

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 10 September 2019 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Chair), Abbie Akinbohun (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Daniel Chukwu, Barry Johnson (Left at 7.45pm), Steve Liddiard (left at 8.26pm) and Jennifer Smith

Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
K King, M Abduirahma, M Mohammed, R Autnes and M Carter
Children in Care Council

Apologies: Councillor Sue MacPherson

In attendance: Roger Harris, Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health/Interim Director of Children's Services
Sheila Murphy, Assistant Director of Children's Services
Janet Simon, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Sue Green, Strategic Lead of Children's Commissioning and Service Transformation
Ruth Murdock, Strategic Lead of Quality Assurance and Reviewing
Kenna-Victoria Healey, 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 4 June 2019 were approved as a correct record.

13. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

14. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Chukwu declared a non-pecuniary interest in that he owned a company with his partner.

15. Local Offer to Care Leavers

Before Officers introduced the report the Chair invited the Care Leavers present if they wished to talk directly to Councillors about their experience of

being in care and any issues they wished to raise with the Committee. Each of the Care Leavers introduced themselves and explained their care experiences.

Members heard how one of the care leavers was now in her last year at university and was training to become a Social Worker. Another explained he had been in the care system since 2016 as part of the aftercare team and lived in semi-independent accommodation; he further explained that he had previously been homeless before coming into care but was now focusing on his studies and getting back into education.

Members heard how one young person was in care for 5 years and was now back living with her family.

Following discussions the Chair thanked the young people for attending the meeting and for sharing their experiences and thoughts about the service with the Committee. All of the care leavers chose to remain for the meeting.

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children then presented the report, in doing so, she explained the Children and Social Work Act 2017 required each Local Authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its Care Leavers. It was highlighted that the Councils Local Offer was to support young people leaving the care of Thurrock Council. The offer was focused on achieving the best outcomes for care leavers and providing all young adults leaving care in Thurrock with the best possible chance of success.

Members heard Officers held an event in August to consult with the young people leaving the care of the Council to see what they thought should be included within the document. It was confirmed that all young people received a copy of the Local Offer and the document will be subject to review annually.

The Committee were taken through the report with the Strategic Lead for Looked After Children touching on points such as the Charter for care leavers in Thurrock and a summary of the Local Offer, which included the care leavers covenant, support with finding a home, Education, Employment and training as well as financial support.

Members noted it was important to understand the history of each individual leaving care and that the Council was committed to supporting them through the new challenges they would be facing as adults with personalised plans.

Councillor Akinbohun sought clarity on the focus groups which were held with Care Leavers. Janet Simon explained that she was setting up a series of focus groups with care leavers to hear their voice and for them to influence service provision for them. The focus group in July reviewed the local offer for care leavers. Care leavers will lead on the topics for future focus groups.

Councillor Chuckwu enquired as to the support offered to young people who might be struggling with addiction. It was remarked that there was support for care leavers from a personal adviser and specialist support services in place.

Referrals are made as appropriate for the young person, however if they were not ready to accept the help given to them; then they would and could refuse the support.

Members were notified that the Council would always be there for its young people when they were ready to accept help and support, even if it had been refused previously.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee were informed about Thurrock's Local Offer to Care Leavers.

16. Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy

The Strategic Lead of Children's Commissioning and Service Transformation introduced the report highlighting the Local Authority had a statutory duty to produce a Placement Sufficiency Strategy which outlined how it would fulfil its responsibilities in terms of Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

Members were informed the strategy was focused on plans to meet the placement needs of children who were in care and young people who had recently left the care of the local authority and those who may be in care in the future.

The Committee heard how the strategy was an area of work which was reviewed and produced annually. The Strategic Lead of Children's Commissioning and Service Transformation stated high standards were expected from providers to ensure that the Councils Looked after Children had their needs met.

Feedback from young people was included within the report with 70% of children and young people scored their overall experience as 6 or above on a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most satisfied) and 87% understood the need for children's services involvement. The feedback also included comments on what young people thought the Council could do to improve, such as help children explain their feelings/listen to the child's voice, help to acknowledge issues and make changes and sensitivity of the power imbalance between social worker and family.

The Chair of the Committee thanked Officers for the report and asked the reasons why there were 14 children under the age of one who were in care. It was explained that the Child's parents may not have been able to look after them or the Council may have known about the Child pre-birth.

The Chair and Committee were assured if there was a way to keep any child safely with their family then this was the first option, including within their extended family.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee were informed about Thurrock's Sufficiency Strategy and actions.

17. Children's Social Care Performance

The Assistant Director of Children's Services presented the report which was for information. Members were notified how during Quarter 1 2019-20 there was a total of 730 children and families assessments completed, which equated to a monthly average of 243 cases.

The number of children looked after had also reduced since 2017/18, which had a monthly average of 315, to 306 in 2018-19 and 295 for Quarter 1 2019/20. Numbers continued to show a steady decrease, this was in part due to the Eastern Region Protocol, where Local Authorities were assisting with unaccompanied asylum seeker children.

Members heard how the service was trying to keep families together as much as possible, with children being placed with extended family and special guardianship orders being used, if it was in the Child's best interest to do so.

The Assistant Director of Children's Services explained that the missing children figure was higher per instance than the number of children; should a child not be home on time or they may have gone out after being told they were not allowed, this was to be reported and therefore the child would be missing for that period of time. It was commented that the missing period was usually for a short period of time and the Child would be returned to their placement fairly quickly.

Members were advised that we had recruited 5 new foster carers in Q1 and the Council were committed to recruiting new Foster Carers through the year, with the assistance of additional funding for a fostering recruitment team.

Following remarks on the lack of encouragement around education for some children in care, the Foster Care Association representatives commented that sometimes it was difficult to encourage young people in care to go to school or college despite all the best efforts of foster carers and professionals. It was stated that it was important to remember that some young people go through traumatic experiences and so getting them to attend school for half a day was an achievement which could be built on. It was further stated that each child was different and putting pressure on a young person could sometimes do more damage than help.

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. For any specific areas of interest to be flagged for inclusion/expansion within the next report.

18. Children Coming Into Our Care During June And July 2019

Strategic Lead for Looked After Children addressed Members on this report, as members had asked previously to have an understanding of some of the reasons why children came into our care. Strategic Lead for Looked After Children explained that during June and July 2019, there were 29 young people in total who came into the Councils care; of those 29 children and young people:

- 15 were under 10 years of age
- 5 were aged between 10 – 15 years of age
- 9 were 16+ years of age; 7 of whom were unaccompanied asylum seekers
- There were 6 family groups
- 6 were female and 23 were male

The unaccompanied asylum seeking young people would be initially accommodated by Thurrock whilst waiting transfer to another Eastern Region local authority through the transfer protocol. The main presenting issues for the 16+ young people who are not unaccompanied asylum seeking children, who came into the Councils care was family breakdown, including parents who did not feel they could manage the presenting behaviours by the young people.

Officers explained children who came into the Councils care under the age of 15 (20 children) did so because the care offered to those children meant they were not considered to be safe in the family home.

Members were notified the Council went into court proceedings in respect of 14 of these children to secure their position in the Councils care and to plan for their permanence. 6 children were placed with extended family members, the remaining 14 were placed with foster carers.

Members heard some of the key issues which led to children coming into the Councils care, included

- Domestic Violence
- Mental health issues
- Substance misuse (including alcohol)
- Homelessness
- Neglect
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the information in the report.**
- 2. For the information in the report to assist Members in their role as Corporate Parents**

19. The Council Pledge to Looked After Children

The Strategic Lead for Looked After Children introduced the report which provided information on the Council Pledge for Looked After Children. She explained that all Councillors were corporate parents to the Councils looked after children. Ensuring that the Councils looked after children were able to influence and shape the services provided for them was both a statutory duty and a key priority.

Members were informed that the Pledge was therefore informed and developed with the Children in Care Council. It was further explained the Pledge set out a number of promises that the Councils children and young people had identified which, if delivered, made Thurrock Council a good parent and carer.

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr Redsell, said she wanted a copy of the Pledge to go to Full Council and for all Members to have a copy of the Pledge so they will be aware of the promises we have made to looked after children and care leavers.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee endorse and adopt the Thurrock Pledge for Looked After Children.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Committee ensure the Pledge for Looked After Children is understood and effective across services working with looked after children.**

20. Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report

The Strategic Lead of Quality Assurance and Reviewing presented the report which outlined the appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) for a child or young person in the care of the Local Authority was a legal requirement under s.118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

It was explained that the IRO had a number of specific responsibilities, including but not limited to ensuring that plans for looked after children were based on a detailed and informed assessment, were up to date, effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs.

Members heard how during the reporting period, the IRO service had remained very stable with only one change in personnel due to retirement. The Service continued to comprise of five, permanent Independent Reviewing

Officers. During the performance year April 2018 – March 2019, the IRO service conducted a total of 755 reviews, which was an increase on the number of reviews conducted the previous year.

The Strategic Lead of Quality Assurance and Reviewing advised Members that in preparation of the IRO Annual Report, an Audit was undertaken of Looked After Children reviews by the Interim Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Parenting Committee noted the IRO Annual report 2018 - 2019 and the recommendations in the report.

The Chair of the Committee suggested that standing orders be suspended as the meeting was running beyond 9pm. Members agreed.

21. Intensive Foster Carer Training Action Research

The Chair advised Members that the report would be deferred to the next meeting as Keeley Pullen, Virtual Head teacher, was unable to attend this evening due to illness.

Resolved:

That this report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee on 7 January 2020.

22. Corporate Parenting Committee - Annual Report 2018/2019

The Assistant Director of Children's Services introduced the report which highlighted the work of the Committee over the last year and asked that Member's refer the report to Full Council for all Members to see the work of the Committee.

Members heard how the report included an overview to being a Corporate Parent, key points to improving the outcomes for Looked After Children and what makes Corporate Parenting effective.

The Chair of the Committee thanked Officers for the report and commented that she welcomed the report. She continued to state that it was important to share the work of the Committee with all Members and felt this was a step forward.

RESOLVED:

1.1 That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2018/19 be noted.

1.2 That the Corporate Parenting Annual Report be referred to Full Council, to share the work of Committee and their main achievements for 2018/19 municipal year.

23. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2019/2020

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

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the following reports be included on the Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2019/2020:**
- **Children's Social Care Performance – January and March 2020**
 - **Ofsted Update/ Report – January 2020**

The meeting finished at 9.15 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