

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 3 March 2016 at 7.00 pm

- Present:** Councillors Susan Little (Chair), Bukky Okunade (Vice-Chair), Leslie Gamester, James Halden, Steve Liddiard and Joycelyn Redsell (arrived 7.04)
- Natalie Carter, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Jackie Howell, Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
Sharon Smith, Vice Chair, The One Team, Foster Carer Association
- Apologies:** Councillors James Baker, Clare Baldwin and Christina Day
- In attendance:** David Archibald, Interim 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
Paula McCullough, Commissioning Officer, Children's Services
Jenny Shade, 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.

25. Minutes

The Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee, held on the 3 December 2015, were approved as a correct record.

Councillor Okunade asked that her question on Education Results of Looked After Children be added to the minutes.

“Councillor Okunade asked the Officers how much help and support is given to young children in terms of forward planning and career guidance to ensure that care leavers were in education. The Officer stated that this would depend on the age of the child and their particular settings, but normally from years 9, 10 and 11 talks were undertaken regarding the child's aspirations for the future. From this point work is done on the pathway that the child would like to go down for further education and from year 10 talks would take place around visits to colleges, specific educational events and involvement of the key worker. From Year 11 a personal career plan would be drawn up for every student to identify their needs.”

Councillor Halden asked that his request for information on the Recent External Placements for Young People item be added to the Minutes.

“Councillor Halden requested a breakdown of external placements that were made out of choice for placements outside of the borough against those placements made within the borough.”

The Chair asked Officers to report back on the Action Point raised at the December committee.

The Action was asked by Councillor Liddiard who asked the Officer to provide an average cost for Thurrock placements and a scaling for this against the lowest and highest average Looked After Placement costs nationally.

The Officer provided the committee with the following breakdown:

Contract Placements	-	Average Cost per week	£873.58
	-	Spot Purchase per week	£911.70

Therefore the average cost for a Thurrock Placement per week would be £879.42.

26. Items of Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

27. Declaration of Interests

Councillor Halden declared a non-pecuniary interest as he had been interviewed as part of the Children’s Services Ofsted Inspection.

Councillor Okunade declared a non-pecuniary interest as he had been interviewed as part of the Children’s Services Ofsted Inspection.

Councillor Little declared a non-pecuniary interest as he had been interviewed as part of the Children’s Services Ofsted Inspection.

28. Health of Looked After Children

Patricia Perolls, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, presented the report which focused on the most recent data that was available and the most recent Care Quality Commission inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children’s Health Service undertaken within Thurrock. The main key points highlighted were:

- Performance for completion of yearly Review Health Assessments has shown improvement on the previous year.
- A figure for recorded dental checks had improved from 84.2 per cent to 92 per cent.
- A figure for recorded immunisation records were also up from 57.8 per cent to 85 per cent.
- Improvements had been made to improve the health outcomes for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Young People.

Patricia Perolls stated that although improvements had been made it was hoped that these could also be improved further in the coming year.

The Looked After Children's Nurse for Thurrock would now be based within social care one day a week to support the Council and progress improvements in the collection of data.

Councillor Halden asked if the Initial Health Checks were carried out by general practitioners. Patricia Perolls confirmed that these checks were undertaken by community paediatricians and where it was felt that inferior quality health checks had been undertaken on out of borough placements had been referred back to the borough for completion.

Councillor Halden asked if this service was commissioned by the Clinical Commissioning Group and what monitoring would take place to ensure the service was being undertaken. Councillor Halden made reference to the Learning Disability Health Checks that was an agenda item on the Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Patricia Perolls confirmed that it was very important to monitor the Clinical Commissioning Groups performance and this was monitored by Key Performance Indicators on a quarterly basis.

Councillor Halden asked how the 83.3 per cent of checks that had been carried out compared to the Council's neighbouring boroughs. Patricia Perolls confirmed that she did not have this information to hand but agreed to produce a report on this and let Members have a copy.

Councillor Redsell asked whether the health work undertaken by Thurrock Council to ensure parental health history was available was already being done. Patricia Perolls confirmed that this was the case but information was very reliant on parents willing to share birth history. It was also confirmed that training of staff on health assessments were essential due to the more complex and emotional cases that were being dealt with.

Councillor Okunade stated how pleased she was with the immunisation figures and asked how the out of borough Looked After Children were being monitored. The Officer confirmed that co-ordination is undertaken by the Looked After Children's Team with the out of borough Nurse and that assessments were being quality assured on a 3 monthly basis. Any concerns by the local nurse were referred back to the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children.

Patricia Perolls confirmed that plans were in place to undertake quality assurance visits to out of borough Looked After Children.

Councillor Little stated that Sight Tests were also an important part of a child's health care and that this should be made part of the health assessment.

Jackie Howell stated that Looked After Children attend yearly sight tests unless there were problems which they would then attend every 3 months, it is also the responsibility of the foster carer to ensure these checks were undertaken.

Councillor Halden stated that some local general practitioners were under immense pressure and what confidence was there that Looked After Children's problems were prominent in general practitioners mind, especially those single handed general practitioners who, in some instances, were opting for retirement rather than being inspected by the Clinical Commissioning Group.

Patricia Perolls confirmed that under Section 11 Audit there were aspects that general practitioners have the knowledge of Looked After Children and that when Patricia Perolls started her role she visited all practices within the borough. A booklet on Primary Care Resource Pack regarding Looked After Children had been provided to each Thurrock practice. Information and regular updates were sent and all contact details were available.

Councillor Redsell stated that further information could have been provided on the feedback provided on the report from the Care Quality Commission, especially around some explanation regarding the age of the child.

Sharon Smith stated that Looked After Children were accompanied by Foster Carers at appointments and they were seen by the paediatrician and not the nurse.

Andrew Carter stated that although the report was positive he questioned the timeliness of health assessments and urged the Committee to keep close scrutiny on the timeliness of all health assessments.

Councillor Okunade asked for clarification on how different initial health assessments were undertaken on unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Andrew Carter confirmed that unaccompanied asylum seekers were treated no differently although in between the health assessments, age assessments may need to be undertaken.

Councillor Redsell asked if a Looked After Child was diagnosed with TB would the placement be stopped. Andrew Carter confirmed that very few cases had been diagnosed and that this would not stop any placement from happening.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee were asked to scrutinise this report.**
- 2. That the Health of Looked After Children Report be added to the Corporate Parenting work programme in the next municipal year.**

29. Recent External Placements for Young People

The Officer presented the report which briefed Members on the range of issues regarding the placement choices made for Looked After Children for the period November 2015 to January 2016.

The Officer referred members to comparison data within the report which included:

- The increase in the number of Looked After Children in the period November 2015 to January 2016.
- The increase to 85 unaccompanied asylum seeking children making Thurrock the third highest area in the Eastern Region with the number of unaccompanied asylum children.
- The 16+ age group is the busiest area of activity of those Looked After Children entering and ceasing to be looked after.
- The breakdown by age of children becoming looked after within this period.
- The aim to keep a looked after child within a 20 mile radius from their birth home.

Councillor Little asked Officers to look at the criteria on how the 20 mile radius is calculated.

Councillor Halden requested again for a breakdown of external placements that were made out of choice to be placed outside of the borough rather than a making that placement within the borough. This was an action point that Officers would take away and report back on.

A discussion took place between Members, Co-Optee Members and Officers on the involvement of the Children in Care Council to undertake a short survey on feedback about placements.

It was agreed that this survey may encourage all Looked After Children to engage.

The discussion was encouraged by all Members and would provide them with feedback on how Looked After Children felt about their placements.

Councillor Okunade also stated that consideration and care would need to be given to the type of questions asked and the survey would not be undertaken to monitor their placement.

Councillor Halden agreed that the questions would need to be professional and with no leading questions.

Councillor Gamester stated that transcripts could be used if this would be the preferred option to get feedback.

Councillor Little stated that graphs could be used to monitor how a Looked After Child was feeling.

It was felt that as good corporate parents, Members should be aware of any issues that arise in placements.

Councillor Redsell asked for clarification on the reasons why the number of 0-5 year olds entering and ceasing to be looked after in this period. The Officer confirmed that the exact reasons were not to hand but this was likely that the child had returned home, been adopted or under special guardianship.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Members of the Corporate Parenting Committee review the efforts made by Officers to choose appropriate resources for Looked After Children, including our more difficult to place children.**
- 2. That the Health of Looked After Children Report be added to the Corporate Parenting work programme in the next municipal year.**

30. Children in Care Council and the Voice of the Child

The Officer presented the report which updated Members on the functioning of the Children in Care Council and its actions in representing the voice of the child for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

The Children in Care Council was transferred to Open Door in February 2015 with 15 active members, a chair and vice-chair who attend monthly meetings, training and planning days. The project works with young people between the ages of 8 to 25 who were looked after or have been looked after and who were entitled to an after care service.

Open Door works within the National Advocacy Standards and as such is led by the young people and is known as the Young People Looked After Project.

Councillor Little asked Jackie Howell and Sharon Smith if their foster children were aware of the advocacy service and it was confirmed that they were very aware and that children were actually being mentored by Open Door.

Councillor Redsell applauded Joseph Kaley who attended Full Council in February on the item of the Children in Care Pledge and asked if there were Open Door representatives at schools. Sharon Smith confirmed that several schools had Open Door representatives present.

Jackie Howell commented that schools were deemed by some Looked After Children as safe places and not necessarily the place to talk about their situation with other children.

Sharon Smith stated that the safeguarding training undertaken by Thurrock Council is very good for foster carers to understand the importance and awareness of young people using Facebook.

Councillor Okunade thanked Natalie Carter for the event held in February and asked how the nominations were made. Natalie Carter stated that all nominations were made by social workers and foster carers.

Councillor Little stated unfortunately she was unaware of the event and would have like to have attended. Natalie Carter apologised and thought that all Members had been invited.

David Archibald commented that at the last local authority he worked for the Children in Care Council attended the Corporate Parenting Committee where an item was allocated to them on the agenda to provide Members with feedback and this proved very popular with Members.

It was agreed by all Members that this would be a good idea and the Chair commented that if it worked for another authority it should work for Thurrock.

The Officer stated that this could work if the planning and communication was in hand and that the consideration of timings of the committee would need to be addressed to ensure that the committee did not start too late.

It was agreed that the dates of the Children in Care meetings were circulated to all Members.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee supported the role of the Children in Care Council.**
- 2. That the Councillors and Senior Officers attend the Children in care Council meetings when invited.**
- 3. That the Corporate Parenting Committee support and endorse the role of the Young People's Project.**

31. Children In Care Pledge Update

Natalie Carter presented the report and referred Members to the following changes to the Pledge:

- Social workers would visit at least 12 times a year
- Access to life story work in conjunction with Thurrock's life story policy
- Social workers to give young people their contact details such as email, mobile telephone number
- Respect your privacy when possible
- Seek your viewed about contact arrangements
- Support in opening back account/savings account

- Provide with identification such as passport, birth certificate or alternative identification
- Support to have access to your files.

Councillor Halden asked if there were any other amendments discussed but discarded. Natalie Carter confirmed that only 8 amendments were received by the Children in Care Council.

Councillor Little asked what happened to money saved once a child leaved care. The Officer confirmed that in a majority of cases the money goes with the child but there have been incidents where this has not been as smooth as it should have been and that this would be monitored.

Councillor Redsell stated it was encouraging to see young people opening bank accounts and learning the benefits of savings.

The Officer stated that financial top up is available for Looked After Children who attend university but it would be that expectation that all Looked After Children would seek employment, apprenticeships or attend further education once reached the age of 18.

Councillor Redsell stated that it should also be the school's ownership to teach young people to save and the importance of money.

Jackie Howell stated that evidence of savings for her foster children would be available for her supporting social worker to see at supervision.

Sharon Smith stated that those independent looked after children may request help if and when claiming benefits and that each child should be dealt with on an individual basis.

Councillor Little asked how younger people were expected to manage their savings. The Officer stated that this was undertaken by savings accounts, junior ISAs or even having a piggy-bank.

Councillor Little asked Officers how easy it would be for those Looked After Children placed outside the borough to have access to their families. The Officer stated that contact meetings would be arranged depending on the needs of the child and the cost of public transport is covered by the Council.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Committee supported the amended Pledge.**
- 2. That the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed that the Pledge is monitored and reviewed by the Children in Care Council (CiCC) on a yearly basis and a report provided to the Committee.**

3. That the Corporate Parenting Committee agreed that a review of the Pledge's content by the CiCC would take place every two years.

32. Emotional Well Being and Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Groups including Looked After Children

33. Work Programme

It was agreed that the next municipal year work programme for the Corporate Parenting Committee would include:

- That the item on Passports and Bank Accounts held by Looked After Children be added to the work programme.
- That the item on the Health of Looked After Children be added to the work programme.
- That the item on Recent External Placement Survey with Children in Care Council Representatives be added to the work programme.
- That the item on Emotional Wellbeing and Mental health Service be added to the work programme.

The meeting finished at 8.50 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