

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 9 March 2017 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), Leslie Gamester (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Sue MacPherson, Martin Kerin and Joycelyn Redsell
- Natalie Carter, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Christina Day, Children in Care Council
Joseph Kaley, Children in Care Council
Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
- Apologies:** Councillor Jan Baker and Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
- In attendance:** Paula Gregory, Designated Nurse
Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care
Paul Coke, Service Manager (Children & Families)
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School
Paula McCullough, Commissioning Officer, Children's Services
Tina Russell, Area Manager, NELFT
Michael Watts Jimenez, Area Manager, NELFT
Jenny Shade, 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.

28. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 10 January 2017 were approved as a correct record.

29. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

30. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

31. Presentation on the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service

Tina Russell, Area Manager, North East London National Health Service Foundation and Michael Watts Jimenez, Team Manager, Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service (EWMHS) from North East London National Health

Service Foundation (NELFT), delivered a presentation on the specific needs of Looked After Children and the impact the emotional wellbeing and mental health service had on the wellbeing of children in care.

The presentation highlighted:

- The service delivery and development with a large scale recruitment campaign.
- Digital opportunities available were the Big White Wall on-line service and the NELFT EWMHS App.
- Support for schools through the Essex Training Programme in 2016/17.
- Implementation post consultation of Care Pathway Model.
- Thurrock Hub would be relocated in spring 2017.
- Referrals received, caseloads, presenting problems, vulnerable groups and pathways to treatment were explained to Members.
- Improved Access Psychological Treatment, Assessments and Outcome Measurements were discussed.
- The role of EWMHS was described and a snap shot of open cases were explained to Members.

Councillor Redsell stated that the services should be offered to all children. Tina Russell stated that the service was and would be prioritised on the presenting need. Looked After Children were fast tracked in seven days.

Councillor Kerin stated that it was positive news on the Big White Wall and asked where the new hub would be situated. Michael Watts Jimenez stated that the service was offered to all children in Greater Essex and the new hub would be in situated in Maidstone Road in Grays.

Councillor MacPherson asked what services were available in the evenings and weekends. Michael Watts Jimenez confirmed that services were the standard National Health Service opening times of Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm but discussions had taken place and was confident that clinics would soon be open longer and later.

The Chair asked what the implications would be for the service's increased caseload and asked Officers how they propose to sustain the improved waiting times for assessment. Tina Russell stated that this would always be a challenge as the number of referrals go up the resources would become tighter. Tina Russell further stated that the offer to young people could not be changed as this was based on need and would continue to be a challenge. Paula Gregory stated that the Government recognised that challenges were being faced as referral numbers increased and that money had been allocated to reduce waiting times and appoint further practitioners.

Paula Gregory stated that reassurance must be given to ensure that it was actually the voice of the child being heard as part of the first telephone consultation.

Paula McCullough encouraged the continued use of NELFT.

The Chair asked Officers what the workaround would be for those parents that could not change. Andrew Carter stated that early offer of help and intervention would take place to ensure the right balance was met.

The Chair thanked Officers for the report and asked for regular updates.

RESOLVED

That the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service Report be presented to Corporate Parenting Members in the next municipal year for further update.

Tina Russell and Michael Watts Jimenez left the committee room at 7.45pm

32. Information on Recent External Placements for Young People

Paul Coke, Service Manager, presented the report that updated Members on the range of issues regarding the placement choices made for Children Looked After for the period 1 December 2016 and 31 January 2017.

The Officer referred members to following data within the report which included:

- The number of Children Looked After was 327.
- The number of unaccompanied asylum seekers had been reduced from 73-67.
- The comparative rate for Thurrock was 63 per 10,000 compared to the regional rate of 60 per 10,000. The Officer stated that this figure did not include the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- Compared the number of in-house foster to independent foster carers and how going forward it would be the Council's plans to utilise the in-house foster carers more.
- The department had approved a further 11 carers since April 2016.
- A potential 10 further carers to be approved by end of March 2017. If all approved the target of 20 carers would have been exceeded.
- Under 1's and Ages 1-5 had increased slightly due to the number of larger families coming into the borough over the last three to four months.
- The Merton Age Assessment would be undertaken when a concern on the age of an unaccompanied asylum seeker child arose.

Councillor Kerin asked Officers to explain the reduction of unaccompanied asylum children between the months of December 2016 and January 2017. Paul Coke explained that this was the Eastern Region Transfer Protocol coming into play and that other Eastern Region Local Authorities had volunteered spaces and that transfers had been negotiated.

Councillor MacPherson requested that the category "Other" in terms of placement type be broken down to identify more specific areas.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee review the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate resources for looked after children, including our more difficult to place children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.**
- 2. That the category “Other” in terms of placement type be broken down in the next Information on Recent External Placements for Young People Report.**

33. Ofsted Inspection Action Plan

Andrew Carter, Head of Children’s Social Care, presented the report that provided Members with an update on the Ofsted Inspection Action Plan. Members were directed to Item 3 of the updated action plan in Appendix 1 that was highlighted as a concern. Andrew Carter stated that the Council had been waiting for the results of the Signs of Safety National Bid to which Thurrock had been unsuccessful. Contingency plans would now be put in place to rescale the implementation and workforce training had already commenced to ensure this process would be embedded into business as usual within the next three months.

Councillor Kerin congratulated the Officers on the positives of the report and welcomed the news that this item would be embedded within this time.

Councillor MacPherson stated that the 70 per cent of care leavers who were effectively supported to gain education, employment and training was not good enough and that this target should be set at a higher level to which it could be aspired to. Andrew Carter stated that this target was well above the national average of 52 per cent and could fail if the target was set too high.

The Chair commented on understanding how we need to be realistic with targets and when to identify the need to move on.

Rory Patterson stated that the Council would continue to push on performance and outcomes.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee considers the current progress and direction of travel in completing the required actions.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Committee receive assurance that action plan will deliver the requirement improvement.**

34. Children in Care Council and Voice of the child

Natalie Carter, Open Door, introduced the report and asked Joseph Kaley, Member of the Children in Care Council to update Members on the Chairperson's statement and the Thurrock Pledge.

Joseph Kaley stated that the Pledge was a document created and audited by members of Thurrock's Children in Care Council in consultation with all looked after children under Thurrock's care that aimed to safeguard and promote a care system that catered for both the needs and wants of all young people.

The Pledge was a key facet of all work carried out by the Children in Care Council and was reviewed and updated on a three year basis. This included the consultation with young people and was undertaken in different ways:

- A telephone survey had been carried out by members of the Children in Care Council overseen by staff at Open Door;
- A paper survey had been handed out at key events that were either hosted or endorsed by the Children in Care Council;
- Regular feedback received from young people over the Children in Care Council contact methods, such as mobile and email;
- An on-line survey carried out by members of the Children in Care Council at key events via the use of a portable computer.

The Pledge was now due to be reviewed and amended in 2018. In preparation of this the members of the Children in Care Council would begin to make plans to consult with young people at events that will be happening during the half-term holidays such as the Celebration Event in March 2017 as well as the Summer Break in 2017.

Both during and after consultation, members of the Children in Care Council would begin to review the document for any required amendments in line with new challenges faced by either new policies, limitations or a change in demographic. The amendments that will be approved by members of the Children in Care Council would be available for the Corporate Parenting Committee to review in early to mid 2018.

All looked after children were issued with a copy of the Pledge and copies were handed out at Children in Care Council events. Feedback was received and concluded that the Pledge needed to be advertised as much as possible and to ensure that young people newly into care were made aware of the Pledge. The feedback also highlighted that social workers were not being challenged enough with regards to the Pledge and young people felt the Pledge was not being enforced as part of the local authorities plan.

The Children in Care Council will ensure that the Pledge was used in all aspects of social work and aimed to design and produce a business card that would highlight all the key facets of the Pledge.

The Chair thanked Joseph Kaley for the good job undertaken and the active role that he played within the Children in Care Council.

Councillor Redsell stated that all 49 Members should be invited to the Celebration Event held on the 31 March 2017. Natalie Carter agreed to send an all Member email out.

Councillor Kerin thanked Joseph Kaley for the report and that he looked forward to seeing the new Pledges. Councillor Kerin requested that Committee Members were regularly updated.

Councillor MacPherson stated that the Children in Care Council were aspirational and thanked Joseph Kaley for his report and that they had to continue to hold Members and Officers to account.

Councillor Redsell stated that copies of the Pledge could be tabled to all 49 Members at Full Council.

Councillor MacPherson stated that a Motion at Full Council could be submitted to ensure that all 49 Members gave their full support to the Children in Care Council Pledges.

Councillor Baker commented on the remarkable work being undertaken by the Children in Care Council.

Keeley Pullen suggested that the Pledge could be distributed alongside the Information Pack and Welcome Letter already being sent to schools.

Joseph Kaley thanked Keeley Pullen and agreed that the Pledge should be exposed as much as possible.

Joseph Kaley confirmed that no unaccompanied asylum seeker children were members on the Children in Care Council but extended invites had been sent. The language barrier appeared to be main reason and would be looking at other ways to involve others which may result having interpreters present.

Andrew Carter stated that it was welcoming to have challenging new ideas but to ensure that duplicate effort was not being undertaken in instances such as the redesign of the Entry Care Package and the Contact Cards as these had recently been redesigned and revised by Officers.

Rory Patterson stated that some good points had been raised and that the Children in Care Council and Officers would continue to work together, have a shared work plan and to meet and monitor progress more regularly. Rory Patterson will be allocated some time on the Children in Care Council, Meet and Greet Agenda, in October 2017.

The Chair thanked all for their comments.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee supports the role of the Children in Care Council.**

2. **That the Members and Officers attend the Children in Care Council meetings when invited.**
3. **That the Corporate Parenting Committee support and endorse the role of the Young People's Project.**

35. Care Leavers into Employment, Education or Training (EET)

Paul Coke presented the report that summarised the approach to improve the number of Care Leavers into Education Employment and Training to enable them to access the regeneration opportunities in Thurrock.

Paula Gregory, Designated Nurse, questioned the impact of bursaries being removed. Keeley Pullen stated that the bursaries were based on travel costs and that the After Care Team had the facility to top these up when required. As part of the post 16 education plan there would be some negotiation as to how bursaries were best spent.

Councillor Kerin asked Officers if they foresaw any challenges within schools that no longer offered work experience. Paul Coke stated that any change was a challenge but work with the Virtual School would continue and key agencies would be pulled together to become more creative. Andrew Carter stated it was too early to say and that work with partnerships would continue which may open up opportunities.

Councillor MacPherson requested what the outcomes would be and the costs involved in working with the National Collaborative Outreach Programme. Further information would be sent to Councillor MacPherson.

The Chair asked Officers why the two databases were not standard. Keeley Pullen stated that they both had different report requirements and different collection periods. What would be required was a snap shot of national comparison so that progression could be monitored. Keeley Pullen confirmed that the database held the educational history of any young person.

Joseph Kaley stated that finding the right bursaries could be challenging for new Looked After Children and that it was important and Looked After Children be encouraged to use Inspire Youth Offer.

Christina Day stated that Looked After Children should have the option of a "back up plan" to enable them to talk through their options when leaving school.

Andrew Carter stated that it was the norm for those leaving university to have loans and to ensure that the right support and guidance was available.

RESOLVED

1. **That the Corporate Parenting Committee support the ongoing development of the programme to enable Care Leaders to transition onto Education, Employment and Training.**

2. **That the Corporate Parenting Committee recommend the activities continue to be delivered by representatives cross directorate, as well as making use of external agencies/services.**

36. Work Programme

The Chair stated that this was the last Corporate Parenting Committee for this municipal year and that the work programme was now complete.

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for their contribution and their continued support to the Corporate Parenting Committees.

The Chair asked Members if there were any items to be added or discussed for the work programme for the next municipal year.

Finally, the Chair wished Andrew Carter all the very best in his new role and that he would continue to be an asset. Members and Officers were all in agreement.

RESOLVED

1. **That the Health of Looked After Children Report will be added to the Corporate Parenting Work Programme for 2017/18.**
2. **That the Tenancy and Accommodation Support for Care Leavers Report will be added to the Corporate Parenting Work Programme 2017/18.**
3. **That the report on Virtual School Annual Report will be added to the Corporate Parenting Work Programme for 2017/18.**

The meeting finished at 9.14 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