

## Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 6 March 2019 at 7.00 pm

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**Present:** Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Chair), Qaisar Abbas (*arrived 19.24*), Abbie Akinbohun, Barry Johnson, Steve Liddiard and Luke Spillman

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

**In attendance:** Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children and Families  
Janet Simon, Strategic Lead of Children Looked After  
Clare Moore, Strategic Lead of Youth Offending Service and Prevention  
Tiffany Bright, Interim Strategic Lead of Skills  
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After  
Wendy Le, 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.

### **25. Minutes**

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 15 January 2019 were approved as a true record.

### **26. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

### **27. Declaration of Interests**

Councillor Liddiard declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a foster carer.

### **28. Families Supported By Early Help**

Clare Moore, Strategic Lead of Youth Offending Service and Prevention, presented the report which outlined the Early Help Service that had been in Thurrock Council for over 10 years. iMPower were commissioned in 2017 to provide support to the service due to the overwhelming demand faced. The strategy recommended was for a more integrated working partnership between the Council and its partners to enable the Council had enough support in the event of a crisis. A key strength of the existing Early Help

service is that it already works with families and children in using 'assets' and a strength-based model of intervention.

Praising the good report, the Chair asked for a report to be brought back on the 586 children mentioned. She asked that the report provide clarity on the reasons why and what services were being provided to the 586 children. Clare Moore explained that the children's needs varied and could include domestic violence situations or parents with mental health issues. A breakdown would be provided within the report.

Agreeing that a report should be brought back, Councillor Spillman added that the report should include the actual services that were provided to the children in the Early Help service. He went on to say that early intervention was a good solution to prevent most situations from arising and questioned whether there were enough resources within the service to meet demands. In answer, Clare Moore said the service was resourced well in terms of staffing because there was a large team to deliver the service. Money was re-invested in staff and the service was looking to expand delivery to include the partners.

Councillor Spillman commented that early help intervention was more than just a social care issue as it encompassed other departments within the Council such as the housing service. He queried whether there were systems in place for departments to work together in regards to early intervention. Explaining that there were systems in place, Clare Moore said that relationships were considered more than processes. Relationships between colleagues in departments were strong and processes needed to be strengthened to ensure delivery of the Early Help service. Councillor Spillman went on to agree that there needed to be 'joined up thinking' within the Council.

Giving praise to the report, Councillor Johnson understood some referrals to the Early Help service came from the homeless team and he questioned where else referrals came from. He went on to ask if the Members could provide their help in any other areas. Clare Moore answered that referrals usually came from schools and the homeless team and had provided support to families in renting situations to prevent them from falling into arrears. In private rented accommodations, this was sometimes difficult as the service was not always aware families were falling into arrears. The service aimed to develop further within in the adult mental health service and work well with all partners and departments.

Councillor Akinbohun questioned the percentage of successful cases where the Early Help service had been able to help families. Clare Moore said success was measured through parental feedback in surveys and this was currently at 94% upon families leaving the Early Help service. Questionnaires were undertaken with families and those who also knew the family as relatives or friends.

Following on, the Chair sought clarification on the remaining 6%. Clare Moore explained that some families did not want the Early Help service; some

families resolved issues themselves and some families did not meet the threshold requirements. The Chair went on to ask if there had been cases where the service had intervened too quickly when it was not needed. In response, Clare Moore said that families would tell the service when they were not needed.

Councillor Liddiard commented on the interesting report and was pleased to hear that there was 94% success rate as it was rare to see those cases.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the report.**

**29. Transition - Preparing Care Leavers for Adulthood**

*Councillor Abbas arrived 19.24.*

Presented by Tiffany Bright, Interim Strategic Lead of Skills, the report provided an overview of the offers and services available to Care Leavers which included the House Multiple Occupancy (HMO) scheme.

The Chair gave praise to the good report and thought that HMOs were a good start for Care Leavers. However, she was unsure how foster children felt about HMOs. The Committee discussed the option of HMOs and that some Care Leavers might find it harder to transition out of the service. Some young people would still need looking after during the transition phase and the service had to ensure young people had the needs to run their own home. The Committee felt the Council, as Corporate Parents, should be able to provide more for young people. It was a matter of managing expectations and the difficulty was in balancing housing needs and there needed to be more accommodation available.

Councillor Akinbohun questioned the success rate of Care Leavers transitioning from care to independence. Tiffany Bright answered that of the 250 18 – 21 year olds within the aftercare service, 20% required more help and there were some that required intervention. The other 200 were doing well and responded to their allocated support workers. Councillor Akinbohun went on to ask how many Care Leavers were able to acquire accommodation. In response, Tiffany Bright said more than 50% of Care Leavers were able to gain accommodation which was a combination of aftercare accommodation and rented properties on their behalf. Some Care Leavers were living with family or friends and some were in custody but regardless, all were still supported by the service and had an allocated support worker.

Pleased to see the report, Councillor Spillman mentioned that he had seen some rent arrears in social homes and asked if the service was confident that systems were in place to prevent a case slipping through. Answering that there were bi-monthly meetings with the housing team to prevent cases from slipping through, Tiffany Bright went on to confirm the service was confident. Care Leavers were also provided with the care they needed to transition.

Referring to the Spectre First mentioned in paragraph 2.1.12, Councillor Johnson asked the service to keep the Committee informed of the progress of the partnership and how well it was working.

**RESOLVED:**

**1. Recommendations**

**That the Corporate Parenting Committee provided comment on the service's work in the following areas:**

- 1.1 Work cross directorate and, in consultation with CL, to publish and promote the Local Offer**
- 1.2 Inform all CL of their rights under the Act and local policies to support them**
- 1.3 Build and maintain a diverse range of teams and partners to sign up to the CL Covenant including robust data collection and regular reporting**
- 1.4 Continue cross directorate work to extend/formalise the corporate approach to CL**

**30. Report on Merton Assessments**

The report was presented by Janet Simon, Strategic Lead of Children Looked After and outlined the Merton Age Assessment which was carried out on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). The assessment was undertaken when the age of an UASC was uncertain and was undertaken by two high level social workers. Paediatric and dental assessments were not to be relied on.

Councillor Spillman asked if there had been many cases of age concerns in which an assessment had to be carried out. Janet Simon answered that there had been 5 cases out of the 98 UASC that had arrived last year and found that some were adults which led to their detainment. Councillor Spillman was relieved to hear a low number of cases and hoped that the age assessments were carried out in an ethical manner.

Councillor Akinbohun queried whether the UASC inflow was high. In answer, Janet Simon said that there had been an influx during July 2018 to October 2018 but the inflow had slowed down in the last few months. Thurrock's maximum capacity for UASC was 28 and they currently had 30. The Council had an agreement with the Eastern region in which other Local Authorities (LAs) would take some of the UASC to keep each Council's capacity for UASC down.

On the nature of co-operation, Councillor Spillman questioned whether there were complications with other LAs. Explaining the Eastern region protocol, Janet Simon went on to say the agreement stated LAs would take some cases of UASC if they had not reached their maximum capacity themselves. Adding to this, Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children and Families, said that there were some discussions and queries from LAs in regards to the age of UASC but of all the UASC that had arrived in Thurrock, nearly all had been received by other LAs following protocol. The protocol had been effective since its implementation in 2016. Councillor Spillman went on to question which LA in the Eastern region had the highest number of UASC to which Janet Simon replied that it was Thurrock Council.

Councillor Akinbohun asked if an age assessment had been challenged by other LAs taking in UASC from Thurrock. Confirming there had been challenges, Janet Simon went on to say that Thurrock Council would take the UASC back and reassess. There had also been a young person that had challenged the outcome of the assessment too. Councillor Akinbohun went on to ask who helped the young person to challenge their assessment and whether they received legal aid. Janet Simon explained that if a UASC was deemed to be an adult, they were detained and she believed there were specialist solicitors to help them.

Mentioning a conference, Councillor Akinbohun said she had heard that asylum seekers were given £30 a week to live on and she questioned whether that was enough for them. Janet Simon explained that UASC came into the system to be looked after. Over 18's were treated as adults and she was unsure of the processes regarding adults as she worked with children.

Following on, Councillor Spillman questioned if adults were entitled to legal aid. Janet Simon was unsure but understood that many solicitors operated on a 'no win, no fee' basis. However, she would check and feedback to the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee noted and provided comment upon the work of officers in relation to Merton Age Assessments of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.**

**31. Pupil Premium Plus Report for the Virtual School**

Presented by Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After, the report detailed the use of the Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) Grant for Children Looked After (CLA) and the proposed strategy on the use of the grant for 2019-2020.

The Chair gave praise to the report and commented on the detailed information given.

Councillor Spillman questioned if the funds were distributed to the LA and academy schools. Answering that the funds were distributed to whichever school CLA were in, Keeley Pullen said some children were doubled funded so did not always receive the extra funds. Instead, the extra money was used to commission an extra service to support them. Councillor Spillman went on to ask what monitoring and interventions were in place to ensure the schools delivered with the use of the funds. Keeley Pullen answered that monitoring was through Personal Education Plans (PEP) and meetings with the school. There was a robust dialogue between the Virtual School and schools regarding the interventions in place and clear escalation processes which ended with Keeley Pullen herself, the Corporate Director of Children's Services and Ofsted if needed. However, this scenario has never happened.

The Chair stated that it would be good to see which children did well within the Virtual School. Referring to paragraph 3.4.10, the Chair sought clarification on the first sentence. Keeley Pullen clarified that without additional funding from the PP+, some CLA would not have been able to attend educational visits which were too expensive.

Councillor Johnson mentioned that he was a school governor and saw how PP+ was spent and questioned how school reports would show whether they had CLA in their school. Keeley Pullen explained that it was a statutory requirement for schools to publish PP+ spending. However, school reports were broad and school governors were able to request further information within reports. To the Virtual School, schools had to clarify PP+ spending through PEP and discussions.

Of the £602,600 mentioned in paragraph 3.1.1, Councillor Akinbohun sought clarification on the spend of the rest of the fund. Keeley Pullen answered that the rest of the fund was allocated as the top slice which was detailed on page 42 of the agenda. The figures were received from the finance team but it had to be noted that some of the leftover money came from children who had left care or had not used the full amount.

Councillor Akinbohun queried how the service monitored whether CLA were receiving the services needed with the funds. Keeley Pullen explained feedback was provided from students which was used to improve services and staff would raise accountability where needed. Younger children were usually unaware of the funds but older children were asked.

Jackie Howell, Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association, questioned whether CLA over 16 still received the same PP+ grant or whether it was bursaries received. Confirming this was not the case, Keeley Pullen explained that PP+ was received up to year 11 but the Virtual School monitored up to 18 years of age and did not manage bursaries. Jackie Howell mentioned that bursaries were not managed well by schools and young people had to provide proof that they were still in care. Keeley Pullen said that the Virtual School tried to use funds to support their post-16s where necessary as post-16s had no funding. The Virtual School relied on foster carers and young people to

notify the service of where they encountered difficulties. Post-16s PEP would usually show where their bursaries were spent.

The Chair queried the percentage of CLA that took up the offer of 1 – 1 tuition. Keeley Pullen explained that year 10s would usually take up the offer and currently 70% of them were having weekly tuition. Some children had dropped a tuition subject because they were doing better and would take up another subject that they were struggling in. Upon reaching year 11, some children moved away from tuition as their school offered more revision classes. However, tuition was offered again if a dip in grades were seen. Currently, year 6s had been offered tuition which was well received.

#### **RESOLVED:**

##### **1. Recommendation(s)**

**1.1 That the Committee notes the budget and spending report for 2018-2019 for Pupil Premium Plus Grant for Children Looked After.**

**1.2 That the Committee notes the overall spending by schools of the grant.**

**1.3 That the Committee approves the proposed strategy plan for the Pupil Premium Plus Grant for 2019-2020.**

##### **32. Work Programme**

This was the last Corporate Parenting Committee meeting of the municipal year. The Committee thanked Officers for their reports and attendance.

There were no reports added to the work programme for the next municipal year.

**The meeting finished at 8.40 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**

