

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Cared For Children and Care Leaver Committee

held on Tuesday, 5th December, 2023 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)
Councillor J Saunders (Vice-Chair)

Councillors L Anderson, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, C Bulman, D Clark,
G Hayes, S Holland, B Posnett, J Saunders and B Puddicombe

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director Children's Services
Kerry Birtles, Director of Children's Social Care
Annemarie Parker, Head of Service: Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Angela Murney, Participation Worker - Youth Support Service
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Jenny Foulkes, Service Manager – The Children's Society
Nicola Booth, Operations Manager – Adoption Counts
Kristen Roberts, Operations Manager – Adoption Counts (joined remotely via Teams)

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Gilman.

16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2023 be agreed as a correct record.

18 UPDATE FROM THE SHADOW COMMITTEE (VERBAL UPDATE)

The committee received a presentation with an update from the shadow committee, My Voice, and feedback from the children and young people. Since the last committee meeting, there had been lots of conversations

with the shadow committee around education as a theme. Young people talked about their experiences and lots of them had felt positive about staying in the same school where possible; however it was recognised that, for some, it did mean extended travel time which could have an impact. Regarding the Virtual School, it was noted that not all had had 1:1 support from a learning mentor but those that did found it positive. Language within schools was also raised as an important topic and there was an opportunity to educate further on this subject.

The committee thanked the officers for the work involved.

19 ADOPTION COUNTS ANNUAL REPORT 1 APRIL 2022 - 31 MARCH 2023

The committee received the Adoption Service Annual Report 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023.

A number of queries were raised, including:

- Only 27% of stage 1 assessments were being completed within the target timescale, therefore how could interest be sustained
- A request for an update on the commissioning of the adoption psychology service
- What the impact was when a paediatrician was not in attendance as adoption panel meetings
- What progress was being made with delays in court proceedings

In response, the committee were advised that the adoption service were conscious of the delays in stage 1 timescales and that this was due to statutory checks being undertaken. A number of conversations had taken place with partner agencies and the current systems in place at Adoption Counts were being looked at to establish whether anything could be done differently.

The adoption psychology service was commissioned each year, with it currently being commissioned until March 2024. Consideration was being given to whether there would be funding available for it to continue after this.

A lack of a paediatrician attending the adoption panel consistently was something that continued to be escalated by the panel, however assurances were given that this was not detrimental to the panel being able to make decisions as up-to-date health information still had to be provided in writing.

There were improvements in court proceedings, both locally in Cheshire East and regionally. As a region, the average length of time for care proceedings was now under 50 weeks. Cheshire East had a strength in

reducing the number of hearings per case meaning quicker decisions could be made but there was still more work to be done.

A request was made for the Adoption Service Annual Report to be brought to committee as early as possible. Officers would take this request away and suggested that it may be possible to bring a mid-year update, for example a presentation with updates and highlights.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

20 CHESHIRE EAST ADVOCACY AND INDEPENDENT VISITOR SERVICE – THE CHILDREN’S SOCIETY ANNUAL REPORT

The committee received the Cheshire East Advocacy and Independent Visitor Service Annual Report for October 2022 to September 2023.

It was noted that the current commission was due to end in late 2024 and it was queried whether there was an update on where this was up to in the commissioning cycle. The committee were advised that there was a statutory requirement to provide an advocacy service and that due diligence was being done to ensure an advocacy service would continue to be provided.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

21 CARED FOR CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS SCORECARD Q2 2023-24

The committee received the Cared for Children and Care Leavers scorecard for quarter 2 of 2023-24.

Recruitment of social workers and dental checks for children and young people continued to be areas of concern for members. Social worker recruitment was improving with some agency workers applying for permanent roles. Dentistry remained a priority for improvement.

Reference was made to work streams which members had previously had the opportunity to be involved in directly. It was noted that members were not currently allocated to specific work streams and it was queried whether this could be started again. Officers agreed that it would be good for members to be involved and suggested that the new year would be a good opportunity to put out invitations for areas of interest.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

The meeting commenced at 14.00 and concluded at 15.50

Councillor C Bulman (Chair)