

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 14 September 2021 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Abbie Akinbohun (Chair), Adam Carter, Sara Muldowney, Kairen Raper and Elizabeth Rigby.
- Laura Hall, Thurrock Open Door
Sharon Smith, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Jenny Josling, Vice-Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
- Apologies:** Councillors Jennifer Smith (Vice-Chair), Georgette Polley and Jane Potheary
- In attendance:** Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services
Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help
Ruth Murdock,
Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, Looked After Children
Kenna-Victoria Healey, 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.

9. Minutes

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting meeting on 1 June 2021 were approved as a correct record.

10. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

11. Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interest.

12. Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 1 2021-22

The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help presented the report which was on pages 13/36 of the agenda.

Councillor Carter sought clarification as to the number of asylum seeking children within the Council's care as the figures in the report were different to those mentioned. The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early help explained these were more up-to-date figures as the report was written

for the September meeting. Councillor Carter asked if these figures could be circulated to Members of the Committee.

Referring to 4.2, youth detention accommodation Councillor Muldowney commented it was worrying to see an increase of knife crime involving young people and enquired as to what the Council was doing to prevent this. The Assistant Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help explained the Council were looking into the overrepresentation of the BAME young people in the criminal justice system as this was a national issue not just within Thurrock. She continued to advise that research into the area evidenced that young black males were not always given the same opportunities as young white males from the police or the courts. She continued to advise that the Council had strategic meetings with a variety of partners including Health, Police and Education service to help identify young people who could be at risk of joining gangs and the possibility of going through the criminal justice system.

The Director of Children Services echoed the comments made by the Assistant Director in that officer were working with a variety of partners, and seeking to fund outreach work with schools. She continued to explain that by working with secondary schools to identify those children who could be at risk of antisocial behaviour or even joining gangs, with early help and support this could stop children being excluded from school. She commented that great work had been completed with the Olive Academy and the Community Safety Team had been working with the Police to help the prevention of gangs within the borough. Councillor Muldowney commented she was pleased to see a good focus on the prevention and support of young people.

RESOLVED:

1. That members note the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and note the work that is undertaken to ensure good and improving performance.

2. Note the impact of COVID 19 on performance.

13. Adoption Statement of Purpose

The Strategic Lead Looked after Children and Placements presented the report found on page 37 to 58 of the agenda.

Councillor Muldowney thanked officers for the report and enquired as to what the differences were from the statement of purpose for 2021/2022 to the previous year. The Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Placements referred members to 4.13 of the appendix and explained that the Council recognised the importance of continuing contact for children with birth families and a further change within the statement was that the Council now made arrangements for ongoing contact either direct or indirect between the child and their birth family, unless there were exceptional circumstances to prevent this.

It was further enquired if there was a difference of outcome between children who were fostered and those who were adopted. The Strategic Lead Looked after Children and Placements explained there was a significant difference as when a child was going through the adoption process there was a strict checklist which had to be followed. She continued by explaining once an adoption order had been made that child would then be part of that family unit.

Members were further advised that the council was part of adopt East, an alliance of adoption services and voluntary adoption agencies which included Essex, Suffolk, Southend and Norfolk. The Strategic Lead Looked after Children and Placements explained when a child was in foster care they still remained a looked after child until they were 18 and a care leaver. There were also statutory duties the Council must fulfil for a child who was with a foster family this included Initial Health Assessments.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock's Adoption Statement of Purpose

14. Fostering Statement of Purpose

The Strategic Lead Looked after Children and Placements presented the report on pages 59 to 86.

Councillor Carter thanked for the Strategic Lead for her report and enquired following the last meeting where Members and officers discussed the rebranding of recruiting Foster Carers, he asked how officers were getting on with this and for an update on any new foster carers. Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Placements was pleased to advise Members since April 2021 the Council had approved five new fostering households, and there were currently 12 applications going through the assessment process. She continued that although there had been less enquiries, there were more families being put through to the assessment stage and the Council had still received an increase in enquiries to the previous year.

Councillor Rigby enquired as to whether officers were monitoring where most of the enquiries were coming from such as social media. The Strategic Lead Looked after Children and Placements explained officers were keeping KPIs and tracking which of the media outlets were most effective. She stated since the rebranding approach officers wanted to try everything from newspapers to the Councils website to billboards. There were discussions too advertise via online outlets such as social media. Previously recruitment would take place in the form of word of mouth and people talking with current foster carers.

The Chair of the Committee asked as to what the incentives were for someone to become a foster carer for Thurrock. It was explained that one incentive was that if a foster carer lived within the borough, subject to criteria, their council tax would be paid by the Local Authority. The Strategic Lead

Looked after Children and Placements continued by advising in addition there was a great fostering community who supported not only new members but each other on a daily basis.

Members then heard from the Foster Carers on the Committee, who explained that before a child was placed within their care they would receive a phone call from the Authority to explain the child's background and to enquire if they felt the child would match within their family. It was up to the Foster Carer with the information they had, to make the decision whether they would accept the child. It was commented that both foster carers felt it was a great job, and exciting as not knowing what could come next, sometimes you could have a child for a short period of time and other times it could be a number of years. Members heard how the foster carers wouldn't do the role that they did if they didn't love being able to support these children and young people as it was not only difficult for the foster child but also on their own families as they were also accepting a child to be part of their family.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee are informed about Thurrock's Fostering Statement of Purpose

15. Independent Visitor Service for Looked After Children

The Strategic Lead for Quality Assurance and Reviewing Children Social Care presented the report to the committee which was found on page 87 to 96.

The Chair of the Committee enquired as to how the independent visitors were recruited. The Strategic Lead for quality assurance and Reviewing Social Care explained that Thurrock Opendoor made the necessary enquiries and the independent visitor would be paired with the young person depending on the requirements needed. She continued by advising all independent visitors received training before being introduced to the young person.

Councillor Raper thanked officers for the report and enquired how this support had been previously offered to children. It was explained the strategic Lead for Quality Assurance and Reviewing Children's Social Care has been within her role for the last three years and for this time the service had been offered alongside Thurrock Opendoor.

RESOLVED:

The Committee understands the duties as Corporate Parents regarding Independent Visitors for children who are looked after.

The Committee has the opportunity to scrutinise practice against questions set out by the National Independent Visitor Network (ivnetwork.org.uk) hosted by Barnardo's.

16. Children in Care Council Update

As the Chair of the Children In Care Council and the Children In Care Council Project Worker had sent their apologies to the meeting, the Chair of the Committee asked members if they would be in agreement to defer the item to the January meeting to allow Christopher to speak to the Committee.

This was agreed by all members.

RESOLVED:

That the report be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee on Tuesday 4th January.

17. Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report 2020/2021

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced to the report which was to be found on pages 105 to 116 of the agenda.

Councillor Rigby the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee for 2020/2021 commented that she welcomed the report as it informed all Members as to the work of the committee. She continued by thanking officers for their hard work.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2020/2021 be noted.

That the Corporate Parenting Annual Report be referred to Full Council, to share the work of Committee and their main achievements for 2020/2021 municipal year.

18. Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme

The Corporate Parenting Committee discussed the work programme at pages 117/118 of the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be updated to reflect the following:

- **Sufficiency Placement Report be moved to 1st March 22**
- **Report on KPI within the foster department – 4th January 2022**
- **Report following DFE visit and report on care leavers including its recommendations – 4th January 2022**

The meeting finished at 8.13pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

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