

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on Wednesday, 20 July 2022 in City Hall

Commenced 4.33 pm
Concluded 6.10 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Thirkill Alipoor Humphreys	Pollard	Knox

Non-voting co-opted members:

Jude MacDonald West Yorkshire Heath and Care Partnership (WYHCP)
Daniel Ware West Yorkshire Police

Others

Rhian Beynon One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY)
Sue Booth Bradford Council Committee Secretariat
Helen Cliffe Bradford Council - Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing Team
Jonathan Cooper Head, Virtual School (HT/VS)
John Heron Bradford Council, Strategic Lead, Fostering Service
Ali Jan Haider West Yorkshire Heath and Care Partnership
Amandip Johal Bradford Council Children's Services
Dr Catherine Murray Consultant Paediatrician and Designated Doctor for Children Looked After
Belinda Newsome Bradford Independent Foster Carers Association (BIFCA)
Helen Osman Helen Osman Governance Services (Clerk)
Michelle Rawlings One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY)
Philip Segurola Bradford Council - Assistant Director Safeguarding and Review, Commissioning & Provider Services (AD/SRCP)
Steven Watson Bradford Independent Foster Carers Association (BIFCA)

Councillor Thirkill in the Chair

Action No.	Action	Person	Timing
1	WYHCP to agree escalation route for resolution of issues with GPs declining to carry out medical examinations of prospective adopters.	J MacDonald	31-08-2022
2	IRO Service Manager to include in the "Statutory responsibilities and Additional responsibilities of the IROs" section of future reports confirmation that these responsibilities are being met.	H Cliffe	Ongoing
3	WHYCP to discuss with J Heron, BC Fostering Service, the issue of crisis support for children with severely complex needs.	Ali Jan Haider	31-08-2022
4	Strategic Lead, Fostering Service to provide training and/or information to Councillors and Officers to enable them to support foster carer recruitment	J Heron	31-08-2022

1. ALTERNATE MEMBERS (Standing Order 34)

Councillor Humphreys alternated for Councillor Duffy

2. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

No disclosures of interest in matters under consideration were received.

3. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2022 be signed as a correct record.

ACTION: City Solicitor

4. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

5. ONE ADOPTION WEST YORKSHIRE (OAWY) ANNUAL REPORT

The report of One Adoption West Yorkshire (**Document "A"**) provided an overview of the adoption service activity from April 2021 to March 2022.

1. Michelle Rawling (OAWY) talked through the One Adoption West Yorkshire Annual Report for 2021-22, which covered the West Yorkshire area.
2. Rhian Beynon (OAWY) talked through the Highlight Performance

Report for Bradford, 2021-22, which focused on Bradford District.
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3. Referring to section 3.2.4 of the annual report, which dealt with the issue of a small number of GPs who had declined to carry out medicals for prospective adopters, set their own fees or requested that OAWY pay the CCG^[1] fees, the Panel asked what the outcome had been of escalating the matter with the local CCGs. OAWY said that in some cases the issue had been resolved quickly. However, GPs were not obliged to carry out medicals for prospective adopters. Asked whether there was a set scale of fees for such medicals, OAWY said that the CCG would refund a set sum but that GPs were free to charge more than that sum. Replying to questions, OAWY said that this was the case across the region, rather than for Bradford only.
4. Jude MacDonald (WYHCP) undertook to agree with OAWY an escalation route within WYHCP to resolve such issues, either by negotiating a solution with the GP or by bringing in an alternative practitioner to conduct the required medical examination.

ACTION: Jude MacDonald

5. Referring to section 3.2.5, the Panel queried the reference to pupils being excluded “*unofficially*”. Such exclusions were not unofficial, they were unlawful. The Head of the Virtual School (HT/VS) said that there was not an increase in such cases, but that they did happen. Asked how schools reacted when they were challenged, HT/VS said that, if there was a case for the child to be suspended according to the school’s policies and procedures, the child should be formally suspended; if there were no such case, a discussion was required about appropriate provision for the child: schools could not simply tell a child not to come to school.
6. Turning to section 3.2.7 on special guardianship, the Panel queried the statement that “... *the means test cannot be waived where children were not previously looked after, and Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit must be deducted unless the child was previously looked after.*” OAWY explained that a child who stayed with relations who then became special guardians would not have been previously looked after, although they would have been if the family had not stepped in. If they had been previously looked after, the means test would have been waived. This meant some families were being means tested and others were not. OAWY was consulting a QC^[2] on how to address this unfairness.
7. Referring to section 3.3.14 and the trend shown against the A1 indicator from 2018-19 onwards, the Panel noted that the time between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family had increased in Bradford more significantly than it had in neighbouring authorities. Asked the reason for this, OAWY said that Covid had affected the timeliness of care proceedings, including though delays to Placement Orders and extended family member assessments. Moreover, the staff turnover and retention issues among Bradford social workers posed a real challenge.
8. Turning to section 3.4.1, the panel asked whether the final sentence: “*Following retirement, we no longer have the additional three recruitment and assessment social work posts.*” indicated that these

three posts had been removed from the structure. OAWY said that these had been time-limited posts established to address the backlog of prospective adopters. Through natural wastage, the establishment had been returned to its original structure.

9. Referring to the Compliance Audits (section 3.4.54), the Panel asked for clarification of the table. OAWY said that compliance audits were the system used to identify any gaps in its data system. Asked what lay behind the figure of 9% resolved against the adoption support heading, OAWY explained that many cases related to adult adoptees who returned to access their files: they were not asked for the same data as other people and so the data might include gaps – for example, if they had not been asked their ethnicity. Replying to questions, OAWY said that steps were being taken to amend the system so that such gaps in the data were not identified as anomalies in future.
10. Asked to give an example of an anomaly, OAWY said that a report on adopters might say that they had been matched with a child, while the child's report said that they had not been matched: this would be an anomaly. The cause might be that the child's file had not yet been updated. There would be no impact on the child: the anomaly would be a purely administrative matter.
11. Replying to questions, OAWY confirmed that West Yorkshire did not have sufficient prospective adopters to meet the need of all children. This was partly because West Yorkshire had the second highest number of children with adoption plans in the country. Asked whether an adopter could specify the characteristics of the child they wished to adopt, OAWY said that the agency had to be confident that the match would be successful and that the adoption would last into adulthood. For some adopters, it would be too much to take on more than one child, for example. Asked whether the agency would separate siblings, OAWY said that this would only happen if it were specified in the adoption plan.
12. Asked about the mismatch between the number of prospective adopters and need in Bradford, OAWY said that the demographics for Bradford were similar to the rest of West Yorkshire. Siblings, older children, children with high levels of need and BAME^[3] children were harder to place than their peers. The Panel discussed the historic difficulty of identifying sufficient BAME prospective adopters to meet the need and the research that existed on the reasons, and the need to recruit more BAME adopters. There was now a national strategic team in place, funded by DfE, to undertake further research. Asked whether it remained policy to place children with adopters of the same ethnic background, OAWY said that the needs of children were considered holistically: ethnicity, religion and culture were all taken into consideration, but were not overriding factors in determining placements.
13. Asked whether there was a particular need for Eastern European adopters in Bradford, OAWY said that more Eastern European adopters were coming forward, as more Eastern European children also came forward. The agency reached out to other areas that had more Eastern European adopters as necessary.
14. Asked whether a Bradford child would always be placed within

Bradford, OAWY said that they would be placed in West Yorkshire. The aim was to place children as close to their original home as was safe and possible.

15. Philip Segurolo, (Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Review, Commissioning & Provider Services - AD/SRCP) said that the adoption process worked well in Bradford. There were some issues with delays, partly because it took time to identify the right placement for children with complex needs. A balance had to be struck between essential and desirable factors in making a placement: it was not always possible to find a perfect match, for example for a child with a complex ethnic profile. In the case of trans-racial placements, the adoption plan and associated support took account of that.
16. The Chair observed that significant improvements in the partnership working between the neighbouring authorities had improved their ability to place children and reduced the number of adoption breakdowns.

Resolved

- 1. That the Corporate Parenting Panel receives this report and continues to support the work of One Adoption West Yorkshire and the local authority to ensure our adopted children and families receive the best possible support.**
- 2. Officers establish escalation process for GP assessments to Panel Members at Bradford and Craven Health and Care Partnership**

Action: One Adoption West Yorkshire

clinical Commissioning Group: CCGs were abolished on 01 July 2022 and replaced by Integrated Care such as West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership. These minutes use both terms according to the prepared prior to 01 July 2022.

een's Counsel (lawyer)

: – Black and Minority Ethnic

6. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT

The report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services (**Document "B"**) p Corporate Parenting with an overview of the IRO service for 2021 – 2022.

1. The agenda paper was taken as read.
2. Helen Cliffe, Service Manager, Safeguarding and Reviewing Team (Service Manager) said that the number of children in care had continued to increase during 2021-22. The workforce was relatively stable, ensuring consistency of Independent Review Officers (IROs) for children. As mentioned by One Adoption West Yorkshire under the previous agenda item, court delays presented issues, particularly in relation to Discharge from Care Orders.
3. Replying to questions, the Service Manager said that a permanent IRO

- had now been appointed to replace an IRO who had retired in June 2022.
4. Asked whether the statutory and additional responsibilities of IROs, as listed at section 2.1 of the agenda paper, were being met, the Service Manager said that, broadly speaking, they were, and in some cases were exceeded. If system blockages prevented the outcome of review meetings being available within 5 working days of the meeting, the outcomes were available in hard copy. The minutes of review meetings were usually issued on time, though IROs had a significantly higher case load than they should (around 90 children per IRO, compared with the 75 specified in the handbook). Occasional delays to the minutes were marginal. Consultation was not always practical, for example in the case of very young children, but IROs ascertained their wishes and feelings through other means, such as observation in their placements, visits, WhatsApp, online. The Service Manager reminded the Panel that children were free to decline to talk to their IRO.
 5. The Service Manager said that care plans were reviewed to ensure that they continued to reflect the current needs of the child. Although it was not a statutory requirement, IROs chaired all first Supervision Order Reviews for children who concluded Care Proceedings with a Supervision Order, embedding the plan before handing over to the social work team to continue the child in need arrangements. IROs facilitated training workshops and reflective practice sessions and participated on working parties to develop the service, including the Mockingbird and Family Time models. IROs also offered student placement support.
 6. The Panel asked that future reports include confirmation, in the section on the statutory and additional responsibilities of IROs, that these responsibilities were being met.

ACTION: IRO Service Manager

7. Referring to the commentary at the end of section 3.1 of the agenda paper, the Panel asked whether the list of statistical neighbours to Bradford remained the right comparator. Amandip Johal (Children's Services - CS) said that the list was determined by DfE and provided a useful set of comparators. A Panel member considered that this demonstrated that the 2018 thresholds had been incorrect.
8. Turning to section 3.2, the Panel discussed the ongoing debate about the number of young people entering care through use of police Powers of Protection and a possible disparity in the thresholds used by the police and social care services for decisions about intervention. Daniel Ware, (West Yorkshire Police – WYP) drew a distinction between the generalist function of police officers and the specialist function of social worker and Children's Social Care: the latter had the expertise to make more nuanced judgements. A police officer's assessment of whether a situation was safe for a child would be based on their lived experience and the kind of considerations that a member of the general public might make; whereas a child protection specialist from police or social care would bring more specialist experience to the judgement. There was a need to impart that specialist knowledge and expertise to general officers to inform the serious decisions that they were required to make in a crisis situation about whether to remove a child from their home.
9. Replying to questions, WYP confirmed that the concerns of police officers were recorded, whether or not a child was removed from the home. An Emergency Duty Team (EDT) had been established within the police

operations centre, so that the Duty Inspector who made the decision to use protective powers was co-located with the EDT and could share information and decision-making. Wherever possible, a social worker was deployed to accompany the police officer. Officers were required to capture on body video and to document their feelings, perceptions and decision-making process, and notifications were referred to Front Door. Replying to questions, WYP confirmed that this information was conveyed in real time. Officers were encouraged to seek out extended family members in preference to removing the child wherever possible and safe to do so.

10. WYHCP said that decisions on removal of a child could be a difficult judgement for social workers, as well as for police officers. Decisions required strong supervision and excellent communications. As children entered care, the demands placed on health services, in the absence of a robust prevention and Early Help paradigm in Bradford, added pressure to the system.
11. WYP agreed that Early Help in Bradford was widely recognised to be insufficient. A multi-agency co-located Early Help offer was being rolled out across West Yorkshire to identify cases that did not meet statutory thresholds but where intervention was clearly required. Baseline universal provision had been put in place across the District, and the intention was to develop a more bespoke approach in each area according to its specific needs over the next eighteen to twenty-four months. AD/SRCP considered this to be essential: the number of children entering care was increasing and the District lacked sufficient carers and the resources to fund placements. Bradford was an area of very high need, but more timely intervention for families would reduce the number of children who had to be taken into care. The reductions in Early Help, family support and other services had led to intense pressure on the system. The concern of the Panel was how to reconstruct this kind of scaffolding swiftly and effectively.
12. WYP said that, from the point of view of service delivery, the drivers and factors that led to increased numbers of children entering care were increasing: he cited the rising cost of living, migration, complexity of family lives and safeguarding issues. For both an ethical and pragmatic reasons, it was important to intervene as far upstream as possible through Early Help and Family Support. The Panel agreed: the vision was for children to be happy and healthy at home, not happy and healthy in care. In the interests of children and families, a way must be found to reverse the trend of increasing numbers of children entering care, though this must not distract attention from the removal of children who were not safe at home.
13. Turning to page 23 of the agenda paper, the Panel asked what was being done to ensure that the education plans of children and young people were up-to-date and appropriate. The Service Manager said that she would have expected IROs to escalate more partner agency challenges than they had: it might be that they were escalating them but not recording them as escalations. She said that some children in care did very well academically and went on to college or employment. This was not the case for all, however: there were instances of manipulation around part-time education plans, or tutoring for only one or two hours per day. This was difficult to resolve. Stronger co-operation was needed between the SEND, Health and Children's Social Services teams to ensure timely review of EHCPs. CS said that young people raised the issue of education

consistently: they would lead a Corporate Parenting Panel session on their concerns in this area in August 2022.

14. Asked whether caseloads were reducing, the Service Manager said that they were not, because the number of children in care was increasing.
15. Referring to section 6.1 of the agenda paper, the Panel asked whether the service ever received any negative feedback from children families and other agencies. The Service Manager said that she was not aware of any.
16. Referring to Table 13, the Panel queried the number of cases resolved at Challenge Stage 1 (236) and raised Challenge Stage 2 (48). The Service Manager said that a challenge was not always issued at Stage 1: if the matter was very serious, the Stage 1 process would be bypassed. Asked whether the 2 cases shown at Challenge Stage 3 implied that 46 of the 48 Challenge Stage 2 cases had been resolved, the Service Manager confirmed that it did. The recording of challenges had now been improved.
17. The issuing of challenges by IROs had an inevitable impact on the workforce: however politely the challenge was issued, it was demoralising for the social worker concerned. All possible ways to bring the care plan back on track needed to be considered. Replying to questions, the Service Manager said that where a challenge persistently reoccurred after it had apparently been resolved, the Assistant Director would be alerted.

Resolved –

That the Panel welcomes the report and look forward to receiving future reports to track progress in the service.

Action: Strategic Director, Children’s Services

7. FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT COVERING THE PERIOD OF 1ST APRIL 2021 TO MARCH 31ST 2022

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require that the Fostering Services provide written reports on the management, outcomes, and financial state of the fostering service. This Annual Fostering Service Report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to fostering services in the Bradford Council area as required by statutory guidance. The Annual Fostering Service Report must be presented to Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Strategic Director of Children’s Services submitted **Document “C”** which presented the Fostering Service’s annual report which provided an overview of the work of the Fostering Service and should be read in conjunction with the fostering Service Statement of Purpose (Appendix A).

1. John Heron, Bradford Council Strategic Lead for Fostering (SLF), introduced carers from BIFCA: Steven Watson and Belinda Neilson. The agenda paper taken as read. SLF highlighted the development of the relationship between Fostering Service and BIFCA: the aim was to work in partnership with foster carers to recruit and retain more carers and improve the quality of service. He talked through the developments planned for 2022-23 as set out in section 14 of the agenda paper.

2. Noting the conversion rate of 6.6% from initial contact through the website to approval as a new foster carer, the Panel asked whether the non-conversion due to potential carers dropping out or being eliminated by the service. SLF they were both: some visitors to the site might be curious but have no real interest in fostering. Those who downloaded information from the site were required to provide an e-mail address, and these contacts were followed up: of the 1625 initial website contacts, 381 had downloaded material and responded to this follow-up contact confirming their interest in fostering. The Fostering Service was in competition with independent fostering agencies, many of which could pay carers significantly more than the local authority could: on average, a potential carer would consider a list of five agencies before deciding whether to foster and if so with which agency. For this reason, the Fostering Service made appointments to see potential carers as quickly as possible. Of the 381 potential carers who had confirmed interest, the Fostering Service had visited 320, of whom 118 had been invited to make an application: 33 had done so, and of those 25 had been successful. Asked whether the use of the internet for recruitment of carers, SLF said that it was secondary to existing carers in its importance to recruitment.
3. Noting the relatively poor conversion rate at an advanced stage of the recruitment process (33 applications from 116 home visits), the Panel asked whether this reflected unsuitability of the potential carer's circumstances or the potential carer withdrawing as they learned more about fostering. SLF said that there was nothing that the service could do to help potential carers to envision how their lives as fosterers would look. A new manager had been recruited to the fostering recruitment team and was undertaking creative promotional work with BIFCA. There was a need to support this with a budget. It would be helpful if Council staff and Council workers wore badges promoting foster caring: all in the Council should see foster carer recruitment as part of their job.
4. The Panel discussed the scope to tap into the willingness of the public to open their homes under the Homes For Ukraine scheme. Councillors who had been involved with Homes For Ukraine would be in a position to support this. Foster carers present saw value in a campaign encouraging those who had thought of taking a Ukrainian refugee to consider fostering. AD/SRCP agreed: these families were known to the local authority and had been DBS^[1] and household checked: there was no reason why they should not be asked the question.
5. Referring to section 6 of the agenda paper, the Panel asked whether virtual fostering panels were effective. SLF confirmed that they had worked well, encouraging more people to take part who might otherwise have been unable to do so. It would be unfortunate to lose those benefits, but there were also advantages in in-person meetings. A hybrid model would be adopted.
6. Replying to questions, SLF confirmed that there was a shortage of foster carers in Bradford: ideally, around 75% of children would have foster carers, compared to 69% at present. The gap was particularly stark for children with more complex needs. A Level 4 foster care setting was needed, with wraparound care for both the child and the carer, including therapeutic, medical, police, educational and CAMHS^[2] services.
7. Ali Jan Haider, WYHCP, undertook to discuss with SLF the issue of crisis support for children with severely complex needs.

ACTION: WYHCP

18. AD/SRCP highlighted the need to consider the profile of carers: it was challenging to recruit carers for adolescents or young people with disabilities and experiences that affected their ability to form attachments. Potential carers were encouraged to be confident that the local authority had an effective structure to help them

develop strategies to support these children. A Panel member observed that carers she knew said that they did not receive the CAMHS support that was needed: carers present agreed strongly that this was an issue. This needed major priority for Children's Services. Replying to questions, SLF agreed the availability of CAMHS and other multi-agency support to wrap around the carers was partly a budget issue. However, if agencies were willing to work together flexibly there was also scope to do more with existing resources.

19. A carer observed that having strong training and other support gave carers the confidence to take on children with more complex needs. Collectively, carers needed to be able to manage the needs of any child in Bradford. Another carer said that, when a carer was asked to take on a child, they typically received limited information about the background or needs of the child or the length of the placement. Thus it was difficult to tell whether the child would be a good match, particularly if the carer already had other long or short term foster children: carers were reluctant to risk unsettling those existing placements. Asked what care would need to make them more confident about taking on foster children, the carer said it would be helpful to have some flexibility for agencies to intervene if things started to disrupt existing placements. Asked what support currently existed in such situations, the carer said that there was none. SLF said that the supervising social worker could help, but that a more robust support structure was needed.
20. Asked about the risk that independent agencies would poach carers trained in-house at the expense of the local authority, a carer quoted Richard Branson: "Train people well enough so they can leave, treat them well enough, so they don't want to." SLF said that foster carers showed great loyalty to their supporting social worker and their organisation.

Resolved –

- 1. That Members of the Panel wish to thank foster carers for their care of the children of Bradford both throughout and beyond the Covid pandemic**
- 2. That information is provided by the service to help with the recruitment drive of more foster carers**

Action: Strategic Director, Children's Services

Disclosure and Barring Service

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

AD/SRCP said that the next formal meeting of the Panel would be held in October 2022 and would focus on health. He advised the Panel that a DfE adviser would visit the local authority for two days in September to review its performance as corporate parent, specifically in relation to care leaders.

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