

# **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Committee**  
held on Tuesday, 17th November, 2020 as a Virtual meeting

## **PRESENT**

Councillor K Flavell (Chairman)  
Councillor J Saunders (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors R Bailey, J Barber, M Beanland, J Buckley, C Bulman, P Butterill,  
S Edgar, S Holland and M Warren

## **ALSO PRESENT**

Mark Palethorpe- Executive Director of People  
Kerry Birtles- Director of Children's Social Care, Children in Need & Child  
Protection  
Laura Rogerson- Head of Service for Special Educational Needs and  
Disability (SEND) and Virtual School Headteacher for Cared for Children  
Keith Martin- Head of Service for Children with Disabilities and Fostering  
Lauren Conway- Interim Head of Service: Children's Service Development  
and Partnerships  
Gail Spray- Head of Service, Adoption Counts  
Nicola Booth- Operations Manager, Adoption Counts  
Shan McParland- Designated Nurse Looked after Children and Care Leavers ,  
NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)  
Helen Davies- Democratic Services Officer

## **18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

## **19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **20 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Councillor Kathryn Flavell noted that whilst she had given apologies for the meeting, she had dialled in and was present however this was not reflected in the list of Members present.

**RESOLVED-**

That the minutes of the meeting 29 September 2020 be received and noted as a correct and accurate record.

## 21 CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor Kathryn Flavell presented the Corporate Parenting Annual Report. The Committee noted that much progress had been made and joined up way of working was clear within the report. The voice of young people was clear to see and ran through all the work, this had been considered a strength by The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).

On the subject of education, there had been fantastic attendance and this had stayed strong throughout the pandemic. There were some issues with care leavers and the figures for those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) improving.

Councillor Flavell noted that the engagement options for Members had not been fulfilled yet because of the pandemic, but most Members had signed up and by Spring 2021 front line visits should be returning.

The Committee noted good exam results, some being above the national average and congratulated students and teachers, especially when considering some young people had had a harder start in life.

RESOLVED- That:

- a) The report be received and noted;
- b) Those Members with an outstanding DBS Check ensure it is up to date in preparation for face to face visits.
- c) Helen and Lauren to liaise with Paul Mountford to ensure this report has an onward journey to Cabinet as well as Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Well Being Board.

## 22 CORPORATE PARENTING UPDATE REPORT 2019-20

Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care presented this item to the Committee in the form of a presentation rather than just the raw scorecard data.

Kerry advised the Committee that, Children's Social Care had successfully navigated through the pandemic, enabling frontline practitioners to safely deliver services with the welfare of children and families as a top priority.

The current position for the service was recovery planning. There was some evidence where children and young people had been adversely affected at the beginning of the pandemic, however a return to business-as-usual could be seen on reflection of quarter 2 data.

Key headlines for Quarter 2 (1 July- 30 September 2020) data were:

- 32 children became cared for taking the total population to 537;

- The number of care leavers as of the end of Sept 2020 was 282;
- Statutory compliance in relation to virtual and face to face meetings was between 79% and 86%;
- Statutory compliance in relation to completing reviews for cared for children remained at 98%; and
- Statutory obligations in completing pathway plans for care leavers rose slightly from 97% to 99%.

Health monitoring and assessment had shown that the health needs of Children and Young People had not been compromised during the pandemic, during the first half of the year, the majority of work had been completed virtually unless there had been an identified need for face-to-face interaction.

The Committee heard it was crucial to support young people to achieve permanence as soon as possible. Permanency planning for Cared for Children had been affected mainly by:

- Children initially not being able to transition to their adoptive homes;
- Courts initially being unable to progress adoption hearings; and
- Care Leavers initially being unable to move to more permanent accommodation.

There had been two young people adopted but the number of those placed for adoption or transitioning to adoption remained high at 54.

There had been five adoptions this year which equated to a third of where those figures would be expected to be. The priority had been for those new into care but there were some delays. When children arrive into care, it is good practice for them to have a plan at four months, drift and delay is not good for young people.

Frontline services continued to be essential to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people.

This report had been collated pre-second lockdown, updated guidance was expected when the current guidance expired.

Those young people who were NEET were of most concern at the start of the pandemic, the impacts of the pandemic on the national economy are yet to be fully realised. The service invested in the NEET programme, eight NEET young people are now in Covid-bubbles.

There had been a small number of children discharged from care.

The retendering process had provided a strong offer from the provider in north and south of the borough resulting in excellent care for 16 and 17 year olds through a transitioning period of life.

Elected Members were engaged in front line activity which enabled the service to be better prepared for challenge.

Kerry finished by advising the Committee about Bespoke Children's Homes, there were four commissioned Homes in the borough however the Home in Macclesfield had experienced significant difficulties that related to staffing and infrastructure and as a result the children had to move out. Despite the unplanned change, the service had taken ownership and both children had been successfully transitioned into their next home. Kerry recognised that setting up a Children's Homes is complex work and the service will be keen to take learning away from this experience.

Before the Committee engaged in questions, the Chairman congratulated Kerry on behalf of the Committee on her new post as Director of Children's Social Care.

The Committee asked when the Macclesfield Bespoke Children's Home might be reopening. Kerry advised this could potentially be January 2021 following recruitment for a Manager and Staff Team.

RESOLVED- That:

- a) Kerry Birtles be thanked for her attendance and presentation to the Committee;
- b) The contents of the report be received and noted; and
- c) This Committee continue to provide challenge to the service

## **23 VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEAD TEACHER'S ANNUAL REPORT**

Laura Rogerson, Head of Service for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Virtual School Headteacher for Cared for Children attended the meeting and presented this report to the Committee.

The Committee heard that the Virtual School had continued to provide an effective service to Cared for Children within statutory duties throughout the pandemic. Laura noted that the Virtual School Headteacher had also provided an Interim role as Head of Service for SEND, so a Deputy had been appointed to help support the work.

The emphasis of this report was on case studies that outlined impact, there had been links with partners and direct quotes to add more depth to report.

In terms of staffing there had been an increase in core staffing, some of this was funded through the Pupil Premium. The service was committed to ensure all children and young people in care were in an education provision that was right for them.

Children, Carers and Families had been contacted in August to encourage a return to school in September and discuss any support that may have

been required. During the first term, there was a priority on the completion of Personal Education Plans for students to have clear targets on their return to school.

The Committee heard that the main use of the Pupil Premium funding had been used towards one to one or small group teaching, supporting the enhancement of social and emotional skills and the purchase of specific resources. There had been other uses for the funding which included:

- High cost support for children with particular needs;
- Exam preparation;
- Preparation for transition;
- Recreational activities;
- Support of post 16-year olds to enable the reduction of those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) from 16% in 2019 to 6.3% this year; and
- An RSPCA programme where children got to work alongside staff to care for animals as part of their school day and bespoke school work.

In terms of attainment children have not missed out during the pandemic and have attained very well. There had been a 92% attendance since the return to school with 55% of Personal Education Plans completed. The service were aiming for this to get to 90% by Christmas.

The Committee were advised that since the start of this term, the Council had brokered a range of interventions to support targeted work with vulnerable groups and to support catch up. Some were Cheshire East programmes where some were Government initiatives and included academic mentoring, the National Tutor Programme and the increased use of IT through the national 'EdTech' programme.

The Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions and give comment to the report.

The Chairman noted that the current percentage figures for those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) had come down significantly to 6.3% and the service should be commended on that.

There was a query about how the quality of the teachers provided by Government was measured. Laura advised that the National Tutoring Programme contained a database of over 30 providers and the schools submit an expression of interest directly to the Department for Education (DFE) and from there a provider is assigned. Whilst the service is not directly involved in that there was a feeling that the service would be working more closely with schools to determine the needs of the school. Whereas with academic mentoring there was one specific provider which enabled the service to have more oversight on what the offer would be.

The Virtual School was funded to enable the service to procure tutors, impacts of this will be measured via the Personal Education Plans (PEP).

RESOLVED:

That Laura be thanked for her attendance and presentation and that the report be accepted and noted.

#### **24 ADOPTION PANEL CHAIRS REPORT OCT 2019- MARCH 2020**

Nicola Booth, Operations Manager at Adoption Counts attended the meeting and presented this report to the Committee.

Nicola advised the Committee that currently there were 52 active panel members, and that Adoption Counts were continuing to recruit with the aim of having a wide and diverse panel membership. Ideally there would be a preference for greater diversity to represent a wider range of the community.

Panel meeting were regular and the majority of feedback from those attending panels was positive.

The Committee were invited to ask questions that related to the report.

Panel Members were sourced and appointed often by word of mouth or if they had expressed an interest. The role was open to all especially those who had diversity of life experiences. Some had experience of working with families or had been adopted. If there were birth mothers who wanted to join the panel, Adoption Counts would be interested to hear from them.

Nicola stressed that adopters can come from all walks of life, not necessarily heterosexual couples.

The Committee agreed the report was positive to read considering the backdrop of the national pandemic.

RESOLVED- That:

Nicola be thanked for her attendance and presentation to the Committee and that the contents of the report be received and noted.

#### **25 ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020**

Nicola Booth, Operations Manager and Gail Spray, Head of Service for Adoption Counts attended the Committee to present the Adoption Annual Report 1 April 2019- 31 March 2020.

Key highlights included:

- The strength of working relationships between Adoption Counts and Cheshire East Council; robust tracking systems in place for children and had a joint up working approach to care plans;
- Last year 16 children were adopted and 19 placed, this was consistent with year before (17 adopted and 16 placed);

- There had been an increase in timescales for children being adopted and placed, this had risen in comparison to years before; and
- It had been important to find adopters to meet the needs of often complex health or development needs of children over a life long period.

Nicola gave a case study of a six year old girl who had been registered blind and had suffered significant abuse and neglect during the first four years of her life. She needed a family to meet lifelong needs. Due to the importance placed on individual care plans, she has gone on to flourish with her adoptive family.

A1 figures related to the child coming into care and moving in with family.  
A2 figures related to the time when court places order and Local Authority deciding on a match.

Both A1 and A2 figures were judged nationally.

A1 figures were 426 days. Currently the average was 486 days for England.

A2 figures were 121 days, current 201 days is national England average.

Adopters were approved by adoption counts, rather than nationwide. Lots of time was spent assessing families to get a good knowledge on strengths and weaknesses to be able to support where necessary. Placing inhouse gave a good outcome for children.

Two children had been placed in fostering for adoption, the children join the families at earlier point in their lives which is positive for children.

There had been a slight increase of those with a plan of adoption (23), 25 where the Court had given placement orders.

The quality of reports for adopted children had improved and contained much more detail of the journey of the child. Children could now see their history later in their life.

The Adoption support service had received feedback that people had chosen them as an agency because of the organisations reputation.

The ongoing developments for the service related attracting those from BAME communities as potential adoptive families.

Adoption Counts had organised Adoption picnics which had proved as a successful matching method, 76 children were able to be profiled and 85 adoptive families been to those.

There had been 110 adopters approved in last year, an increase from 85 in the previous year. However there was a recognised national adopter shortage.

The Committee were invited were pleased to see the reasons outlined in the report for why timescales may have taken longer in some instances.

There was some conversation about why Cheshire East Council had the highest number of applications for adoption support across a geography of Stockport, Manchester, Trafford and Salford. The Committee heard that Cheshire East were able to advocate successfully for the needs of their children.

The Committee were interested in peer support and were pleased to hear how adopters are supported (at times) organically through peer support and thought this was a positive outcome to reassure new parents.

RESOLVED-

That Nicola and Gail be thanked for their attendance and presentation and that the report be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 5.33 pm

Councillor K Flavell (Chairman)