



Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Corporate Parenting held at County Hall, Glenfield on Friday, 25 January 2019.

PRESENT

Mrs B. Seaton CC (in the Chair)

Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC
Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC

Mr. G. Welsh CC
Mrs. M. Wright CC

8. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2018 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

9. Declarations of Interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting. No declarations were made.

10. Change to order of business.

With the consent of the Chairman it was agreed to vary the order of business.

11. Leicestershire County Council's Corporate Parenting offer.

The panel received a presentation by the Assistant Director of Children's Social Care, Children and Family Services on Partnership working toward better outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers and Leicestershire County Council's Corporate Parenting Offer.

Arising from the presentations the following points were noted:

- i) It was noted that the action plan to improve outcomes for care leavers was focused on the highest priority and most complex areas that could only be addressed through partnership working. Once the action plan had been endorsed by partners a timeline and targets would be added. Targets would be co-designed with young people to ensure that they reflected the lived experience of care leavers.
- ii) The first key action that partners could support the County Council in meeting was providing suitable accommodation for care leavers. The Council would like partners to endorse the Housing protocol currently in development to enable a care leaver to apply for social housing at 17.5. This was especially a problem for those coming out of prison near their 18th birthday as it left them effectively homeless. The Council was working with the district councils to enable a care leaver to apply at 17.5 and start the search early to give the best opportunity to provide suitable accommodation, recognising that there was a shortage of social housing and that in some cases interim accommodation would need to be

provided. There were currently 9 Children in Care in prison and 280 care leavers that the Council was supporting.

- iii) A significant concern for young people in and leaving care was the ability to gain and sustain employment. The Council was asking agencies to work with care leavers and the virtual school to offer and support care leavers and children in care to gain job opportunities and apprenticeships. Officers were exploring whether travel cards and some of the corporate benefits available to County Council employees could be rolled out to care leavers in support of this. There was an incentive for employers to take on care leavers in addition to the apprentice levy of £1000 from the Department of Education.
- iv) The Department of Education would be visiting the County Council in February to act as a critical friend in light of the change in law to extend the support to care leavers until the age of 25. The visit would test the ambition of the offer, identify strengths and weaknesses and consider the availability of additional resources to support the work.
- v) Success would be measured in a variety of ways, such as through a reduction in the reoffending rate for care leavers and improved mental health. It was recognised that a flexible approach was needed for the success criteria, including measures such as attending interviews and training rather than just the number of care leavers in employment.
- vi) The Corporate Parenting Board was a requirement of the Social Work Act 2017. Most authorities had a formal board. The County Council's Board was well attended with good input from young people, including as co-chair. A breadth of work was undertaken to ensure that the children's voice was heard by the Corporate Parenting Board, including through the Children in Care Council and Supporting Young People After Care group. The agendas were also carefully managed to ensure that there was sufficient time to discuss each item.
- vii) It was considered best practice to have a Children in Care Council to bring young people together and enable them to share views. The County Council's Children in Care Council was well attend and consisted of a younger group and an older group which currently met on the same night. This would change from April 2019, to ensure that the meetings could have a social element as well as the structured meeting. Consideration was being given to how to incorporate more of the harder to reach children in care and children with disabilities into the Children in Care Council and its work.
- viii) Children's Rights Officer had an advocacy role and represented the child's view. This complemented the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), which had oversight of the care plan for the child and ensured that the outcomes were reached. The County Council worked to a caseload of 105 for an IRO, taking into account the dual role for children in care and child protection cases. The weighting applied to the different types of cases meant that this was within the national guidelines, which recommended a caseload of 70 for an IRO who focused solely on children in care. IROs were busy but effective and able to manage their caseload.

- ix) If a child was unhappy with their placement they would talk to the person they felt most comfortable. Usually in the first instance it would be the social worker. However, they could also speak to the IRO or ask to be referred to the Children's Rights Officer. Referrals could also be made by the social worker. The referral process required clarity and a review after the fact to ensure that the right outcomes were met.
- x) The IRO role was independent, which meant that they had a different management structure to the social workers responsible for children in care. If they had concerns, an escalation process was in place and they were also able to seek legal support from CAFCASS. Monthly meetings took place with the Assistant Director.
- xi) There was a broad range of financial support available for children in care including a Laptop offer and driving lessons in which the Council would pay for one and the young person pay for the next.
- xii) While Corporate Parenting within the directorate had always had a strong backing, particularly from the Cabinet Lead Member, it was only in the past two years the Council has had legislative support. Over the last six months, progress had been made in getting the message out to the wider council.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the presentations and information now provided be noted;
- (b) That members who are also members of district councils be requested to raise the issue of starting the search for suitable accommodation for care leavers at 17.5 with their district council colleagues.

12. National requirements - legislation, guidance and best practice.

This item was discussed during the previous agenda item (minute 11).

13. Role and Responsibilities of workers involved in supporting Children in Care.

The panel received a verbal update during the meeting on the role and responsibilities of workers involved in supporting Children in Care during the other items of the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Panel be provided with a team structure of those involved in supporting Children in Care.
- (b) That Members be provided with an annual report of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

14. The role of the virtual school.

The Panel received a report and a presentation from the Head of the Virtual School on the role of the virtual school.

Arising from the discussion the following was noted:

- i) One of the Leicestershire Virtual School priorities is to raise the aspiration of children in care and the aspirations that adults have for children in care and ensuring there is a clear focus on Education, Employment and Training and those not in Education, Employment and Training.
- ii) Collaboration with the Corporate Parenting team was a priority and as of September 2018 the Virtual School and Corporate Parenting co-funded a full time participation officer who worked across areas, delivering greater capacity and ensuring continued collaboration across services to provide a balanced programme of events. The team was always looking to the Business Community to provide sponsorships.
- iii) There were a variety of events to try and appeal to children in care and care leavers and efforts were made to support them with anything where they had shown an interest. For example, if they expressed an interest in the Armed Forces the Authority would support them through the application process.
- iv) Aspirations were usually heavily influenced by birth families and peer groups and being in care was seen as an isolating factor. It was important that the children were not treated any different at school, but also that their needs were taken into account. Foster Carers would discuss with the supervisory social worker regarding school trips and there were a few ways it could be funded, such as pupil premium fund, the enhanced pupil premium fund and the hardship fund and also a split between the authority and the foster carers.
- v) The Department for Education had launched a Care Leaver Covenant in October 2018. The Council was making contact with local business groups to encourage local businesses to sign up.
- vi) Leicestershire County Council currently has six ring fenced apprenticeships for children in care and care leavers. The apprentices were matched to young people who had expressed an interest in that area of work and had the relevant qualification. The target for the first year was that six young people were in post by April 2019. Procedures were in place which prioritised apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers and they were integrated into the County Council's 'Guidance for Managers on the Recruitment and Employment of Apprentices'. To date, seven informal meetings had been arranged with care leavers, four had led to work trials being arranged and two were currently employed as apprentices.
- vii) The Virtual School was leading on the delivery of an Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Independent Living qualification for children in care aged 16 plus and care leavers. Training had been delivered to 25 carers and Personal Advisors on how to support young people completing the course which aimed to promote understanding and confidence in delivering advice and support.

15. Topics for Discussion with the Lead Member.

Arising from discussion the Members agreed that they would like to discuss the following topics with the Lead Member for Children and Families:

- i) The Lead Member's expectations for the panel.
- ii) How the County Council should benchmark itself against best practice.

CHAIRMAN

25 January 2019

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