

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 7 January 2020 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Joycelyn Redsell (Chair), Abbie Akinbohun (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Daniel Chukwu, Barry Johnson, Steve Liddiard and Jennifer Smith
- Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Kerry King, Children in Care Council
- Apologies:** Councillors 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
Tiffney Bright, Skills Manager
Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School
Kenna-Victoria Healey, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

24. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 10 September 2019 were approved as a correct record.

Councillor Redsell, Chair of the Committee explained that she had agreed for the recently circulated document, which had been published by the Local Government Association and would allow this to be discussed at the Work Programme.

25. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

26. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

27. Children's Social Care Performance

The Assistant Director of Children's Services introduced the report and in doing so, explained it gave Members an overview of the performance of the

Children Social Care Service. It also compared the authority to its statistical neighbours.

The Chair of the Committee thanked officers for the report and sought as to how many children under the age of 2 years were in the Councils care. The Assistant Director of Children's Services advised the figure was low with a percentage of between 4 and 5 percent of children in care being under 2 years old. She continued to explain that unless the Council was assured a child could return home safely, then they would be placed with a family member, and if this was not possible the child would be adopted.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That members note 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.**

28. Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)

The Assistant Director of Children's Services presented the report, advising the Committee, that the ILACS inspections by Ofsted focused on the effectiveness of local authority children's services and arrangements in four areas. At the end of the Inspection Ofsted rated Thurrock's services as Good.

Following the inspection, Ofsted left three recommendations, which Officers were already working on.

Members were further informed that Thurrock's children's social care last Ofsted inspection was judged to be 'requires improvement'. Members heard how the Council were notified of the ILAC inspection on the 4 November, with inspectors visting from the 11 November for two weeks.

The Corporate Director for Adults, Housing and Health and Interim Director for Children's Services commented that during the inspection there were up to seven Ofsted inspectors in the service. He stated he was impressed with the attitude of staff and the way they embraced the inspection, with many preparing for weeks in advance, staying late and even working weekends.

It was enquired by Members as to how Officers were planning to improve on recommendation 3. The Assistant Director for Children Services explained it was supporting children and being ready to listen when they were ready to tell their story.

Members thanked officers for their continued hard work not just through the recent Ofsted inspection.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock's outcome from the Ofsted ILACS.

29. Head Start Housing - Progress To Date

The Skills Manager addressed Members notifying them the Head Start Housing Strategy was formally launched in December 2018 and was an initiative between Children Services and Housing.

She continued to advise the Head Start Housing Strategy aimed to return all care leavers to Thurrock by December 2023, it was explained this was so they could be better supported by more visits from their After Care Personal Advisor, have easier access to local services, diverse education and employment opportunities and regular access to networks of family and friends.

During questions from the Committee it was enquired if Officers felt Grays was the right area for housing care leavers. The Skills Manager advised she felt it was, for a number of reasons including easy access to the services on offer to them, quick support from advisors and in an area where many care leavers had family ties too.

Councillor Johnson commented that he welcomed the strategy and the cross-working between both services.

RESOLVED:

- 1. Continue to work on cross directorate specifications for services covering estate agency, repairs, storage and floating support;**
- 2. Continue work with Housing to purchase up to 12 beds for exclusive use by Care Leavers;**
- 3. Create and promote innovative ways to engage Care Leavers to evaluate the Head Start Housing service, as well as develop basic maintenance and cleaning skills;**
- 4. Continue reducing costs, improving quality, maximising cost avoidance, regularly reviewing/modifying processes and developing effective working relationships with partners to further extend the portfolio of properties;**
- 5. Continue work to develop joint protocols, enable consistent use of terminology and templates for services from 16 years+ and positively contribute to other directorates' strategies.**

30. Intensive Foster Carer Training Action Research

The Head Teacher for Virtual Schools, presented the report to the Committee explaining one of the roles of the Virtual School was to provide training to a range of colleagues including social workers, designated teachers and foster carers. This training included providing information which enabled those professionals to support the educational outcomes for Looked after Children.

Members heard how the Virtual School Headteacher was currently participating in an exciting new professional qualification for Virtual Schools which explored support for a range of colleagues who supported children in care. It was explained the two year course was being provided by Bath/Spa University and the National Association of Virtual School Heads.

At the end of the course the Virtual School Headteacher for Thurrock would obtain a Master's Degree in Professional Practice for Care Experienced Children. A key element of the course was to complete a piece of action research which related to the role of the Virtual School Headteacher; with the focus of this particular subject having been chosen based upon prior research into the impact that foster carers could have on promoting the educational outcomes for children in their care.

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association, both shared their experiences of being foster carers and having to speak with schools to get the best for the children they were caring for.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Committee support the structured training programme to be delivered to foster carers which is provided annually by the Virtual School;**
- 2. That the Committee sets an expectation that all Thurrock foster carers attend the training to improve their knowledge and confidence to support the education of the children and young people in their care.**

31. The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After - Academic Year 2018/2019

The Head Teacher for Virtual Schools introduced the report to the Committee explaining she was pleased with the improvement in attendance rates to 96% as this was above the national average for all schools.

She continued to explain there had been a there had been no permanent exclusions of Children Looked After for over a six year period and that wherever possible schools were encouraged to avoid fixed term exclusions. The Committee were informed a total of 16 pupils had been excluded across the academic year, which equated to 8.2% of the cohort.

It was then expressed that the Local Authority carefully monitored any child missing education for those Children Looked After placed in and out of the borough. With the Virtual School producing weekly data for any child who was missing education due to lack of a school place or through extended absence.

Members heard how the attainment in the phonics screening check was low for this year. In response to this, the Virtual School had purchased phonics resources for children to use at home which were linked to developing

recognition, synthesis and segmentation of letters and words. It was explained that these games and practical approach should support the work completed in school.

Councillor Akinbohun enquired as to how Officers were planning to reduce the number of exclusions. It was explained that there were a number of reasons for a child to be excluded from school and the aim was to be made aware of a decision to exclude before the decision was made; as in many cases the virtual headteacher was informed after this decision was taken.

It was commented that it was important for schools, carers, the virtual school and the local authority to be in communication at all times, so to ensure the right support was given to Looked after Children.

The Chair of the Committee commended the report and thanked the Headteacher of the Virtual School for all of her work.

RESOLVED:

- 1. The Committee notes the non-validated DFE outcomes of the summer 2019 teacher assessment, tests and examinations and commends the pupils, their schools and parents/carers on their achievements;**
- 2. That the Committee notes that prior attainment for pupils will impact on attainment in later years and CLA in care have made good progress;**
- 3. The Committee approves the Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for the academic year 2018-2019 and uses this information to acknowledge, evaluate and if appropriate, challenge the services that are provided for all CLA.**

32. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme 2019/2020

The Chair of the Committee addressed Members explaining that the document that had been circulated to them by Democratic Services, had been published by the Local Government Association, with the aim to offer support to local Members in their roles as Corporate Parents. She asked that the document be added to the work programme for the March meeting; so that a full discussion could be had.

RESOLVED:

That the following reports be included on the Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme for the 3 March 2020:

- Support for Care Leavers – Resource Pack**
- Update on Ofsted Recommendation – Timeliness of Health Assessments**

The meeting finished at 8.05pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**