

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 4 June 2019 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Chair), Abbie Akinbohun (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Daniel Chukwu, Barry Johnson, Steve Liddiard and Jennifer Smith
- Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
- Apologies:** Councillors Sue MacPherson
- In attendance:** Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children and Families
Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Education and Skills
Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Mark French, Personal Advisor, Children's Services
Dan Jones, Adoption, Fostering and Placements Service Manager
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School
Julia Sutton, Fostering Team Manager
Kenna-Victoria Healey, 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 6 March 2019 were approved as a correct record.

2. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business

3. Declaration of Interests

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

Councillor Redsell declared a non-pecuniary interest in that she was involved in a looked after child case.

4. Children's Social Care Performance

The Strategic Lead for Looked after Children presented the report to Members and in doing so explained referrals into Children Services had fluctuated over the last six months. The Committee were informed that when comparing data over the last six months with the same period from last year, there was an increase of eight contacts.

Members were notified the numbers of children subject to a child protection plan due to concern about abuse or neglect had reduced. This was due to fewer plans being complied and the length of time children were subject to plans was being reduced. The number of children looked after for 2019 had also reduced and were now in line with the Councils statistical neighbours.

The Strategic Lead for Looked after Children advised the Committee the percentage of referrals received that related to a child previously referred within a 12 month period were monitored and on average the percentage of repeat referrals had increased from 10.6% for 2017/2018 to 13.3% for 2018/2019.

She continued to advise Members the average time for a child from entering care to being placed with adopters had reduced from an average of 565 days in 2015/2017 to 423 days this year. This was higher than the Eastern Regions average of 378, however was lower than the National average of 486.

It was explained that children with missing episodes had also reduced from 26 at the start of the year to 19 as of March 2019. The number of new foster carers being approved between April 2018 and March 2019. The Committee were informed the percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training had risen from 61% last year to 65% for 2018/2019. This was better than similar authorities where the average was 50.89%.

The Chair of the Committee queried as to the reason children were placed with in-house foster carers. Officers explained there was a matching process which also took into account if a child had any siblings. By placing children with in-house foster carers, meant that additional support could be provided if it was required.

Councillor Johnson commented that as Thurrock was not geographically the same as the Eastern Region, why were comparisons being made. He further stated he felt it would be best if Thurrock was compared with its static neighbours.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That members noted the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services**
- 2. That any specific areas of interest were flagged for inclusion/expansion within the next report.**

5. Validated Attainment Outcomes for Children Looked After 2018

Presented by the Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After, the report detailed raising achievement in all areas of education for Children Looked After was a key priority for Thurrock Council.

It was mentioned that the Department for Education (DFE) published validated attainment data in March 2019, which detailed the results for Children Looked After and provides comparative data against National Children Looked After.

The Committee were first informed of the year 1 phonics screening check, which was undertaken in June. Members were advised that as yet there was no national data provided by the DFE linked to Children Looked After. The percentage of children who reached the expected standard has increased compared to the previous year, the Committee were further advised for 2018 there were 6 pupils in the cohort and the pass rate was 67%.

Members were notified since 2016 KS1 assessments were no longer reported as levels and as such could not be compared to previous years. Therefore when comparing performance, the overall three year trend for Key Stage 1 pupils was very positive for reading and writing. However, it was highlighted that there was an issue relating to maths attainment.

The Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After went on to explain KS2 results were also no longer reported as levels, with each pupil receiving their test results as a scaled score and teacher assessments based on the standards in the interim framework. For the whole Thurrock CLA cohort the statistics for those achieving the expected standard were reading 65%, GPS 59%, maths 71% and writing 65%.

She continued to inform Members for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) who had been in care for 12+ months; their attainment across a three year period had improved.

The Chair stated she was pleased to receive the report and its results for the boroughs Looked After Children. She sought clarity as to why writing results for KS2 had dropped for 2018. It was explained the exams for KS2 were teacher assessed and it was assumed that teachers were aiming on the side of caution, instead of over unfluctuating results.

It was commented that year 6 pupils were given a voucher once they had completed their exams. The Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After explained that this was a new initiative for 2019 and children would be gifted with a £30 WH Smith voucher to allow them to purchase their stationery in preparation for secondary school. In addition to this revision packs were being created for Year 10 pupils with top tips for revision, preparing them for their GCSEs.

RESOLVED that the Committee:

- 1. Noted the validated DFE outcomes of the summer 2018 teacher assessment, tests and examinations and commends the pupils, their schools and parents/carers on their achievements.**
- 2. Recognised that the cohorts of pupils are small and that this should be considered when comparing year on year data.**
- 3. Noted that prior attainment for pupils will impact on attainment in later years and that Thurrock CLA in care have made good progress.**
- 4. Had a clear picture of the attainment and progress outcomes for pupils who are looked after and also have a Special Educational Need or Disability.**

6. Fostering Statements of Purpose

The Adoption, Fostering and Placements Service Manager introduced the report to the committee explaining the fostering statement of purpose set out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole. The Statement of Purpose related to the Fostering Service provided by the Fostering Placement Support Team and the Placement Assessment Team.

Members were notified that the statement outlined the recruitment, approval, assessment, support and monitoring of the fostering service. The Committee was further notified of the establishment of the recruitment team which had grown significantly within the last year. The team had been very successful generating knowledge about fostering with more advertising and interest from the general public and this was providing to be beneficial to the service. It was mentioned that within the fostering support team an interim manager had been placed. Officers advised the Statement also include a Framework of decisions and placements offered for children with a variety of needs.

The Adoption, Fostering and Placements Service Manager was hopeful that the recruitment drive would continue to be successful and would enable the team to not only gain new carers but to retain carers and to have a base of foster carers for Thurrock children.

The Chair thanked officers for their report and asked that for the new Members of the Committee that the term of bridging foster carers was clarified. It was explained that bridging foster carers would take children on a short term basis or children that were in between placements or children that were going home.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee were informed about Thurrock's Fostering Statement of Purpose.

7. Adoption Statement of Purpose

Members were addressed by the Adoption, Fostering and Placements Service Manager who explained the report set out the roles and purpose of the Adoption Service, including the recruitment and approval of families hoping to adopt. It was further explained that the statement also highlighted the matching service for children, to ensure their needs were met.

Members were advised since the Adoption Service had been brought back in-house, there were 4 families who were currently going through the process to ensure it was fit for purpose, with the aim of setting the process live in July 2019.

Clarity was sought on the report where it mentioned adoption from other countries. Officers explained this covered the assessments of application and approval for people to adopt children from other countries. At present the service was being provided by the in-house adoption team, so any families looking to adopt children from overseas would in the first instant contact the Local Authority.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Parenting Committee were informed about Thurrock's Adoption Statement of Purpose.

8. Fostering and Adoption Panel Reports

Adoption, Fostering and Placements Service Manager introduced the report confirming that the fostering and adoption panel was a joint panel which heard both fostering and adoption cases. The Committee were made aware that the panel had a duty to produce a report every year. Members were advised that officers had met with the chair of the panel and discussed a development plan.

During questions from the Committee it was confirmed that sibling assessments were undertaken to ensure where possible siblings were kept together. It was also explained how to become a member of the panel and that the elected member currently sitting was Councillor Little.

RESOLVED:

That Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee were informed about the function and activities of Thurrock's Adoption and Fostering Panel.

9. Private Fostering Report

The Fostering Team Manager explained that Private Fostering was a private arrangement between a parent and someone other than a close relative. Private Fostering occurred when a child under the age of 16 (or under 18 if

disabled) was cared for and provided with accommodation, by an adult who was not a relative for 28 days or more. The Committee heard Private Foster Carers may be from the extended family, such as a cousin or great aunt. In most cases a birth parent selects and arranges private foster placements, which could take many forms.

Members were informed that should it be necessary, then evidence of the relationship between the adult and the child was sought. With this the School Admissions team also assisted the private fostering team, in that if the relationship on an application form was not one of parent, then this was followed up to seek who was looking after the child. It was made clear that the main responsibility of the team was to ensure that any child not living with a parent was safe.

It was then explained to Members that should a child not leave their property or home and were being looked after by someone other than their parent then this was not classed as private fostering.

The Committee were notified the team received 47 Private Fostering notifications between April 2017 and March 2018 this was 22 more notifications than 2016/2017. From of the 21 Private Fostering notifications, 20 initial visits were completed within the 7 working days timescale.

Officers further explained that different forms of adverting had been produced for children and adults, this included newspapers, GP Surgeries and social media. On top of which the team also held information sessions and training days for schools.

The Head Teacher of the Virtual School for Children Looked After enquired as to if referrals were coming through schools, how were the team receiving referrals for younger children who were not of school age. Officers explained that training as also been given to Health Visitors and those in contact with young children and babies.

RESOLVED:

That Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee were informed in respect of children Privately Fostered in Thurrock.

10. Care Leavers

The Personal Advisor within Children's Services presented Members of the Committee with a presentation on Care leavers into Employment, Education and Training.

A copy of the presentation can be found as a supplementary to the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the Presentation given by Officers.

11. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2019/2020

The Committee discussed the work programme for the up and coming year.

RESOLVED:

That the following reports be included on the Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2019/2020:

- **10 September 2019 – Focus group work with foster carers**
- **10 September 2019 – Looked After Children Pledge**
- **10 September 2019 – Forster Care Case Studies**
- **10 September 2019 – Local Offer for Care Leavers**
- **07 January 2020 – Head start Housing**

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