

MINUTES of a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE** held on 29 July 2016 at County Hall, Matlock

PRESENT

Councillor J A Coyle (in the Chair)

Councillor J Street

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor C Bisknell

27/16 **MINUTES RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.

28/16 **CHIEF OFFICER** Judith Greenhalgh, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources, attended the meeting to inform the Committee what her department was doing to support the corporate parenting role.

Corporate Resources had worked with Children's Services to develop a Care Leaver's Internship Scheme, and internships would be offered to three young people in landscaping, joinery and roofing. The Council's first strategy on Social Value in Procurement had recently been developed, and Manager guidance had also been developed to include options for offering training, work experience, apprenticeships or jobs via the procurement of contracts.

The arrangement of work experience placements for care leavers had been coordinated with children's services, and to date 19 applications had been received. Five placements had been completed, four had been withdrawn due to a change in personal circumstances, three were on hold at the care leaver's request, and seven were in the process of being arranged. There was some concern that the aspirations of care leavers were not being raised enough at an early stage, and it was agreed that this needed to be improved. There was to be a focus on EET/NEET at the next meeting of the Committee, so this would be discussed further.

Legal Services supported the Council in securing care proceedings, and 86% of cases had been dealt with in 26 weeks. Training and support was delivered to social workers on the legal framework surrounding looked after children, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, of which a further 97 could become settled in Derbyshire. The skill base surrounding this would need to be looked at further, and training was due to be provided on 30 September.

An in-house apprenticeship scheme was being developed to replace the current arrangement with Learning Unlimited. This would sit alongside existing pre-apprenticeship schemes, and Corporate Resources would work

with Children's Services to support care leavers into apprenticeships where this met their abilities and aspirations. Two senior managers within Corporate Resources held strategic lead roles for Thriving Communities areas, and seven care leavers were now being mentored, and a work experience placement was being arranged for one young person.

29/16 **CHILDREN IN CARE PERFORMANCE** The number of children in care was currently 606, which was below the national average. There had been good participation rates of young people attending reviews, and where a young person would not be present in their review, attempts were being made to talk to the young person before it took place so that they were more involved in their own care planning. There had been an increase in the number of S47 enquiries, but it was stated that risks were being managed better and more children were being kept at home following a meeting.

The number of children who went missing from care had improved, and the number of missing from care episodes had reduced. Work was being undertaken around children in care sufficiency, and the number of IFA placements. The frequency of visits to children placed more than 20 miles from home and out of county was discussed.

Details were provided around the breakdown of children in care by placement type, and the percentage of children looked after who had had three or more placements within the year. This had happened for a variety of reasons, and lots of good work was taking place around this. There had been an increase in the number of children in care who had had three or more social workers in the last twelve months, and it was felt that this was largely down to the structure. A number of newly qualified social workers had been appointed, and more complex cases had had to be moved to more experienced officers. However, the structure would be looked at over the coming year.

In terms of the number of children admitted to care, there had been clear direction from the Court around case law, and it was felt that discussions needed to take place with the Court as there were more family placement breakdowns. There had also been an increase in the number of re-admissions to care. Regular meetings took place with the Judiciary and the Local Family Justice Board, and these issues would be raised.

There needed to be an improvement in the number of children in care aged 5 and under who had had an up to date health surveillance check. There was also an issue with children in care in Chesterfield who had had their teeth checked by a dentist, and these would need to be addressed by Health colleagues.

There had been an increasing trend in the numbers subject to a Special Guardianship Order. Details were provided of the number of adoptions of children in care, and this had been lower than previous years. There was a decreasing trend in the number of children placed for adoption, and the 2015/16 annual outcome had been lower for the number of adoptive families approved and the number of children matched with adopters.

With regard to the percentage of care leavers living in suitable accommodation, it was felt that a number were not in the most appropriate setting. A piece of work was being undertaken around this, and it was stated that there needed to be a stronger link with the District Councils to provide suitable accommodation. This issue could be highlighted with the possible arrival of additional unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

30/16 PERFORMANCE REPORT – QUALITY ASSURANCE IN CHILDREN'S HOMES The Committee was provided with an update on the Regulation 44 visits and inspection judgements for all Derbyshire County Council Children's Homes. All children's homes were required to have a monthly inspection visit undertaken by an independent person under Regulation 44 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2015. These visits were in addition to the inspections received from Ofsted, and were undertaken by Quality Assurance Managers.

The focus of the visit was to ensure that all children within the placement were being appropriately cared for, and their individual needs were being met. When writing the report, the visitor had to state whether children were being effectively safeguarded, and that the conduct of the home promoted children's wellbeing. Visits also assisted in service development by providing a regular independent perspective on the functioning of children's residential provision. It was stated that a Governance Group had been established, which met on a monthly basis, to scrutinise the reports and pull out the main themes/issues to inform future work.

Ofsted had a statutory duty to inspect each children's home twice a year, and the timing of the inspections took account of previous inspection findings, complaints and concerns received about the service, and the content of monitoring reports provided to Ofsted. The evaluation of the care, experiences and progress of children and young people in all areas of their lives were at the centre of the inspection. Current Ofsted judgements for overall effectiveness for Derbyshire County Council run children's homes during 2015/16 and the first few months of 2016/17 were stated.

In terms of what the local authority had been doing, 100% of visits made within timescale had been maintained for a number of years. A revised governance arrangement had been introduced to ensure that officers were monitoring results, identifying issues early and promoting consistency in the

provision for all children in care living in a children's home. A full audit had been undertaken in one home where the expected quality standards were consistently not being met and/or addressed. This had contributed to the home moving from a previous Ofsted judgement of requiring improvement to good. The quality of both the visits and the report to ensure effective support and challenge was provided by the Quality Assurance Team had been improved. A thematic deep dive approach had been developed and undertaken as part of the visit into specific issues such as medication and supervision, and more had been planned in the coming months looking at EHCPs and Pathway Plans. An additional Quality Assurance Manager had been recruited to work directly with the homes which had yet to achieve good or better in their Ofsted inspection judgements.

Over the next quarter, work would continue with the homes working to attain an Ofsted judgement of good or better, and each home had a clear development plan and it was hoped that the additional support and challenge provided for the managers would help them to achieve their overall aims. It would be necessary to ensure that Quality Assurance Managers and Children's Homes Managers worked collaboratively to ensure that all Derbyshire run children's homes were providing high quality residential provision; and a young inspectors scheme was being developed to all young people to contribute to the regulation 44 visits and wider quality assurance of the Children's Homes.

The role of elected members in providing support and challenge to children's homes was also being developed. A document had been created for members to complete when visiting a children's home, and it was the intention that this would be undertaken on a bi-monthly basis. Members would be contacted to see whether they wanted to be involved in the process, and Mary Wilton/Bev Milway would facilitate the visits. It was felt important that the member visits were not intrusive, and residents of the homes would be asked whether they would prefer the visits to take place when they were at home or out.

31/16 PERFORMANCE REPORT – INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE An update was provided on the performance of the Independent Reviewing Service. Caseloads had remained fairly static during the last financial year, fluctuating between 58-60. The planned reduction of 1 FTE Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) had recently been achieved, and this had had an impact on caseloads, increasing the average to 64, which remained within the requirements outlined in the IRO handbook. It was important to recognise complexity within the overall caseloads of individual IROs, and descriptions had been developed for seven complexity levels. A snapshot was provided, as at May 2016, of the numbers of children in care by complexity level.

Overall, the percentage of reviews completed within timescale during the last financial year had been recorded as 87.5%, which was a slight increase from the previous year's performance. Year on year performance had remained fairly static, and a full audit had been undertaken to understand the reasons. It was clear from the audit that there was some level of complexity in the way the data was drawn from the system which could conflict from the order of upload. This would result in reported performance which was below the reality. Further work was underway to ensure accurate data was submitted to the DfE for 2015/16. Performance since January 2016 had been much improved, and this would continue to be monitored monthly and each incident of lateness would be challenged.

The majority of children in care who had participated in reviews had done so by physically attending and speaking for themselves. The percentage who had done so during the 12 months ending March 2016 had shown a small increase. The second largest group had been the percentage of children who did not attend but had conveyed their feelings to the review through a facilitative medium, and this had shown a decrease. A total of 219 children in care had received additional contacts between reviews during 2015/16, and this amounted to 36.5%. A total of 749 additional contacts had been made, which had been an increase.

Overall, compliance with the handbook remained high, but the evidence was due to be reassessed, and an update report would be provided. In terms of challenges, the team had recently developed a form to capture the challenges made outside of the escalation process to provide information about both individual challenges and their impact and a means of identifying emerging trends both within individual localities and for Derbyshire as a whole. Implementation had taken place in March 2016, and the first submission was presented. There had been a total of 67 escalations during the 2015/16 financial year.

As part of the Team's commitment to improving the quality of practice, a quarterly peer audit of IRO review reports had been developed. Analysis of the audits undertaken had identified that there was significant good practice across the service, but there was a lack of consistency in the quality of the report writing. Presentation had been picked up in a number of audits where the layout had not always reflected the importance of the document, and a number of errors had been identified. Decisions not being SMART and timescales were not always clear. All key learning points had been fed back to the team and it was envisaged that improvements in these areas would be evident in the next audit. A number of key priorities had been identified with the Team for 2016/17 and these were highlighted.

32/16 RESIDENTIAL CARE – CHILDREN IN CARE PROVISION – STEPHENSON HOME The Committee was informed of how the learning

related to the closure of Stephenson Children's Home in 2015 had been applied to subsequent service improvement and development. Young people who had lived at the home had provided feedback on how the care they had experienced there affected them and information on what made a good home. This had reinforced the importance of young people's participation when recruiting care staff or planning new services.

Stephenson had been a 7 bed children's home, focused on those needing a crisis or short-term assessment placement, but the model had been flawed in a number of ways. It had been very difficult to set a positive culture for the home in the same way as was achieved in other homes. Some young people had come in a crisis, but had then been almost in limbo whilst decisions were made about their care plan. With no permanent address, educational provision had been poor, and this had often dragged on due to young people staying at the home longer than they should. It was felt that 7 was a large number of young people to safely meet their immediate needs, and little true assessment could be undertaken in such a short-term setting. Planning for homes now recognised that, given the complexity of the needs of young people in residential care, homes needed to be smaller.

Some independent visitors had raised concerns about the home, but these had not been robustly acted on. There was now a stronger challenge and escalation route, whereby if concerns were not acted on satisfactorily, they would be escalated to the Strategic Director. A cross-service audit process had been developed, so if there were particular issues facing a home, a team would undertake a comprehensive assessment which could then be used by the home manager to make improvements. There was also a stronger emphasis on protecting the quality of care.

There had been a number of staffing issues which had impacted negatively on the quality of care. The principles and practice of social pedagogy had not been applied as fully at Stephenson, and staff struggled to empathise with young people or to feel confident in challenging others. The staff team rarely utilised the reflective practice sessions offered by Horizons. Staff supervision and development plans for the home had been missed due to the high volume of emergency paperwork or having to support constant difficult situations. Social pedagogy had now been reinforced across residential homes, and the Operations Managers and Head of Service for Children in Care Provision now met regularly with Horizons and received monthly reports of their work in the homes. Where staff and young people were experiencing additional difficulty, greater attention was now paid to their emotional health and extra support was provided.

Young people who had lived at Stephenson had described the impact of other young people coming in an emergency, or living with others with conflicting needs. This increased risk had led to groups of girls becoming

easy targets or sexually vulnerable young people being placed with alleged perpetrators. The number of young people with high risk behaviour being placed together without adequate planning had also led to some young people feeling that they needed to conform to the behaviours being displayed by other young people. A more thorough approach was now taken to determining new admissions to homes, and this improved practice had been recognised by Ofsted.

Since the closure of Stephenson, the Time Out Team had been developed, which provided a responsive service able to make emergency and short-term interventions, with a number of core objectives. The Team worked closely with the residential homes and fostering services. Whilst foster carers already took children in emergencies, an Emergency Contract Care service was being developed to meet the needs of the young people who previously would have been placed at Stephenson or other residential homes.

Any placement provision needed to work closely with the placing social worker. Reviewing contributing factors to the poor outcomes for many who had lived at Stephenson, it appeared that there had been a lack of challenge by the residential team to social workers. Residential homes were now more assertive in how they worked alongside social workers. A comprehensive review of placement sufficiency and needs analysis for the next five years was now underway. The building would be retained pending the outcome of the sufficiency review. In the short-term, it was being used whilst another home was refurbished.

RESOLVED to note how the learning related to the closure of Stephenson Children's Home in 2015 has been applied to subsequent service improvement and development.

33/16 **CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY** It was reported that a new national strategy for care leavers had been developed, and this would be presented to the next meeting.

34/16 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING** The next meeting was due to be held on 20 September 2016.