

**MINUTES** of a meeting of the **CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE** held on 9 April 2013 at County Hall, Matlock

**PRESENT**

Councillor M V Longden (in the Chair)

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors B Lewis and J E Patten

**13/13**      **MINUTES RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2013 be received.

**14/13**      **MATTERS ARISING – (a) Children in Care Reviews** (Minute No 5/13 refers) It was reported that, with regard to children in care reviews being completed within the prescribed timescale, the current performance was now improved, and the issues that had been raised had been addressed. This significant improvement would be evident in the next performance report.

**15/13**      **CHILDREN IN CARE – PERFORMANCE REPORT** At the end of February 2013, there were 667 children in the care of Derbyshire County Council, and this was a small decrease. As a result, there had been a small reduction in the number in care per 10k population aged under 18, and this compared with statistical neighbour and England averages. Derbyshire had historically had a low number of children in care per 10k population when compared with the statistical neighbour group of authorities and the overall England figure.

At district level, the largest decrease in the number of children in care had been seen in Amber Valley, Bolsover, Erewash and North East Derbyshire. In contrast, Chesterfield, High Peak and North Dales and South Derbyshire and South Dales had all seen an increase. Disabled Children's Teams had seen a decrease in the number of children in care. At 28 February 2013, the number of children in care who were aged 5-9 had seen a significant increase, and all other age groups had seen a reduction.

During the twelve month period to 28 February 2013, there had been 276 admissions to care, and this had been a 4.5% decrease when compared with the number of admissions during the 2011/12 financial year. The most notable changes were an increase in admission of children aged 5-9 and a decrease in admissions for children aged under 1 and 10-15. The category of need of children admitted to care during the twelve months to 28 February 2013 was broadly in line with those from 2011.12. Abuse or neglect continued to be the most common reason why children were taken into care, accounting for nearly half of admissions.

At District level, when comparing the twelve month period to 28 February 2013 with 2011/12, there had been increases in admissions for Disabled Children, Chesterfield, and North East Derbyshire. This contrasted with reduced admissions in Bolsover, South Derbyshire and South Dales, High Peak and North Dales and Amber Valley. Erewash had seen no change in the number of admissions.

During the twelve month period to 28 February 2013, there had been 315 discharges from care, and this represented an increase when compared with the 2011/12 financial year. The most notable changes had been significant increases in discharges of children aged 1-4 and young people age 18. This contrasted with decreases in discharges of children and young people aged under 1, 5-9, 10-15 and 16-17.

Information indicated that children and young people were remaining in care for a longer period of time before discharge, and the largest increases had been seen for children discharged after 1-3 years. The number of children discharged from care who had been adopted had continued to increase, and there had been a continued reduction in the percentage returning home to live with parents.

The number of children in care who were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies had increased at 28 February 2013, and this contrasted with a fall in the number of children in care placed with DCC foster carers. The number who had been placed in an agency residential placement had decreased.

Information available for Key Performance Indicator outcomes at the end of February 2013 showed that, for the six indicators where information was available, performance had improved for three indicators but had fallen for three when compared with outcomes for the 2011/12 financial year. Action was being taken to address the issue of compliance with Children in Care review timescales. There was some concern around the decrease in the number of care leavers in education, employment or training, and a report would be presented to the next meeting.

**RESOLVED** to note the report.

**16/13      INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING ROLE** Despite some significant improvements over recent years, outcomes for children in care were generally significantly poorer than those of their non-looked after peers. This was particularly the case in terms of education outcomes, with just 24% of Derbyshire children in care achieving five good GSCE grades (compared to 82% of all children nationally). 33% of care leavers were NEET (compared to 12% nationally), 18% of care leavers

were unemployed (compared to 4% nationally) and only 6% of children in care went on to higher education (compared to 38% nationally).

Improving aspiration and opportunity for young people in care was a priority for the County Council, and the Uni-fi Project represented a £1m+ investment over three years to achieve this. The Authority had agreed to appoint a Virtual School Head to ensure that all schools had effective designated teacher arrangements, and that every child in care was receiving the best possible education and had access to mentoring and additional 1:1 tuition.

The Council was keen to create better corporate parenting arrangements, and new structures had been agreed and were in place to ensure that all outcomes for children in care were maximised wherever possible. Presentations on strengthening the corporate parenting role had been given to the Chief Officer Group and the Senior Leadership Forum.

There was to be the development of a Chief Officer/Assistant Director mentoring project, where each officer would be allocated a small number of Year 10 and 11 children in care to track progress, attendance at school etc, act as progress chaser when existing processes to tackle obstacles to achievement had not been successful, be a named senior manager the young person or their advocate could contact, and act as a career mentor to any of the cohort by offering a meeting to discuss their area of service. There would also be the development of work experience placements for care leavers across the County Council and potentially with partner agencies. Work was underway to ensure a greater take-up of the County Council apprenticeship scheme for care leavers, and it was stated that a number of senior management teams across departments had offered help in supporting and mentoring young people prior to job or apprenticeship interviews. A campaign had been undertaken to recruit more foster carers and adopters from County Council employees, and publicity workshops had been arranged in May 2013.

For the majority of Elected Members, there was limited involvement in corporate parenting, and initiatives to increase participation and involvement were highlighted. It was suggested to increase Elected Member involvement on the Corporate Parenting Committee, and also involvement in the monthly Regulation 33 quality assurance visits to all registered children's homes. There could be links between local members and district based foster care support groups, and members could be encouraged to take up opportunities to help recruit foster carers and adopters. Members could also be encouraged to attend children in care celebratory events.

It was stated that an Elected Members Charter was being developed, and it was felt that this could be discussed at a session for all Elected Members. This would be raised at a future meeting.

**RESOLVED** to note the report, and that consideration be given to the suggestions in connection with strengthening Elected Member involvement in the corporate parenting role.

**17/13      VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEAD FOR CHILDREN IN CARE** Approval had recently been given by Cabinet for the appointment of a new designated full-time Virtual School Head (VSH) for children in care. Local authorities had a statutory responsibility to ensure that they promoted the educational achievement of looked after children, and having a VSH was one of the key ways in which a local authority could demonstrate that it was discharging this legal obligation.

The VSH role had previously been piloted, and the evaluation had found that the role could make a real difference, particularly when the VSH had a strategic role and sufficient seniority to influence practice. The Government had produced a toolkit advising that the VSH role should be undertaken by a person with substantial, current or previous senior level experience of supporting vulnerable children in educational settings. The VSH would be responsible for establishing a virtual school, to include ‘designated teachers’ in every school in Derbyshire. The teachers would collaborate to ensure that children in care were provided with bespoke support to enable them to achieve well at all school phases.

It was noted that Derbyshire had included some VSH functions in the Access and Inclusion Officer post since 2009, and since then, some local work had resulted in gaps closing in Derbyshire at Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 2. However, performance at Key Stage 4 was well below the national average. There was a small number of authorities that were successfully closing the gap for this group, and an analysis of the common factors in high performing authorities had identified that there was a very strong culture of accountability by elected members and the VSH.

The learning from the Uni-fi Project had identified the importance of a strong, high profile and robust leader of education for children in care, to act as a champion with schools, source the opportunities for young people educationally, and to ensure appropriate accountability for the progress of children in care was in place. Uni-fi’s ambition was for the Council to be excellent corporate parents, with a high profile virtual school being fundamental. The poor progress in Derbyshire for children in care at Key Stage 4, associated poor outcomes for care leavers, learning from local initiatives and high performing authorities provided a strong rationale to establish a full-time, senior role to fulfil the VSH function. The cost implication of the VSH post was £80,945, and would be funded from existing CAYA budgets.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

**18/13      CHILDREN'S HOMES** Information was provided on the work undertaken in children's homes during 2012/13, and the current developments within the service.

In terms of Quality Assurance, all children's homes had been inspected twice during the period 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013. There were nine children's homes for looked after children, and in the last full inspections, eight had received an overall rating of good, most with outstanding features, and one had been unsatisfactory. At the follow up inspections, the home that had been unsatisfactory had been judged to be making good progress. Out of the remaining eight, four had received good progress, two had been satisfactory and two had been unsatisfactory. These were being dealt with.

There were also four homes that accommodated disabled children and young people, one for looked after children and three providing short breaks/shared care. Three of the homes were new, and two had received a satisfactory outcome and one was good with outstanding features. At the follow up inspection, the good home had been judged to be making good progress. The fourth home had received a good outcome and satisfactory at the follow up.

Each home was also visited on a monthly, unannounced basis by Quality Assurance Managers, and the focus was primarily to ensure that the day to day care provided was satisfactory. Over the last twelve months, the visits had highlighted good practice as well as identifying issues which needed to be addressed. Residential managers viewed the reports as very useful in assisting the general monitoring of practice.

Complaints by young people or members of the public were monitored, and these had all been satisfactorily addressed within the required timescales. In eight of the thirteen homes, there had been no complaints from young people, and where there had been complaints, they had tended to be about daily issues.

Managers also undertook regular monitoring of their particular home, and these reports were summarised on a six monthly basis and sent to Ofsted. It was reported that a self-evaluation tool had been developed, and this would be rolled out across the homes. It was also stated that visits by Elected Members had been variable, but it was stressed that they would be welcomed.

Staff turnover over the past twelve months had been minimal, with twenty members of staff leaving their posts. However, two had returned, four had moved to similar posts within the service, and six reliefs had been

successful in obtaining permanent contracts. Recruitment and selection for replacement staff had been successful alongside a newly developed induction process.

There had been on-going training focussing on restorative justice, reflective practice and reducing substance and alcohol misuse. Social pedagogy continued to be fundamental in shaping practice, and new training, to be undertaken by the University of Derby along with a temporary part-time seconded post of Social Pedagogy Strategy Officer, would increase its impact across services. Staff at Stephenson were reviewing their approach to assessment, with a view to training staff on person centred approaches. The restructure agreed by Cabinet was now being implemented, and the two key intended outcomes were clearer management responsibility and more homely domestic and cooking arrangements.

There were now fewer onsite offences going through the criminal justice system, and the staff team was more aware of the criminal justice system and offered support at Court and at Police stations when required. In terms of children going missing, residential staff were following the revised protocol which included the involvement of advocates in follow-up interviews to find out and tackle the reasons for young people going missing.

Hill View was a new home for looked after severely disabled children, and some children receiving shared care at other homes were subject to looked after status. A report on these services and related issues would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

Over the next few months, work would be completed to review the role and purpose of children's homes and to consider future need for both residential and contract care provision. A further report would be presented to the Committee.

**RESOLVED** to note the progress made since 2008 and the work that is on-going to maintain progress, and

(1) To receive a further report as and when any new requirements/regulations are introduced in response to the Children's Commissioner's report;

(2) to receive an annual performance report; and

(3) to require monitoring of missing children by Quality Assurance Service Managers under Children's Homes Regulations 33 and 34/Schedule 6 and by Elected Members visiting homes.

**19/13      CHARTER FOR CARE LEAVERS** In December 2012, the Government had launched a Charter for Care Leavers, and local authorities were required to consider whether to sign up to the Charter. For those that did, there was a requirement to explain to care leavers how the aspirations of the Charter would be met. The 'promise' to care leavers covered a range of headings, and these were detailed.

Young people had been consulted about the details of the tender, and had raised a number of questions about the detail of the Charter. Young people had also asked for an opportunity to help with the promise that Derbyshire should be making to children in care. The Children and Families Minister had written to local authorities about this, and this had been responded to.

A group of young people would be meeting to look at the promise and to make recommendations about promises to care leavers regarding identity, acknowledging and growing potential, finance, essential information and how this was shared and provided, short, medium and longer term support, finding and providing essential items for moving to independence, and what it meant to be a lifelong champion. It was the intention to have the promise completed in the next few weeks, and the outcome would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

In terms of finance, junior ISA's were now being provided for children in care to encourage positive savings habits and planning for the future. Barnardo's and County Council staff were consulting with young people about money and what they required in terms of support with finance. The Leaving Care Grant (Setting Up Home Allowance) was currently in place at up to £1,550 per care leaver, and this covered essential items required to set up a home. Young people also received other funds in addition to non-financial support.

The County Council had produced a 'Care to Learn' strategy, and it was stated that there were some actions within this that needed to be taken forward. Work was progressing regarding apprenticeship opportunities with external and internal apprentice programmes, including the profiling of care leavers and the identification of actions to enable them to be work ready. A raised profile of corporate parenting responsibility across the Council was also proving to be effective in terms of offers of work placements.

The new care leavers' accommodation tender was in place, and care leavers would form part of the panel evaluating applicants for the service. This was due to meet in April 2013, and it was hoped that a new provider would be in place by September 2013. The Staying Put Scheme and Supported Lodgings provision was managed by the Barnardo's Leaving Care Service, and the outcomes for young people who benefited from this

accommodation were excellent. Over 90% were in education, training or work, and the accommodation review had identified the need to increase the capacity for this provision.

With regard to proposed actions, consultations would be completed with care leavers and feedback would be presented to the Children in Care Strategic Governance Group/Corporate Parenting Committee. Proposals made for the content of the Leaving Care Pledge would be co-ordinated with the Children in Care Pledge and offer for Derbyshire children in care. Further work was to be completed between the County Council, Barnardo's and care leavers' consultation groups regarding essential finance required to enable a move to independence, and this would include saving strategies and details of what young people could expect regarding money management and savings plans. Steps would be identified to review the capacity for the delivery of Supported Lodgings and Staying Put placements for care leavers in order to meet accommodation shortfall.

**RESOLVED** that (1) agreement be given for Derbyshire County Council to sign up to the Charter; and

(2) the proposed actions be agreed.

**20/13      SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN IN CARE NOT IN FULL-TIME EDUCATION** A key task of the Children in Care Education Service was to support school aged young people in care who were not in full-time education. Teachers and Integration Support Assistants worked with social workers, residential social workers and foster carers to negotiate and plan with schools and other education providers to minimise breaks in learning. The Integration Support Assistants worked primarily with children who were not in school full-time to help them progress towards integration into school. Since September 2012, the Children in Care Education Service had reviewed plans to reintegrate school aged children in care who were not in full-time education.

A summary was provided of why individual children in care were not in full-time education, along with the plans and progress towards addressing this. Seventeen children had currently been identified, and it was noted that nine cases had been resolved since the last report had been presented. The list included children who had a full-time place available but who either refused or were unable to access it for the time being.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

**21/13      CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ISSUES** With regard to the Big Book Bash, it was reported that a number of authors/illustrators had now been booked to attend the event, and video messages would be played from authors who were unable to be present.



A Caring Voice representative now attended the Children in Care Strategic Governance Group meetings, and it was the intention to organise a carnival day. Representatives from the Group would attend the day to run a stall, and it was hoped that this would help children in care meet the senior staff of the authority. This event would take place in September.

It was reported that an approach had been made by Eastwood Grange for the Council to provide advocacy for the young people who stayed there. This was currently being negotiated. It was also stated that Advocates were recording resolution stories to present to the Senior \Management Team.

The Children's Rights Team had been asked to provide training on children's rights to all Ofsted inspectors nationally, and this would be taking place over the next few weeks.