

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Monday, 11 March 2019 in Performance Room, Ground Floor, Culture Fusion, Thornton Road Bradford

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 6.00 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Engel Tait Thirkill	D Smith	Humphreys

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Chair of the Children in Care Council
Yasmin Umarji – Bradford Education
Jude MacDonald (Bradford District Clinical Commissioning Group)

Apologies: Inspector Kevin Taylor

Councillor Thirkill in the Chair

29. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency Councillor Engel disclosed an interest in Minute 32 as she was on a working party who were looking at Children’s Services Improvements.

Action: City Solicitor

30. MINUTES

Resolved-

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2019 be signed as a correct record.

Action: City Solicitor

31. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

32. PROGRESS UPDATE FOLLOWING THE OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILAC)

The Interim Strategic Director submitted a report (**Document "Q"**) which provided the panel with a progress update in respect of improvements identified within the Improvement Plan following the recent OFSTED inspection (September 2018) and subsequent DFE notice to improve issued on the 4 December 2018.

More specifically the report focussed on changes and improvements within Workstream 2 of the Improvement Plan – Partnerships namely:

- The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Front Door Service

In addition, the report also provided the panel with a general update relating to:

- The structure and governance around the Improvement Board including Improvement Plan, and
- OFSTED's first monitoring visit.

The Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care Improvement reported that steps were being taken to making improvements in response to the OFSTED Inspection of Local Authorities Children's Services which included:

- The safeguarding sub group had worked with the improvement consultant to go back to basics and develop a revised consent policy and redraft of the thresholds document in relation to the Multi agency review of the consent policy and thresholds.
- A Back to Basic's programme for all children's social care staff was being developed which focussed on what good looked like in terms of case recording, voice of the child, analysis of risk within assessments; undertaking home visits and use of supervision.
- Review and refresh of the social work job role, with a view to achieving an increase in grade to support retention of staff in a competitive market.
- Looking at reducing social work caseloads to a more appropriate level of 20 for experienced social workers and 17 for newly qualified.
- Quality assurance through audits was beginning to show some shoots of improvement in casework, although there were still challenges around consistency and quality of practice for too many teams.
- A Social Work Health Check had been completed with some positive results including social workers stating that they were finding their teams to be supportive, they liked the flexible working arrangements that Bradford offered and they had easy access to training and development. Whilst areas they would like to see improve centered around reduction in case loads, stability with the teams, retention of experienced staff and more opportunities to spend face to face time with children and young people.

- There had been some internal changes to the front door and MASH, including a social worker now being based at the Contact centre that screened all calls coming in. In order to achieve this, a decision was made to redirect the current five email boxes where contact and referrals came into and four telephone lines into two each respectively. This allowed and assisted the social worker in monitoring just two email boxes.
- OFSTED had completed their first monitoring visit on the 6 – 7 March, where they specifically focussed on the front door and MASH which went well.

Members of the Panel made the following comments:

- Did the service have sufficient staff because of the changes made to the Front Door?
- What was the reason for 133 children not being under the correct team?
- Needed to ensure there were no delays in dealing with care orders.
- The Panel was originally told caseload would be reduced to 20 and now being told the Service would reduce caseload down to 25; what was the up to date position on reducing social work caseloads?
- What was the progress in relation to the recruitment of social workers?
- The service received a budget for extra social workers.
- The issues the social workers had was not all about caseloads; retaining staff was crucial.
- What was the latest on sharing information between agencies and acting on referrals?

In response to the questions raised by Members it was reported that:

- The service was identifying where cases should sit in the system to take the pressure off early based services; ideally experienced social workers should have a caseload of 20 but the service was starting with 25; there would be redistribution of work across the service.
- The changes to the front door service and Early Help and Prevention Service would help in terms of children being dealt with faster in terms of where they should be placed etc and permanent arrangements needed to be looked at.
- Any capacity issues in relation to Front Door would be dealt with.
- The Service was not ready in terms of moving cases on; remit of some services had been widened.
- The Service was reliant on how fast the courts dealt with care orders but needed to ensure the delays were not being caused by the department.
- Some staff had a caseload of 30 and the service was pushing to reduce that to 25 which would be positive; recruiting and retaining social workers was a local and national problem.
- A recruitment campaign would be started in 3 months time; the service still employed agency staff; some agency staff were being converted to permanent employees.
- The service did receive extra funding for social workers and had received approval to look at pay scales to be in line with neighbouring authorities;

once the pay scale had been sorted then the recruitment campaign would begin.

- In terms of retention of social workers the service was looking at supervision, manageable caseloads, environment they worked in etc; building blocks would be put in place to ensure that it was a good place to work.
- The consent document had been redone and shared with partners; 4 threshold events were being held; the threshold document was being redesigned.

There was a short discussion on how more elected Members could be engaged with Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

Resolved-

- (1) That the steps being taken to making improvements in response to the OFSTED Inspection of Local Authorities Children's Services be recognised and that the progress being made to the Improvement Plan continue to be monitored.**
- (2) That future reports to the Panel on the progress being made with the Improvement Plan include what actions have been taken or being taken.**
- (3) That consideration be given as to how more elected Members could be engaged with Corporate Parenting responsibilities and that this be reported to the Panel's meeting on 15 April 2019.**

Action: Assistant Director, Children's Social Care Improvement

33. THE PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN IN THEIR REVIEW MEETINGS

Young people at the Corporate Parenting Panel asked for assurance about whether when children did not attend their reviews their voice was accurately reflected and the review was done with someone who had knowledge of their care plan. The Assistant Director (Children's Social Care Improvement) submitted a report (**Document "R"**) which addressed the questions raised and provided assurance.

It was reported that:

- Children participated in their reviews by a variety of different methods. Children choose different methods and people to express and communicate their wishes and feelings.
- If a child chooses not to attend a meeting and present their wishes and feelings via an advocate or professional this did not mean that they never attend their review meeting- the report showed that most children did attend some meetings.
- IRO's (Independent Reviewing Officer) were proactive in seeking out communication and visiting children who did not attend their review

meetings to ensure that they were kept informed of any changes to their care plan.

- Key professionals such as social workers and foster carers were also instrumental in achieving the voice of the child and supporting IRO's to communicate outcomes from review meetings.
- Reasonable explanations had been provided in situations where there had been no communication between the child and the IRO.
- This audit exercise had evidenced that IRO's did not just accept how children felt or their opinions via third-party but face-to-face meeting and communication was common practice to ensure that the views presented were indeed the views of the child.

Members commented on a number of issues which included:

- Concerned that some of the actions listed at paragraph 6 of the report should have been undertaken by a social worker rather than the IRO.
- Some of the actions listed at paragraph 6 needed further examination as to why the actions were not being picked up by social workers.
- Information provided to young people in the form of reports, minutes etc should be child friendly.
- It should be mandatory that the IRO visits the child before a review meeting took place.

In response to the comments raised by Members it was reported that:

- Some of the actions listed in paragraph 6 of the report were isolated incidents and did not indicate that key teams were not doing what they should be doing.
- It may be that some children felt it was more appropriate to ask the IRO rather than a social worker.
- Making reports/information child friendly would be looked into and would be undertaken in consultation with Children in Care Council.
- IRO's visiting a child before a review meeting took place would be looked into.

A Member of the Children in Care Council stated they felt a bit more reassured that the views of the child were represented accurately.

Resolved-

- (1) That consideration be given to the Independent Reviewing Officer undertaking a visit to meet the young person (Looked After) before a Review meeting took place.**
- (2) That the Independent Reviewing Offices Service looks at models of child/family friendly presentations of Review minutes.**
- (3) That further information be provided to Members on the points raised**

at Section 6 of the report in particular as to why some of the points were not raised with Social Workers.

Action: Assistant Director, Children's Social Care Improvement

34. THE CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL

The Assistant Director, Children' Social Care Improvement submitted a report (**Document "S"**) which highlighted the differences in allowances for 16-17 year old Young People in Fostering placements, Community homes and living independently.

The Co-ordinator of Bradford's Children in Care Council and Participation reported that:

- The Children in Care Council (CiCC) felt that many Young People left care from fostering placements or community homes without being financially prepared for independence.
- The CiCC believed that those Young People who transitioned from care to independence between 16-17 were financially disadvantaged compared to those Young People who remained with Foster Carers or in Community Homes.
- The CiCC wanted to highlight financial inequality between Young People who were Fostered, in Community Homes and those who lived independently.
- The CiCC were concerned that one 16-17yr Young Person presently doing exactly the same things with their life in 3 separate types of placement would receive 3 different levels of money.

A discussion was held on the different allowances paid to young people and the Panel felt strongly that a more in depth report was required.

It was felt tables in the report did not reflect the money spent by the home, activity money and other allowances; needed further information in relation to residential allowance, semi independent living and living independently.

Members were informed that if a post 16 child was in a financial crises then that would be looked into and acted upon.

Resolved-

That a further more in depth report be presented to the Panel on the differences in allowances for 16-17 year old Young People in Fostering Placements, Community Homes and Living Independently as discussed by Members at the meeting.

Action: Assistant Director, Children's Social Care Improvement

Chair