

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 6 September 2017 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Bukky Okunade (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Jan Baker, Leslie Gamester, Martin Kerin and Joycelyn Redsell
- Natalie Carter, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Joseph Kaley , Children in Care Council
- Apologies:** Councillors Sue MacPherson (Chair), Christina Day and Sharon Smith
- In attendance:** Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Care and Targeted Outcomes
Paul Coke, Service Manager for Children and Families
Andrew Osei, Service Manager for Placements
Paula Gregory, Designated Nurse for Looked after Children Thurrock CCG
Keeley Pullen, Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After
Kenna-Victoria Martin, 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.

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on the 9 March 2017 were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

Councillor Okunade, Vice-Chair of the Committee, informed Members she had allowed an item of urgent business and invited the Corporate Director of Children's Services to present the report.

The Corporate Director of Children's Services addressed Members advising them at a previous meeting it was agreed that the Committee should receive regular performance data. He commented that it was important that Members of the Committee were aware of the performance of the service as it enabled them to challenge officers and to ensure they were aware of what was happening.

The key issues were highlighted to Members in that:

- Thurrock had one of the highest rates of Looked after Children in the eastern region. The borough had seen a rise in the number of Looked after Children to 350 plus during the last year; however that had since reduced to 320. This was particularly down to the reduction of unaccompanied asylum seeker children, which were now under 40 from 103, due to the work on the Eastern Region transfer Protocol and the work Officers had completed within the eastern region. It was commented that the council would be at their expected rate for unaccompanied children by September 2018.
- There was an underlining pressure in the high volume of Care Proceedings, which were taking place. In particular the number of young children and babies coming into the care system had risen.
- 93% of Looked after Children reviews had been completed on time. This included the difficulty of completing reviews on time for older children and unaccompanied asylum seeker children. The Corporate Director of Children's Services assured the Committee that all statutory reviews had been completed.
- 12 adoptions had been completed this year and officers were hopeful that more would be completed. It was explained that a full report on adoptions would be reported to the Committee later in year.
- Members were notified that the Council were increase recruitment for Foster cares in the borough.

The Vice-Chair enquired as to performance regarding return interviews for children missing from placements. The Assistant Director of Children Services advised that Open Door had been commissioned to undertake these interviews and there was a procedure in place. There was room for improvement and data around the levels of children for whom interviews were carried out would be provided to Members in future.

Councillor Kerin asked why there was a gap between the number of placements in-borough and outside of the borough, and what steps were being taken to continue to improve. The Committee heard that it was important to place as many children as possible within Thurrock to allow access to Thurrock schools and services. Local placements also reduced the need for social workers to spend precious time travelling outside of the borough for visits. A continuous rise in unaccompanied asylum seekers had contributed to the increase in placements outside of the borough, usually semi-independent placements in London. This had begun to shift but a key development was the recruitment of local carers which enabled more children to be placed locally. There was more to be done.

Councillor Kerin asked when an update might be received and it was confirmed that a report would be presented at each Committee meeting outlining the data but a report describing the work to date, trends in data and progress could also be presented either in December or March.

RESOLVED:

Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the update.

3. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Kerin declared a non-pecuniary interest in that his wife worked in a Local Authority School.

4. The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After - Academic Year 2015-2016

The Headteacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After introduced the report which detailed the provisional outcomes for all pupils in the Virtual School cohort for the academic year 2015-2016 and the ratified data which had been recently provided by the DFE Statistical First Release, highlighting the attainment of pupils placed in care for longer than 1 year.

Councillor Kerin was pleased to see the Progress 8 score and asked whether the current cohort was on course to improve the figures. The data provided was for the 2016 cohort. The 2017 cohort had achieved better but the DFE had not yet provided the measures. The guidance for schools document advised that it would be difficult to gauge what their Progress 8 score would be and the DFE were not looking to make firm predictions until 2019. The year 11 GCSEs had been very impressive, 20% of the entire cohort attained 5 A-C, having been in care for a year or more. There were only 25 pupils moving from year 10 into year 11, preliminary predictions were that their results might not be quite as good as this year's due to the nature of the cases.

The Vice-Chair asked for clarification around the discrepancy in figures in section 3.2.4 of the report. Members heard that 2 students attended special needs schools and therefore did not participate in the KS2 SAT. 2 children had not been in care for more than one year and therefore did not meet the criteria for the DFE return.

The Vice-Chair queried section 4.4 of the report which implied that Children Looked After could not cope with attainment 8 and why the council did not have the same aspiration. Members heard that not all students would be entered for 8 GCSEs therefore could not achieve Progress 8. Schools only entered pupils for subjects where they were confident a pupil would obtain a grade, timetables were tailored to ensure the best outcomes. The Service would continue to push for higher achievement but was cautious as they did not want to dishearten pupils. Vocational subjects and B-Techs did not qualify as a GCSE result. The Vice-Chair felt that the blanket statement was too generalised and it was wrong to imply that Children Looked After could not cope.

Councillor Kerin asked whether there were any schools where more or less Looked After Children were entered for 8 GCSEs. Looked After Children

were quite widespread across the borough but generally those in mainstream schools had a better chance of obtaining progress 8 than those in alternative provision, however the key aim was to provide the best outcomes for post-16 pathways. There were varying other factors to influence these figures but mainstream schools on the whole aimed to achieve Progress 8.

Councillor Kerin asked for a breakdown of the data to see how Looked After Children were progressing in line with national averages and the difference between mainstream schools and alternative provisions. It was outlined that any such data would be highly contextual and it would be hard to compare given the measures used.

The Service Manager for Permanence for added that as a Local Authority and a Corporate Parent Thurrock had clear aspirations for its children, individually and as a whole. Thurrock was working with agencies to challenge and push all Thurrock's young people and Looked After Children.

Councillor Watkins referred to page 38 of the agenda and the fact that 83% of Looked After Children in Year 11 attended provision outside of the borough. He asked whether these were also living outside of the borough or commuting to school, and how much communication there was with those schools and relevant Local Authorities. Members were advised that, from last year's data, those pupils in out of borough schools were also in out of borough placements; where possible pupils were kept in a Thurrock School. Those out of borough schools were visited once a term and Local Authorities were contacted if needs be such as in the case of education health and care plans. Students' attendance was monitored regardless where they were placed but the biggest challenge the service faced was visiting children placed outside of the borough if they refused to attend. Face to face contact was more difficult but the service was aware and addressed issues accordingly.

The Vice-Chair asked for more information regarding the governing body. The Governing body had been put in place the previous academic year to improve lines of accountability. The Governing body provided a complementary reporting mechanism allowing the service to focus on Looked After Children and areas which needed development.

RESOLVED:

1. The Corporate Parenting Committee notes the verified DFE outcomes of the summer 2016 tests and examinations and comments the pupils, their schools and parents/carers on their achievements. In particular, that Thurrock CLA has performed above national CLA performance indicators in all areas.

2. The Corporate Parenting Committee approves the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for the academic year 2015-2016 and uses this information to acknowledge, evaluate and if appropriate, challenge the services that are provided for all CLA.

5. Health of Looked After Children

The Designated Nurse for Looked after Children of Thurrock's CCG presented the report which updated Members of the Committee on the national and local data regarding the health status of Thurrock's Looked after Children. It was further explained that the report focused on new initiatives and developments to improve health outcomes for Thurrock's Looked after Children.

She continued to comment on the demographic of Looked after Children placed outside of the Borough, which could at times impact on the health needs of Children as it meant relying on other Local Authorities to complete health assessments and this made it difficult to meet statutory deadlines. It was confirmed that the process was monitored on a regular basis by not only the Local Authority but also the provider organisation and the CCG.

Members were notified of the improvement work undertaken around the strength and difficulties questionnaire. The Designated Nurse for Looked after Children of Thurrock's CCG explained there was a Looked After Children Steering Group, which met monthly, to discuss those children who had a high strength and difficulties questionnaire score. The Looked After Children Steering Group met to ensure there was a clear plan of care for those children and to monitor them closely.

The Committee heard that GP involvement had been highlighted by the CQC, following which there was now a form for GPs to complete before a health assessment. It was explained that GPs held a lot of information and so they were now being incorporated into the assessments.

Councillor Kerin thanked officers for the report and the work they were doing. He commented that it appeared the work was harder to complete with children who were placed outside of the Borough. He queried how much of an impact it had on the workload of officers compared to Children living in Thurrock. It was agreed that it made it more difficult; however there were robust notification systems in place, with a weekly Looked After Children list from the Local Authority. As soon as a child was moved to outside of the borough, the team would contact the Looked After Children team at the Authority where they are based. Along with a health assessment which was to be completed by the relevant team, communication across all parties was kept to a high level.

The Service Manager for Placements commented that there was a cohort of Children who were settled in their placements outside of Thurrock and to move them back in the borough was not an option. He further stated that the planning behind placements was important and that children should only be placed out of borough when it was truly necessary.

Councillor Gamester asked if, in some cases children were placed hundreds of miles away from their local area, was it also the responsibility of that Local Authority as to their care. Officers confirmed the process was to share the details with the Looked After Children team in the area they were living, it

would also be up to them to complete all of the health assessments although this would be funded by Thurrock. She explained that if it were in the best interest of the child that a member of the health team from Thurrock was to go out to complete a visit then this would be done. It was confirmed that officers from Thurrock had complete oversight of all their children, regardless of where they were placed; this included quality checking assessments.

Councillor Watkins sought confirmation of GP contributions to the health assessments process. He asked how often they were routinely requested to supply information prior to a child being seen for their health assessment. The Designated Nurse for Looked after Children of Thurrock's CCG explained they would be asked to complete the form ahead of each assessment and the information provided by GP would inform the person undertaking the assessment of, recent GP attendances, medication and or if any, concerns.

The Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association enquired as to why, for the yearly health assessment, GPs were requested to complete a form prior to the assessment instead of speaking to the Foster carers as they should know all about the children who are in their care. It was advised that not all children were in foster placements and it was felt it was important to receive such information from the GPs. It was explained that it was a recommendation of the CQC to include GPs, as the primary record holder into the health assessment process.

RESOLVED:

The Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee note this report.

6. Information on Recent External Placements for Young People

The Service Manager for Families and Children introduced the report which provided Members with an update on a range of issues regarding the placement choices made for Looked After Children.

Councillor Redsell asked if any 16-18 year olds were staying with their foster carers. There were around 5 young people in the Council's 'Staying Put' Policy, staying with foster carers. There were clear, robust plans around that to assist young people through transition into their own accommodation.

It was enquired if the Council was doing anything to help 16-18 years to stay with their foster carers as it was difficult for young people to find their own accommodation. It was explained there was no expectation for young people to leave care at 16 years old; it was made clear that the expectation was for young people, if possible, to stay in their placements until they were 18 years old.

Officers continued to explain that between the ages of 16 and 17 young people were shown and taught the independent skills they would need to live on their own. Members were further notified that the council had supported accommodation at Clarence Road which would be used to assist with the

transition from foster care to living on their own. It was highlighted that there was an in-house policy with the Housing Department, under which any child leaving care was guaranteed their own accommodation.

RESOLVED:

That the members of the Corporate Parenting Committee review the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate placement resources for looked after children.

The Chair thanked the Service Manager for Families and Children for his hard work for the Looked After Children in the Borough as he was due to be leaving the Council in the next month.

7. Work Programme

The Committee discussed the work programme for the municipal year.

RESOLVED:

That the following items be included on the work programme:

- **Annual Report – December 2017**
- **Out of Borough Placements – March 2018**
- **Children in Care Council Presentation – December 2017 & March 2018**
- **Performance Update – Every meeting**

The meeting finished at 8.40 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**