

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Monday, 20 January 2020 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 4.30 pm
Concluded 7.00 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE
Thirkill Tait	Pollard

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Chair of Children in Care Council
Sue Lowndes Bradford Education

Councillor Thirkill in the Chair

23. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

24. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

25. THROUGH CARE

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "N"**) provided an update to the panel on developments in respect of the Leaving Well 'app' a pathway planning tool for care leavers.

The Assistant Director explained that the Through Care was a pathway planning process for Bradford care leavers. The feedback from young people had highlighted that the process required reform and therefore efforts were on going to find an appropriate base pathway planning tool. Evidence showed that where a suitable model had been implemented, positive results had been seen.

The Local Authority had a duty under the Care Act to ensure that care leavers were given a care pathway. The pathway planning process starts when a young person reaches 15 ½ -16 years and 3 months; 615 young people were eligible for a pathway plan. Those over 21 were also provided with a slim line version of the pathway plan. Within this context, and given resource pressures, the Service had gone on a journey and engaged with young people and IT partners over a 12 month period to improve engagement and provide clarity in terms of pathway planning. All Social workers now have a smart phone and tablet to communicate with young people, through an app based system. A staged roll out had been undertaken and the early results were positive, with some evidence that not everyone was engaging with the technology. Further take up would be encouraged, however existing systems can still be relied upon to bridge any gap.

The feedback from the roll out of the new system had been positive and the cost of implementation was modest. One of the benefits of the new system was the ability of young people to task their key workers with a to do list and young people could access the service 24 hours a days, with the provision to alert key workers to any problems and therefore the balance of power had now shifted to the young person. There was an opportunity to expand this service and work was ongoing to evaluate the management data, with a view to improving services across different aspects of Children's Social Care.

During the discussion a Member ascertained information around management plans and what needed to be covered. In response it was stated that the pathway planning from the App was uploaded on the system and work was on going on how this information could be better utilised in terms of better informing management plans.

In relation to a question on costing for plans going forward especially for those young people who were over 21, it was explained that a number of options could be looked at with the new system, which would enable better transition planning to be done and that the App could be extended to those involved in transition services to provide a more holistic service going forward.

In response to a question on what other Local Authorities were doing in this area, it was explained that a number of Councils had developed similar systems, and that 20 Councils were part of the second pilot and Bradford was in regular contact with a number of Councils on how the App could be further improved.

In relation to a question on response times and how the App alerted key workers to a particular problem, it was explained that the App was essentially a communication tool and was not intended to replicate systems per se, and that any reviews with the young person would be undertaken in line with existing processes ie the care plan would be reviewed every 6 months.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Corporate Parenting Panel welcomes the report from the Through Care team and the work undertaken to support young people to successfully engage and navigate the new application, to have a voice and a clear pathway plan to their future and aspirations.**
- (2) That the Corporate Parenting Panel supports this pilot and future plans for investment. This will evidence and assist to quality assure service to our young people during the restructure.**

ACTION: Strategic Director Children's Services

26. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS & ADVOCACY SERVICES

The Strategic Director of Children's Services presented a report (**Document "O"**) that provided an overview regarding the independent advocacy service that enabled children and young people to be supported and heard in matters that affected them.

A comprehensive overview was given, details of which were contained in the report.

During the discussion, a Member asked a question regarding the number of children who required support from independent visitors, it was explained that this was partly dependent on how much they were engaging with services as to the level of support required, and inevitably some independent visits would drop off.

In response to a question on what independent visits can actually give young people, it was explained that essentially it was a befriending scheme.

In response to a question regarding cost it was stressed that the Contract was for 30 volunteers to provide the necessary support and that in addition advocates received a salary and expenses.

In terms of the independent visitors, quarterly meetings were undertaken and relevant information/action was communicated to the social work team.

Resolved -

- (1) That the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) complete an annual report with more detail regarding ethnicity and age range for each of the areas for which they are commissioned to provide a service. It has been agreed that this will be included in the data that they provide on a quarterly basis. This will help enhance the understanding of how well our services support and enable children.**

- (2) That a further report be provided to the Panel in 6 months time to include an update regarding progress against the actions identified; a review of closed cases and an analysis of the levels of satisfaction young people received in respect of Child Protection Services.

ACTION: Strategic Director Children's Services

27. CHILDRENS PARTICIPATION REPORT - DECEMBER 2019 VIEWPOINT - WHAT ARE YOUNG PEOPLE TELLING US?

The Strategic Director of Children's Services presented a report (**Document "P"**) on the importance and different types of child participation within children looked after reviews. There was a specific emphasis on the use of viewpoint as a tool for child participation with Bradford's children.

The report explained how viewpoint fits in with other types of participation as well as covering performance of completed questionnaires and what Bradford children are telling us through the use of viewpoint.

The report also included information on Bradford's viewpoint user-group, its functioning and findings.

A comprehensive overview was given, details of which were contained in the report, drawing attention to the fact that although the Viewpoint system was a versatile tool, take up was inadequate.

During the discussion and in response to a question on the technical problems facing Viewpoint, it was explained that there remained a number of barriers with the use of the system and although managers can access and collate information using Viewpoint, the message of using the system consistently was lacking. To this end a proactive guide was being developed on how to use the system for new and existing staff.

A Member commented that the poor take of the system was a concern, particularly as the Ofsted judgement in Children's Social Care had pointed out that the voice of the child was a crucial aspect to capture going forward. In response it was explained that there was a feeling the Viewpoint was seen as repetitive and the feedback from the Children in Care Council was that it was not effective in capturing the Children's voice and therefore this had to be looked at.

A number of Members raised concerns at the number of responses Viewpoint had manage to capture and that 310 responses out of a possible 1245 was not a good response rate. In response it was stressed that this was not the only participation tool that was being utilised and that functionality of the system was still good. In addition there was a possibility of developing our own App based system and this would be looked at in conjunction with the Children in Care Council. This could pose as an alternative to Viewpoint and could be more cost effectiveness.

The Chair commented on how managers engaged and used Viewpoint needed looking at and that the use of the system needed to be better regulated with new staff during the training phase. In essence there needed to be a smarter way on how Viewpoint was used.

Resolved –

- (1) That a review be undertaken on whether Viewpoint is the most effective way of capturing Children’s experiences.**
- (2) That the quarterly reports available from Viewpoint are reviewed and discussed within the Viewpoint User group but are also shared with frontline service for discussion and review to help social workers to understand the experiences of children and young people.**
- (3) That reports from Viewpoint be used to inform training and that its profile be raised amongst practitioners.**
- (4) That as part of the improvement work, the following be undertaken –**
 - (i) Completion and quality of life story work – how are children engaged in this work and the impact this has in terms of supporting children to understand their experiences.**
 - (ii) Indicators for what will make children feel settled and safe in placement – understanding the quality of placements through auditing and feedback from children through an adapted questionnaire.**
 - (iii) Improving communication within the placement and with the social worker – work with the fostering and residential services and the Children In Care Teams to understand some of the challenges for children to develop positive relationships with carers and social workers and how to navigate some of the barriers to improve better and improved communications.**
 - (iv) Improved links between Education and Children’s Services to support an understanding of what education experiences are like for children as well as what support is available to help with homework.**
 - (v) Ensure that carers and children are aware of the leisure offer from Bradford Council.**
- (5) That alternatives to Viewpoint are explored and reported back to the Panel.**
- (6) That the completion of questionnaires used to inform Viewpoint are given priority in social work practice.**

ACTION: Strategic Director Children’s Services

28. PLACEMENT SUFFICIENCY

A verbal update was provided by on the number of children currently in care. Although the overall figures were increasing, the current figure stood at 1240 children, with 256 children placed outside of the district.

The impetus going forward was to ensure that internal management system and structures were sufficiently robust to drive up improvements as well as stabilise the cost of care provision, which were very high in particular for children who had very specialist needs, and that those needs could only be met by placing them in very specialist provision, costs in this area could fluctuate wildly.

The Service was working hard to ensure stringent value for money was being applied and although there was a sufficiency issue in Bradford in terms of insufficient placement provision, the service was trying its level to manage this in a more sustainable manner.

During the discussion, it was explained that work with the CCGs was on going to get funding to support children in care. In addition driving up performance was key in reducing the number of children in care and to this end a revised senior management structure was being implemented by the new Strategic Director to drive up standards.

Resolved –

That the verbal update on Placement Sufficiency be welcomed and acknowledged as a valid and informative report.

NO ACTION

29. WORK PLAN 2019/2020

Resolved –

That the work plan 2019/20 be amended to include an item at the April meeting on EU Citizenship.

ACTION: Strategic Director Children's Services

Chair

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