

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 10 January 2018 in City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 6.25 pm

Present – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT AND INDEPENDENT
D Smith	Engel Tait Thirkill	N Pollard

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Ali Jan Haider
Inspector Kevin Taylor
Yasmin Umarji

Bradford District Clinical Commissioning Group
West Yorkshire Police
Bradford Education

Observers: Councillor V Slater, Portfolio Holder – Health and Wellbeing

Apologies: Children in Care Council

Councillor Thirkill in the Chair

24. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

25. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meetings held on 13 September and 8 November 2017 be signed as a correct record.

ACTION: City Solicitor

26. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

NO ACTION

27. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS' ANNUAL REPORT

A report was submitted by the Deputy Director (Children's Social Care) (**Document "O"**) in relation to the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service and presenting its Annual Report for the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017; the production of which is a requirement of the IRO Regulations.

The IRO Manager highlighted the points below:

- There had been an increase in the numbers of Looked After Children (CLA) to 927 (as at 31 March 2017); this increase reflected the overall national trend.
- Care Proceedings were taking longer than the 26 week limit as a result of delays in respect of the Court and assessments.
- There had been a reduction in the number of Section 20 Agreements (Childrens Act 1989) and the Authority had a robust Legal Gateway Panel reviewing cases.
- The numbers of Placement Orders and Adoption Orders had decreased. Adoption was no longer seen as the preferred permanency plan and there was more emphasis on finding solutions within family and friends networks.
- The numbers of family and friend placements had increased with 45 placements being outside the district. The Authority was committed to keeping children within their family network where this was safe and possible.
- The balance between the numbers of those entering care and those leaving had changed with more entering care than leaving.
- Bradford had one of the largest populations of young people in the country, if not the largest.
- The Courts no longer favoured Special Guardianship Orders if a placement was untested.
- The IRO's caseloads were approximately 20 children above the guidance level in the IRO's Handbook.
- The Team was proud of the results achieved in respect of CLA reviews, with 98% being on time despite an increase in numbers, and the best performance to date in respect of participation by CLA of 97%.
- All Care Plans that were deemed to 'require improvement' were presented to the Deputy Director's Performance Clinic for consideration.
- In terms of the Quality Assurance (QA) Audits, a reduction in the percentage of Care Plans classed as 'outstanding' was believed to be due to adjustments to the thresholds and the increased familiarity of IROs with the definitions of each classification. The actions deemed necessary to bring about improvement were detailed in each case.
- 78 QA challenges had been issued with resolution being achieved for over 90% and 44 acknowledgements of good practice had been shared; a practice that had been welcomed by staff.
- IROs from Bradford had attended the Regional Annual IRO Conference.
- An update was given in respect of the information/figures since April 2017.

- The key priorities for the Service for 2017/18.
- A new Missing Co-ordinator been appointed and IROs had attended workshops on this issue.

The IRO Manager answered Members' questions:

- Although adoption was an option for consideration the current emphasis was on placing children with people that were known to them and the judiciary was keen to know what options had been considered within a child's family network. It was seen as a last resort by the Courts and this meant additional challenge to the Local Authority to show that all such options had been assessed. An Advisory Permanence Panel was being established by the Authority.
- The Adoption Service was now part of a regional consortium and recruitment for adopters was ongoing.
- There were still a significant number of children awaiting adoption.
- There were specific requirements in respect of the recruitment of IROs. Applicants had to have a certain level of experience to be considered suitable and would have the experience and skill set to challenge in their work. New appointees were given a detailed induction over a two week period. Supervision was undertaken on a between 4 and 6 weekly basis and there were annual appraisals. He considered that the IROs were well supported.
- A CLA's IRO could be the most consistent presence in their life. The IRO Team had been very stable for the last few years with most officers who had left the Service having retired. The newly recruited IROs had made a positive contribution to the service.
- IROs did do quite a lot of travelling. For those CLA placed outside the Authority's area if they were in a stable, long term fostering arrangement and there were no concerns then there was no absolute requirement for a face to face meeting and a 'light touch' assessment could be undertaken if appropriate.
- He did not have data in respect of the number of young people who had been looked after, left care and subsequently become looked after again although an audit had been undertaken in the recent past and the results presented to the Performance Review Panel. It was accepted that where possible children should be placed with family but this sometimes meant taking a risk that it would not work. This was an issue that was carefully scrutinised as it would obviously be disruptive for the young person.
- In some cases a young person might make their own decision to return home despite an assessment by the Authority that their needs were not being met by a parent; in such situations the Service would do all it could to make the situation as safe as possible for the young person concerned.
- The frequency of reviews depended on the individual circumstances of the young person.
- In terms of the increase in the number of Care Plans deemed to require improvement; a deeper audit had been undertaken of the care plan documents with the intention of bringing about improvement and IROs had been asked to be robust in their audit of these plans.

The IRO Manager was thanked for his comprehensive report.

Resolved –

- (1) That the key priorities for the Independent Reviewing Officer Service, as set out in Appendix 1 to Document “O”, be endorsed.
- (2) That, in future, the Independent Reviewing Officers’ Annual Report be presented to the September meeting of the Panel.

ACTION: Deputy Director (Children’s Social Care)

28. INDEPENDENT MONITORING OF CHILDREN’S HOMES AND INSPECTION OUTCOMES

The Deputy Director (Children’s Social Care) submitted a report in relation to the independent monitoring of the Authority’s Children’s Homes and the outcome of statutory Ofsted inspections for 2017-18 (**Document “P”**).

The Quality Standard Manager (QSM) highlighted the following key points:

- There were currently ten children’s homes offering a range of long term and short term/respite care.
- She aimed to promote good practice in addition to identifying necessary actions and making recommendations for improvement
- The reports she produced were sent to Ofsted and were used to inform inspections.
- Elected Members were able to bring a different perspective and insight to visits and also gave the benefit of additional scrutiny. Their input was also considered by Ofsted.
- An initiative to identify a schedule of visits to increase participation had not been particularly successful.
- She met with fellow Regulation 44 officers, from other authorities, on a regular basis to share experiences and good practice and to drive forward improvement.
- A robust Regulation 44 inspection regime brought valuable challenge to the homes and allowed responses to be made to issues as they occurred; it also led to more positive outcomes in terms of inspections.

Members made the following comments:

- The reports produced by the QSM were thorough and showed an in-depth knowledge of the homes and the young people.
- The visits were considered to be both interesting and worthwhile.
- Elected Members must support the QSM in this role.
- An issue raised, further to a visit, in respect of there being a lack of books being available for the young people had resulted in a project across all the homes to promote literacy; this was an excellent example of the value of this process and the contribution that could be made by Elected Members.

Resolved –

- (1) That Document “P” be noted.
- (2) That the Quality Assurance Manager (Regulation 44) be thanked for the report and that all Elected Members on the Corporate Parenting Panel be urged to make every effort to take part in monitoring visits to the Authority’s residential and respite homes.

ACTION: *Deputy Director (Children's Social Care)*

29. WORK PLAN 2017/18

The Panel’s Work Plan for 2017/18 was submitted (**Document “Q”**) for Member’s consideration.

In respect of issues discussed at previous meetings of the Panel the Portfolio Holder reported that the Executive had agreed that as from April 2018 looked after children who had left care would not have to pay Council Tax until they were 21 and that any foster carers who were part of the ‘staying put’ scheme would not lose entitlement to single person benefit where this was applicable.

It was noted that the issue of bullying in schools was being considered by the Children’s Trust Board and the Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee; if there was a specific issue in respect of looked after children then that would be brought to this Panel.

The Chair confirmed that the Children in Care Council were consulted, on a regular basis, in respect of any matters that they might wish to be considered by the Panel.

Resolved –

That an item be added to the Panel’s Work Plan for 2018/19 in respect of issues affecting looked after children in respect of citizenship and obtaining passports.

ACTION: *Deputy Director (Children's Social Care)*

Chair

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

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