

Cheshire East Council

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting: 14th November 2017

Report of: Kerry Birtles, Head of Cared for Children & Care Leavers

Subject/Title: Corporate Parenting Update

Portfolio Holder: Jos Saunders

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.

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

Advisor appointed to boost local support for care leavers

- 5.1. A new adviser to support young people as they leave the care system has been appointed as part of the government's drive to improve the lives of vulnerable children. Mark Riddell MBE has been appointed as the National Implementation Adviser for care leavers, and will work closely with local

authorities as they drive forward the new duties introduced through the Children & Social Work Act (2017). Mark was until recently the leaving care manager in Trafford, the first local authority to receive an outstanding Ofsted judgement for its leaving care service. Our officers have already worked closely with Mark as part of the New Belongings Project. Mark's role includes helping councils to develop a stronger local offer of support for care leavers, offering Personal Adviser services for all care leavers up to age 25 and delivering on their special responsibilities as a 'corporate parent' – principles set out in the Act. He will have a particular focus on supporting those councils that have had their leaving care services rated as inadequate or requiring improvement by Ofsted.

Update on Homelessness Reduction Act

- 5.2. The Homeless Reduction Act will come into force on 1st April 2018 and will place new duties on Local Authorities and other public bodies to identify, support and refer households at risk of homelessness. Clause 10 places a duty on all public authorities, where they encounter someone who they believe to be homeless or threatened with homelessness, to ask that person to allow the relevant council to be informed. If the person agrees, the public authority must notify the council and provide the person's contact details.
- 5.3. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 significantly reformed England's homelessness legislation by placing duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. It also requires housing authorities to provide homelessness services to all those affected, not just those who have 'priority need'. These include:
- an enhanced prevention duty extending the period a household is threatened with homelessness from 28 days to 56 days, meaning that housing authorities are required to work with people to prevent homelessness at an earlier stage;
 - a new duty for those who are already homeless so that housing authorities will support households for 56 days to relieve their homelessness by helping them to secure accommodation.
- 5.4. Strategic Housing will provide further guidance prior to the Act coming into force.

Local Developments

Children in Care Council Update

- 5.5. During the last month the young people attending the Children in Care Council have been involved in a range of key activities alongside informal activities designed to support their personal, social and educational development.

- 5.6. Pre-event consultation for the Game Changer conference in Blackpool - the Game Changer event is a North West regional event for children in care and care leavers and is the first of its kind. Some of the young people were also involved earlier in the year in the planning of the event, that took place in Blackpool on Saturday 4th November.
- 5.7. Takeover Day 2017: Group members are taking an active role in Takeover Day 2017 and will be working alongside Nigel Moorhouse and Mark Palethorpe next month. Young people also expressed an interest in being able to 'Takeover' other key roles for the day.
- 5.8. Star Awards: Young people have been involved in the Star Awards event planning, putting forward ideas and giving feedback on the last few details of the event. A care leaver was involved in the judging panel this year.
- 5.9. Planning for Corporate Parenting Committee: Young people have discussed the key issues affecting them ahead of the November Corporate Parenting Committee. The young people looked at the theme of Education in preparation for the upcoming session.
- 5.10. Visit from Head of Service: The young people organised a session and invited Kerry Birtles, the new Head of Service, along so that they could spend some time getting to know each other. Kerry also discussed with the young people what their key concerns were and the group decided on some areas of work that they will cover in the coming months, such as the Pledge and the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

National Adoption Week 2017

- 5.11. National Adoption Week took place from 16th – 22nd October. This included a successful campaign for Cheshire East along with the other local areas as part of 'Adoption Counts'. Cheshire East received 27 enquiries between 16th and 22nd October (the highest weekly number to date). This included an open evening on 18th October, which 14 households attended. There were also 9,968 visits to our website during the week, which peaked at 1,881 on 21st October.

Update on Teenage Pregnancy and Parents

- 5.12. Corporate Parenting Committee has been particularly interested in the work underway around those in care who are pregnant or teenage parents. The following provides an update on recent work:

Care Leaver Mothers

- 5.13. Motherwell is a charity for women run by women, promoting positive health and wellbeing, by offering a range of educational services, holistic therapies and mental health support. The charity was recently successful in achieving a funding bid to provide a Parent Advocate Worker to support our care leaver parents. The Parent Advocate Worker will provide support to mothers who have had their children removed, to prevent the cycle taking place again via one to one support, counselling and alternative therapies.
- 5.14. Research Project – this will be carried out by the Head of Abuse Studies at MMU Crewe. This is a three year project which will research the correlations in childhood experiences of abuse and implications that this has on parenting. It is hoped that this research will identify which interventions are successful with families, and which are not. Additionally it will also identify if there are any gaps in services.
- 5.15. Positive Parenting Groups – working with the children's centres, we held our first Positive Parenting Group in July 2017 at Oak Tree Children's Centre in Crewe. 11 out of 20 pregnant and parent female care leavers indicated they would engage with the group. Going forward, the group will be split into two models across the North and South of Cheshire East.
- North Locality Positive Parent Group - this will be an informal peer support group with the plan to bring services to their group, as and when identified by the young people or identified by staff as a need, around their parenting and health issues.
 - South Locality Positive Parenting Group - one day a month our south based care leaver mothers can access the children's centre and have their own group. On this day they can also access health advice and support from services already based within the centre.
- 5.16. Care Leaver Fathers

Research Project, Care Leaver Fathers - A research project into male care leaver fathers and their experiences and interactions with social care in relation to their own children is currently underway. This research will give the fathers a voice and the data will be used to identify any areas which the fathers feel that support is lacking. Improvements can then be implemented in the service via a training programme will be given for Personal Assistants/Social Workers. We have had a good response from fathers interested in taking part in the research project.

Direct one to one support and group support for Care Leaver Fathers via Dads Stuff - this has been assigned to all Personal Advisors to refer. Dads Stuff who can offer care leaver fathers direct one to one support, and this includes absent fathers who want to be involved in their child's life. They will support dads with their overall parenting and attend meetings in support of dads. Our dads also have the option of attending the Dads Stuff group, once

they feel confident in accessing the service, or before if they are happy to. The current group in Sandbach is a busy group and this is being extended across other areas in the authority.

Resource Folder – we have set up a resource folder covering the following topics; advocacy, domestic abuse, emotional and mental health, housing, identity, immigration, independence and ready to live alone, LGBT, money and budgeting, parenting, physical health, sexual health, sexual exploitation, substance misuse and trafficking and slavery.

Update on children's home position

- 5.17. The commissioning process for the redesign of Cheshire East's residential homes for children in care was completed at the end of 2016-17 and a contract was awarded to BetterCare Keys, a national children home provider, to run from 1 April 2017. The aim is to provide a more flexible range of children homes and to increase the capacity to care for more of our children within the borough. However, the provider has had significant challenges in mobilising the service due to recruitment issues and we are currently exploring other models of delivery. We currently have a 3 bed Children's Home operational in Crewe. We are looking at our options to commission for an additional 11 beds as planned and agreed by Cabinet in October 2016.

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 There are no direct financial implications of this report.

7.4. Human Resources Implications

7.4.1 There are no direct financial implications of this report.

7.5. Equality Implications

7.5.1 There are no equality implications as a result of this paper.

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. Cared for children and care leavers are a vulnerable group that are at risk of a number of factors – poor education and training, health, safeguarding and transition into adulthood.

9. Contact Information

Contact details for this report are as follows:-

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