

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Monday, 22 July 2019 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 6.30 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Tait	Humphreys
Thirkill	

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Chair of Children in Care Council
Inspector Kevin Taylor
Yasmin Umarji
Sue Thompson

West Yorkshire Police
Bradford Education
Bradford District Clinical Commissioning Group

Apologies: Councillor Adrian Farley and Councillor Dale Smith

Councillor Thirkill in the Chair

1. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 April 2019 be signed as a correct record (previously circulated).

Action: City Solicitor

2. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

3. APPOINTMENT OF NON-VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

The Panel was asked to consider the appointment of Non-Voting Co-opted Members for the 2019/20 Municipal Year and to make a recommendation to the Regulatory and Appeals Committee.

Resolved –

That it be recommended to the Regulatory and Appeals Committee that the appointment of Non-Voting Co-opted Members to the Panel for the 2019/20 municipal year be confirmed as set out below:

- **Inspector Kevin Taylor – West Yorkshire Police**
- **Yasmin Umarji (until September 2019) – Education**
- **Sue Thompson – Bradford District Clinical Commissioning Group**
- **Chair of the Children in Care Council**

Action: City Solicitor

4. CHILDREN PLACED OUT OF BRADFORD

The Local Authority had a duty to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within its area to meet the need of children whose circumstances were such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation in the local authority area. This was referred to as 'the sufficiency duty'.

The Assistant Director (Performance, Commissioning & Partnerships) submitted a report (**Document "A"**) which set out the numbers of children; services offered; challenges and sufficiency plans.

Members were informed that:

- There had been a significant rise in the number of Children Looked After (CLA) over the last 15 months; the current number of CLA was 1202.
- This was a 23.2% increase, of this increase 15.8% were aged between 10-17.
- There was a good level of own provision compared to purchased provision; 63% of provision of accommodation for CLA was provided by the Local Authority.
- Over the last 12 months there had been a significant increase in the number of CLA placed into purchased provision purely because of the availability of placements in area, a number of these would be outside of Bradford.

- It was essential that own provision needed to be increased.
- CLA numbers were rising locally and nationally, there were a limited number of external providers of foster care and more importantly residential care. There were on average between 400 / 500 referrals per month nationally to the private residential sector.
- This often meant that despite a children's social care referral stating a specific need there may be no availability and the best available placement would be taken. This could mean that children and young people were placed at distance into a setting that might not be the best match. There were a number of actions in place to try to address this including developing more flexible provision locally; working with the market to have more local provision and increasing the number of in-house Foster Carers.
- There had been increasing instances of permission to accommodate a young person being given by Head of Service and no placement being available. This effectively meant a child or young person remaining in the current placement.
- Bradford had a block contract of 10 beds with a provider called Hexagon and utilised these within homes in Bradford. This had recently been reviewed and extended for a further year. As part of the review it increased from 8 beds to 10 as it was good quality provision and the block contract was more cost effective. The commissioning team was currently reviewing to see if there were further opportunities to use block contracts.
- When CLA were placed into a private children's home out of area, it was important that a risk assessment was undertaken with the local Police, placements teams and safeguarding team in the Local Authority (LA) to ensure that they were aware that a young person was being placed into area. A written notification was sent to the LA so that the CLA nursing team, Virtual School and Local Authority were aware. This was supposed to also happen when a child was placed in Bradford from another authority, but did not always consistently do so. This was being addressed through individual conversations with local authorities and regional and national networks.
- Bradford had experienced a number of situations in out of area placements where the local Police had put significant pressure on an external children's home when a young person had been going missing or risk was seen to be escalating which could result in placement disruption; providers were run as businesses and were Ofsted registered and police concern may trigger a poor Ofsted judgement. An inadequate inspection outcome for a private provider meant that LA's would not place their children with them. As a result difficult placements often ended with limited notice.

- When Children were placed at distance support to the placement when problems were occurring could not easily be provided, Social Workers undertook statutory visits on a monthly basis and these were increased when needed however distance from Bradford did mean that young people could be isolated at times when they needed increased support.
- CLA being placed at distance from Bradford raised a number of concerns; support to these young people and ensuring that the quality of the provision was monitored was paramount, increasing the use of technology to remain in contact with CLA such as face time and Skype should be explored wider in the council. These tools were the norm for young people and professionals also should embrace innovation as a way of remaining in touch to complement routine visits. Currently not all social workers were able to access this relevant IT when away from the office.
- Work was on going to increase local sufficiency which included increasing internal fostering, revising emergency fostering offer, increasing local Children Homes capacity, ensuring sustainability of B Positive Pathways, reducing length of time in care by effective permanence planning, revising commissioning strategy and sustaining build on the Mockingbird Family Model.

From the information presented, Members made the following comments:

- They were concerned that the number of out of area placements were increasing.
- Were children being placed into Bradford from other authorities and was this minimising provision for Bradford's Looked After Children.
- Children placed out of area needed face to face contact with a Social Worker and not just contact through social media; they needed the right level of support; young people may not want the Council using snap chat etc.
- What actions were being taking to monitor attendance at school.
- What processes were in place for children being placed into Bradford from another authority and vice versa? It would be useful to have the Placement Co-ordination Team attend a future meeting to explain the process and circumstances of out of area placements.
- Were out area placements disturbing for the young person?
- Who was working with the police when a child/young person went missing from an out of area placement in external Children's Homes?

- Was OFSTED aware of the impact on external placements from Police visits?
- The Council needed to grow more of its own 16+ provision; a lot of 16+ external provision was not regulated.
- The improvements to IT capability and use of social media for Social Workers needed to be undertaken in consultation with Children in Care Council.

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

- Some neighbouring authorities had chosen to outsource their provision which had not worked; Bradford's response had always been to provide more of its own provision.
- Children placed into Bradford from other authorities did not reduce provision for Bradford children, there were only a few children that came from other authorities and the vast majority were placed with family, friends or fostering.
- Increasing the use of IT such as face time and skype for Social Workers would not take away the support being provided but would improve what was already in place and would complement routine visits; the service was looking at better ways of communicating with young people and IT would be another tool; access to IT needed improving; discussions with Children in Care Council would take place on the way forward in increasing the use of IT when communicating with young people.
- A review was currently underway to look at quality of placements and strengthen arrangements with external placements and issues such as children going missing would be looked at.
- A number of the placements that were placed into Bradford from other authorities were emergency placements and information had to be chased up; a written notification should be sent to the local authority so that the Children Looked After Nursing Team, Virtual School and Local Authority were aware; it was important that a risk assessment was undertaken with the Police, placements team and safeguarding team in the Local Authority to ensure that they were aware that a young person was being placed out of area; Bradford had a Placement Co-ordination Team that dealt with out area placements.
- Some out of area placements were through Guardianship Orders, family friend provision etc young people in their teens generally wanted to return to Bradford.
- Bradford was working closely with the Police when dealing with missing children from external placements, the same level of partnership working was not taking place in other authorities which was a national challenge.

- More could be undertaken on how the authority monitored and challenged providers.
- Some OFSTED reports highlighted significant risks; external providers needed to have good provision in place; a number of factors were considered before the police were involved with a missing young person; OFSTED were invited to regional forums and issues were brought to their attention.

Resolved –

- (1) **That the work being undertaken in the sufficiency plan to improve the level of provision locally be supported.**
- (2) **That the IT capability for Social Workers (SW's) and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) be reviewed and the availability of IT to SW's and IRO's to assist them with remaining in contact with Children Looked After and keeping in touch with Young People in out of area placements be improved.**
- (3) **That a report on how providers end placements be provided to the panel so that it can be monitored and challenged.**

Action: Strategic Director, Children's Services

5. CITIZENSHIP/ACCESS TO PASSPORTS FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS AND BREXIT IMPLICATIONS

The Assistant Director (Performance, Commissioning & Partnerships) submitted a report (**Document "B"**) which provided an update from the report submitted in September 2019, regarding issues of Citizenship and Passports for Children who were in care, in particular regarding children who were EU Citizens and plans to apply for settled status or citizenship for those children.

Members were informed that:

- There were currently 59 children who were EU nationals in care; some of these children, where their permanence plan was that they would remain looked after separate from their family and they would live in the UK; measures were being put in place to apply for British Citizenship.
- For children who continued to live within their own family, or continued to have significant links with their family and home country, it was important that they had the necessary paperwork and identity papers, and that an application for Settled Status was made. The application itself was free, but the documents needed to prove eligibility such as birth certificates and passports did cost money if they were not already in place.

- Often parents did not have the necessary paperwork or refused to give this to the social worker. Social workers therefore needed to work to get hold of the necessary documentation and if the families did not have the paperwork new copies were needed. This was not straightforward and involved working with the individual embassies or consulates and the children being seen at the embassy (usually in London). Passports could not be issued without identity papers and birth certificates.
- Some creative work was being undertaken to ensure children had identity papers and passports to allow them to go on school trips etc.
- The Settled Status application scheme opened at the end of March and plans were being put in place for children in care to apply for Settled Status, however to submit the application the child needed all the necessary documentation so the focus now was on ensuring this was in place first.
- The delay in Brexit had meant that the work regarding applying for Settled Status had become less of a priority but it still needed to happen. All workers of children who were EU migrants had been asked to meet with the Through Care Service Manager in July to update on plans and progress regarding Settled Status or Citizenship for the children they were working with.
- The cost of citizenship applications was at least £1,000 per child. Significant costs could also be incurred through travel to embassies in London; legal costs needed to be met and there was a shortage of Legal Advisors who specialised in children's asylum and immigration issues.

In response to the information provided, Members commented on the following:

- What did settled status mean for an individual?
- Did settled status allow young people to have access to higher education?
- Was anything being undertaken in relation to the shortage of Legal Advisors who specialised in Children's asylum and immigration issue?
- The Council needed to lobby the government to raise concerns about the settled status application scheme and its implications.

In response to the comments raised it was reported that:

- Settled Status gave an individual the right to live in Britain and access benefits but did not result in an individual acquiring a British Passport.
- Settled Status did give young people access to higher education.
- Settled Status had become less of a priority for the government due to the delay in Brexit but the authority needed to make progress due to the delay and complexity of obtaining appropriate paperwork.

- There was a team leading on Brexit in Bradford looking into amongst other things the shortage of legal advisors who specialised in children’s asylum and immigration issues who had links with the Home Office; citizen advice bureau also provide support in this area; a few new immigration lawyers had just started through work from the Yorkshire and Humber Brexit Group.
- Staff who had success in this area were being asked to write a guidance note for others to follow.

Resolved –

That the Chair of the Panel write to the Local Government Association raising concerns about the Settled Status Application Scheme and the implications it has for Local Authorities.

Action: Assistant Director (Performance, Commissioning and Partnerships)

6. ONE ADOPTION WEST YORKSHIRE ANNUAL REPORT

The Assistant Director (Performance, Commissioning & Partnerships) submitted a report (**Document “C”**) which set out the annual report of the work of One Adoption West Yorkshire.

Members raised strong concerns in relation to the delay in children’s medicals being undertaken in a timely manner. The Assistant Director Performance, Commissioning and Partnerships confirmed that the matter had been escalated and Commissioners in Health and the Hospital Trust were aware of the issues in relation to the time taken for a young person to undergo a medical which was leading to delays in progressing care plans.

In response to a Member’s question it was explained that the new Adoption Support Fund portal on the Government website came into force at the beginning of July 2018 and this was much more user-friendly and along with the improved business support processes there had been a higher number of successful applications for therapeutic support for families. In total One adoption had accessed £2.1 million to support 650 adopted children in West Yorkshire.

The Chair felt that a verbal report should be provided to the panel on the progress with the delays in medicals being undertaken for young people.

Resolved –

That the report be noted and the work of One Adoption West Yorkshire and the local authority to ensure adopted children and families receive the best possible support continue to be supported.

Action: Assistant Director, Performance and Commissioning

7. WORK PLAN 2019/2020

The Panel's Work Plan for 2019/20 was submitted for Member's consideration (Document "D").

Resolved-

That the 9 September meeting of the Committee be held at Culture Fusion and includes the following items:

- **Young People's feedback from the development event**
- **Corporate Parenting Report – Places (leisure facilities for Looked After Children)**
- **Report on Emotional and Mental Wellbeing of Looked After Children – (financial element and provision of CAMHS for Looked After Children – requested at the 15 April 2019 meeting of the Panel)**

Action: Assistant Director, Performance and Commissioning

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