

Cheshire East Council

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting: 6th September 2016

Report of: Pete Lambert, Head of Cared for Children

Subject/Title: Corporate Parenting Update

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Liz Durham

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update to the Corporate Parenting Committee on national and local developments in relation to cared for children and young people and care leavers.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to:
 - 2.1.1 Note the contents of the report;
 - 2.1.2 Note the proposed future updates around national and local developments; and
 - 2.1.3 Comment on the scorecard at Appendix 1 and identify any further measures required for a quarterly scorecard.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The Corporate Parenting Committee is as advisory group to the Cabinet and, as such, needs to be aware of any national or local issues that are likely to impact on cared for children and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Committee need to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. None; this is an update report.

5. Background

National Developments

Children and Social Work Bill

- 5.1. The Children and Social Work Bill, published earlier this year, is currently progressing. The main elements of the Bill are:

Looked-after children and care leavers

- Standards for how local authorities should act as a 'corporate parent' to support children in care and as they move into adult life.
- A requirement on local authorities to consult on and publish a 'local offer' to care leavers, setting out the services they are entitled to.
- An extension to the right to a Personal Adviser, someone who will make sure care leavers receive the support they need as they transition into adulthood, to all who want one up to the age of 25.

Adoption

- Ensuring courts and local authorities take better account of a child's need for stability up to the age of 18 when making decisions about their future.
- A duty on local authorities and schools to promote educational achievement for adopted children and those in the long-term care of family members or guardians.

Regulation of social workers

- A specialist regulator for social work, to enable a clear focus on standards and effective training and development.

Children's safeguarding

- Better protection of children by ensuring that lessons are learned from serious child safeguarding cases.
- Support for innovation in children's social care by allowing local authorities to pilot new, innovative approaches.

- 5.2. The DfE has begun developing draft statutory guidance that will underpin the corporate parenting principles set out in the new Children and Social Work Bill. These principles, once finalised, will be applicable to all LAs in England but will not replace duties that LAs already have under the Children Act 1989. To ensure this guidance is as useful as possible the DfE is seeking examples of what good corporate parenting looks like in local areas in order to inform this work. The Bill has implications for how Cheshire East delivers its services and further updates will be provided to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Children's social care reform: a vision for change'

- 5.3. In January 2016, the Department for Education (DfE) published '*Children's social care reform: a vision for change*'. The paper set a vision and reform programme for children's social care, structured around three key areas, known as pillars:
- **People and leadership** - bringing the best people into the profession, equipping them with the right knowledge and skills and developing leaders equipped to nurture practice excellence.

- **Practice and systems** - creating the right environment for excellent practice and innovation to flourish and creating a learning culture, drawing on both best practice and the lessons when things go wrong.
- **Governance and accountability** - making sure that what we are doing is working, using data to show the strengths and weaknesses in the system, and developing innovative new organisational models with the potential to radically improve services.

Putting Children First

- 5.4. In July 2016, the DfE published '*Putting Children First: delivering our vision for excellent children's social care*'. The paper sets out – against each of the above three pillars – the DfE's programme of reform in children's social care for the next four years, detailing how it will create the conditions to enable Government, local authorities and their local partners, social workers and other professionals such as foster carers to provide consistently excellent children's social care.

'Keep On Caring - Supporting Young People from Care to Independence'

- 5.5. Following on from '*Putting Children First*', the government published 'Keep on Caring' in July 2016, which sets out specifically and in more depth what it means to put care leavers first.
- 5.6. Firstly, it sets out how the government will use the Innovation Programme to rethink how services are delivered and what support is provided, with a strong focus on finding new and better ways of helping care leavers develop the social networks that will sustain them not just in the years immediately after leaving care, but throughout their lives. The government will also support new ways of delivering services, for example through Trusts, which have a clear and specific focus on improving care leavers' life chances.
- 5.7. Secondly, it sets out how the government will strengthen the culture of corporate parenting, both locally – through planned legislative measures – and through changes to central government policies, so that they better respond to care leavers' unique status and circumstances.
- 5.8. Finally, it sets out how the government will support and challenge local areas, so that all deliver to the standards of the best.

Independent report on children's residential care

- 5.9. Also published in July 2016 was an independent report on children's residential care by Sir Martin Narey, former Chief Executive of Barnardos and independent social care adviser to the Department for Education. Sir Martin Narey's key conclusion in the review report is that despite the history and reputation of children's residential care, children living in these settings are treated overwhelmingly well. Children's homes can and should be better though and the report makes 34 recommendations to deliver significant improvement.

Not Seen, Not Heard

5.10. The Care Quality Commission (CQC), the independent regulator of all health and social care services in England, recently published '*Not Seen, Not Heard*', a report on children's safeguarding and looked after children services in England. The review is the result of two years of research, looking into the quality of care that young people receive with local authority areas. The CQC's summary findings are as follows:

- Two out of every three young people we spoke to told us they didn't feel involved in their care;
- Most areas we visited couldn't prove to us they were making a difference to children and young people;
- Health staff need to improve how they share information with the right people at the right time; and
- When young people are old enough to leave children's care services it can be very difficult for them to move to adult services.

5.11. CQC made the following recommendations:

- Children and young people must be actively engaged in their care
- Services must ensure their focus is on outcomes
- More needs to be done to identify children at risk of harm
- Children and young people must have access to the emotional and mental health support they need.

5.12. These recommendations are currently being considered by the Corporate Parenting Operational Group and proposed actions will be reported back to the Committee.

Local Developments

National Transfer Scheme – Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

5.13. Nationally, 2015 saw a significant increase in the volume of unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) arriving in the UK, with 3,043 claims being lodged; representing a 56% increase on the previous year. In light of the varying commitments to support unaccompanied minors, the Government have established one national dispersal/transfer scheme, which will deal with all three strands of asylum and refugee children who will ultimately require local authority care provision. This ensures a fair and equitable distribution at a national level, as opposed to only a small number of local authorities, eg, Kent, being overburdened with UASC applicants, as is currently the case.

5.14. The Immigration Act 2016 provides a legislative framework with four key provisions to assist in the implementation of a national scheme. These being:

- To make the transfer of legal responsibility from one local authority to another much easier.
 - Places a duty on the local authority to provide information about available services.
 - Places an obligation on the local authority to set out in writing reasons for not supporting the transfer of children.
 - Provides a duty to accept the transfer of relevant children under a mandatory scheme, if sufficient voluntary commitment is not provided by local authorities.
- 5.15. On 4th July a regional event took place, with strong senior officer and political representation to discuss a way forward for the north west. A task and finish group was established to:
- Develop a proposal for a regional approach to standards to work with unaccompanied minors – using evidence of what works/best practice from areas with more experience.
 - Develop a proposal for a regional approach to completing age assessments, aimed at reducing the likelihood of judicial review of decisions, if through a consistent approach risks may be mitigated and shared.
 - Based on information already known about sufficiency of accommodation – consider and make proposals for local authorities to consider, based on age, vulnerability and need; considering joint opportunities to commission facilities that might reduce cost pressures.
 - Using knowledge of resources already in place e.g. regional Fostering Front Door, make recommendations about how this can occur.
 - A single approach to development of a marketing and communications strategy to attract interest from specific communities who may offer support and accommodation; with a focus on the development of shared accommodation and supported lodgings options.
- 5.16. It is anticipated that Care leaver status would apply to the majority of young people transferred to Cheshire East. This will subsequently impact on the case loads and capacity of the Care Leavers Team. There is a potential shortfall in the home office grant to fund these additional young people and this is being raised locally and nationally.

Care Leaver Pledge

- 5.17. Cheshire East care leavers and professionals worked together earlier in the year to decide on the 10 key things that would improve the help and support care leavers receive. Regionally care leavers said that they wanted:
- To feel listened to by everyone who is supporting us
 - For our friendships to be valued

- To have accurate information about our rights
- Council tax exemption for care leavers up to 25
- Help to get into work
- To have our life choices respected
- Improved multi-agency working for care leavers
- To be able to remain in care homes until we're 21, if we ask to
- To be encouraged and supported to pursue our interests and form our own identities
- Better mental health provision for care leavers.

DfE Innovation Fund – Expressions of Interest

- 5.18. Cheshire East Council has recently submitted a number of expressions of interest to the DfE Children's Social Care Innovation Programme. If successful, these bids would provide a significant opportunity for Cheshire East to enact change on a scale that we would not be able to support from our resources in house, and to invest in preventative approaches, thus potentially saving money in the long term. It is also an opportunity to be involved in shaping the direction of change for children's social care and to be a leader for change within the sector. A detailed report will be going to a future Cabinet meeting when the full financial impacts are determined.

Cheshire East Children's Rights and Participation Service

- 5.19. Cheshire East's Children's Rights and Participation Service is currently delivered by The Children's Society. This includes the advocacy and independent visitor service and the participation of cared for children and young people through, for example, the Children in Care Council. The current contract expires at the end of November 2016 and discussions are currently underway on options from December 2016 onwards; this includes delivering elements of the service 'in-house', extending the existing contract and re-tendering to test the market. The Corporate Parenting Committee will be kept updated on developments.

You Can Foster Campaign

- 5.20. September sees the launch of the regional foster carer recruitment campaign called 'You Can Foster'. The theme of the campaign will be 'Ambition' focussing on the important role foster carers play in supporting children & young people and helping them to realise their dreams. The campaign will feature on regional TV and radio as well as online via social media channels such as Facebook.

Foster Carer Survey

- 5.21. The recruitment and retention of high quality Cheshire East Foster Carers continues to be a priority for the service. A recent survey has provided some key feedback on what is important to our Foster Carers, including:
- Receiving adequate information about the child (89% of respondents)
 - Support from own children, family & friends (71% of respondents)

- Well managed payment systems (71% of respondents)
 - Access to specialist help and advice (69% of respondents)
 - Only 37% of respondents thought that guaranteed respite was very important in motivating you to foster
- 5.22. The majority of Foster Carers were happy with the training and development opportunities provided by Cheshire East. Areas for improvement include the support received from their supervising social worker, the information received to care for children and information available on our website. The service is working on an action plan to address these areas.

Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report

- 5.23. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report for 2015-16 has been drafted and will be presented to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee. The report will provide quantitative and qualitative evidence that summarises how the IRO service executed their statutory duties to ensure that children's voice, views and rights were at the heart of care planning and review and that the decisions made in relation to these children were in their best interest.

Corporate Parenting Performance Scorecard

- 5.24. The Corporate Parenting Committee need to be able to scrutinise and challenge performance to improve outcomes for cared for children and young people. The attached scorecard at Appendix 1 is an extract from the performance information currently scrutinised by the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee.
- 5.25. Corporate Parenting Committee is asked to consider the attached scorecard and identify and additional measures required. Areas the Committee may wish to include are:
- Access to advocacy and independent visitor services
 - Information on the use of local foster carers
 - More information on the health of cared for children and care leavers, including immunisations, developmental assessments, annual health review and dentist checks
 - More information around the take up and educational attainment of cared for children including the early years and apprenticeships
 - Offender rates
- 5.26. Once the content is agreed, it is proposed that the scorecard will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee on a quarterly basis.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1. Although the number of Cheshire East cared for children and young people is relatively small, they are a vulnerable cohort, who live across Cheshire East and in other local authority areas.

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1. Policy Implications

7.1.1. There are a number of policy implications as a result of local and national developments and these will be reported, as appropriate to the relevant Committee.

7.2. Legal Implications

7.2.1. The national and local developments described in this report are wide ranging and will in many particulars have legal implications. Legal advice will be sought, as appropriate, upon all relevant emerging issues.

7.3. Financial Implications

7.3.1. The continued increase in demand for social care services for cared for children and unaccompanied asylum seekers will have a budgetary impact and these are being reported separately to Cabinet. The Council as a whole is managing a substantial reduction in resources from Government, savings resulting from transformation programmes etc will help, but demand for these services is continuing to increase. Therefore, the allocation of additional resources to this service will require greater reductions elsewhere.

7.4. Human Resources Implications

7.4.1. There are potential staffing implications from the increase in the cared for children population, in particular around unaccompanied asylum seeker children. These are being reported separately to Cabinet.

7.5. Equality Implications

7.5.1. Cared for children and care leavers tend to have poorer outcomes when compared to their peers.

7.6. Rural Community Implications

7.6.1. None.

7.7. Public Health Implications

7.7.1. None identified at this stage.

8. Risk Management

- 8.1. Managing the increase in demand for social care services is a current risk on the Children and Families risk register. The number of referrals requiring a social work assessment continues to increase and consequently the numbers for children and young people in care and on a child protection plans have increased significantly over the past year. Whilst this is in line with national increases, there is a risk that if the current increase in demand for services continues, this will affect staff's ability to deliver effective social work practice.

9. Background Papers

- 9.1. Appendix 1 – Corporate Parenting Scorecard
- 9.2. *'Children's social care reform: a vision for change'*
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-reform-a-vision-for-change>
- 9.3. *Putting Children First* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/putting-children-first-our-vision-for-childrens-social-care>
- 9.4. *Residential Care in England: Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of children's residential care*
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-residential-care-in-england>

10. Contact Information

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