

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Parenting Committee**
held on Tuesday, 29th September, 2020 Virtually

PRESENT

Councillor J Saunders (Vice-Chairman) Councillors R Bailey, J Barber, J Buckley, C Bulman, P Butterill, S Edgar, S Holland and M Warren

ALSO PRESENT

Jacquie Sims- Director of Children's Social Care, Children in Need & Child Protection

Kerry Birtles- Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers

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

Karen Chan- Independent Reviewing Officer

Lauren Conway- Interim Head of Service: Children's Service Development and Partnerships

Helen Davies- Democratic Services Officer

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Michael Beanland.

The Chairman of this Committee, Councillor Kathryn Flavell, dialled into the meeting, however to enable smooth running and full connectivity the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Jos Saunders, chaired the entire meeting.

8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

9 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED-

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 14 July 2020 be accepted as a correct and accurate record.

10 CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

Kerry Birtles, Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers presented the Corporate Parenting Update Report to the Committee.

The Committee heard that during the pandemic, 80% of Cared for Children were able to be seen face-to-face and in their homes. The remaining 20% showed a clear Covid-19 risk.

The most significant areas of impact had been children that needed care.

Laura Rogerson, Head of Service for Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Virtual School Headteacher for Cared for Children, advised the Committee that during the pandemic, those who needed to attend school were able to attend, and were supported. Children's attendance with social worker was registered at 85% with 98% schools open and a 90% attendance rate, this is above national average and included those who could not attend because they had to isolate. (Isolation was classed as an authorised absence).

The Virtual School worked jointly with social care and extra funding had been invested.

Currently there was a specific focus on Personal Education Plans (PEPs) being completed and this was scheduled throughout this term.

All the young people that were due to go to college had secured their places. Five young people were recorded as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), this was a low number and they were being supporting with next steps. There had been no rise in children being able to access next steps 16+.

The Committee were advised that the reasons why young adults come back, can include connectivity with family, challenges with employment, and the feeling of isolation.

RESOLVED- That:

- Kerry and Laura be thanked for their update and attendance;
- The report be received and noted; and
- This Committee provide support and challenge to the local authority's actions in respect of the report.

11 QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Kerry Birtles, Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers advised the Committee that the performance had been covered in the previous item of business.

12 EDUCATION UPDATE

Laura Rogerson, Interim Head of Service SEND and Virtual School Headteacher for Cared for Children attended the meeting and gave a verbal update to the Committee.

The committee was told that 96.5% of schools across the borough have reopened which equated to 136. Five schools have partly reopened. There was a 90% attendance rate, and an 85% attendance rate for those

children who had a social worker. The Education Recovery Group met regularly and supported any challenges and gave regular guidance to schools.

There were regular meetings for parent/carer forums.

Virtual Personal Education Plans (PEPs) have continued, these had reduced during the pandemic but the focus was on those transitioning. This half term the focus was on PEPS, gaps in learning and identification of where extra support could be put into place.

There had been good results from students over summer, with all 16 year olds moving onto the courses they had opted for.

Out of 110 18-20-year old students, five had been recorded as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

Two young people went to University. Six students could go to University next year if they opted to do that.

The Committee were invited to ask any questions, there was some discussion on:

- The National Tutoring Programme, the detail was in development and there was guidance going to schools this was an item that could be brought back to this Committee at the next meeting; and
- For students who could potentially be left out or were further behind with their education, tutors could be provided as tailored support where needed. Sometimes this was done via the school in-house and sometimes agency tutors were employed.

RESOLVED- That

- a) Laura be thanked for her attendance and update to this Committee;
- b) The update be received and noted;
- c) An update on the National Tutoring Programme be brought back to the next Committee meeting.

13 VISION AND IDENTITY FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Jacquie Sims, Director of Children's Social Care, Children in Need & Child Protection attended the meeting and advised the Committee on this item.

The Committee were advised that it would be helpful if they, as Elected Members, could promote the vision as widely as possible to ensure the outcomes for Children were received.

The vision had been formed via the positive feedback from Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) gave

positive feedback on how the Council embedded the voice of the child within services and the responsive partnership working. The next step for children and families was an overarching vision to demonstrate ambition.

As the vision became more embedded, this would support Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Corporate Parenting Committee to improve outcomes for children and young people.

The Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions and there was some discussion that included:

- The need for performance measures behind the vision, to be outcome driven so performance could be measured;
- The ambition of the Executive Director for People to reduce the number of children who needed to be cared for;
- Cheshire had a higher number of cared for at home children than other parts of country, the ambition was to reduce numbers of those who could safely exit care. For those children who were in settled places, work was being done to explore secured special guardianship arrangements to assess if this was the right move for them and continue to assess exactly the right level of support. This would be an important piece of work for team over the next few weeks and a more detailed overview would be available for the next Committee meeting.

RESOLVED- That:

- a) Jacquie be thanked for her attendance and presentation;
- b) That the update be received and noted; and
- c) A detailed overview of the exploration of secured special guardianship arrangements for children in settled places to be brought to the next Committee meeting.

14 MEMBER FRONTLINE VISITS PROSPECTUS

Kerry Birtles, Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers thanked the Committee for their participation in expressing their preferences in relation to Member Frontline Visits.

RESOLVED-

That Jennifer Jenkins, Improvement and Development Officer will contact the Committee directly to advise of next steps.

15 FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

Keith Martin, Head of Service for Children with Disabilities and Fostering presented the Fostering Service Annual Report to the Committee to give an overview of the last 12-months.

The Committee heard that it had been a busy year for the service, and following the inspection by Ofsted there had been positives raised around the support and training to foster carers, however they found that Cheshire East had difficult engagement with foster carers, it is acknowledged this was during a time when Foster Carers did not have a voice within CEC. Since then, an external body had been employed to investigate this as an area of concern and Cheshire East had accepted their recommendations.

The current priority was the recruitment of foster carers. The establishment of a marketing and recruitment team were part of this priority with a heightened communications campaign to follow, linked to the vision: "Together for Fostering".

The Committee heard that from 275 enquiries there had been 54 expressions of interest. There were 112 Cared for Children within Cared for Foster Care and 57 family and friends placements- those family members were still subject to same foster requirements.

There had been some Issues around foster children cross boundary and moving school placements.

There was ongoing work to streamline work within the Fostering Service to enable more collective and strategic outcomes. Currently there were three teams within the fostering service, the goal was to expand within the current staffing structure and post 18 family living team.

The Committee were advised that the Fostering network, a close partner of the Council, have developed a Foster Friendly Employer programme. Currently if a Cheshire East member of staff who is also a Foster Carer needed to attend a Cared for Review or Training, there is no provision to enable them to attend in work time other than for them to use their own Annual Leave. The Foster Friendly Employer Programme aims to change that. Keith advised a paper was being drafted for the Council to consider.

There were no questions from the Committee.

The Chairman summarised that it was positive to see the 12-month review, there was clear ambition to increase the amount of foster carers for Cheshire East, and this Committee would be interested to measure the success on that as it is made.

RESOLVED- That:

- a) Keith Martin be thanked for his attendance and update to the Committee;
- b) the report be received and noted; and
- c) a paper be prepared for a future Committee date on the measure of success in recruitment of Foster Carers and Foster Friendly Employers.

Karen Chan, the Independent Reviewing Officer, attended the meeting and updated the Committee on the IRO Annual Report.

The key headlines from the report were:

- There had been two IRO's joining to the team last year to address the high case numbers, however Children in Care figures increased which led to an outturn position being similar to where it was before;
- 26% more reviews in 2020 than in 2019;
- 98% of children over 4 contributed in some way to their review;
- 62% attended the review despite creativity around thematic reviews from IROs to encourage more attendance. IRO's worked with a focus group to establish what the appeal of reviews would be for children;
- The department received an Investing in Children award for the second year running;
- 60% of all disputes have been resolved informally;
- Ofsted noted- Whilst the department does challenge it does not always have an impact in changing outcomes, IRO's were working to improve and change practice and standards;
- There were good examples of social workers going above and beyond in their role, with positive examples of best practice;
- There had been good Ofsted feedback, the child focus aspect was commended, but there was a need for more critical evaluation. IRO's had started peer reviews to address this; and
- Last years targets were met, apart from consultation for reviews- there was a low return rate, however there had been a better rate of consultation during the pandemic. There had been a variety of forms to consult with the IRO's- teenagers liked Microsoft Teams, where it was important to maintain socially distanced visits with children.

Going forward IRO's looked at children that had come into care, to scrutinise their plans and ensure the options were available to them and that had been fully explored. Reunification where it was right and appropriate whereas challenge if it was not right.

The Committee raised a couple of points around ensuring there was the capacity to meet the ambition within the team, and whether a series of meetings would be onerous to children.

Karen confirmed there had been recruitment of another IRO for six months to establish the trends in relation to the number of cases, and that the child could choose which part of the meeting they wanted to be in, and if parents were not able to be in meeting at same times, it would be stretched to a series of meetings. If that works best for the child that's what they do.

RESOLVED- That:

- a) Karen Chan be thanked for her attendance and presentation; and
- b) the Annual Report be received and noted.

17 UPDATE ON INSPECTIONS DURING COVID-19

Jacquie Sims, Director of Children's Social Care, Children in Need & Child Protection advised the Committee on this item.

The Committee heard that following suspension of Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) Inspections in March 2020, they had now been reinstated and would follow similar themes to the current inspection framework, but would be in context of the national pandemic.

Ordinarily the Council would have been subject to a focussed visit with a theme e.g. cared for children, or a targeted area inspections (JTAI) on an area of practice. However, between now and the end of March 2021, Ofsted would be conducting an 'assurance visit' instead. There would be ten days notice for the Council to prepare and that call is expected between now and March. Officers are putting together evidence in readiness for a visit.

There were no further questions from the Committee.

RESOLVED-

That the update be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 4.00 pm and concluded at 5.32 pm

Councillor (none)