

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 24 October 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Mark Hurrell (Chair), Elizabeth Rigby (Vice-Chair), Lynda Heath and Cathy Sisterson and Lee Watson (as Substitute)

Wendy Caswell, Chair, Thurrock Foster Carer Association

Apologies: Councillors Ngozi Alike, Neil Speight, Laura Hall and Jackie Enifer

In attendance: Janet Simon, Assistant Director – CSC and Early Help
Elise McQueen, Head of Looked After Children
Clare Moore, Head of YOS and Prevention
Adriana Cimpean, Interim Service Manager for the Through Care Service
Carly Banks, Participation and Engagement Officer
Thurrock Young Voices
Elizabeth Shields, Service Manager, Social Care Service Managers
Peter Turner, Panel Chair
Sharon Hall, Assistant Director, SET CAMHS and Children's Services for South Essex & Thurrock
Dean Rufai, SET CAMHS and Partnerships. NELFT
Clare Angell, Deputy Director Babies, Children and Young people & SEND
Ines Paris, Designated Lead Safeguarding Nurse
Emma Trencher, Senior Democratic Services Officer

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.

12. Minutes

The Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on the 31 July 2024 were approved as a correct record.

13. Items of Urgent Business

There were no Items of Urgent Business.

14. Declaration of Interests

There were no Declarations of Interest.

15. Thurrock Young Voices

Thurrock Young Voices presented their report as set out in the Agenda. The report updated members of the success of the Power of Participation workshops that took place across two days earlier in the year. Members were advised that a further workshop had been arranged for councillors which was well attended and beneficial with all workshops receiving great feedback from workers and Councillors.

Members were advised of a possible new event that was being discussed whereby local businesses could come together to advise and educate Care Leavers on what services were available to them and how they could support and mentor Care Leavers through work experience, possible job opportunities and help with donations of food, clothes and essential items. Members were asked to support this future event.

Members noted and commented:

- Under the Portfolio for Good Growth, Members were advised work had already started to advocate for care leavers to help gain apprenticeships and job opportunities. It was noted conversations were taking place with businesses to support this initiative with future visits and engagement being encouraged. Members also offered their time to become mentors for care leavers and agreed to liaise with businesses in their wards to ascertain what work experience and opportunities could be provided. Action Point Thurrock Young Voices to draft a mentoring programme and to liaise with corporate parenting committee members and the Cabinet.
- Officers were engaging in conversations across all directorates of the Council to gather information on what could be offered to care leavers and young people and members were asked to note the initial feedback had been positive. Action Point Officers to liaise with members and facilitate, on behalf of the Young People, to progress the initiative and Members offer of help.

Members thanked Thurrock Young Voices for their presentation and agreed they were an inspiration to the Council.

16. Children's Social Care Performance

The Head of Service for Children Looked After presented the report as set out in the Agenda. Members were asked to note the following key points:

- Thurrock's children in care numbers had remained relatively stable.
- In Quarter 2 the number of Children Looked After had reduced from 284 to 267.
- At the end of Quarter 1, Thurrock's rate of Children Looked After per 100,000 was below their statistical neighbours and below the England average.

- Members were asked to note the table on page 27 of the Agenda, this showed the reasons behind Children Looked After ending.
- In August of Quarter 2, only 2 children became Looked After which was the lowest number seen in a single month for over a year.
- The age profile of Children Looked After had mostly remained stable, however, there had been a slight increase in the 10-15 age range which put Thurrock slightly above their statistical neighbours.
- At the end of August 2024, 70% of Children Looked After were placed within 20 miles or less of their home. Of the 30% of children placed more than 20 miles from their home, 8% were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- At the end of Quarter 1, 41% of Care Leavers were in Education, Employment or Training. At the end of August 2024, this figure had risen to 43.3% which showed a slow month on month rise.

Members noted and commented:

- In the report it was noted Thurrock were below the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) quota for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), members questioned if we were being asked to take additional UASC within the Borough from other Boroughs. Officers advised as we were a port authority we were always on or about our threshold of 44.
- Members questioned why, at the end half of last year, were the UASC numbers over the National Transfer Scheme threshold of 44. Officers advised there was an influx of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers coming into the Borough and explained how the NTS scheme worked and how figures were reported.
- Members asked for an explanation of Thurrock's role in looking after Children who are within the Youth Justice System. Officers advised interventions are put in place with a hope this would steer children away from re-offending.
- Members asked why had our numbers of Children Looked After decreased from the end of Quarter 1 to end August. Officers explained this was due to several factors including, the early intervention work the service carried out with families and the measures and services in place during initial assessments.
- Members questioned what was being done to increase the percentage to 100% of social worker visits to Children Looked After being in timescale. It was noted the recent figures were on or around the low 90%. Officers explained any delays were addressed through performance management meetings and support offered. In some cases, the visits might only be 1 day out, but this had to be reported as late within the services data. Confirmation was given that it was very small timescales when identified as late.

- Members questioned what was being done to increase the percentage of Care Leavers who were in Education, Employment or Training. It was noted in September 2023 the percentage was 58.6%, which dipped to 39.9% in May 2024 and was now at 43.3%. Officers advised there were many factors that contributed to the dip, including Covid, and there were several interventions in place to deal with this. It was advised there was a Steering Group made up of different organisations and departments who looked at all individual strategies to ascertain what was being done to improve outcomes of young people. It was further advised there was an action plan for each young person, looking at their individual needs as it was not a one size fits all to see how they could get back into education or employment. It was advised a plan was being development and worked on with the Council and business as to what could be done differently to enhance opportunities for Young People.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Members were sighted on the work undertaken in the service to ensure good and improved performance and areas for development and challenge in Children's Social Care.**
- 1.2 Members scrutinised the performance data and provided challenge to the service, relevant partners and corporately how, as corporate parents they provide appropriate services, keep children and young people safe and promote good outcomes.**

17. SET Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Report for Looked After Children - January-September 2024

Dean Rufai from CAMHS presented the report as detailed in the Agenda. The report described and analysed the service provided by the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health service, known as SET CAMHS to Children Looked After. It was advised SET CAMHS is a health service that was jointly commissioned between the Local Authorities and Integrated Care Boards in the wider Essex area and provides services to children of all ages and backgrounds who have a level of mental health needs. The report focused on the work SET CAMHS provides in relation to Children Looked After in Thurrock during the period January 2024-September 2024 and provided an overview of the children referred and the mental health service they received.

Members noted and commented:

- Members questioned how many schools engaged in the trauma therapy support offered. The CAHMS Officer advised that trauma therapy was not offered in schools in isolation, it was clarified shared information was provided to schools and general support was given to better understand the system and behaviours.

- Members questioned the zero referrals of children with eating disorders. The CAMHS Officers confirmed that they do get referrals from Thurrock for eating disorders, but none of these were for Children Looked After.
- Members questioned what resources were in place to cope with the increased numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who, it was acknowledged come with their own mental health issues and quite often language barriers, given the service is already over capacity and how was the ICB coping and helping to support this. The CAHMS Officers confirmed they were very flexible and offered fast track assessments for Looked After Children and also a hotline that could be used. It was explained using the ethos that mental health is everyone's business, good links with social care and education have been established especially around UASC. Action Point the ICB would like the opportunity to bring a report back to Corporate Parenting Committee on how a more flexible mental health model is being developed and introduced through a collaborative working group.
- Members questioned if the timeframes were being met, whereby the contract required an assessment within 10 working days and allowed an extra 5 working days for the plan to be with the social worker. CAHMS Officers confirmed they were.
- Members asked for clarification on the key areas for improvement.

RESOLVED:

1.1 Members noted and reviewed the SET Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Report for Looked After Children during the period January – September 2024.

1.2 Member noted they were aware of the key areas for improvement.

18. Initial Health Assessment for Looked After Children

Clare Angell, ICB Deputy Director, presented the report as detailed in the Agenda. It was noted Thurrock Council had raised concerns around service delivery of Initial Health Assessments and targets not being met. It was advised the Report was to provide assurance that the task and finish groups were progressing against plans presented in March 2024. The report included descriptions of IHA provision across Mid and South Essex for Looked After Children and referred to a potential and sustainable costed model and redesign options to ensure the ICB's statutory responsibility continued to be maintained and ensured ongoing delivery for the population.

Members noted and commented:

- Members questioned why there was an aging population of paediatricians and what was being done to combat this?

- Members questioned the report stated there was an increase in Numbers of Children Looked After being referred to the service, however, in an earlier report it had been noted Thurrock's numbers of Children Looked After had not increased. Clarification was given on the figures.
- Members asked for clarification of what work the Task and Finish Group were undertaking. The ICB Deputy Director gave a detailed description of the work undertaken against the mandate that was given.
- Members questioned if there would be a central referral hub as it was noted in the report there currently was not one. The ICB Deputy Director confirmed under the new model everything was being looked at and depending on the preferred route, anything was possible.
- Members asked within the performance data could the figures be broken down to show Thurrock children as it was noted the figures in the report was for the whole region and could it include updated figures for Q1 and Q2 including July and August. Action Point the data requested would be brought back to committee.
- Members questioned why, if there was a backlog, does Health Assessments have to be completed by a paediatrician? It was confirmed it was a statutory responsibility.
- Members asked for reassurance that KPIs are a priority in any future contracts. Members also questioned where the governance was for the Task and Finish Group mentioned in the report. It was confirmed there was now a formal process in place to take KPIs through. Reassurance was given that formal governance was in place.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Members agreed to support an approach to involve all local authority colleagues across the South, Essex and Thurrock footprint.**
- 1.2 Members agreed to the request for a return after January 2025 to receive an update on progress.**

19. Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers

The Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption presented the Report as detailed in the Agenda. The Report provided an outline to the committee detailing the progress of recruitment activities for Foster Carers in Thurrock. The report set out the plans of how to address the sufficiency of foster carers within Thurrock, including how the service planned to recruit more carers and how the service retained the current cohort of carers.

Members noted and commented:

- Members questioned the value of joining Foster East. It was confirmed that it was still early days, but it is hoped there would be an increase in enquiries in the future.
- Members questioned what Councillors could do to help recruitment of foster carers. The Service Manager advised promotion within network areas and channels would be beneficial.
- Members noted an improvement in communication and advertising.
- Action Point Democratic Services to share the Mockingbird video with the committee.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Members were sighted on the work undertaken in the foster service in respect of fostering, recruitment and retention to ensure sufficiency of care for Thurrock's Looked After Children.**
- 1.2 Members provided challenge and feedback in relation to the plan to ensure it is effective in achieving recruitment targets, retaining high-quality foster carers and addressing any caps in provision, supporting the objective of providing sufficient, stable and nurturing placements for Thurrock's Looked After Children.**

20. Fostering Statement of Purpose

The Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption presented the annual Fostering Statement of Purpose. Members were asked to note the main difference to this year's statement was the addition of the newly launched Foster Carer Association and how co-production with the Foster Carer Association was at the heart of Thurrock as a foster service. How processes and policies were decided and further advising the Foster Carer Association would be sighted on all processes and policies and would then give feedback.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Members of the Committee were informed about Thurrock's Fostering Statement of Purpose and the Local Authority's statutory duties and held officers to account and scrutinised the work of the service.**

21. Adoption Statement of Purpose

The Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption presented the annual Adoption Statement of Purpose. Members were asked to note the main difference this year was, as a Member of Adopt East, the Statement of

Purpose had been standardised against other member authorities to ensure consistency across Adopt East.

Members thanked the whole of the Fostering and Adoption Service for their hard work.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Members of the committee reviewed Thurrock's Adoption Statement of Purpose and held officers to account to deliver the services required as part of their statutory duties and the Council's ambition for children.**

Standing Orders were called at 9.11pm when it was agreed the meeting would be extended by 30 minutes.

22. Fostering and Adoption Annual Panel Report 2023-2024

The Chair of the Panel presented the report as detailed in the Agenda. Members were updated on Thurrock Council's Fostering and Adoption Panel's annual activities and performance. The committee were reminded the Panel were an independent body and a critical friend, in terms of the recommendations they made. Members were asked to note the panel was now more diverse than it had been in the past. The Panel Chair advised that the Panel are now working hard to find creative ways of gathering the views and feelings of the children.

- Members questioned how foster carers were reviewed.
- Members acknowledged there was a Care Leaver who now sits on the Panel. Members asked if the Panel would be prepared to provide a mentoring arrangement with Thurrock Young Voices and Children in Foster care to provide them with a different outlook in order to encourage high aspirations and achievements. Action Point discussions between the Foster Service and Panel would take place to see if this could be facilitated.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 Members of the committee reviewed and commented on Thurrock's Fostering and Adoption Panel's annual performance.**

23. Work Programme

Members were invited to discuss and add to the Work Programme.

Members referred to the update the ICB had offered earlier in the meeting. The Deputy Director enquired if the report could be brought after end January. Action Point a report would be brought to March committee but an update would be given in January by the Social Care Team on performance.

A full recording of this meeting can be found from the following link: [Thurrock Council - Corporate Parenting Committee, 24/10/2024](#)

The meeting finished at 9.28 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**