

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday 9 September 2015 in Committee Room 4, City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 1630
Adjourned 1735

PRESENT – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
M Pollard	Engel	Leeming
	Tait	
	Thirkill	

Co-opted Members: Chair of the Children in Care Council
L Donohue – Bradford Achievement Service
J Pickles (West Yorkshire Police)

Apologies: N O'Neill (Bradford NHS)

Councillor Thirkill in the Chair

9. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency, Councillor Leeming disclosed that she was a foster carer for Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

10. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents.

11. UPDATE ON THE OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Assistant Director, Children’s Specialist Services presented a report (**Document “C”**) which provided comprehensive information regarding outcomes for Looked After Children.



This was a summary of the information known about looked after children in Bradford, as at 31 March 2015, and drew on the same data used to provide statistical returns to the Department for Education (DfE). All the figures were provisional as the DfE would publish the final figures in October 2015. Comparisons to performance levels at 31 March 2014 and the first National Statistical Release for 2013-14 were given.

In presenting the report the following matters were highlighted:

- The results in most areas were generally positive.
- The cohort comprised 878 children and young people, which was the same figure as last year. Despite more entering the care system a higher number had been found permanent placements.
- The Authority's placement stability, both in the long and short term, compared favourably with the figures for both statistical neighbouring authorities and nationally. Stability was an important issue and was a priority for the service.
- There had been an increase in the number of adoptions and the current position with regard to children awaiting adoption was very positive.
- The large majority of looked after children were having the necessary health checks.
- The number of young people completing a 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire' (SDQ) had increased (this was used to assess emotional health needs).
- The Ofsted inspection framework had changed, as from April 2015.
- There was now an established single point of contact for each partner organisation to answer any queries forthcoming from Ofsted.
- The results in respect of educational outcomes had not yet been validated and a report would be submitted to the Panel in November.
- A separate report would be submitted to the Panel at a future meeting in respect of the educational outcomes for care leavers. There had been a significant increase in the numbers of young people in education, employment or training as at 31 March 2015. There had also been an increase in the numbers living in suitable accommodation.

The Assistant Director undertook to provide more detailed information to Members, after the meeting, in respect of queries raised about the figures as follows:

- Reasons for the decrease in the number of children having immunisations.
- Reasons for the reduction in the percentage of 0-4 years olds becoming looked after.
- The numbers of children/young people in each score band on the SDQ and a breakdown of the results indicating age.

She also responded to other questions with the following information:

- The worst case scenario in terms of accommodation was bed and breakfast provision; this was only used very occasionally in certain circumstances.
- There had been issues with one of the residential homes in terms of placements, care planning and the use of this provision. A further inspection would be undertaken in January to ensure that improvements had been undertaken.
- The Authority had a strong background of taking in refugees and asylum seekers. All local authorities had been asked to consider taking children as a result of the recent crisis. The various types of placements and provision were being assessed to establish if there were any vacancies and a corporate approach taken in respect of the numbers that could be accommodated in the future.

- No specific work had been undertaken with existing foster carers on this issue to date but it was an area that would be looked at. Most of the expertise to deal with these young people, who could be traumatised, was centred around the residential units.
- A further report to update the Panel on the situation would be presented in April 2016; this could include an update on foster carer training

Resolved –

That the report, the favourable figures therein and the work undertaken by the Service be welcomed and that the thanks of the Panel be conveyed to all those involved in the care of looked after children.

ACTION: Assistant Director – Children’s Specialist Services

12. RESIDENTIAL CARE REVIEW

The Assistant Director, Children’s Specialist Services updated the Panel on the review of Bradford’s children’s homes that had been commissioned by the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care (NCERCC) and had been undertaken over the Summer.

The Assistant Director outlined the background to the review:

- The last residential home had opened in 2007.
- Expenditure had reduced from £14 million to £6 million over the preceding eight year period.
- The inspection regime was becoming more challenging.
- Private providers were risk averse which meant that they were reluctant to accommodate those children and young people with the most challenging needs; the local authority therefore had to do so which had an impact on its residential homes.

and explained that:

- The review had been undertaken by members of the NCERCC over a period of three months and the scope had been the most positive use of residential care.
- The views of all parties had been compiled, including the young people and staff teams in the mainstream residential homes.
- The positive conclusions were that the authority had established, committed and knowledgeable staff; the district cared for many of its own children; there was good placement stability, and safeguarding was taken seriously.
- The initial findings included the need for: a clear placement strategy based on detailed needs assessment; a move towards the development of each home in a specific specialism with links to the fostering offer and commissioning; a reduction in the size of the homes; a review of training.
- One of the homes felt institutionalised and this needed to be addressed.
- The action plan, covering a period of 18 months, would result in fully considered, planned placements, improved outcomes for young people, the provision of a choice of options linked to needs analysis; and more homely environments with disciplined, clear ways of working.

- This work would be undertaken through the implementation of a clear project plan, using a partnership approach and inclusive of all parties whilst trying to ensure the least possible impact on those young people in residential care.

In response to Members' questions the Assistant Director said that:

- The matter of how homes would be reduced in size when the Council already had certain buildings in use was a complex issue. There were a number of options to consider.
- The cost implications were not known at this stage but it could be that bringing more of the district's own young people to live within the district could reduce costs. There was currently a crisis situation in respect of the provision of 'secure beds'.
- 'Tier 3' young people were now being placed within the district rather than outside. The impact of the increase in the numbers of these children had been included in the figures reported in the previous item in respect of emotional health.
- In the longer term there may be the possibility of the establishment of specific specialist provision in the district with the potential to accommodate young people from other authorities. It was considered likely that there would be significant cross-border collaborative work taking place.

Members commented as follows:

- There was a need for a focus on training for foster carers.
- This was a short time frame for a significant amount of work; the results would be awaited with interest.

Resolved -

That a progress report be presented to the Panel in six months time.

ACTION: Assistant Director – Children's Specialist Services

13. WORK PLAN 2015/16

The Panel's work plan for the forthcoming municipal year was submitted (**Document "D"**) for Member's consideration.

Resolved –

That the following items be added to the Panel's Work Plan for 2015/16:

- Report to update the Panel on the situation in respect of refugee/asylum seeking looked after children, in April 2016.**
- Progress report in respect of the Residential Care Review, in March 2016.**

ACTION: Assistant Director – Children's Specialist Service

14. **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The Chair explained that Julie Jenkins, the Assistant Director, was leaving the Authority after six years service. Members thanked Julie for her invaluable work and the help she had given them during this time and wished her well for the future.

Julie thanked the Members of the Panel for all their support. She said that she had seen the role of the Panel grow and flourish during this time. She also expressed her thanks to the Children in Care Council for their input and support.

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Committee.

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THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER