 2017 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), Leslie Gamester (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Jan Baker, Martin Kerin (arrived 7.05), Joycelyn Redsell and Aaron Watkins (Substitute) (substitute for Sue MacPherson)

Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association  
Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association

**Apologies:** Councillor Sue MacPherson  
Natalie Carter, Open Door  
Christina Day, Children in Care Council

**In attendance:** Paula Gregory, Designated Nurse  
Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services  
Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care  
Alan Cotgrove, Business Manager, Local Safeguarding Children's Board  
Roger Edwardson, Interim Strategic Leader School Improvement, Learning and Skills  
Angela Grant, Independent Reviewing Officer  
Neale Laurie, Safeguarding and Child Protection Coordinator & LADO  
Paula McCullough, Commissioning Officer, Children's Services  
Jenny Shade, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

### **18. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 4 October 2016 were approved as a correct record.

### **19. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **20. Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **21. Information on Recent External Placements for Young People**

The Officer presented the report that updated Members on the range of issues regarding the placement choices made for Children Looked After for the period 10 June and 30 November 2016.

The Officer referred members to comparison data within the report which included:

- The increase in the number of the looked after children within this period. The Officer stated that the number of Children Looked After since the report had been published had been reduced from 350 to 327.
- The decrease in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers. The Officer stated that the decrease in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers would be due to the closure of the asylum camp in Paris and with the introduction of the Eastern Region Transfer Protocol.
- The comparative rate for Thurrock was 62.6 compared to the national rate of 60.0. The Officer stated that this figure did not include the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- The increase in the number of children under the age of one in this period.
- The increase in the number of children between the age 12-15 and 16+.
- The reduction in residential care.
- The approval of 6 new in-house foster carers with further assessments in place.

The Officer stated that work continued on the recruitment of foster carers and that work with iMPower was ongoing dealing with the challenges of Children Looked After that have been placed outside the borough.

Councillor Redsell asked Officers for clarification on the increase of children under the age of one. The Officer stated the number had increased due to the drive to swiftly place children permanently and accounted for those babies up for adoption.

Councillor Redsell stated that the 49 Councillors should be used to promote the recruitment of foster carers with leaflets being tabled at Full Council. The Officer agreed and had been working with the communications team on how best to use Councillors and employees to increase the number of potential foster carers.

The Chair asked Officers if the 6 new in house foster carers was an improved figure compared to last year. The Officer stated that this overall was not the case but the direction of travel was right and that foster carers were being used more effectively.

The Chair asked for the opinion of a foster carer on the changes that have been made. Jackie Howell stated that there were no longer levels of foster carers and that all carers were expected to take in emergency placements. Jackie Howell had concerns though that these emergency placements had to be in the interest and safety of children that were already in situ. She had an

understanding of the expectations of foster carers and had received good support. The Officer agreed with the comments made and that dialogue with foster carers would continue to ensure that the right matches were made and that support continued.

## **RESOLVED**

**That the members of the committee note the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate resources for looked after children, including our more difficult to place children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.**

### **22. Thurrock Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LSCB), Serious Case Review (SCR) Report - James**

The Officer presented the report that included a summary which was provided to the Local Children's Safeguarding Board. The Officer stated under regulation 5 of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board Regulations 2006 set out the requirements for Local Safeguarding Children's Board to undertake this serious case review and to learn from the findings. The report was published on the Thurrock web site from the 1 December 2016 and will remain on there for 18 months. The same report will be published on the NSPCC national website.

All members agreed that the findings of this report were tragic and heart rendering to read.

The Officer stated there were 6 findings and 16 recommendations in the report that will be drawn up as an action plan and be will reviewed and presented to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February.

Councillor Redsell stated that practitioners, social care and education had to work together and learn from the mistakes made. The Officer stated that schools already form part of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and would be involved in all the proposals.

Councillor Kerin asked Officers whilst James was in school what may have been picked up to have encouraged him to stay in education. The Officer confirmed that James had a real focus in music but James had been reluctant to engage on any courses. James had received continued support and social workers had made every effort to help him gain employment or further education.

The Officer stated that those drawn into gangs would not care if you had a good education or not and that work continued with the Youth Offending Service to identify the long term consequences of gang life.

Councillor Watkins asked that based on the circumstances could James been picked up earlier as a Child Looked After. The Officer stated that there were

no issues with the family and that engagement with them had continued throughout.

Councillor C Baker stated that pressures from gangs may have contributed to his death. The Officer stated that the review was recorded as an open verdict so unfortunately this may never be known. That work with the Youth Offending Service continued on educating young people on exit routes from gangs.

The Officer stated that James had not appeared on the Intelligence and Gang Matrix and that intelligence sharing was vital across boundaries to keep track of gang memberships.

Councillor Redsell stated that the Police and Crime Panel were looking at how gang activities could be addressed and disrupted before they took hold.

The Chair asked Officers how recommendations worked for those allocated to other local authorities. The Officer stated that the counterparts in these local authorities would on behalf of Thurrock Council ensure that action were being done and report back to Thurrock so that the action plan could be updated.

Councillor Gamester asked what the timescales were following up with these actions. The Officer stated that the board was proactive with the review of the serious care review group meeting every six months. Updates from agencies were received within the appropriate timescales.

*Alan Cotgrove left the committee room at 7.45 pm.*

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee scrutinised the report of the Local Children's Safeguarding Board, its findings and its recommendation.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Committee track progress by Children's Services in responding to the recommendations of the review.**

### **23. Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service**

The Officer presented the report that provided Members with an update on progress made with the development and performance of this new service with a specific focus on support for Children Looked After. That mental health services were on a significant transformation journey that would take time and that the transfer from four providers across Thurrock, Southend and Essex into one had been complex. The Officer stated that the new components were now in place and had already seen a doubling of young people being supported. Communications with stakeholders was ongoing and the service had been presented to a number of partnerships.

The Officer stated that the “Open Up, Reach Out” had key ambitions for the first stage of the transformation, these were:

- Improving access and equality
- Building capacity and capability in the system
- Building resilience in the community

The Officer briefly updated members on the performance and waiting time targets.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the report and the achievements made so far.

The Chair asked Officers what reassurance could be given that waiting times would be met based on the increased demand. The Officer stated that providers delivered evidence based therapies over a shorter period of time with a wraparound support package working in partnership with health, social care and education to ensure those children in the system got well and left the system. A risk register would be developed for those individuals where concern had been identified and to bring them back into the system if necessary.

Councillor Redsell asked how many schools were being trained. The Officer stated that a bespoke training pilot will be undertaken with Tilbury Pioneer School and evaluated and then offered to all schools. The number will depend on how many of the schools take up the training.

Councillor Redsell asked for clarification on where the contact details can be found for the children’s crisis teams. The Officer stated that this number was openly available and through the NELFT service. The Officer confirmed that based on the referrals coming to Thurrock it was evident that this number was known.

Councillor Watkins asked whether the numbers being recorded with mental health problems that had frequently been unnoticed or ignored had now decreased based on the work that had been undertaken. The Officer stated that a lot of work was being undertaken with schools to ensure that early identification was in place.

Councillor Watkins asked Officers what process would be in place to teach parents about social media apps. The Officer stated that this was beyond the scope of this report and that the local safeguarding children board would concentrate on this but would be dependent on parental up take.

The Officer stated that training sessions on “Walk the Line” for children and “Stranger Danger” for adults were available, alongside the digital safety magazine for foster carers.

Paula Gregory asked Officers if there had been any increase in the number of referrals for Children Looked After. The Officer confirmed there was no

significant increase and this was a compliment to work undertaken by foster carers.

Councillor Kerin stated that he was pleased with the training being undertaken in schools but asked Officers what steps could be taken to be ahead of the game with social media apps. The Officer stated that this was beyond the scope of this report but the monitoring of apps would continue and training materials would continually be updated.

The Officer stated the Local Safeguarding Children's Board ran annual workshops that were presented by experienced Police Officers who had updated knowledge of key social media apps and websites. The Officer agreed to send dates for "Stranger Danger" training to all Members.

Councillor Redsell stated that focus should be on those children that would be transitioning from primary to secondary school. The Officer stated that this was already in the work stream to reach out to those vulnerable children and offer support.

## **RESOLVED**

**That the members request a presentation from the new provider on the specific needs of looked after children and the impact the service has had on the wellbeing of children in care.**

*Paula McCullough left the committee room at 8.15 pm.*

### **24. Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2015-16 - clarification regarding children's voices being heard**

The Officer presented the report that was requested by members on the 13 October 2016 Corporate Parenting Committee that examples be recorded of the activities undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to ensure that children's voices are heard within the Children Looked After process.

The Officer stated that participation of children and young people in their reviews was good and continued to be an area of growth to ensure the voice of the child was heard. Observations of those that cannot verbally communicate and those of children, young people and parents when undertaking a review was a vital part of the Independent Review Officer role. The Officer continued to present to Members with some examples of child and parent behaviour whilst observing some recent reviews. All Members thanked the Officer for these.

The Officer confirmed that the Independent Review Officer stayed with a Children Looked After until they were out of care.

The Officer stated that foster carers could complete a booklet called "My Life" on behalf or with children and young people in their care.

The Chair asked for clarification on the number of children that did not attend their review and what plans were in place to ensure they attended in the future. The Officer stated that this was dependent on the age of a child, those that attended but were not verbalised and adolescents who do not always want to engage.

The Officer stated that within three days of a child coming into care they will be presented with a card that listed all the names, photos and contact details of all the Independent Review Officers. Foster carers were encouraged to use these and displayed them in their homes so that their Children Looked After would know who their Independent Reviewing Officer was and how they could contact them.

Jackie Howell stated that Children Looked After should be given the opportunity to attend a review but this must be at the best interests of that child. Some children may engage more than others but all should be given the chance to attend and speak.

Councillor Watkins asked what the follow up process would be for those that did not attend a review and for those Children that did not speak in reviews. The Officer stated that each case would be treated on an individual basis and relied on a child stating what reviews they would like to attend. The service would rely heavily on foster carers and social workers who knew a child well to understand when they were ready to attend a review.

## **RESOLVED**

**That the Corporate Parenting Committee to satisfy itself that children are included and are encouraged to engage in the care planning process/Looked After Reviews.**

*Angela Grant and Neal Laurie left the committee room at 8.37 pm.*

## **25. Performance Dashboard**

The Officer introduced the report and stated that the Performance Dashboard was created to set out and provide members with a range of performance data and measures for Children's Social Care. An Improvement Plan Overview Group had been established to provide an additional layer of oversight and challenge to ensure Officers maintain high ambitions for the service and improvements are implemented with pace.

All members agreed that it was a comprehensive report that should continue to be presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee in its current format. The Chair commented that at a glance information should be added to the dashboard.

Paula Gregory asked Officers whether information on health assessments should be included in the performance dashboard. It was agreed by Officers

and Members that the health assessment report should stand independently and be reported on separately away from the performance dashboard.

Councillor Redsell asked Officers for clarification on what happened when the 20 unaccompanied asylum seeking children had left care. The Officer stated that there was a robust process in place which included the unaccompanied asylum seeker either:

- Leaving care.
- Moving outside the borough and would follow the transfer route and be the responsibility of that local authority.
- Go missing nationally and would follow the national referral mechanism and that the Police would be notified.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee consider if the current Dashboard covers the areas that the committee wishes to focus on and identifies any other areas for scrutiny.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Committee received assurance as to the current functioning and performance of Children's Social Care.**
- 3. That the Corporate Parenting Committee identified any areas that they would require a "deep dive" analysis of.**

## **26. Educational Attainments of Children Looked After**

The Officer presented the report that stated that raising achievement in all areas of education for Children Looked After remained a key priority for Thurrock Council and that the Virtual School monitored and supported the educational progress and outcomes for Children Looked After irrespective of where they are placed in or out of borough. The Officer explained that the Virtual School was responsible for pupils aged between 3 years and 18 years and that included those children who had left care during an academic year.

The report included provisional outcomes for all pupils in the Virtual School cohort for the academic year 2015-16 and the year groups reported on were:

Early Years – Foundation Stage

Year 1 (6 year old)

KS1 (7 year old)

KS2 (11 year old)

KS4 (16 year old)

The Officer explained that the Good Level of Development measure was awarded at the end of the early years foundation stage and how performance compared of Thurrock Children Looked After against national and Thurrock non-Children Looked After pupils.



The Officer stated that year on year improvements had been made but the results were not where they should be for Children Looked After. The Officer referred Members to the Children Looked After outcomes against the total cohort and the outcomes for the 19 eligible Children Looked After students who were entered for GCSE for clarification.

Councillor Redsell thanked the foster carers for all the good work done.

Councillor Kerin echoed Councillor Redsell comments and asked Officers how many Children Looked After were there in pre-school setting. The Officer confirmed that this was a small number and that each child would have a personal education plan prepared and would be monitored under the early years service.

The Chair asked Officers how the performance of Children Looked After placed outside the borough was being monitored. The Officer stated that this was challenging and placements locally would be preferred so that they Thurrock Children Looked After could be monitored and schools challenged more if placed in a Thurrock school.

The Officer stated that the performance of Thurrock Schools was tremendous and the virtual school and the Council would continue to work with schools and families. The aim is to build up resources of foster carers so that Children Looked After can be kept close to Thurrock and would do the utmost that all Thurrock children get the benefits from Thurrock schools.

Councillor Redsell asked how many Children Looked After were home tutored. The Officer agreed to supply this figure to members.

## **RESOLVED**

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee notes the provisional outcomes of the summer 2016 tests and examinations and commends the pupils their schools and parents/carers on their achievements.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Committee recognises that data cannot be compared to previous years due to a change in curriculum and assessments (particularly at Key Stage 1 and 2).**
- 3. That the Corporate Parenting Committee recognises that the cohorts of pupils are small and that this should be considered when comparing year on year data.**
- 4. That the Corporate Parenting Committee recognises that the length of time in care can affect the progress and outcomes of the pupils.**

## **27. Work Programme**

Members agreed to add the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service Report to the work programme for the 9 March 2017 committee.

Officers agreed to table for Members the “Suicide Prevention Guidance” for the 9 March 2017 committee.

**The meeting finished at 9.00 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact  
Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**