

DORSET COUNCIL - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 9 DECEMBER 2019

Present: Cllrs Toni Coombs (Chairman), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chairman), Stella Jones, Cathy Lugg and Andrew Parry

Apologies: Antonia Dixey, Chief Executive, Participation People, Lynn Giles, Dorset Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service and Martin Hill, Foster Carer

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Maggie Aldwell (Service Manager, Care and Protection), Paul Beecroft (Communications Team), Louise Drury (Quality & Assurance), Jane Edwards (Operational Manager (C&S 13-25)), Ann Haigh (Participation Worker, Participation People), Madeleine Hall (Corporate Parenting Officer), Tanya Hamilton-Fletcher (Service Manager Care & Support), Jan Hill (Foster Carer), Theresa Leavy (Interim Executive Director of People - Children), Elaine Okopski (Dorset Parent Carer Council), Claire Shiels (Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships), Mary Taylor (Acting Assistant Director for Care and Protection), Fran Thompson (Fostering and Permanence Panel), Michelle Wintrip (Dorset Advocacy and Independent Service) and Liz Eaton (Democratic Services Officer)

53. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2019 were confirmed and signed.

54. Declaration of Interest

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made at the meeting.

55. Public Participation

There were no public questions or statements received at the meeting.

56. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items of business.

57. Fostering and Permanence Panel Annual Report

The Corporate Parenting Board received the Annual Report from Fran Thompson, Independent Panel Chair, Fostering and Permanence Panel.

She informed the Board since 2007, there had been a requirement on all local authorities to have a fostering panel chair. A stable membership panel had built up and met 4 times a month on concurrent Tuesdays and Wednesdays

hearing approximately 5 or 6 cases each day. A total of 167 cases had been heard between April 2018 and March 2019, out of those 21 mainstream foster carers and 19 connected persons were recommended for approval. The Annual Household Review of foster carers had been carried out and improved upon during the year due to the appointment of two Reviewing Officers to assist in the process following the Modernising Fostering review in 2017.

After 2017, the Fostering Panel undertook the role of recommending matches for those children in care who required long-term fostering.

The Chairman asked what the challenges were for the fostering panel and what the Board could do to make things better. The Panel Chair explained that when a child has been placed with a family member, they went through the same assessment process with references taken up. There was a huge variance in the way the family responded to the assessment as quite often they did not feel they should be assessed. Statistics showed there was great benefit if a child stayed with the family, the Panel had to weigh that up with the standards expected of foster carers. If the family member was not recommended as a foster carer the courts may recommend a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). The biggest challenge was administration, the panels tend to be lengthy and they had to be minuted and with blue print for change administration was not being completed. The courts were also setting dates that were unreasonable by not allowing adequate time for the assessment process to be completed.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children thanked the Panel Chair for her report emphasising it was necessary to provide the right support for the Authority's carers as they were looking after children who had been traumatised. She felt it was important to get the connected support on board. Regarding administrative support sometimes there was an over-approval of minutes and perhaps there was a way of getting them agreed quicker. She wanted to limit the amount of recording that people carried out and training support would be provided on that.

The CLiCC representative asked the Board if it was found to be safe for a child to be with a family member were they asked straight away, and if the foster panel thought the child was safe with other family members would you ask those family members. The Independent Panel Chair explained the child would already be placed with a family member, if possible, as an emergency. The Fostering Panel had to weigh up the consequence of not placing the child with the family. If approval was refused the child would have to move again. If it was thought other family members would be able to look after the child, they would be asked to do so.

One member enquired how many family members, for example, grandparents refused to have a DBS check and what proportion were turned down. The Panel Chair confirmed that some family members were turned down although it was not a large proportion and would estimate somewhere in the region of 15% were not recommended for approval. It might be the parenting the grandparents had provided for their own children was not acceptable for them to look after a grandchild. Sometimes they were unable to accept that.

One member commented that Foster Panel members produced a fair report even when they turned down a foster parent. The loss of administrative support would mean case reports would not be provided in a timely fashion and it would be difficult if the case files were not produced on time.

The Chairman hoped to have teased out where there were difficulties by the time the next Fostering and Permanence Panel Annual Report was presented to the Board when it was hoped things would have improved.

Resolved

That where there were administrative difficulties these would have been resolved by the time the next Fostering and Permanence Panel Annual Report was presented to the Board.

58. Annual Fostering Service Report

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Executive Director of People – Children on the Annual Fostering Service Report.

Officers confirmed changes had taken place during the last couple of years, they were still working closely with Whitehead-Ross Education and Consulting (WREC) whose role it was to recruit new foster carers over a two year contract period. A booklet had been designed for training foster carers, each carer having their own personal development plan. A recruitment and retention strategy had been developed to encourage recruitment of foster carers and gain enthusiasm for people locally to look after children. The format of support groups had changed to ensure foster carers had time out and their children who were particularly supportive had been recognised at the Awards Ceremony.

The Foster Carer Representative commented that although WREC's marketing was excellent they were a little behind the projected two year target on delivering 70 new foster carers with 21 approved and 14 more this current year. Officers confirmed this was so and mentioned a number of carers had retired and would need to be replaced. It was confirmed the contract was a payment by results contract and there was a close partnership between the fostering team and WREC. It was considered that the Authority was comparable with the private sector service with the range of support carers required, if a family had difficulty with a placement they would have support and a short break away from the family could be arranged. Supporting our foster carers was paramount.

The CLiCC representative asked what was meant by "mainstream". Officers explained "mainstream" would be someone looking after a child they did not know and "connected" they would be looking after a child they were related to eg, grandchild.

One member asked if the Authority advertised in schools or colleges. Officers confirmed the opportunity to advertise in schools and colleges should not be missed.

The Chairman mentioned she had looked at the summary in the report and wondered what success looked like and considered it was about foster carers staying with the Authority, having the right person and the right number. Success was getting it right so that everyone was happy and settled.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children confirmed that of the 297 foster carers 203 were in placements. All our carers provided good care. Where people were located was important as it was hugely disruptive for a child not only to leave their family but also to leave the locality they lived in and move away. The CLiCC representative asked how long the process took to become a foster carer and whether there was a minimum age. Officers confirmed the process took approximately 6 months and explained that some applicants may not be suitable for various reasons. It was confirmed there was a minimum age and officers asked the CLiCC representative what they thought it should be. The CLiCC representative thought it should be approximately 20 and felt the child needed to go to a home where it would be loved regardless of whether they were middle-class or lower-class carers. Officers confirmed 21 was the minimum age for someone to become a foster carer and the Authority wanted people from all backgrounds, faiths, LGBT community etc. The CLiCC representative asked whether the Authority promoted the various backgrounds as they might not be shown in advertisements. It was confirmed that getting the match right was important lots of foster carers were over the age of 50 and older parents could be brilliant with children.

One member asked if the Authority looked at service families as she was aware of several army families who did not think they were eligible to foster. The Interim Executive Director of People – Children felt they required people who could provide respite and provide shared lives. Working people who could provide supportive lodgings for older children.

The Foster Carer Representative asked whether the Authority currently specifically targeted diverse groups. One officer confirmed the Authority did and there had also been conversations with service families.

The Chairman mentioned having considered both the independent report and the service report she was a little worried there was no mention of the point made regarding lack of administrative support in the service report and would hope the report would reflect where there were challenges. The Fostering Panel Chair confirmed her report was written up until April 2019 and they had lost 2 panel members in the last 2 months, when the report was written there was no issue, but in the meantime felt there should be some help.

The Chairman hoped there were plans for promoting foster caring next year as the Appendix only related to the Foster Carers fortnight. Officers confirmed there was not only the Foster Carers Fortnight but a strategy with WREC about how things were progressed.

Noted

59. **Commissioning Arrangements for Independent Fostering Agency Placements**

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Executive Director of People – Children on Commissioning Arrangements for Independent Fostering Agency Placements.

Officers informed the Board there was a framework agreement across a number of Local Authorities with different fostering providers whereby the Authority would require providers to meet the needs of the individual child. There were 50 providers with 102 Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements, about half the placements were with Dorset and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) the other half were placed further afield.

BCP carried out the contract management of the agreement and held quarterly meetings ensuring key performance indicators were met. In addition, officers held annual conversations with foster providers. All providers were either rated as good or outstanding and occasionally a place may have to be independently bought for a child outside of the framework, currently there were about 20 children where that had happened.

The Chairman asked when a child was placed with an agency that was not on the framework how did that compare in terms of costs. Officers confirmed they would have contact with them and would have an individual contract for that child, quality would remain the same.

One member asked who monitored children who were fostered outside of the area and whether the children came back into the county. It was confirmed that the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and Social Workers would monitor and feed back to officers and, yes, sometimes children would come back into the county.

Regarding quality assurance the Chairman asked if the Authority received feedback from the young people on placement. Officers confirmed they did but not as much as they would like, and more work had to be completed in this area.

One member referred to paragraph 4 of the report and the market engagement event held during the autumn with independent providers and asked officers if they were conscious that if it cost £500 to have a child in county that amount would double for an IFA and did that still apply. Officers confirmed it could do as there was a price differential and the Authority had to ensure it received value for money in terms of the range of provisions available.

One member asked whether for a new contract, the current terms and conditions would be reviewed and whether there was enough flexibility. Officers confirmed they were always in conversation with the providers and at the time of retendering officers would review what was required.

Noted

60. Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Executive Director of People – Children on the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2018/19.

Officers informed the Board there had been some progresses and some areas where improvements could be made.

One member felt the Board ought to get involved with the children more and considered it was not fair to have the same representative from CLiCC attending meetings.

The Participation Worker, Participation People mentioned that everyone was invited to the activity days. The Chairman asked that next year's calendar be reissued.

The Chairman mentioned the proposal for future meetings of the Board was to have 6 formal and 6 informal meetings. The informal meetings, to include the young people, would consist of 3 workshops and 3 activity meetings. The formal meetings would be open to the public the informal meetings would not.

All Board members present agreed with the new proposal.

The Chairman drew attention to paragraph 4.2 of the report and mentioned the Leader of the Council had also attended the awards ceremony and thoroughly enjoyed the event.

Members thought the ceremony was very high profile in recognising the achievements of children and young people but also allowed for quieter conversations to be had with foster carers.

The Chairman informed the Board there would be an action plan, the Corporate Parenting Officer would keep and update the master list.

The Corporate Parenting Officer mentioned all recommendations within the report ought to be added to the action plan.

The Chairman drew attention to paragraph 6.6 which contained links to Board members' working lives. At the present time with social housing renting you could not get an extra bedroom until you became an approved foster carer but could not become an approved foster carer until you had an extra room. She was on the Housing Register Executive Advisory Panel (EAP) and they were currently looking at this situation to enable things to go forward.

The Board discussed the working opportunities Dorset Council should be able to offer to children and young people who were in care, for example if someone wanted experience of working in a country park or working with animals the Authority should be able to offer that to them. There should be a

real opportunity for all young people who wanted to be in education, training or a workplace.

The Chairman asked the CLiCC representative if they had any view about what the Corporate Parenting Board did and the way it was done. The CLiCC representative mentioned that at the last training day for Corporate Parents out of the 19 candidates attending only 2 knew what the Corporate Parenting Board did. The Corporate Parenting Officer confirmed CLiCC received information through Participation People and that they all received a 'Your Care Spotlight Pack' which provided information about Corporate Parents. Young people were involved in the induction and training of new recruits to include elected members.

It was noted the Recommendations were agreed.

Resolved

1. That the Participation Worker, Participation People re-issue next year's calendar of activities.
2. That Board meetings would consist of 6 formal and 6 informal meetings.
3. That the Corporate Parenting Officer keep and update the master Action Plan.
4. That the recommendations contained within the report be agreed and added to the Action Plan.

61. Service Update and Performance Data - Ofsted Inspection/JTAI and QA

Officers confirmed this item would form part of the following report on Children in Care and Care Leavers Performance Overview.

62. Children in Care and Care Leavers Performance Overview

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Executive Director of People – Children on Children in Care and Care Leavers Performance Overview.

Officers informed the Board the Executive Summary on the report gave a snapshot over the previous 6 months.

The Chairman asked whether officers were receiving any feedback from young people on the type of accommodation they were looking for. Officers confirmed they were working with Adult Services and young people varied some wanted independence while others wanted to stay close to the residential home and others wanted accommodation with other young people, but they all wanted security and to know they would be safe.

The Chairman asked if there was a range of accommodation the Authority was squeezed on. Officers thought supported accommodation and secure tenancies were a problem with the cost of accommodation being quite high in Dorset. Some care leavers were in private rented accommodation which was quite costly. Trying to find accommodation for young people who attended university during their end of term breaks was difficult.

It was mentioned there would be a workshop around accommodation and housing and perhaps the Chairman could invite other members from the Housing Register EAP to attend once the date had been agreed.

The Board discussed developing a pathway to independence for young people, it was important that foster carers provided life skills for young people.

One member asked officers to pass his thanks onto the Friends of Dorset Care Leavers for their sterling work.

Reference was made to page 59 of the report and one member asked about the reasons for the increase in the number of children in care. It was reported by officers that this was due to an increase in the number of children that came into the Council's care as well as a reduction in the number of children that were leaving the Council's care during the previous 6 months. Officers reported it was important the Council had strong care planning in place to ensure that good decisions about permanency were made in a timely manner.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children stated that by March 2020 all children matched in long-term arrangements with foster carers would have a permanency plan in place.

The Chairman asked that by Easter 2020 the Board would like to know that was the case and all children would know what the plan was regarding their permanency.

Resolved

1. That the Chairman invite the members on the Housing Register EAP to attend the Workshop on accommodation and housing once a date had been agreed.
2. That by Easter 2020 the Interim Executive Director of People – Children inform the Board that all children matched in long-term arrangements with foster carers had a permanency plan in place.

63. Care Leavers Annual Report

The Corporate Parenting Board considered are report by the Executive Director of People – Children on the Care Leavers Annual Report.

Officers confirmed the report was self-explanatory and would draw the Board's attention to service development work. Agreement had been reached for care leavers to be exempt from paying Council Tax. Attention was drawn to Friends of Dorset Care Leavers who were brilliant as they were not connected to the statutory service.

One member referred to unsuitable accommodation and asked what measures were in place for those in custody or had no fixed abode. It was noted that those in custody would receive regular visits from a welfare adviser and officers would be informed when they were due for release so that accommodation could be organised although some of them would enter the

Probation Care Service on release. The Personal Advisers (PA) would give them a personal phone to use on release.

Officers confirmed the specialist Personal Adviser, who had been in post for approximately one month, was developing a range of accommodation including supportive housing and lodgings and looking at the benefits of shared housing for those in custody or who had no fixed abode. This was a grant funded fixed term appointment for 12 months. There was also a PA currently working on education and employment who was working with Bournemouth University.

The CLiCC representative asked whether the Council tax exemption had started. Officers confirmed that would start next year from April 2020.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children thought this area of work to be of huge significance as the number of LAC was high and would rise. Investing in the service was essential. The Chairman extended the Board's thanks to Friends of Dorset for their commitment which was improving the lives of care leavers and making a real difference.

The Chairman mentioned she was involved with a charity outside of Dorset the Atwell Trust and was going to visit the Young Lives Foundation in Maidstone.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children asked if there was anything the Board could help to deliver. Officers thought the Board could drive through employment opportunities and housing development as the needs of young people were essential to that planning. The Chairman commented that now the Authority was one council the design of housing need should become easier and thought a workshop on planning and housing might be of benefit.

Officers mentioned another development was in relation to apprenticeships. Agreement had recently been reached that each Directorate would have one apprenticeship that would be offered to young people. One member thought all the organisations the Authority used ought to take on an apprenticeship.

The Chairman asked officers to provide a further update report on the delivery of the service to the meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.

Resolved

That officers provide an update report on the delivery of the service to the meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.

64. Child Exploitation and Missing Children

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Executive Director of People – Children on Child Exploitation and Missing Children.

Officers mentioned there had been an increase in the last quarter of missing children due to the summer months and every report to the Police of a

missing young person was recorded. Although they may have been reported missing that was not always the case, for example a young person late home may be reported as missing. Officers offered a Return to Home interview (RHI) to every child that was reported as missing, there were very few exceptions but if someone was in hospital it would not be appropriate. There was concern about the very high decline rate for an RHI and if that could be improved upon.

One member asked whether it would be easier to carry out an RHI on-line and how long were they missing before being reported to the Police. Officers confirmed that could vary but could be as little as 5 minutes in some cases.

One member referred to the report and asked whether the declines from young people who went missing on multiple occasions was a cause for concern. Officers confirmed that it did concern them as they did not know where the young people wanted to be, they might just want to spend the night with a boyfriend they do not necessarily think they are missing. The Return to Home Interviewing officers visit their house and they still refuse to see them. The Chairman asked if the interview was on a one to one basis. Officers confirmed they would like to see them on their own as there could be something pushing or pulling them away.

The Foster Carer representative gave an example of a teenager who stayed with them on respite who had run away. She refused to see the RHI officer initially but he encouraged her by using non-verbal communication through a series of cards and she handed them back to him with the reason why she had run away.

The Interim Director of People – Children asked if future reports could show the age of missing children.

There Board discussed curfews and young people being made aware of the consequences of missing a curfew. It was noted that a measured response was required if a young person missed a curfew it should not be seen as a punishment.

Officers explained it was the first year of using the new toolkit to monitor child exploitation which had been positively received by the Authority's partners. There had been an improvement in the way exploitation was being handled and a difference was being made with some young people, but this was work in progress.

Resolved

1. That all future reports included the age of missing children.
2. That officers provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an update report at their meeting on the 23 April 2020.

65. Exempt

66. **Unregistered Placements Update Report**

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Executive Director of People – Children on Unregistered Placements Update.

Officers informed the Board in addition to the 3 young people in unregistered placements there had been one young person in overnight accommodation, one in accommodation for about 6 days and another who had stayed overnight. The 3 young people remained in the same accommodation as previously reported and officers were currently working to take one property over from the out of county provider. Child B and C were placed in Dorset Council accommodation with Child B remaining in that property as they would turn 18 and become an adult in the new year. Officers were in discussion with Ofsted to arrange for the properties to become registered.

One member asked if the properties became registered would they always be registered and what was the position regarding a children's home. Officers confirmed as long as the properties were correctly staffed, they would remain registered. Regarding a children's home there were a couple of properties in the Weymouth area that were considered appropriate, but it would be a few months before the Authority would know if it was possible to use the accommodation.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children thought the Board would benefit from reading some of the case studies for some young people who had very complex cases and would provide some for the meeting of the Board in February 2020.

Officers confirmed that emergency placements were visited regularly by a social worker and independent person who checked everything was correct and staff log books were accurate. It was very important to have the correct matching of young people sharing accommodation.

Resolved

1. That the Interim Executive Director of People – Children provide some case studies for the meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.
2. That officers provide a further update report on progress to the meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.

67. **CLICC Update and Challenge Cards**

The Participation Worker, Participation People asked if Board members would like to attend the residential being held on the 19 February 2020 at PGL, Osmington. The youth summit was being held at the Plaza Cinema on the 30 January 2020 and there were still places available for the Takeover Challenge being held on 14 February 2020, members could book a place through Eventbrite. If Board members could not attend officers asked if they would please mention the dates to colleague Councillors.

The Board considered the 6 Challenge cards:

Challenge One – “In June we were promised the results of the transport review and how that affects our taxi challenge. What were the results of that review?”

The Participation Worker, Participation People commented that young people were promised the answer after the July meeting. The Corporate Parenting Officer confirmed she would provide the result at the next formal meeting of the Board in February 2020.

Resolved

That the Corporate Parenting Officer provide the result at the next formal meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.

Challenge Two - “We feel that foster Carer training needs a bit of a re-vamp and concentrate more on things that concern the young people they care for. We would like more training on mental health and behaviour – to help carers to deal with difficult behaviour better. Is this possible and can we help?”

The Participation Worker, Participation People mentioned that some young people felt that foster carers would be out of touch with LGBT and they would like foster carers to have dedicated training in some of those areas. The CLiCC representative mentioned the important topics were not being touched on in training. The Interim Executive Director of People – Children Confirmed officers would look at the training plan and work with CLiCC to co-produce the training. The Acting Corporate Director – Commissioning and Partnerships would look into the training and report back on the situation to the formal meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.

Resolved

That the Acting Corporate Director – Commissioning and Partnerships look into the training and report back on the situation to the formal meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.

Challenge Three – “Some children in care want to have access to their records before they are 18. Is there a way this can be facilitated if the young person in question feels they are ready?”

Officers saw no reason why young people could not have access to parts of their files. The Participation Worker, Participation People commented the young person in question, who was 15, felt they were ready to read their file. Officers would discuss how this should be handled and as they would not want the young person to read their files off the computer. The Acting Corporate Director Care and Protection would report back on this challenge to the formal meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.

Resolved

That the Acting Corporate Director Care and Protection would report back on this challenge to the formal meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.

Challenge Four - “When there is a problem at school, some of us feel that communication between the school and Social Services is not good enough or fast enough. What can be done to address this?”

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children mentioned the Virtual School had carried out a great deal of work to ensure that did not happen as the last thing the Authority wanted was vulnerable young people being excluded. She would ask the Corporate Director – Education and Learning to investigate and report back to the formal meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.

Resolved

That the Corporate Director – Education and Learning investigate and report back to the formal meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020.

Challenge Five – “One of our previous challenges was to help Foster Carers to understand how to use Delegated Powers. What has happened about this and is there any evidence that it is working?”

The Acting Assistant Director of Care and Protection mentioned she had spoken with the Fostering Team and while there was evidence that delegated powers were being used by some carers, officers did not seem to have a very good picture of how it was working. She would take this away for the IRO service to report on.

The Participation Worker, Participation People mentioned this related to requests to have a sleepover or going away on short breaks or relations birthdays.

Officers agreed to talk with the Looked After Team to find out whether delegated powers were working and mentioned foster carers could always contact the IRO. The Acting Corporate Director Care and Protection would report back on this challenge to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on 11 February 2020.

Resolved

That the Acting Corporate Director Care and Protection to report back to the Board at the formal meeting on 11 February 2020.

Challenge Six – “In July of this year, as a response to our challenges, we were told that Social Workers would be carrying identity cards. We have seen no evidence of this yet and Social Workers we have spoken to don’t seem to know about the cards. Can we have an update please?”

The Participation Worker, Participation People thought the process was in place but when she had asked Social Workers about the ID cards, they did not know anything about them. The Acting Assistant Director for Care and Protection mentioned everything had been agreed and all that was required was the contact details for the social worker and duty team and then teams changed and moved around. The Interim Executive Director of Children – People thought they could get some printed up with contact numbers to be

completed by February 2020. The Interim Executive Director of People - Children would report back on this challenge to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on 11 February 2020.

Resolved

That the Interim Executive Director of People – Children report back to the formal meeting of the Board on 11 February 2020 regarding this challenge

The Chairman mentioned as the Challenge Cards were mainly aimed at officers and were submitted in advance of the meeting would officers come prepared with an answer in future.

Duration of meeting: 3.00 - 5.36 pm

Chairman

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