

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 15 January 2019 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Chair), Qaisar Abbas, Abbie Akinbohun, Barry Johnson, Steve Liddiard and David Potter (Substitute) (substitute for Graham Hamilton).
- Apologies:** Councillors Graham Hamilton, Sue MacPherson and Luke Spillman.
Billie-Jo King, Children in Care Council Chairperson
- In attendance:** Gregg Brown, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Kerry King, Children in Care Chairperson
Jackie Howell, Chair of The One Team Foster Carer Association
Sharon Smith, Vice- Chair of The One Team Foster Carer Association
Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director Children and Families
Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School
Paula Gregory, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children
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.

15. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 5 September 2018 were approved as a true and correct record.

16. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

17. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

18. Children in Care Council Update

The Thurrock Open Door Representative informed the Committee of the resignation of the Children in Care Council's (CICC) Chairperson, Joseph Kaley. Since then two new joint Chairpersons had been elected – Billie-Jo King and Kerry King.

A paper update of the CICC was provided to the Committee and the Thurrock Open Door Representative invited questions and comments from the Committee. There were no questions or comments as the Committee was satisfied with the update.

19. Looked After Children Health Report

Presented by the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children (LAC), the report recommended that an update regarding the health of LAC remain a standing item on the agenda. This was due to the low returns in March 2018. The Headteacher for Virtual School suggested meeting with the Designated Nurse for LAC as there were LAC within the virtual school. The teams had been working together on the Education and Health Care Plan. The Designated Nurse for LAC had also provided the Committee with a sample of the sleep pack and clothing pack that were given to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who did not usually have clean clothing upon arrival and often struggled to sleep.

On the percentage of children placed in care outside of Thurrock, Councillor Abbas expressed concern and questioned if this was the reason why the service was unable to meet targets. Explaining that the service worked together with nurses outside of Thurrock, the Designated Nurse for LAC went on to say they strived to achieve the same targets. However, compiling paperwork together took a while which caused delays. Overall, the service had improved on its target and was dramatically higher than a year ago. Adding on, the Strategic Lead of LAC said the delay also arose from acquiring consent to complete the required paperwork. The service was working with social workers on the consent form.

Councillor Abbas asked if there were mechanisms in place to avoid sending LAC out of the borough. In answer, the Strategic Lead of LAC said the first choice was to place children within the borough but due to resources and availability, this was not always possible. Adding on, the Designated Nurse for LAC gave assurance that children placed outside the borough were monitored and in the event of no response from carers, this would be escalated to the local authority's Clinical Commissioning Group and onto Public Health England. Procedures were followed in line with statutory guidance.

Regarding acronyms within the service, the Chair asked Officers to clarify these in future reports. She went on to ask Officers to ensure recommendation 1.2 of the report was followed through with a report to be brought back.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 That the Corporate Parenting Committee provided comments and it is requested that whilst there are ongoing concerns around the compliance of meeting statutory targets for Initial Health Assessment this issue should remain as a standing agenda item for the Corporate Parenting Committee.**

- 1.2 That the Corporate Parenting Committee provided comments and it is requested that due to the significant reduction in the reported number of children having an up to date dental check and being fully immunised, this area of care is kept as a standing agenda item to be monitored by the committee.**

20. The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After - Academic Year 2017-2018

The report was introduced by the Headteacher of the Virtual School for LAC which outlined improved unauthorised attendance rates and the reduction on fixed term inclusion. Additional staffing had helped to raise standards and the key focus was a continuation on tuition.

Giving praise to the good results from the report, the Chair asked if there were any children missing education reported within the system. The Headteacher of the Virtual School for LAC replied that meetings were held to monitor attendance. There were currently two LAC missing education and had exited from the Education and Health Care Plan but were receiving home tuition.

The Chair sought clarification on the contradiction between attendance rates that had not improved and the improved rates of unauthorised absences. Explaining that attendance of LAC was monitored daily, the Headteacher of the Virtual School for LAC said a variety of reasons could be given as to why children missed school. Deciding not to attend was marked as an unauthorised absence and it was the responsibility of foster carers to notify schools of non-attendance to ensure the absence was marked as authorised.

Congratulating the virtual school on the good set of result, Councillor Liddiard mentioned available learning resources at Grays Library which would be ideal for UASC before they were placed into care. The online learning resource was free of charge and available in different languages. Thanking Councillor Liddiard for this information, the Headteacher of the Virtual School for LAC would pass this onto the UASC team.

RESOLVED:

- 1.1 The Committee noted the non-validated DFE outcomes of the summer 2018 teacher assessment, tests and examinations and commended the pupils, their schools and parents/carers on their achievements.**
- 1.2 That the Committee recognised that the cohorts of pupils are small and that this should be considered when comparing year on year data.**
- 1.3 That the Committee recognised that the length of time in care can affect the progress and outcomes of the pupils.**

1.4 That the Committee noted that prior attainment for pupils will impact on attainment in later years and CLA in care have made good progress.

1.5 The Committee approved the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for the academic year 2017-2018 and used this information to acknowledge, evaluate and if appropriate, challenge the services that are provided for all CLA.

21. Report on Unregistered/Private HMO's for Young People in Thurrock

The report was presented by the Strategic Lead for LAC which detailed supported 16+ accommodation and private/unregistered housing of multiple occupancy (HMO) for 16+. Registered HMOs for children went through a process of legal checks but there was no requirement for post 16 HMOs. The service had been made aware of two unregistered HMOs within the borough and was working to resolve this.

Thanking the Officer for the report, the Chair was pleased this had been brought to the Committee's attention as she felt there was a need for the Committee to be made aware of private HMOs. Giving assurance, the Strategic Lead for LAC said Thurrock's LAC were monitored and placed in homes within the service. The Chair expressed concern on unregistered HMOs who bought homes to let out to young people and felt these needed to be regulated. Agreeing with this, the Strategic Lead for LAC said the service was aware of other local authorities using private HMOs.

Referring to the range of costs indicated within the report, Councillor Abbas asked for more detail as to where these costs went and if these were included in private HMOs. The Strategic Lead for LAC explained that Thurrock's LAC were not placed in private HMOs and would not place the services 16+ LACs in these either. The service would not cover the cost for private HMOs and the figures given in the costs were in relation to Thurrock's monitored LAC. Adding to this, the Interim Assistant Director said the service had a HMO scheme for over 18 years old care leavers which was seen as a stepping stone to independence.

Councillor Johnson commented that there were legal checks and procedures in place to ensure landlords of HMOs were compliant to obtain a licence. The Chair declared a non-pecuniary interest as she was on the Licensing Committee.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the members of the Committee reviewed the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate supported accommodation for looked after young people over the age of 16.

22. Report on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

Presented by the Strategic Lead for LAC, the report outlined the UASC process which included an age assessment. Those found to be over 18 became the responsibility of the Border Force. The service worked with the Eastern region to ensure the UASC flow protocol was followed and were working on a protocol regarding missing UASC.

The Chair commented that Thurrock received more UASC as the borough had two ports. She asked for more clarity on the age assessment process.

On missing UASC, Councillor Abbas sought reasons on why children went missing. The Strategic Lead for UASC explained the difficulty of pinpointing a reason as many would arrive at the weekend and go missing before the service met them. Adding to this, the Assistant Director for Children and Families said preventative actions were taken to prevent UASC from going missing and a robust protocol was in place to settle children. When people came to claim a child, checks were carried out as well.

Councillor Akinbohun queried the ages of UASC. In response, the Strategic Lead for LAC said the given age was usually 16 – 17 years of age but some young people would admit they were instructed by their agent to give this age range.

Councillor Abbas questioned how children managed to slip away if the protocols were robust. The Assistant Director explained every action was taken to prevent children from running away but one could leave when they were just 'popping to the shops'. Adding to this, the Strategic Lead for LAC said young people were not accompanied when they went out and could feel restricted if they were escorted everywhere.

Continuing on, Councillor Abbas if the mechanisms that were in place were effective to prevent children running away. Stating protocols were effective, the Assistant Director for Children and Families pointed out that some UASC came with the intention to leave already. The Chair said the issue was more of a national level and was not just an issue within Thurrock. The concern was where these children went. Councillor Abbas queried if there were still costs incurred when children went missing to which the Strategic Lead for LAC confirmed no.

Councillor Liddiard questioned if the missing figure of 16 UASC was a cumulative figure to which the Strategic Lead for LAC answered the figure was over a 3 year period. Adding to this, the Assistant Director for Children and Families said many UASC did not come to the Council for help and they were known to the Council because they got caught at the borders. Only a small number of UASC did come for help.

RESOLVED:

That the members of the Committee reviewed the work of officers in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) presenting to the borough.

23. Children's Social Care Performance

The report was presented by the Assistant Director of Children and Families and gave a summary on the performance of Children's Social Care.

Congratulating the service on their adoption figures, Councillor Liddiard also welcomed the good results on care leavers in education and training.

The Chair asked for a more detailed breakdown on the supported 730 children and families within Early Help. A report would be brought back to the next Committee meeting.

RESOLVED:

That members noted the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and work undertaken to manage demand for statutory social care services.

24. Work Programme

The following reports were added to the work programme:

- Pupil premium synopsis
- Early Help service
- Merton age assessment
- Looked After Children Health Update

The meeting finished at 8.25 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