

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday 9 March 2016 in Committee Room 4, City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 1630
Adjourned 1745

PRESENT – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR
M Pollard	Engel
	Tait
	Thirkill

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

Councillor Thirkill in the Chair

28. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

29. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2015 be signed as a correct record.

30. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

31. **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE**

The Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services presented a report (**Document "L"**) examining the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service, which was responsible for the review of the care plans for all Bradford's Looked After Children. The report provided data for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 December 2015 and demonstrated the robust oversight of care planning in the Bradford district.

It was explained that the relevant regulations required the production of an IRO Annual Report and that this report needed to provide evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of the reviewing service, examine the quality of the reviews offered to young people and set targets for the development of the service.

In presenting the report the Assistant Director covered the following issues:

- The purpose and legal context of the service.
- The positive findings of recent research into the effectiveness of IROs.
- The staffing profile of the service in Bradford.
- Enhancements made to the role of the IRO and the increased emphasis on intervention.
- Statistical information in respect of the numbers of looked after children and how they were split in terms of age, gender, legal status, placement type and category of need. (She explained that, as a result of a legal challenge to the use of Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, all looked after children with this status would be reviewed to ensure that its use was appropriate in their case).
- A figure of 93% had been achieved in terms of participation by young people in the review of their care plan; this was an improvement on the preceding year.
- The percentage of reviews held within the statutory timescales had also improved to 98%.
- An internal Quality Assurance process had been introduced in September 2015. This provided a more robust way of recording evidence of the work being undertaken by IROs in order to illustrate the difference they could make. In addition it would help to improve the effectiveness of the IROs, facilitate the sharing of good practice and act as a performance tool for each individual IRO.
- The appointment of a Missing Children's Co-ordinator for the district was being progressed. Nationally the issue of children going missing from home and care had been an area of increasing concern during the preceding eighteen months. Daily monitoring was now undertaken and work was underway to establish a clearer picture of the risks to young people and to establish the most effective methods of addressing this problem.
- The 'Bradford Young People's App' had been launched in December 2015 and was a source of a lot of up to date information in an accessible format.
- The proposed work plan for the service in 2016/17.

It was suggested that the timing of the presentation of the annual report to the Panel be changed as this would allow the figures for a whole year to be presented giving Members a more accurate picture.

The Assistant Director responded to questions from Members and Co-opted Members:

- In terms of the 112 occasions recorded as 'child not attended and did not send views' (Code PN7); this was not always the same children. A young person may have contributed really well but just been unable to attend on one occasion. The number recorded as such had reduced in comparison with the figures for the previous year. The IRO would always make the effort to communicate with a young person recorded as Code PN7 to establish the reason for non-participation.
- Those young people who refused to attend reviews were usually in the 16-17 years age group and this could be for a range of reasons. No audit had been undertaken in respect of any correlation between those recorded as Code PN7 and those who went missing.
- The participation of children under the age of four was not recorded although IROs did still see these children.
- A lot of young people with complex health needs did participate in their reviews; only a small number were unable to do so.
- Figures could be provided in respect of the number of Emergency Orders made within a certain period. These were temporary orders that would last for a maximum of two days.
- It was believed that some turnover in staffing could be seen as an opportunity to introduce new skills and a different perspective. The minimum requirement for an IRO was now Level 3 Qualified Social Worker with 5 years experience. The staffing group was also more diverse than in the past.
- The nature of the IRO's role had always meant that limited time was spent within the team environment; it was not considered that the move towards working from home/remotely had made a significant impact on the IRO's work pattern. There tended to be a number of people present in the office in the earlier part of the morning when information and ideas could be shared. Workshops and team meetings were also undertaken on a regular basis allowing plenty of opportunity for collaboration between IROs.
- The Young People's App was still a work in progress. At this point in time 79 people had created accounts. Use of this facility would be encouraged.
- The authority had an accurate picture of the number of children in care who went missing on a daily basis and all cases were followed up within 72 hours to try and prevent re-occurrence. Any lessons learned were disseminated both within the authority and to other local authorities on a reciprocal basis. This process was relevant to all children who went missing not just those who were looked after.
- In terms of those missing from education, a number of these would not also be missing from home, the data for each group had not been correlated. Young people missing from education were identified by the Education Social Work Service.
- In respect of the Quality Assurance audits: the grading related to the social work practice in each case. If the assessment was that improvement was needed the relevant Team Manager was copied into the audit report, which included a section setting out the actions required to improve. If two audits in a row were graded as such then this would be subject to a challenge. To date this system had worked well and the feedback from Team Managers had been positive.
- Four further challenges had been made in February. Challenges could and were made at any stage not just as part of the auditing process.

Members made the following comments:

- The app was a good idea but if a young person did not own a smartphone they could not use it.

- It was noted that most homes and foster homes would have access to a personal computer and facilities were also available at the Leaving Care Offices.
- Different methods of communication should be tried with those young people who didn't participate.
- The Virtual Headteacher monitored those looked after children and young people missing from education.

Resolved –

- (1) **That the work undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service and its ongoing role in providing robust and challenging reviews of all Care Plans be noted.**
- (2) **That the improvements made, during the last 9 months, in children's participation, the continued improvement in timeliness and the successful introduction of a quality assurance process for the service be noted.**
- (3) **That the Service's Work Plan for 2016/17, as set out in the Appendix to Document "L", be endorsed.**
- (4) **That an update report be submitted to the Panel in November 2016 and the next Annual Report be presented to the Panel in June 2017.**

ACTION: *Assistant Director – Children's Specialist Services*

32. LEAVING CARE SERVICE - SINGLE POINT OF CONTACT UPDATE

Previous reference: Minute 17 (2014/15)

Members recalled that, at the meeting of the Panel held on 14 January 2015, they had given consideration to a report of the Assistant Director – Children's Specialist Services about the issues and developments in respect of employment, education, training opportunities and support for care leavers, including the progress made in respect of apprenticeships and Higher Education. The Panel had resolved, amongst other things:

'That the Assistant Director – Children's Specialist Services be asked to submit a further report to the Panel, in six months time, to update Members on any progress made in respect of the provision of a single point of contact for the Leaving Care Service for young people who are not in education, employment or training, to include any suggestions of how the Panel might support this provision.'

The Assistant Director – Children's Specialist Services therefore presented a report to update the Panel on this issue (**Document "M"**).

In presenting her report, the following issues were highlighted:

- The background of budget cuts, changes in resources and loss of the Connexions Service.
- The number of different personal advisers that care leavers were seeing and the lack of face to face engagement were matters of concern; there was a clear need for consistency and stability.

- A care leaver being NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) for anything over two months was of deep concern. The longer a young person was NEET and the older they got the harder it became to find a placement
- She had arranged a meeting with the Director of 'Prospects' to discuss these concerns and to try and achieve improvements.
- A significant concern was those who may fall through the net
- Young people needed to know where they could go for consistent advice.
- The figures in relation to the amount of time a young person was NEET prior to coming to the attention of the Leaving Care Service were being compared to other local authorities and a wider project was looking at whether any lessons could be learned from the approach taken by other authorities. The figures had been better when 'Connexions' had still been in place.

Members expressed a wish to be kept informed of the outcome of the Assistant Director's meeting with the Director of 'Prospects'; there was evidently a clear need for a single point of contact and for the prevailing situation to be improved.

Resolved –

That the Assistant Director – Children's Specialist Services be requested to convey the Panel's concern about the lack of, and the need for, a single point of contact for education, training and employment support for care leavers to the Director of Prospects and to explore ways to resolve this lack of provision.

ACTION: Assistant Director – Children's Specialist Services

33. **WORK PLAN 2015/16**

The Panel's Work Plan for the remainder of the municipal year 2015/16 was submitted (**Document "N"**), for Member's consideration.

The Assistant Director took on board a Member's suggestion that the Children in Care Council should be asked if they had any issues that they wished to be considered by the Panel in the future.

Resolved –

That the following matters be added to the Panel's future work plans:

- (i) **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service; update report in November 2016.**
- (ii) **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service; Annual Report in June 2017.**
- (iii) **A report on Regulation 44 visits.**

***ACTION: Assistant Director – Children's Specialist Services
Interim City Solicitor***

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