

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 3 March 2020 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Chair), Steve Liddiard (Vice-Chair), Abbie Akinbohun, Daniel Chukwu, Sue Shinnick and Jennifer Smith
- Apologies:** Councillors Barry Johnson and Sue MacPherson
- In attendance:** Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School
Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Alison Smith, Leaving Care Social Worker
Lucy Tricker, Democratic Services Officer
- Rafael Antunes, Chair – Children in Care Council
Christopher Bennett, Vice-Chair, Children in Care Council
Annie Guidotti, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Jackie Howell, Chair – The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Sharon Smith, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Crystal Wilson, Child in Care Representative
-

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.

33. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 7 January 2020 were approved as a correct record.

34. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

35. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

36. Children's Social Care Performance

The Corporate Director for Children's Services presented the report and in doing so, explained that it provided a summary of Children's Social Care performance. She explained it described current activity levels and performance of Children's social care services in responding to the needs

of vulnerable children. The Corporate Director for Children's Services highlighted that timelines for assessments were now good, although there was room for improvement. She stated that in Quarter 3 the number of children with Child Protection Plans had increased from 142 to 170, but this was still lower than the national average and statistically similar local authorities. She also highlighted that the Looked After Children population had remained stable, and was in line with other similar local authorities, and this was due to an increased focus on permanence planning to ensure decreased waiting times.

The Chair stated that this was a good report, and looked forward to seeing the end of year report, which would contain the final figures. She questioned point 3.6 of the report, and asked why more children were going to live with relatives. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children replied that when a child could no longer live with their parents, the first step a local authority took was to consider if the child could live with other family or friends. She stated that this was looked into before the consideration of foster carers, as children living with other relatives or friends provided better permanency and outcomes for the child. The Chair then questioned point 4.4 and asked how old the Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers were. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children replied that there were currently 28 Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers in Thurrock, who ranged between 16 and 17 years old. She added that one of these children was considerably younger, but now had a Care Order in place.

RESOLVED:

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

37. Local Government Association: Support for Care Leavers; Resource Pack for Members, published January 2020

The Corporate Director of Children's Services introduced the item to the Committee, explaining the Local Government Association (LGA) had produced a resource pack on 'Support for Care Leavers' for Members in their Corporate Parenting role.

She continued to advise the resource pack set out an introduction for Members about care leavers and statutory responsibilities for Council's and Members. It was highlighted within the resource pack was a number of sessions that would be of use to Members such as:

- Key Lines of Enquiry for all Councillors, which set out the issues that Members would need to consider when having oversight of services for Care Leavers.
- Case studies from Local Authorities who have tried different ways of working with their care leavers.

Members heard how the resource pack was deemed a helpful tool for Members in their Corporate Parenting role, to consider what areas of practice relating to care leavers they wish to scrutinise.

The Chair felt this was a useful resource pack, and felt that all Members of the Council should see it, so they could better understand their Corporate Parenting role. The Chair asked if an update on the resource pack could come to the next committee. Councillor Liddiard agreed with the Chair that all Members should view the pack, as he felt it was very important.

Councillor Smith drew the Committee's attention to page 33 and asked what care leavers were telling the council, and how they could share their views. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children stated that the Children in Care Council held different events throughout the year to get feedback from children in care across the borough, and consider the care leavers' offer. She added that this month the Children in Care Council were running an event to take care leavers out and discuss the care leavers' offer. She added that they were also working to develop joint working between the finance team, Staying Put team, and the housing team to assist care leavers.

The Chair then asked the care leavers that had attended the meeting to give their views regarding the care leavers offer. The Chair of the Children in Care Council stated that he had recently moved from a hostel to his own flat, and stated that he had struggled to get paperwork, such as passports and habitual residency tests, because he was estranged from his parents. He added that this had made it difficult to get a job. He commented that the Children in Care Council organised lots of events, particularly at the Inspire Hub, which were aimed at getting care leavers together and planning group activities. He felt these sessions were good as it allowed to care leavers to see the more 'human' side of their social workers, and gave the children something to do. He felt that the Council should provide more reasons and opportunities for children in care to meet, as it allowed them to discuss their experiences.

The Thurrock Open Door Representative invited all Councillors to the next meeting of the Children in Care Council, to allow Members to meet more children in care. The Chair asked the Corporate Director of Children's Services to invite all Councillors to the meeting, as she felt that all Councillors had a responsibility as corporate parents.

The Leaving Care Social Worker spoke on behalf of the Child in Care Representative and stated that as a child that had recently left care, Ms. Wilson now had to manage her own tenancy, bills, and job. She stated that Ms Wilson was on minimum wage for her age bracket and often had to work 70 hour weeks to ensure her rent and bills were paid for, and she had no

family support. The Leaving Care Social Worker felt that some council departments did not understand how difficult it could be for young care leavers, and asked if more specialists who understood the care system could be put in place in the housing and council tax teams. She added that if Ms Wilson fell behind on rent or bills, demanding letters would be sent, which could be frightening for a young adult who had just left care. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children stated that the team were currently working on their financial policy to ensure that care leavers received the support they needed, and that working was worthwhile for them. The Chair highlighted some avenues of support for care leavers, such as their Local Councillors who can help provide support and point care leavers in the right direction. The Chair congratulated the Child in Care Representative for all her hard work and dedication. Councillor Liddiard added that support could also be found in community hubs, as many volunteer organisations such as DIAL, housing support, and Local Area Coordinators ran sessions that could be of use.

RESOLVED:

- 1. Consider the Support for Care Leavers resource pack**
- 2. Consider which lines of enquiry regarding care leavers, they wish to pursue with Officers**
- 3. That an update report be provided at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee**

38. Update on Ofsted Recommendation – Timeliness of Initial Health Assessments

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children addressed Members notifying them the report set out the actions taken by Children's Social Care and Health colleagues to address the timeliness of Initial Health Assessments for Children who are Looked After.

She continued by explaining when a child or young person came into care, they would have an Initial Health Assessment (IHA). This was a statutory health assessment; the assessment is to be completed within 28 days of coming into care. A paediatrician or an appropriately trained medical practitioner completes the assessment.

It was further explained the Initial Health Assessment identified existing health problems and deficits in previous healthcare and provides a baseline for managing the child's future health needs. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children highlighted point 3.12 of the report and stated in April 2019 only 25% of IHAs were completed on time, but this had increased to 71% in December 2019, and increased again to 81.5% in January 2020. She stated that although there were still some difficulties, processes were now in place and regular meetings were being held between the social care team and healthcare colleagues.

The Chair stated that as there were challenges within the healthcare sector, she would raise it as an issue at the next Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. She asked why a child was only assessed once a year, once they reached the age of five. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children replied that the IHA set a benchmark for the child's health, but that if additional health needs were identified then additional sessions with a paediatrician would be arranged. She added that if a child was seen yearly it would ensure that no illnesses or problems developed, but a foster carer could take the child to the GP or A&E if problems arose in between IHA visits.

Councillor Liddiard asked who conducted the IHA, as GP's were often fully booked, which it would make it difficult to schedule IHAs. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children replied that the IHA was conducted by an approved paediatrician, but there were currently issues regarding a deficit in healthcare, which were outlined at 2.1 of the report. The Chair of the Foster Carer's Association added that only two or three paediatricians were approved to carry out IHAs, which meant it was difficult to schedule appointments as they were often very busy. She stated that she had often had difficulties scheduling IHA appointments, as the doctor could only offer one or two slots, some of which were during school time. The Corporate Director of Children's Services thanked the Foster Carer's Association for the input, as it highlighted issues that may have otherwise not been addressed. She stated that she had invited health colleagues to the meeting, but they had been unable to attend as Thurrock commissioned NELFT to provide community paediatricians for IHAs. She felt that a child should not be taken out of school for an IHA, particularly as many children in care already had poorer attendance when compared to children not in care. She stated that although the IHA service had improved, there was still work to do and issues that needed to be resolved.

Councillor Akinbohun asked if the service was under pressure due to the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, and the Strategic Lead for Looked After Children replied that although the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers had increased in the last quarter, they had not put the service under pressure. She stated that the system had been under pressure recently due to an increase in the number of referrals and large sibling groups being identified throughout February. The Head Teacher for Virtual School added that there was only a 10 day timeframe in place for Education Plans, which meant that the education system for Looked After Children was also under pressure, due to the large number of referrals. Councillor Akinbohun stated that she felt worried that the service would not be of good quality if new Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers arrived within Thurrock. The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children replied that the system pressure did not predominantly come from Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, but came from the lack of capacity within the system.

The Chair asked if an update report on IHAs could come before the next Corporate Parenting Committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That Corporate Parenting Members were informed about Health and Children's Services efforts to improve the timeliness of Initial Assessments for Children Looked After.
2. That an update report be provided at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee

39. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2019/2020

The Committee discussed the work programme ahead of the new municipal year. Members agreed to a number of reports being included on the Work Programme. The Chair thanked the Committee Members for all their hard work throughout the year, and wished luck to those Members standing for re-election. She also congratulated the next Corporate Director of Children's Services on her appointment.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed for the following reports to be included on the Work Programme for 2020/2021

The meeting finished at 7.55 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