

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE** held on 21 April 2016 at County Hall, Matlock

**PRESENT**

Councillor J A Coyle (in the Chair)

Councillors C Bisknell, D Charles and J Street

Apologues for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Greenhalgh and A Western

**1/16** **MINUTES RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

**2/16** **CHIEF OFFICER – ROTA FOR FUTURE MEETINGS** The Chief Officers within the County Council had now all attended a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee to discuss the work that was being undertaken in their areas to support the corporate parenting function. It was agreed that it would be useful for Chief Officers to attend the meeting again to provide a progress report. A schedule would be developed for this.

**3/16** **CHILDREN IN CARE PERFORMANCE** The number of children in care was currently 580, which was a continuing reduction. It was noted that the authority would be spending an additional £12m if the children in care numbers were at the same level as the neighbour average. There was a range of reasons why the County Council's number of children in care was lower, but it was anticipated that numbers would change.

The majority of children in care resided with foster carers. There had been an increase in the number of children who had had three or more placements, and it would be necessary to keep a check on this. There had been a gradual increase in the number of re-admissions to care, and this would be monitored. Consideration would be given as to whether there were any trends, and work would be undertaken to ensure that the numbers leaving care was appropriate.

The number of children in care visits/reviews had been maintained, and there had been significant improvements in the number of up to date health assessments. There were currently 293 Special Guardianship Orders, but it was stated that there could be changes around these. The number of care leavers in suitable accommodation remained high, but there was still an issue around the number who were in employment, education or training.

**4/16** **SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN IN CARE NOT IN FULL TIME EDUCATION** As of 12 February 2016, 28 children in care had been identified

as not being in full time education. A list was provided of the children and summarised the reasons why they were not in full time provision and the plans and progress towards addressing this. The list included children who had a full time place available but either refused to attend or were unable to access it for the time being.

Of the 28, there were two who had currently not got a school placement, but work was taking place to deal with this. All others had a placement, although some were not engaging, and work was being undertaken with these children. The majority of children currently in part time education were of secondary school age, with most in Key Stage 4, and Year 11 predominantly. This had been consistent, although there had been an increase in Key Stage 2. A larger proportion of the children were residing in independent residential care homes.

All children in support centres at Key Stage 4 had at least an element of alternative provision as part of their offer, and attendance and attainment of the group was monitored closely and fortnightly meetings were held to discuss progress. It was felt that some young people who attended support centres did not enjoy the education they received there, and would engage better in a different environment. It was agreed to ask the Head of a Support Centre to attend a future meeting of the Committee to give a presentation on the work undertaken.

**RESOLVED** to note the report.

**5/16      EXCLUSION RATES FOR CHILDREN IN CARE** During the 2015/16 academic year, up to 31 March 2016, there had been 57 children in care who had received at least one fixed term exclusion – 11 had been within the primary age range and 46 had been within the secondary age range. A breakdown of these figures was provided by gender and year group, and also by location of school attended.

The 57 children in care had received a total of 136 fixed term exclusions, and this had resulted in 501 sessions of education being lost – 98 within the primary age range and 403 within the secondary age range. Details were given around the reasons for exclusions by year group, and the majority had been due to persistent disruptive behaviour or verbal abuse/threatening behaviour. Exclusions were most common in Key Stage 4.

A good relationship with Derbyshire schools underpinned the commitment to avoiding permanent exclusions and to keeping fixed term exclusions to a minimum. A rapid response by the authority to situations that could lead to a permanent exclusion was in place, and a range of alternative provisions had been developed to support young people when there had been a breakdown. It was noted that last year's exclusion data had not been

accurate due to the fact that no Derbyshire children in care attending out of county schools had been included in the statistics. In addition, the Virtual School had been aware of a number of 'illegal exclusions', but this had been challenged and had now been resolved. Exclusion data would be looked at further to identify patterns of absences.

In terms of next steps and further areas for improvement for the Virtual School, a meeting would be arranged with senior managers to discuss strategies to significantly reduce the number of exclusions, and there would be a programme of multi-agency training to understand and support children in care who had experienced loss and trauma and who had attachment issues. Work would take place to ensure that there were early warning systems in place, especially for those placed out of county, and there were action plans in place for all pupils receiving their second exclusion. It was the intention to continue to develop alternative educational provision where mainstream had temporarily broken down and was not meeting the young person's needs, and to improve access to data, more regular reviews of PEPs and frequent tracking should identify issues before they escalated. It was aimed to improve liaison with relevant agencies to target schools where fixed term exclusions were repeated, and to ensure there was prompt crisis response/support from the Virtual School. There would be training to schools on strategies to understand and manage behaviour, and the development of an Attachment Aware School programme.

There was a Strategic Group to look at exclusions, and it was suggested that representatives attend a future meeting to discuss the work on fixed term exclusions.

**RESOLVED** to note the report.

**6/16      MONTHLY DATABOOK FOR CHILDREN IN CARE** The Committee was presented with the monthly data in relation to Derbyshire children in care. The headlines for children in care as at 29 February 2016 were highlighted. There had been 589 children and young people in care, and 485 were in 33 different local authorities. 104 children in care were under five, 166 were within the primary age range in county schools and 58 in out of county schools. Primary children attended a total of 122 schools – 71 in Derbyshire and 51 out of county. Secondary children attended a total of 118 schools – 59 in Derbyshire and 59 out of county. There had been 210 children in care within secondary age range, and 134 were in county schools and 76 in out of county schools. 109 children in care were post 16, 173 attended good or better Derbyshire schools and settings, and 99 attended good or better out of county schools and settings. Of the 17 eligible two year olds, 11 children in care were all accessing provision in Derbyshire settings, and of the 29 three/four year olds, 28 were accessing provision – 23 in

Derbyshire settings and 5 in an out of county setting. There was a high level of SEN.

**RESOLVED** to note the report.

**7/16      CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL/DEVELOPING CHILDREN IN CARE PARTICIPATION STRATEGY** The Committee was informed of development work around the participation of children in care in Derbyshire. A number of objectives were presented:-

- To rejuvenate the Children in Care Council and embed participation into the work with children in care
- To rejuvenate the Children in Care Council and embed it into the work with children in care
- To develop comprehensive, young person friendly information for Derbyshire children in care which provides them with all of the essential information they need to know
- To develop a Participation Strategy for children in care, which provides a framework to assess the quality and the impact of participation and a clear improvement plan

A Participation Working Group had been set up and was currently developing the Participation Strategy for Children's Services. The Participation Manager was coordinating the development of a Participation Strategy for Children in Care. The new Derbyshire Youth Council had a co-opted representative for children in care.

The new Children in Care Council was due to meet in May, and it was the intention to have separate North Derbyshire/Southern Derbyshire meetings every six months. Consideration was being given to developing child friendly information on a range of services, and it was the aim to involve the Children in Care Council.

**RESOLVED** to note the report.

**8/16      CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES 2015-17** The overall aim of the Derbyshire Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy for Improving Health Outcomes was to provide a blueprint for the promotion of improved health outcomes for children in care and leavers, to better understand health need and to improve services which were able to support children and young people in care towards a happy and healthy life. The overarching healthcare principles were that children in care should have a similar (not worse) health and development status to that of their peers who were not in care; children and young people in care should know how to access health care and what

they needed to do to achieve a healthy lifestyle; and young people leaving care should be aware of how to access adult health services.

The document had a number of priorities, including to improve the timescales of Statutory Health Assessments, ensure data around Health Standards was robust and included CSE, ensure that the needs of children in care were recognised in the Future Minds commissioning arrangements, promote swimming, and to develop and promote a new NHS healthy living website for children in care. New standards had been developed and these were highlighted, along with the work that had been undertaken.

This was to be the third year of collecting data, and it was hoped that it would be possible to look at whether any patterns or trends had emerged over the last few years.

**9/16      FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT** The Committee was provided with an update of performance data in relation to the Fostering Service. Between January 2015-January 2016, there were 416 homes – 52 had been approved and 51 had resigned. There were 775 approved placement spaces, of which 412 had been filled. At 30 January 2016, there were 111 IFA placements, and over the year 483 children had been fostered. There had been six unplanned endings and 44 young people aged 18+ were being supported by their former carers.

The largest group of children admitted into care were aged 10-15. This trend continued to impact on the fostering service in that the service continued to need more carers willing and able to care for older children. This was offset by the now established pattern of carers providing a home to care leavers. Whilst this was a successful initiative, it meant that there was a gap in possible older placement spaces.

The County Council used Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA), and by year end, there had been 111 children placed with IFAs. Over the last twelve months, the number of children entering IFA care had been relatively low. However, research had indicated that the average duration of time spent in placement for this cohort was 1046 days, and the average age of a child placed was 12.4 years old. 29% of Derbyshire's current IFA population lived within the county boundaries, and 40% lived within 20 miles or less of an area fostering team. On average, the County Council approved 3-4 former agency carers each year, and it was apparent that children placed with agencies were staying within the placement for a significant amount of time.

Details were provided around broader service activity over the last year, including recruitment, Regulation 24 Assessments, approvals, current utilisations, and resignations. In terms of future activity, the Derbyshire Foster Care Council was due to be launched shortly, and this would bring together

foster carers, young people, management and social care staff to discuss service changes and developments. The membership and role of the council were detailed. Work was underway to develop an emergency contract carer scheme to meet the emergency placement needs of young people who would otherwise have been placed in an emergency residential children's home.

Ofsted had previously contacted every fostering provider with a revised dataset to replace the existing formula. This would change how information was passed onto the inspectorate, and would now focus on carers and children fostered as two distinct groups. It was anticipated that the new dataset would form the basis of a revised reporting mechanism, and this would be able to offer a snap shot of all carer activity.

It was felt that the Fostering Service Improvement programme was starting to make a difference. The past year had seen the highest number of carers recruited, and projected approvals for April-June 2016 of 21 indicated a sustained increase. Word of mouth campaigns had proven to be very successful and, following trials, would now be rolled out across the county. It was also noted that better involvement and engagement of foster carers across the fostering service was already having a positive impact.

**10/16      ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT LOOKED AFTER YOUNG PEOPLE INTO EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING** Details were provided of a range of activities being employed to increase the numbers of looked after children in education, employment and training. This included work experience opportunities across the County Council, a Care Leavers Employment Project, traineeships/study programmes offered by Derbyshire Adult Education Service, I Step Up Summer School/Employability Skills, apprenticeships with the Council, care leaver paid internship, identifying job opportunities with organisations the County Council procured from, and senior managers monitoring and challenging care leaver outcomes. Progress had been made with a number of these activities.

**RESOLVED** to note the report.

**11/16      FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER YOUNG PEOPLE GOING TO HIGHER EDUCATION** This report would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

**12/16      ELECTED MEMBER VISITS TO CARE HOMES** A discussion had previously taken place around elected members visiting care homes, and it was asked whether any progress had been made around this. A prompt sheet had been produced for members to use when visiting a home, and lots was being developed around this. An update would be provided to members shortly.

**13/16**        **VIRTUAL SCHOOL** An event based around the Virtual School had been arranged to take place on 7 May. All relevant parties had been invited.

**14/16**        **NEET** It was reported that a meeting had taken place with John Lewis, as the company was interested in working with the County Council to address the issue of young people not in education, employment or training. An update would be provided to a future meeting.

**15/16**        **DATE AND THEME OF NEXT MEETING** The next meeting was due to be held on 14 June 2016, and the main theme would be adoption.

**16/16**        **MEL MEGGS** It was reported that this was to be Mel's last meeting, as she was leaving the Authority. Mel was thanked for her contribution and the work she had undertaken.