

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 3 December 2015 at 7.00 pm

Present:	Councillors Susan Little (Chair), Bukky Okunade (Vice-Chair) (arrived 7:07), James Baker (arrived 7:17), Leslie Gamester, James Halden, Steve Liddiard and Joycelyn Redsell Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Apologies:	Councillors Clare Baldwin, Natalie Carter and Sharon Smith
In attendance:	Patricia Perolls, Designated Nurse, NHS Basildon & Brentwood CCG Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services Andrew Carter, Head of Children's Social Care Paul Coke, Service Manager (Children & Families) Simon Shardlow, Interim Service Manager, Placement and Support Keeley Pullen, Head Teacher for Virtual School Jenny Shade, 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.

17. Minutes

The Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on the 29 October 2015 were approved as a correct record.

Jackie Howell asked that her comment on the Independent Review Officer Annual Report 2014-15 be changed to say Looked After Child Review instead of Health Plan. This was agreed by the Chair and Members.

The Chair reminded Officers that reports should not contain Acronyms as this will assist members to understand the reports.

The Chair also reminded Officers that recommendations should not be to note reports.

The Chair asked Officers to report back on the Action Points raised at the October committee.

The first Action Point was asked by Councillor S Little, who asked the Officer to bring the recommendations and action plan to the Adoption Report to this committee to reassure members that these had been signed off.

Andrew Carter informed the Members of the recommendations from the 2012 Ofsted Adoption Inspection have been followed up as set out in summary below:

1. Ensure that the format of the life story book is appropriate to the child's age and understanding that the book is given in stages and that prospective adopters were encouraged to update it with the child as their understanding develops. Ensure also that the completed life story book and later life letter were given at the latest within 10 working days of the adoption ceremony.
2. Encourage birth parents to use a support worker who is independent of the child's social worker from the time adoption is identified as a plan for the child. Help birth parents to work through their concerns through the counselling they receive and help them to understand how their child will benefit from their involvement in the adoption process.
3. Develop the recruitment strategy to ensure it addresses the recruitment of prospective adopters from minority ethnic backgrounds.
4. Ensure that the adoption panel's recommendation about the suitability of the prospective adopter is made within eight months of the receipt of their formal application.
5. Review partnership working with other adoption agencies so that arrangements most effectively meet the needs of children and adopters. Where support is provided by another agency on behalf of this agency, ensure that written records clearly demonstrate that children and adopters were being appropriately supported.
6. Ensure that you provide birth parents and adopted adults with full information about the Adoption Contact Register in a form that suits their needs. Information is provided to adopted adults in relation to the Adoption Contact Register. Additional focus is required to consistently engage birth parents and provide them with this support. Service planning is focused on increasing support to birth parents.
7. Ensure that all of the information in the children's guide is written in a style that is appropriate to the child's age and level of understanding.
8. Ensure that the manager exercises effective leadership so that the service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible child care and service provision for service users, including birth parents and relatives, adopted adults, children and adopters.

The second Action Point was asked by Councillor Redsell, who asked the Officer to provide a breakdown of the age groups of children attending their Independent Review.

Andrew Carter provided the committee with the following breakdown.

Age Group	Number of Young Persons	Number of Young Persons Attended Review
0-4	39	30
5-11	80	72
12-16	158	132
17 Plus	61	53

18. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

19. Declaration of Interests

No interests were declared.

20. Education Results of Looked After Children

Keeley Pullen briefing summarised the report which outlined the educational outcomes for Thurrock Looked After Children in 2014/15 and analysed the results.

A supplementary document will be distributed to the Committee Members entitled Education Progress for Looked After Children Overview Report – November 2015.

Councillor Halden thanked the Officer for a very comprehensive report but had concerns on how Looked After Children were being tracked through system and how schools would know that some Looked After Children may have specific requirements. The Officer confirmed that Initial Plans and Personal Education Plans were undertaken and that the expectation would be on the school to work with the child and have a good relationship with the carers or foster carers.

Councillor Halden asked for assurance that the relationship between the Council and the schools is robust enough to ensure consistency especially for those children that were in the system at different times. The Officer confirmed that they were confident with the schools and that every reassurance is given that Looked After Children were placed with the right education package.

The Officer also confirmed that Schools and Looked After Children work together to ensure that any transition between schools were carried out.

The Officer stated that Independent Schools do not offer GCSEs so alternative packages are required to be found.

The Chair asked how many Looked After Children were in Year 11 in education. The Officer confirmed that 42 Looked After Children were in Year 11 and that last year's cohort data showed 38 were in education. The Officer explained the difference of four and explained the reasons of the circumstances.

Carmel Littleton informed the committee that the Department for Education only requested data for A*-C and that future reports will be slightly different which will also provide data on Children with Special Needs.

Councillor Baker asked for clarification on what Virtual Schools were.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee scrutinise the 2014/15 performance of Looked After Children and to provide challenge and support to the Virtual School to further improve outcomes for all of our Looked After Children.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Committee hold all schools and colleges to account through the Virtual School to ensure that Looked After Children were making the best possible educational progress.**

21. Recent External Placements for Young People

Simon Shardlow presented the report which updated the members on the placement choices made for Looked After Children between the period of 1 August 2015 to 31 October 2015.

The Officer confirmed that there were 338 Looked After Children with an increase in the number of accompanied asylum seekers. Statistics were explained to members regarding the number of age groups entering and ceasing care and the reasons for these.

Councillor Redsell commented on the increase of 16 plus years of age and the Officer confirmed that this was the most challenging age group to place.

Members asked Officer to provide the committee with a breakdown on the reasons of the six children leaving care on their 18 birthday who deciding not to stay in care.

Andrew Carter confirmed that although the majority of special guardianships were family members, foster carers can also be included in this.

Councillor Liddiard asked Officers for a breakdown of Looked After Children finances compared to other local authorities. Carmel Littleton commented that this may be hard to collate due to the confidentiality of this published data.

Officers agreed to bring this back to the committee in the form of graph comparisons which will display the different age ranges.

This will be added to the Action Plan and brought back to the committee.

Members also asked Officer to provide a response to confirm the breakdown figures of how long Looked After Children were into care before they ceased. This will be added to the Action Plan and brought back to the committee.

A breakdown by age range of children becoming looked after was also explained to the members:

11+	11 young people
9-10	3 young people
8-9	9 young people
7-8	9 young people
6-7	5 young people
5-6	6 young people
4-5	26 young people
3-4	54 young people
2-3	46 young people
1-2	39 young people
0-1	130 young people

Councillor Gamester asked Officers if the education pathway was available for 24 year olds. Paul Coke commented that the local authority had a duty to offer this to 18 plus years of age up to 25 years of age to encourage further education, training or employment.

Simon explained the placement panel which is held weekly and regularly requests ongoing placements to be brought to the panel throughout the year for review based on the child's need.

The Chair requested that the recommendation be amended to say scrutinise and not note.

Action Point for Officers - To provide an average cost for Thurrock Placements and a scaling for this against the lowest and highest average Placement costs nationally.

Action Point for Officers - A breakdown figures of how long Looked After Children were into care before they ceased to be in care.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee scrutinise the efforts made by Officers to choose appropriate resources for Looked After Children including our more difficult to place children.**

22. Health of Looked After Children

Patricia Perolls, Designated Nurse, presented the report which updated members of the healthcare needs of Looked After Children to ensure their health needs were addressed appropriately. It was highlighted to members that there had been an increase in the number of Looked After Children in Thurrock. The report focused on the following issues:

- Reported Performance
- Immunisations
- Health Assessments and Development Checks
- Optician
- Future Plans

The data from the Department of Education indicates that nearly two thirds of Looked After Children were placed out of area. It was clarified that the data in the report was based on last year's statistics and that further data would not be available until next month.

Patricia Perolls stated that Looked After Children were entitled to an annual optician test and those children at the ages of 16 and 17 will be supported by the local authority with help on costs via the National Health Service. If foster carers had any queries regarding the timing of the optician tests they should speak to the Looked After Children's Nurse.

The Chair asked the Officers were there records available for Looked After Children from birth parents. The Officer confirmed that these would be available if the child was born in this area.

Jackie Howell commented how surprised she was at the 57 per cent of the existing cohort were up to date with immunisations. On behalf of all Foster Carers she would like to record that foster carers do all they can to ensure immunisations were carried out on Looked After Children and this is recorded at supervision or at the Looked After Child review.

The Chair thanked Jackie and stated that the Foster Carers were doing an excellent job and appreciated all that they do to ensure Looked After Children were kept up to date with immunisations.

Andrew Carter stated that the 57 per cent was a concern but lots of work was involved to go through records to ensure these were up to date and this required the IT system to be right.

Members requested that a further Health of Looked After Children be returned to the Corporate Parenting Committee, alongside the Care Quality Commission to explain the significant delay in initial health assessments.

Councillor Okunade asked for assurance that data is being recorded accurately. The Officer confirmed that at present the Health and the Social Work systems do not speak with each other so prevents records being updated alongside each other. The Looked After Child Nurse is to hot desk in

the Looked After Children's team on a weekly basis to ensure that information is more readily to hand and will be shared with social workers.

Councillor Gamester stated his concern that the Health Service and GPs were using System 1 but the Local Authority were not, hence there was no cross over and expressed his worry that all this should have been in place several years ago but this still was not the case.

Andrew Carter stated that IT had moved on and a new system called OneView will be available shortly.

Councillor Redsell stated that it was disappointing that the two systems do not yet share data and Councillor Redsell agreed to take this as a matter to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Chair requested that the recommendation be amended to say scrutinise and not note.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee scrutinise the contents of the report, acknowledging where progress has been made, whilst supporting Officers in their efforts to improve, where necessary, especially in facilitating inter-agency cooperation.**
- 2. That the item on Health of Looked After Children be added to the work programme for March 2016.**

23. Housing for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Paul Coke presented the report which updated members on the housing provision for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. The report contained information that clearly demonstrated the ambition of the local authority for care leavers in that the best outcomes in terms of good quality housing provision that any care leavers would be proud of and would be happy to live in permanently.

The report contained current statistics as of November 2015 of the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation from the ages of 19-21.

Paul Coke stated that the After Care Team had a good working relationship with Housing and worked very positively together. It was also stated that care leavers were in a housing allocation priority group.

Councillor Redsell asked clarification on the two bed room properties and who would this be available to. Paul Coke confirmed that these properties would be used as when required and that young persons or unaccompanied asylum seeker could be placed in these properties.

The Staying Put Arrangement where young people who wish to remain living with their carers once they turn 18 was explained to the members.

Councillor Redsell commented that the Staying Put Arrangement should be made more aware to care leavers. Andrew Carter explained that 18 years of age is not an ideal age for any young person to live independently and this was a means of looking for alternative accommodation.

Andrew Carter confirmed that Foster Carers should also be included in the Outcomes Section of the report as they all provide excellent support to young people in their care.

The Chair asked the Officer to explain to the members what Foyer was. The Officer stated that this was a project in the form of transition for care leavers between 16-25 years of age working with key workers on employment, further education and training. Care leavers will also be given priority group in the housing allocation process.

Councillor Okunade asked the Officers how many Thurrock care leavers have been evicted. The Officer confirmed that none had been evicted from the accommodation provided. Reviews were carried out three, six and nine monthly by the After Care Team and accompanied by a member of the housing team.

Councillor Redsell asked the Officers how they proposed to accommodate the 31 young people who will reach 18 years of age this year. The Officer confirmed that this will be a challenging task but these will be reviewed at the Transition Panel and one-to-ones will be carried out to ensure that the right accommodation is found for their needs. The Officer confirmed that it was clear that the best would be found for these young people.

Keeley Pullen stated that not all of the 31 young persons will come back to Thurrock as they were placed outside of the borough, although every assurance will be made to find the right accommodation.

The Chair asked if builders could be asked to pay for some care leavers accommodation as part of any new building developments. The Officer agreed that discussions could take place with the planning department and that Carmel Littleton was currently working with two Officers to try and identify any other council who has done this. Carmel will report back to members.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee support the Local Authority in its duty to provide appropriate accommodation for its care leavers.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Committee supports the partnership working between Social Care and Housing Department.**

24. Work Programme

It was agreed at the Corporate Parenting Committee to amend the work programme to include:

- That the item on Health of Looked After Children be added to the work programme for March 2016. This item will include an update from the Care Quality Commission.

Members were in agreement with the proposed changes to the work programme, following which the Chair requested that an updated work programme be circulated to the Committee and Officers following the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the work programme be noted, subject to amendment detailed above.

The meeting finished at 8.57 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**

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