

Cheshire East Council

Corporate Parenting Committee

Date of Meeting: 7th March 2017

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 Consider the input of the Committee to the Annual Report as set out at paragraph 5.19; and
 - 2.1.3 Endorse the aims and learning outcomes of the corporate parenting training for elected members set out at 5.6.

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

Apprenticeship Levy

- 5.1. Changes which come into effect from May 2017 in respect of the new Apprentice Levy should make it easier for care leavers to be successful in

apprenticeships. There will be a levy on all large employers which will be used to support apprenticeships across the country. This money will support care leavers in two ways:

- Any employer who takes on an apprentice up to age 24 who has been in care will receive an additional £1000 to give additional support; and
- Training providers who provide the training and assessment element of the apprenticeship will receive £1000 for additional support.

- 5.2. The Virtual School and Social Care will be asking employers/providers how these funds will be used and also to make sure that the young person lets the employer/provider know about their care leaver status when applying.

Children and Social Work Bill

- 5.3. The new Children and Social Work Bill, currently going through Parliament, has clauses that place new duties on the local authority and the Virtual School. This includes promoting the educational achievement of children adopted from care or who have left care through a special guardianship order (SGO) or child arrangements order (CAO). The legislation will place a duty on local authorities to appoint an officer (the virtual school head) to provide advice and information to parents, funded early years settings and schools; and will place a duty on the school governing body to appoint a designated teacher to support children in the school they attend.

Local Developments

Arrangements for carrying out inspections of children's homes (Reg 44)

- 5.4. Quality assurance for the Children's Homes that Cheshire East commission or operate directly is important to ensure the best services for our cared for children. Regulation 44 visits and subsequent reports are an important part of the quality assurance framework surrounding Children's Homes and the greater the level of independence, the better. Each Children's Home is required to appoint an independent person to undertake Regulation 44 visits and to date Cheshire East Council have added support and challenge to the process via local Councillors and Voice for Children attending visits. As the Council moves to the wholly commissioned service model via Bettercare Keys, and also expands the number of Children's Homes to five, it is important that the added value that Councillors and Voice for Children provide is not lost. Bettercare Keys have agreed that our current arrangements for supporting Regulation 44 visits can continue when they mobilise the new Children's Home contract.

Update on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

- 5.5. There were no more unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) brought into Cheshire East under the last tranche. Cheshire East continues

to support 6 cared for children and 14 care leavers who were UASC as at the end of February 2017. These young people have settled in well and are receiving good support in Cheshire East.

Corporate Parenting Training for Elected Members

5.6. Work is currently underway to develop corporate parenting training for elected members as part of a programme of child and adult safeguarding training that aims to:

- Understand the profile and needs of our cared for children;
- Understand their role in CE as corporate parents.
- Promote the welfare of children and adults at risk;
- Raise awareness of the key risk factors of abuse and neglect and how to identify signs and symptoms of concern;
- Have an understanding of current legislation with regard to safeguarding children and adults at risk;
- Know what to do if they are concerns that a child or adult at risk is being abused and how to respond to disclosure;
- Have an understanding of what LADO is and what to do if they are concerned about the behaviour of someone in a position of trust;
- Have an awareness of the role of a council member in relation to safeguarding children and adults at risk;

5.7. Specific learning outcomes around corporate parenting would include developing an understanding of:

- Who are our cared for children
- What are the challenges facing our cared for children
- Outcomes for our cared for children
- Understanding legislation with regard to cared for children
- Elected members role as corporate parents
- The role of the corporate parenting committee

Foster Carer Survey and Action Plan

5.8. A Foster Carer Survey was commissioned in May 2016. The survey was distributed via an email link in June 2016 with a completion date 10 July 2016. The purpose of the survey was to gather the views of our in house foster carers in order to assist us in shaping the service over the next 12 months and beyond.

5.9. The survey, which was completed on line, comprised of 20 questions relating to all aspects of fostering and a final question which allowed the carers to give their personal views in terms of how the service could be improved. There were 55 responses in total representing a 38% response rate. The headlines from the survey were as follows:

- a. When asked 'what was very important in motivating you to continue fostering';

- 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 them to foster.
- b. When asked how satisfied foster carers are with the support they receive from their supervising social worker, 61% of respondents were very or fairly satisfied.
 - c. Over 80% of respondents strongly agree or agree that the training we provide gives good opportunities for development, is good for sharing new ideas and information and provides foster children with the best possible care.
 - d. Around 45% of respondents thought that we gave enough information about the child.
 - e. Over 86% of respondents are very clear or clear about their role in what outcomes need to be achieved for the child in their care.
 - f. Less than 50% of respondents told us that it was very easy or fairly easy to access information from our website. Information foster carers would like to see on our website include a who's who with contact numbers and roles, articles and up to date research and a handbook that is easier to find.
 - g. Comments received at the end of the survey had a number of themes; these were around stability and consistency, better matching of children, less agency staff and for foster carers to be treated as professionals.
 - h. All in all, the results have confirmed what we were hearing from our carers during our day to day conversations and we are now working on an action plan to address the issues that have been raised.

Response to the Foster Carer Survey and Action Plan.

- 5.10. We are actively driving forward the recruitment campaign for more foster carers, which in due course should allow for better matching of the children we place. We are specifically targeting the smaller ethnic communities and the LGBT community.
- 5.11. Work is underway in terms of providing more information via the Cheshire East Fostering Website. The aim is to provide up to date contact information, links to helpful resources and easier access to policies and procedures. Training will be offered to foster carers who are not confident using computers.
- 5.12. We are working to improve the support carers receive from their supervising social workers. We have over the last few months recruited several permanent members of staff to bring stability and consistency to the service.

- 5.13. Since June 2016 the foster carer newsletter is now regularly being distributed on a quarterly basis and the foster carer forums have recommenced to keep foster carers up to date and give them the opportunity to air their views. The support groups also continue on a regular basis.
- 5.14. The response to the foster carer survey was relatively poor. We are exploring in consultation with foster carers more productive and efficient methods of gathering feedback over the course of the year as opposed to a single annual survey.

Foster Carer Fortnight

- 5.15. Foster Care Fortnight is The Fostering Network's annual campaign to raise the profile of fostering and to show how foster care transforms lives. It is also the UK's biggest foster carer recruitment campaign. Foster Care Fortnight 2017 will take place from Monday 8th to Sunday 21st May.
- 5.16. Planning is underway to raise awareness of Foster Carer Fortnight in Cheshire East and to maximise our foster carer recruitment campaign. Essentially, there will be advertising digitally and PR activity via the 'You Can Foster' campaign. We are also looking at more advertising on Facebook, our internal communication channels and a partnership newsletter. We are also exploring the idea of targeting the schools with a financial incentive if a carer is recruited and approved at panel. We are currently looking at the costings for some banners to be placed outside our corporate buildings.

Post-16 Tutor

- 5.17. Work is underway to appoint a Post-16 Tutor in Cheshire East. This is to support the learning of those post-16 who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or struggling with education. College courses tend to be offered only in September and only on a full time basis; the Tutor will allow young people to improve and gain qualifications in core skills while they wait for a college place or if they cannot attend full time, eg, if they have young children. The tutor will also be able to offer 1:1 support for any young person in education or an apprenticeship, but who is struggling to complete all the work set. This should help to reduce any dropping out.

Corporate Parenting Committee Annual Report

- 5.18. The Corporate Parenting Committee is expected to provide an annual report on its work an impact as part of its advisory role to the Cabinet. The Committee is asked to consider what to include in the report and what input is required from Members.
- 5.19. The following are suggested areas that could be included in the report:

- Foreword
- Introduction and Purpose of Report
- Cheshire East profile - our children and young people
- Governance, including role of the Corporate Parenting Committee
- Frequency of meetings and attendance
- Listening to our children in care and care leavers
- Corporate Parenting Strategy - progress
- Work of the Corporate Parenting Committee 2016-17
- Our priorities for 2017-18
- Forward Plan 2017-18

Signs of Safety Innovation Bid

5.20. As at the end of February 2017, Cheshire East has still not heard the outcome of the bid to the DfE on its collaborative bid to implement Signs of Safety as a way of working in the borough. We have been given no indication of when a decision will be made but one delaying factor is that any decision cannot be signed off until Edward Timpson returns from paternity leave.

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 Innovation Fund Bid, when known, will bring further funding into the Council. This is matched funded with a budget that has already been secured through transition funding.

7.3.2. There will be a cost for the Post-16 Tutor, but this will be met from existing budgets.

7.4. Human Resources Implications

7.4.1. The Post-16 Tutor will be recruited following Cheshire East's policies and procedures.

7.5. Equality Implications

7.5.1. There are 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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