



Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 27 October 2021 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.00 pm
Concluded 6.55 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Thirkill Duffy Dunbar	Pollard	Knox

NON VOTING CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Daniel Ware West Yorkshire Police

Observers: Cllr Alipoor, Steve Walker - Commissioner (DfE)
Jonathan Cooper - Virtual School Headteacher (Head/VS)

Apologies: Councillor Dale Smith

Councillor Thirkill in the Chair

91. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in items under consideration were received

92. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meetings held on 8 March and 12 April 2021 be signed as a correct record (previously circulated)

93. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

94. UPDATE ON CURRENT CARE ARRANGEMENTS FOR OUR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Assistant Director, Children's Services submitted a report (**Document "A"**) that provided members of the Corporate Parenting Panel with an update on current care arrangements for Bradford's looked after children and a summary of the outcome of the Corporate Parenting Consultation review held 28th July 2021.

The Panel noted that a major theme to emerge from the Corporate Parenting Consultation review on 28 July 2021 ("the July 2021 Consultation"), which had involved both young people and carers, had been lack of consistency and responsiveness of contact with social workers. **Asked** how the Panel could support stabilisation of the social work workforce, Assistant Director, Children's Services, stated that Bradford's current Ofsted status presented challenges to recruitment. Having reviewed how this issue had been addressed by similarly positioned local authorities, officers were exploring options to:

- improve retention of social workers;
- recruit agency social workers as permanent staff; and
- where continued use of agency social workers could not be avoided, establish a single contract to provide a team of social workers, so that the social workers supplied remained in place for the duration of the contract.

Examples of such options included:

- reviewing salaries: Bradford social worker salaries were comparable with those of other local authorities – an increase could be considered;
- inclusion in the contract of social workers of a guaranteed number of training days;
- inclusion in the contract of social workers of guaranteed supervision arrangements;
- support for the costs of car parking: while social worker salaries in Bradford were comparable with those of other local authorities, car parking charges significantly reduced the actual take-home pay of Bradford staff;
- an offer of a two-month sabbatical after three years in post; and
- recruitment and retention allowances.

A Member asked whether more needed to be done to ensure rigorous and consistent record-keeping by social workers so that, in the event of staffing changes, a young person's new social worker was fully informed of their background, issues and necessary actions. The Assistant Director, Children's Services replied that, while record-keeping could reduce the impact of turnover

of social workers, record-keeping alone was not enough to ensure that a new social worker was fully abreast of the rapidly changing circumstances that often affected young people in or approaching care. Furthermore, good record-keeping could not substitute for the development of the trusting relationships that were essential to enable young people to thrive.

Action Point: in order to improve the recruitment process to attract permanent Social Workers, the Director (or HR) be asked to establish an attractive recruitment package that included car parking etc

Action: Strategic Director, Children's Services

The Panel noted that a second major theme to emerge from the 28 July 2021 Consultation had been pathway planning and entitlements. The Panel had previously been informed that pathway planning was strong, but this was not the perception of young people themselves, who were unclear about their entitlements. Asked how information about pathways and entitlements was being clarified and communicated more effectively to young people, the Assistant Director, Children's Services advised that work was in progress to slim down the Improvement Plan and present it in language that was meaningful to young people. For example, it needed to be clear to young people that actions taken by the Council on their behalf, such as securing a college place for them, were part of pathway planning. Officers would consult young people on how they would design plans.

The Panel discussed other themes that had emerged from the July 2021 Consultation which, in addition to communication and pathways, included housing, education, policing and the criminalisation of young people. It was important that this panel address these themes in a way that made clear to young people that their views had been heard and were central to how the Panel was developing the role of the Council as Corporate Parent. To this end, the Panel saw value in each member taking responsibility for driving one or more theme(s); and in each meeting of the Panel focusing on one of the themes.

The Panel discussed the scope to invite young people to advise on the priority of the themes. It noted the need to ensure that consultation with young people was properly representative, including not only the more confident and articulate teenagers who were typically consulted, but also younger children; those with special educational needs and disabilities; and those who did not engage with usual educational provision.

The Panel discussed the tendency for the perception of children to move from "troubled" to "troublesome" over time as, for example, they failed to engage with education and support. The Assistant Director, Children's Services stated the power of using anonymised case studies to:

- support the training of elected members, senior officers and partners in their Corporate Parenting roles by demonstrating how issues arising with older children could be traced back to difficulties earlier in their childhood;

- emphasise the individuality of young people and the challenges they faced;
- prompt thinking about how those difficulties could have been addressed more effectively, to the benefit of both the young person and the public purse;
- illustrate the operational challenges faced by the staff of the variety of agencies that supported young people;
- evaluate the effectiveness of the support that had been provided: for example, whether that support had successfully kept young people out of care, or whether those young people should have been taken into care earlier; and
- celebrate and learn from successes.

The Assistant Director, Children's Services advised that young people who were seen as "troublesome" had usually been known to the local authority for several years. Discussion with the Headteachers of eight local secondary schools indicated that each had several pupils with similar profiles to those who had experienced serious issues. A different approach was needed to address the needs of these young people at an earlier stage and more effectively, so that young lives were not wasted and costs were reduced. **Asked** how many young people in Bradford fell into this category. The Assistant Director, Children's Services could not provide the information immediately, but agreed that it was a very relevant question.

Members asked what influences were at its disposal to address delays in the provision of support from CAMHS¹. The Assistant Director, Children's Services agreed that delayed responses to referrals for mental health therapies led to escalation of the issues facing the young person, followed by too little intervention too late. He saw value in engaging with the Bradford & Craven Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to explore how to streamline funding arrangements and suggested a pooled budget or joint commissioning of mental health support for young people – so that urgently needed support was not delayed by inter-agency arguments about payment. Vulnerability was defined differently in the legislation that governed Community Care from children's legislation, but a focus on the common moral purpose and values that underpinned the work of all involved with the care of vulnerable young people might help agencies to work together to provide the required support with the necessary degree of urgency.

The Panel briefly discussed the impact of persistent absence from education on the lives of young people; the value of Early Help²; the roots of dysfunctional parenting in unmet needs of parents during their own childhoods and the need to break that cycle of dysfunction; the availability of research to support the

¹ CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service: CAMHS supports children and young people from pre-school years up to 16 years of age, (or up to 18 years of age if still in school) where there are severe and long standing concerns about emotional well-being and behaviours.

² Early Help – Local Authority support to a family in the earliest years of a child's life and in response to a problem at any stage later in their lives

development of resilience and capability among parents to support their children; the need to support parents whose child had been taken into care to facilitate the return of that child and avoid the need for siblings to be taken into care; the importance of education in building resilience; the benefits to both consistency for children and the public purse of reducing the number of out-of-area placements. It noted the scope to draw on information from partners to develop *early intelligence* on potential issues and facilitate more effective partnership responses, for example through:

- identification of geographical areas, based on call-outs to the emergency services and visits by social workers, that might benefit from particularly close attention;
- identification of struggling families through information about referrals to CAMHS, attendance at Accident & Emergency;

The Assistant Director, Children's Services stated that Primary School Headteachers were a key source of information about, and pastoral support for, children and families who were struggling but who had not yet come to the attention of social services. The Panel noted that the CPOMS system in schools was used to log welfare concerns about pupils so that patterns and issues could be identified early, and that it had now been connected to 'The Front Door Service'] **Asked** whether there was scope for the Virtual School to use CPOMS information to support early identification of children at a point before the child came into care was raised, The Head of Virtual Schools (VS) said that the VS did not receive all CPOMS data, but did receive information about pupil exclusions and could identify early signs of a child being troubled through data on Persistent Absence³ from school: there was known to be a link between Persistent Absence and children being taken into care.

Referring to the high level of pastoral support available in primary schools, the Assistant Director, Children's Services advised that children started to fall through the support net when they moved to secondary school. Effective *support at this transitional stage* was needed. Furthermore, as children moved in and out of care, or between care settings, they often had to move school. Headteachers advised that moving school typically set a child's education back by six months: thus a child who was moved three times by the age of 16 would have lost 18 months of education. One LA had sought to address this by stipulating that, in certain key years (eg GCSE year), a school move for a Looked After Child had to be approved by the Director of Children's Services. The need for school moves should be reduced as far as possible by ensuring that effective support was in place for foster families to avoid the breakdown of placements.

The Panel noted that, at the 28 July 2021 Consultation, older young people had expressed concern about the lack of clarity around *the transition from Children's to Adult Social Care* and the arrangements for young people between the ages of 18 and 25. The Assistant Director, Children's Services explained that the ability of local authorities to act in cases involving young people over the age of 18 was significantly constrained by the statutory

³ Persistent Absence: attendance by a pupil of less than 90% (ie 19 days or more missed in one year)

definition of a vulnerable adult, which did not apply to many young people over the age of 18 whom the lay person might consider vulnerable, for example because they had been in care. Commissioning frameworks did not exist for these young adults, because they did not meet the statutory definition. It would require primary legislation to change the definition of a vulnerable adult.

Asked about the timing of the development of a Sufficiency Strategy, the Assistant Director, Children's Services stated that officers were currently analysing all children who had come into care in the previous six months to establish the nature of their backgrounds and needs. This would determine the types of foster homes and residential care that would be appropriate to meet their needs and inform the recruitment and training of foster parents. He expected that a draft Sufficiency Strategy would be available in December 2021, with a formal version by the end of January 2022. **Replying to questions**, The Assistant Director, Children's Services confirmed that the Sufficiency Strategy and Plan would run alongside the Strategies and Plans for Corporate Parenting and for Looked After Children & Care-Leavers, with this Panel scrutinising the impact of the *strategies and plans* on the lives of young people.

Acknowledging the weaknesses in corporate parenting in Bradford as identified in the Ofsted inspection of September 2021 the Panel recognised the need to change its approach to its role to provide *more active support and challenge* to officers. Its approach would need to be sufficiently flexible to adapt over time, in light of experience. It discussed the outcomes that the Council, as Corporate Parent, wished to secure for its young people: safety; stability; access to, and engagement with, education, employment and training suited to their needs and interests; healthy lifestyles; engagement in healthy social activity; a voice in, and influence over, their own lives and the services available to them.

The Panel identified the need to:

- review and promulgate its values, based on those of Bradford Council as a whole, and assess their alignment with those of partners;
- make use of case studies to trace interconnectivities;
- develop a forward plan for Panel meetings that focused on the themes identified in the July 2021 Consultation.

The Panel was clear that action was needed urgently and expected to see visible improvement within six months. To this end, Panel members would each take responsibility for driving progress on one or more of the theme(s) identified from the July 2021 Consultation. This work would not be party political: its purpose, like that of this Panel, was to improve the effectiveness of the Council as a whole as Corporate Parent for Bradford's young people.

Action Point: That the core values of the Corporate Parenting Board be explored - Members be linked and be responsible for:

Housing – Cllr Dunbar
Education – Cllr Pollard
Police and Criminality – Cllr Duffy

Health, to incorporate prevention engagement with schools and early support – TBC

Members will report progress and actions to the next meeting of CPP

Action: Members to report progress and actions to the next meeting of CPP.

The DfE Commissioner supported the Panels' view of the urgency of the need for progress. The Panel needed to support and challenge all Council services and their plans to improve their offer for young people. The Panel might usefully consider such questions as:

- how it could be assured that all Looked After young people were safe and receiving high quality care;
- if workforce stability was an issue, how it could be assured that progress was being made sufficiently rapidly and, if it was not, how it could help to speed it up;
- how it could influence the strategic plans of relevant Council departments to ensure that they provided for the needs of young people in, approaching or leaving care;
- what information the Council held about the views of young people on the quality of care they received.

The Children & Families Portfolio Holder reported that she had discussed with the Council Executive its corporate parenting responsibilities. The Panel needed to consider how to mobilise the workforce across the Council so that corporate parenting was clearly understood by all Councillors and senior managers as an integral element of their roles, rather than as the responsibility of Children's Services alone. Essentially, the aim was to remodel and reinvigorate the Council's ways of working to secure the best outcomes as quickly as possible: the active support of Members would be essential in achieving this.

The Children & Families Portfolio Holder had discussed a number of issues raised at the July 2021 Consultation that could be addressed swiftly and reported back to young people and their carers with the Assistant Director, Children's Services and the Acting Strategic Director of Children's Services.

Action Point: Officers to develop a case study-based programme of training and development for as many members and senior officers as possible as corporate parents, emphasising their roles as individuals; to be held at the earliest opportunity.

Training must include:

Corporate Parenting

Values and culture

Regulation 44

The Commissioner noted that the proposed theming of meetings presented the Panel with the opportunity to commission papers from partners such as Housing, the CCG and the Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust on how they were addressing the issues identified by young people and the Panel. The Assistant Director, Children's Services reminded Members that, just as all Councillors and senior managers were corporate parents, so other agencies had a duty to support them in that role: thus, they too would benefit from being questioned by the Panel.

The Assistant Director, Children's Services would present to that meeting a proposed timetable of future meetings and their themes. Panel members who have undertaken to lead on themes would identify the issues that needed to be taken forward within their themes, to supplement the information-gathering being undertaken by The Assistant Director, Children's Services and The Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Review Commissioning Provider.

The Assistant Director, Children's Services would discuss with Cllr Pollard the budgetary implications of work to stabilise the social work workforce outside of the meeting.

Resolved –

- 1. That the following ‘pillars’ and ‘themes’ be established with additions as deemed appropriate. Future meetings to be themed accordingly and Members be linked and be responsible for:**

Housing – Cllr Dunbar

Education – Cllr Pollard

Police and Criminality – Cllr Duffy

Health, to incorporate prevention engagement with schools and early support – TBC

Members will report progress and actions to the next meeting of CPP

- 2. That working with the Lead Member, officers establish a programme of training and development be for members and senior officers as corporate parents to include, but not limited to:**

- a. Corporate Parenting**
- b. Core Values and Culture**
- c. Regulation 44**

- 3. That the Chair work with the Assistant Director, Children's Services to prioritise reports to be submitted to the Panel for consideration under the above ‘pillars’**

- 4. That the Council look to improve the recruitment process to attract permanent Social Workers, the Director (or HR) be asked to establish a more attractive recruitment package that includes, but is not limited to,**

car parking charges assistance/concessions

- 5. That the date of the next meeting be arranged and held with 4 weeks**

Action: The Chair and all Members of CPP and the Assistant 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.

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