

MINUTES of a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE** held on 1 April 2014 at County Hall, Matlock

PRESENT

Councillor K Gillott (in the Chair)

Councillors J A Coyle, D T Greenhalgh and B Lewis

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors D W E Charles and A Western

13/14 **MINUTES RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2014 be confirmed as a correct record.

14/14 **CHILDREN IN CARE – PERFORMANCE REPORT** At 28 February 2014, there were 628 children in care in Derbyshire, which was a decrease. The two largest age groups – 5-9 and 10-15 – were the only ones to have increased in number. Between 31 March 2013 and 28 February 2014, the Disabled Children's Team and South Derbyshire and South Dales had continued to see an increase in the number of children in care. The largest decrease had been in North East Derbyshire and Bolsover. The percentage changes in Amber Valley and Erewash had also decreased substantially, and were still falling. There were a number of issues in South Derbyshire and South Dales and these were being addressed. Compared to the statistical neighbour group of authorities and England overall, Derbyshire had historically had a low number of children in care per 10k population aged under 18, and at February 2014, the rate per 10k population in Derbyshire remained at 40.

During the twelve month period to 31 December 2013, there had been 273 admissions to care. The number of admissions broken down by age group was broadly similar to the two previous financial years. However, admissions for 5-9 year olds had increased, and the greatest change was for those aged 10-15, for whom the number of admissions had fallen. For young people aged 16 and over, admissions had fallen back to previous levels, and had accounted for the smallest proportion of cases over the last twelve months. For most of the districts, the number of admissions over the last twelve months was similar to the number in the previous financial year. The exception was in South Derbyshire and South Dales, where the number had increased. Overall since 2011-12, High Peak and North Dales had seen the greatest change, with admissions falling sharply. Abuse or neglect continued to be the most common reason why children were taken into care, and both family dysfunction and parental disability or illness appeared to have declined as a reason for admission.

The percentage of children admitted to care as single children had continued to fall, and the proportion of children admitted with one other sibling remained steady. The number of groups with three or more children had increased.

Over the twelve months to 28 February 2014, the number of children discharged from care had been the same as that over the previous financial year. For those aged under 1 and those aged 1-4, the number of discharges had increased. For the 10-15 and 16-17 age groups, discharges had decreased. Discharges for 18 year olds had decreased slightly over the last twelve months. It was stated that children and young people continued to remain in care for a longer period of time before discharge. Out of the 311 discharged in the last twelve months, most had been in care for between 1-3 years, and the most dramatic changes had been for those leaving care after 3-5 years or 5 years or more, where the numbers had increased significantly. Over the last twelve months, most children discharged from care in Derbyshire had been adopted or returned home to their parents.

At 28 February 2014, 71% of children in care were in foster placements, with 17.7% in Agency and 53.3% in DCC foster placements. The number and percentage of children in care in both agency residential placements and in independent living had fallen since March 2013. Children placed for adoption, however, had continued to increase.

The number of individual children who went missing from home or care had decreased each year over the last three financial years, and this trend had continued for the twelve months ending February 2014, with 363 children going missing over the period. The number of episodes or incidents where a child had gone missing from home or care had also decreased. Over the last twelve months, it was reported that in 61.4% of instances of a child going missing, a linked return interview had been received following their return or being found, which was a marked improvement.

In terms of key performance indicators, outcomes at the end of February 2014 had generally shown improvement, with performance declining for three out of the twelve indicators, all of which related to older care leavers. The percentage of care leavers in education, employment or training had fallen further, and the percentage of care leavers living in suitable accommodation had also declined. The percentage of care leavers in custody had increased. At February 2014, the measure for the stability of placements for children in care had shown a slight improvement. Some of the biggest changes in terms of percentage points were for reviews and visits within stipulated timescales.

Three year averages for the adoptions indicators were published annually by the DfE as the Adoptions Scorecard, and compared local

outcomes against other local authorities and England. The latest scorecard had been published in January 2014. For indicator A1 for 2010-13, the three year average for Derbyshire had been 623 days and the DfE threshold had been 608 days. Although the figure for Derbyshire was over the threshold, out of the 85 authorities who had not met the threshold, Derbyshire had been ranked 10th highest. The threshold on the 2011-14 scorecard would be 547 days, and it was noted that the average time in Derbyshire was falling and at February 2014 had been 560 days.

For indicator A2, the scorecard 2010-13 three year average for Derbyshire had been 191 days, and the DfE threshold had been 182 days. Derbyshire had been 8th highest out of the 90 authorities not meeting the threshold. The threshold for the 2011-14 scorecard would be 152 days, and at the end of February 2014, the average time for Derbyshire had increased to 213 days. Performance against indicator A3 had improved at the end of February 2014 when based on a definition of 21 months. However, the definition on the next scorecard would be based children waiting less than 20 months.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

15/14 **CHILDREN'S HOMES** The County Council provided 13 children's homes, and each was visited on a monthly basis by Quality Assurance Managers to monitor the effectiveness of the service as required by Children's Homes Regulations 2004. The visits were usually unannounced, and the focus was to ensure that the day to day care provided was satisfactory. The findings were recorded in a report which was sent to the Operations Manager and the Manager of the Home. The manager completed a response and the report and response was sent to Ofsted to assist in inspection monitoring.

The report content had been amended recently to offer more detail of good practice and issues highlighted as requiring attention. This had facilitated improved information gathering and assisted in monitoring practice and the need for development in all homes. A further development had been for the visitor to contact parents to ask their views on the care of their child and the service offered by the home – this had been a very positive action. Particular positive comments had been made in relation to the interaction between staff and young people, the atmosphere and use of praise and encouragement.

Issues relating to property maintenance and the on-going repairs and improvements to buildings were generally good, and where attention was needed, this had been addressed urgently. Records were monitored with particular reference to daily logs, significant events, incidents of young people being missing, physical interventions and restorative actions. Although the need to address certain recording issues was highlighted occasionally, the

monitoring assistance ensured that managers and staff rectified any omissions immediately. Complaints by young people or members of the public were monitored, and these had all been satisfactorily addressed within the required timescales. During the last twelve months, all issues identified as requiring action had been addressed, either at the time of the visit or within agreed timescales. Positive recording was also highlighted.

Managers also undertook regular monitoring of their home, and this was a proactive method of checking, addressing and improving all aspects of the home's operation. Currently, a summary of the findings were sent to Ofsted on a six monthly basis. However, from April 2014, the amended Children's Homes Regulations would require the reports to be sent to Ofsted on a three monthly basis. A new three monthly summary document was currently being developed.

It had previously been agreed that elected members would visit children's homes. A monitoring form and a checklist of what to look for when visiting a home had been developed, and their observations would be fed back into the quality assurance system. Members who had not already visited a home would be encouraged to do so. It was felt important that members be made aware if there were any issues relating to their local children's home.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

16/14 DERBYSHIRE'S PLEDGE TO CHILDREN IN CARE The Pledge to Children in Care had first been implemented in 2009, and had been established as a living document that would be regularly refreshed. It had both measurable and practical aspirations, and was divided into two sections – the first was a set of guiding principles that the local authority and its officers promised to uphold at all times. The second part was a list of issues that were debated and agreed by Caring Voice, and were then presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee with the aim of getting approval for the issues to be addressed over the year. Historically, named officers had been given responsibility for implementing various issues.

The promises that had been made in 2009 were highlighted, and it was noted that at the end of 2010, all had been met. There had been two subsequent refreshes of The Pledge, with the guiding principles remaining the same but the ten issues being changed. The 2011 refresh had had nine promises, which had resulted in a number of changes.

The 2013 Pledge had been formed by a group of young people that had been dedicated to wider issues of equality and discrimination. The list of promises had proved hard to measure in terms of impact and to allocate to officers. The Children in Care Council had devised and distributed a game – The Promise – to all children and young people with examples of promises

that could be kept in the home and had linked them to wider promises. Caring Voice had asked young people to share with them the promises that had been made at home and to report both positive changes and breaches. However, the game had rarely been used. The attempt to shift power for monitoring and noticing change to young people had been forward thinking, although in this instance it had not had the desired impact. As a result, the last Pledge had been the least successful in terms of demonstrating change.

This year, Caring Voice had returned to the format of tangible issues and for officers/elected members' names to be associated with each of the issues. It was proposed that there would also be a return to quarterly updates to Caring Voice on progress. It was suggested that the Strategic Governance Group would be the best place to receive progress, and this could then be fed to the Corporate Parenting Committee. The ten issues that Caring Voice wanted to be included in the Pledge for 2014 were detailed, and if approved, the next step would be to agree who was responsible for implementing each of the promises, how it was to be achieved and how young people would measure whether it had been done. Publicity of the Pledge would be in the form of a flyer and poster, and electronically. Caring Voice had also asked whether members of the Committee would be prepared to physically give their signatures and state why the Pledge was important to them.

RESOLVED that the Pledge be agreed, and that members of the Committee agree to adding their signatures to the Pledge.

17/14 **CARE LEAVER'S CHARTER UPDATE** Following the work undertaken by care leavers on the implementation of the Care Leaver's Charter, a film had been made and was presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee. The group had also met with younger members of Caring Voice to discuss what should be in the Pledge for all children in care and what should be in place specifically for care leavers. A list of practical changes had been proposed with details of when they would like them to happen – these were presented. The seven issues raised in September 2013 that had an expired deadline required evaluation.

The response from the After Care Service, given at the time, was stated. It was reported that some of the longer term objectives were systemic and were not necessarily included in the service specification for the contracted after care service. However, the contract was up for renewal shortly, and it was felt timely to consider which of the items on the care leaver's pledge could be included in the new specification. A potential change in provider ran the risk of the existing pledges being forgotten unless the local authority took overall responsibility for making them happen. It was recommended that the work on the Care Leaver's Charter be used as an example of co-production in the commissioning cycle, documented as such, and shared across the commissioning group for future good practice.

It was agreed that further work would be undertaken on the Care Leaver's Pledge and this would be presented to the next meeting for formal sign off. It was also suggested that the Pledge and Charter could be presented to the next meeting of Council.

18/14 HORIZONS – EMOTIONAL WELLBEING SERVICE FOR CHILDREN IN CARE, CARE LEAVERS AND ADOPTED CHILDREN

Cabinet had previously awarded a three year contract to Derby Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to provide emotional health and wellbeing services for children in care from 1 January 2012 – 31 December 2014, with an option to extend for up to two more years. Horizons had been commissioned to provide services to/on behalf of children in care, care leavers and adopted children. The service comprised clinical psychologists and social workers, plus an educational psychologist seconded to the team.

The service worked directly with children and young people and indirectly to support carers and social workers. Early intervention to promote secure attachments to carers was its main priority. Reflective practice and consultation for children's homes and contract carers provided a key focus on older children. The workload of the team, along with the strengths and weaknesses of the service were highlighted. The service was now in the final year of the contract, but on 3 February, senior management team had exercised its discretion to extend the contract for a further twelve months. A review of the operation of the service had commenced in order to both refresh the service specification and to focus on aspects of the service where performance could be better. Cabinet approval for re-procurement would be sought later in the year, after which an update would be provided to the Committee.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and an update be provided following the re-procurement exercise in 2015.

19/14 CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ISSUES Details were provided of the changes to the Children's Rights Act, and it was noted that the emphasis was around more support for the child. A full report would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.