

DORSET COUNCIL - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2019

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

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

Also present: Cllr Pauline Batstone, Chairman of the Council and Theresa Leavy (External Consultant)

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

Maggie Aldwell (Service Manager, Care and Protection), David Alderson (Senior Advisor, Schools and Learning Service), Mark Blackman (Assistant Director - Schools and Learning), Stuart Dawson (Head of Revenues and Benefit), Karen Elliott (Designated Safeguarding Manager), Madeleine Hall (Corporate Parenting Officer), Ann Haigh (Participation Worker, Participation People), Tanya Hamilton-Fletcher (Service Manager Care & Support), Martin Hill (Foster Carer), Gerri Kemp (Senior Manager, Schools and Learning Service), Elaine Okopski (Dorset Parent Carer Council), Sarah Parker (Executive Director of People - Children), Stuart Riddle (Senior Manager), Mary Taylor (Acting Assistant Director for Care and Protection) and Liz Eaton (Democratic Services Officer)

22. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2019 were confirmed and signed.

23. Matters Arising

Minute 16 – Children’s Placements – Use of Unregulated Placements – Progress Report on Action Taken

One member referred to the visit to the caretaker’s bungalow in Wimborne and confirmed the facility was in a good area, comfortable and hoped it would become a regulated placement.

Minute 17 – Looked After Health Briefing Update – Escalation of Performance of initial Health Assessments – Quarter 4 and Initial Health Assessments

The Chairman read out an email correspondence from Penny Earney the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children explaining the scoping exercise for a new IHA Paediatric model to provide a service outside school would take considerable time. This would commence in September and take approximately four months to complete. For this reason she requested the time frame be rescheduled.

It was noted the time frame had been rescheduled as minuted.

24. Declarations of Interest

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

25. Public Participation

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

26. Audit Report

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Executive Director of People – Children on Audit of Looked After Children and Children who are Disabled Case Files.

The Chairman confirmed it was good to see that things were improving and that officers were understanding things more but commented that there did not seem to be information about what action was being taken. The Executive Director of People – Children confirmed there had been a significant improvement in the audit process and a new process for audits going forward had been scoped which would, in the future, include members of Corporate Parenting Board enabling Corporate Parents to have a thorough understanding of the work carried out with young people and can discuss the challenges they have. Audit reports would be brought to future meetings of the Board and there would be an audit week where auditors could meet officers and speak with young people and foster carers in a proactive way.

One member asked whether the figures in table 3 were national figures. The Designated Safeguarding Manager confirmed the audits were carried out by managers who looked at Ofsted definitions to decide where they thought the judgements should be. Reference was made to the inadequate ratings and whether they were sporadic or in specific teams. The Designated Safeguarding Manager confirmed they were fairly sporadic and explained the procedure for reporting those judgements to ensure improvements could be made.

The Chairman asked if there were any trends showing in the type of inadequate judgements. No trends were being found but the quality of supervision was important.

Resolved

That the Designated Safeguarding Manager produce a detailed report for consideration at the Board meeting on 9 October 2019.

27. Performance Progress - Service Development

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Executive Director of People – Children on Performance Progress – Service Improvement.

A brief update was given on the Blueprint for change which was well on the way to completion. It was hoped the new structure would be shared with staff

week beginning 9 September 2019 to be followed by formal consultation with a view to the new service across the whole of the Directorate being implemented next year. The Executive Director of People – Children explained she would be visiting the Children in Care Council on 5 September 2019 to discuss with them to ensure they would be happy with the changes that were going to be implemented.

Members enquired if there was still a shortage of Social Workers in the Dorchester area and queried that the Blueprint for Change was another restructure on top of recent restructures. Officers explained there were still some agency staff working in the west area but it was hoped permanent staff would be recruited and that the restructure would entice people to apply for social work positions. The restructure was taking longer than LGR but one positive was that staff were involved in the restructure and Youth Workers were back in the structure.

One member thought New Belongings sounded a little like a good news story. Officers explained new belongings was developed by Coram Voice who would develop a model for care leavers and an action plan for young people.

The Chairman felt this would feed into a future report on how well the Corporate Parenting Board were doing. She asked what the timescale was for New Belongings. Officers confirmed they had just started having discussions with Coram Voice regarding how this would work in Dorset.

Noted

28. Children in Care and Care Leavers Performance Overview - Quarterly report

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 they had recently had a meeting with a representative from Housing, Communities and Local Government. With regard to rough sleeping, interviews had been held for a post that would ensure care leavers were living in suitable accommodation. At present there were 26 care leavers attending university with a PA supporting those young people. Not all young people went to university at 18 some were aged 20 and 21 with support being provided to them all.

Officers were working with care leavers and piloting a new SMS Text which would be rolled out soon. Officers were hoping to promote this service by working with Friends of Care Leavers, a separate charitable group, as there was a requirement to keep in touch with care leavers at least 6 times a year. Officers confirmed the Council had a statutory requirement to keep in touch up to the age of 21 but did offer support for 21 to 25 year olds.

Members questioned the threshold for suitable accommodation and asked what the category “Any Other Reason” meant. Officers explained that “Any Other Reason” would have to be looked at again to find out what they were as 33 had transferred to BCP. They would come back to the Board with that information.

The Chairman referred to the number of young people who were NEET and the figure was almost double from last year which was worrying. Officers confirmed this area required improvement and were hoping young people would be encouraged into employment or training. The Council needed to improve on the roles and apprenticeships for young people, they should be actively encouraged to take up employment with the Council.

The Virtual School Head mentioned that in relation to work the Virtual School was supporting and funding a sixth form co-ordinator and programme called “Whatever’s Next”, where young people can be guided in specific departments, for example park rangers etc they were also linking with other providers of apprenticeships and work experience to ensure appropriate matches were made.

Resolved

That officers provide the Board with information on “Any Other Reason” 21, page 34 of the report and whether the figure referred to the number of young people that had left. The information to be provided at the next meeting of the Board on 9 October 2019.

29. SEND Service Annual Report

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Corporate Director for Schools and Learning on SEND Annual Report.

Officers informed the Board the number of SEND Looked After Children was around the national average although the service was seeing a demand in EHCP’s and delivering joint planning and training was an area of focus. The report gave an overview of wider developments and referenced the joint SEND strategy which showed the number of Dorset EHCP’s and that 93% had been completed within the statutory 20 weeks.

The Chairman mentioned receiving the report was timely as the report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman’s investigation into a complaint had just been published. She referred to paragraph 82 where the Ombudsman concluded the Council had failed repeatedly to issue EHCP’s and asked how things would progress going forward.

Officers confirmed they would be looking very carefully at the Ombudsman’s report and ensure the practice and procedures fit in really well in terms of outcomes for children and Looked After Children. The report related to recurring problems and related to young people out of mainstream education. The challenge the Directorate had in terms of restructure was that there was an increasing number of complex children that should be in a place where they might learn and the Council did not have that type of placement.

One member referred to Appendix A the distribution of EHCPs for Looked After Children across the Key Stages – July 2019 and mentioned that for Foundation, KS1 the numbers were fairly low compared with post 16 and suggested that the council must know who the young children were likely to be before they reached education age. He also asked whether the relationship with Public Health was better. The Virtual School Head responded that early screening of young people coming into school in reception and year one was happening in conjunction with the SEN team Education Psychologists to see what their needs were to ensure there was early intervention, screening then took place on a yearly basis. Officers were working with pre-school providers to ensure screening took place as early as possible. The working relationship with Public Health was very efficient.

One member mentioned one of the best ways to achieve a good education was to ensure the children stayed in the same school rather than changing schools and asked if that happened. The Executive Director of People – Children confirmed that officers spent a lot of time ensuring the children stayed in schools.

In answer to a question relating to SEND children outside of the Dorset area being further disadvantaged. The Virtual School Head mentioned a From a Distance Ofsted report published in 2012/13 gave priority to children living out of county to ensure they remained in constant education. The SENCO made sure there was liaison with out of county professionals and ensured any screening took place as quickly as possible.

The Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Help asked for a separate briefing meeting to be arranged to include the Chairman, to understand where there was a policy issue. The Virtual School Head undertook to arrange the meeting to be held during the middle of October 2019.

The Chairman mentioned the report referred to what was needed to be done and enquired about the budgetary impact. The Corporate Director for Schools and Learning referred to the chart on page 52 of the report and confirmed the service was demand led and there were no additional funds. The number of children requiring an EHCP was going to increase and the service would need more resource but in reality the service required another £10m per year to start to address historic deficits that had grown. The recent 7% increase in funding helped.

The Chairman asked what was the effect of the high needs block. The Corporate Director for Schools confirmed that this block of money was being stretched in excess of £5m yearly. The pressure comes partly from high numbers of looked after children in specialist placements where they have an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP). This pressure is being seen by other counties nationally. The number of EHCPs is increasing and further national government resource is needed to fill the deficit.

One member asked what the NHS were doing to support Looked After Children. The Executive Director of People – Children mentioned there was a significant onus on local government, it was a challenge for local authorities and the Council was in negotiations with the CCG regarding some local plans. The Corporate Parenting Officer stated there was a corporate parenting duty for the Council's health partners to work with the Council and members could assist in reminding them of their duty when they were in contact with them.

Members wanted to ensure there was a focus within each year group on youngsters with an EHCP and whether going forward social workers should be alerted and considered the Virtual School Head carry out an urgent review to ensure EHCP's were being delivered.

Resolved

1. That the Virtual School Head arrange a meeting with the Chairman, Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Early Help and relevant officers to discuss where there was a policy issue during the middle of October 2019.
2. That the Virtual School Head undertake an urgent review to ensure EHCP's were being delivered and report back to the Board at its meeting on the 14 November 2019.

30. MASH Update

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

Officers informed the Board that they had been working with Professor David Thorpe from Lancaster University and his team to develop and implement his 'front door' model which did away with written referrals that did not provide all the information or provided information that was very sterile and officers had to make decisions on that written information. The model was based on a much more questioning style of referral looking at what children required and what service should be best to meet that requirement, and creating a much more consultative and advice style of service. There would be no change in families wishing to contact the Council. The information was looked at by numerous people at the 'front door' and when a professional telephoned they would be put through to a social worker. It was hoped re-referral rates would be reduced and ensure the family were supported by people who knew best. The other benefit would be to free-up social workers' time and reduce their case loads. This would reduce children coming into care and those requiring child protection plans and was a positive change on how officers received and made decisions.

The Chairman asked how long it would take. Officers confirmed there were two distinct benefits to the system the first was support and help and advice to partner agencies, the other was to free up social work staff so that they could work effectively with families and commit to working with the families and working with children to effect changes.

One member asked if they would still keep notes on conversations. Officers confirmed that when receiving phone calls they would still be recorded on the

system but as professionals they would write to whoever had called on what they thought had been discussed.

The Chairman asked that the Board receive an update on the model and suggested an update in 6 months' time from October 2019 and she confirmed she would like to arrange a visit to see how this worked. Officers confirmed they would invite CPB members to visit the model at the beginning of November 2019.

Resolved

1. That officers provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an update report at their meeting in 6 months' time on the 23 April 2020.
2. That officers arrange for members of the Corporate Parenting Board to visit the MASH at the beginning of November 2019.

31. 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 informed the Board that significant progress had been made since the last report presented to the Board, an exploitation toolkit had been implemented which was multi-agency and all practitioners could use. There had been a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) risk assessment in Dorset for a long time which worked very well but did not include county lines. This newer toolkit was an adaptation of CSE assessment and looked at CSE, radicalisation, trafficking, slavery, sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation. A multi-agency audit had been carried out which showed that risks missed previously were now being picked up and where progress had not been made this could now be seen in a way that could not before. Where problems were in schools, measures could now be put in place in those particular schools. Officers were also educating families to ensure they stayed safe.

One member asked what could be done to ensure children, especially out of area children, received return to home interviews. Officers mentioned these were the most vulnerable children and it was a difficult task to be able to work with them. Young people needed to be spoken to quickly by someone independent of the care system and officers were looking to see if they could commission someone to conduct the interview and ensure there was nothing wrong in the placement that made a young person run.

Martin Hill, Foster Carer gave an example of a young girl they looked after for a week on respite who had run away a couple of times so that she could contact her boyfriend. The social worker was very good at putting her at ease and any information gathered and collected was shared with the foster carers. Officers mentioned there were 2 dedicated workers carrying out these interviews and feeding information back to carers and social workers so that the risk of running away was reduced. An RHI report was completed every time a young person went missing and a CSE screening tool was carried out to ensure no risk of exploitation had taken place. There was still concern at

the high rate of declines for an RHI and officers would need to be more robust in engaging people at the right time.

The Chairman requested that this be monitored and a further update report on progress be presented to the Board in a few months' time.

Resolved

That officers provide the Board with an update report on progress in a few months' time at the meeting being held on 9 December 2019.

32. Council Tax - Support for Care Leavers

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Executive Director of People – Children on Council Tax – Support for Care Leavers.

Officers informed the Board there had been a longstanding campaign from the Children's Society to urge local authorities to exempt young people from Council Tax as generally they were more likely to get into financial problems than the rest of the population. In terms of what had happened since the campaign started, Council Tax was exempt for young people living in Scotland and Wales, 102 local authorities, both unitary and two tier authorities, in England had adopted the approach. Officers recommended that the Council should apply the discount to care leavers as set out in the report.

Members were hugely supportive of the report and felt that educating young people around financial matters should start very early.

A general discussion on the process of implementing the proposal took place.

One member was concerned that the financial calculations had been based on a Band D property as he did not think that care leavers would be living in a Band D property.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits commented that was the worse case scenario and would be part of further work to be undertaken so that the Council could make the final decision before March 2020.

The Chairman thought the report ought to go to Cabinet in January 2020 and commented on the recommendations in the report as follows:

Recommendation (a) those under our Corporate Parenting responsibility. Did the Board feel this should be Dorset Care Leavers or did the Board recommend it would be for everyone who was a Care Leaver in Dorset regardless of what their authority provided for them. They may have come from another authority living as a Care Leaver in Dorset, whose responsibility would they be in terms of this discount. The Head of Revenues and Benefits considered if the Council opened the discount to all Care Leavers living in Dorset, the Council would not necessarily know that a Care Leaver had moved from another authority. The Corporate Parenting Officer confirmed that all local authorities had the opportunity to introduce the scheme and the

proposal should be for Dorset Care Leavers only. The Corporate Parenting Board agreed with this suggestion.

Recommendation (b) and (c) the Board agreed as set out in the report, although one member asked what happened if there was a dispute over a Care Leaver's age. It was explained that age assessments were completed if there was ambiguity.

Recommendation (d) one member thought this might encourage Care Leavers to get in touch.

Recommendation (e) the Board agreed, although the Chairman considered that where the Care Leaver lived in shared accommodation, they must pay their individual Council Tax.

The Chairman asked officers to amend the recommendations appropriately and to provide a more realistic estimate of the cost. She asked for a report to go to Cabinet as soon as possible with clearance from the Executive Director of People – Children and the Lead Member.

Resolved

1. That Recommendation (a) should apply to all Dorset Care Leavers.
2. That Recommendations (b), (c) and (d) as set out in the report were agreed.
3. That Recommendation (e) as set out in the report was agreed but ensure where the care leaver lived in shared accommodation they paid their individual Council Tax.
4. That officers amend the recommendations in the report appropriately and provide a more accurate estimate of the cost so that Cabinet would approve the agreement. The report to be presented to Cabinet as soon as possible with clearance from the Executive Director of People – Children and the Lead Member.

33. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items for consideration.

34. Unregistered Placements Update

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

Officers had an update to the report - there were now 3 children in unregistered placements. Two of the children are in Dorset Council property and one was in a long standing placement. The Council were in discussions to see if they could take over the property and register it, the agency were happy to enter into discussions to enable the young person to stay in that property. The Executive Director of People – Children confirmed the courts were supporting the young person to stay in the property which was where they wanted to stay. The Council needed to get the other 2 properties registered.

One member mentioned he had visited the young person where great progress had been made, the property and neighbourhood were fine.

Officers confirmed they were working with Ofsted to inform them of unregulated placements and letting them have information about the providers of unregistered provision. Members of staff were now completing independent visits similar to the regulation 44 visits on the quality of the placement, staff and how the young people were settling in – these were unannounced checks.

One member was concerned about placing young people in unregistered accommodation and asked that it should be as suitable as possible for the young person. Officers confirmed the accommodation was suitable.

One member mentioned that the Fostering Panel had cases of young people going into unregistered placements and concern was raised but no one had reported back on the placements. The Acting Assistant Director for Care and Protection was happy to have the information and look into the placements.

The Corporate Parenting Officer informed the Board the Chair of the Fostering Panel would submit their annual report to the next meeting of the Board in October and also be in attendance at that meeting.

Noted

35. CLiCC - Responses to challenges considered at the last meeting of the Board and the Children in Care and Care Leavers Satisfaction Survey 2019

The Corporate Parenting Board received the Responses to Challenges considered at the last meeting of the Board and the Children in Care and Care Leavers Satisfaction Survey from the Participation Worker of Participation People.

The Participation Worker thanked councillors for returning their homework and confirmed there was still time for those who had not completed the homework to do so as none was being set at this meeting.

The Chairman mentioned that some of the questions were proving very difficult to find the answers to and meant they had to ask officers to provide the information.

The Participation Worker referred to the Challenge Cards and one of the questions relating to ideas about how to recruit to CLiCC, although 4 new enquiries had been received since the last meeting. Question 5 related to the manifesto and CLiCC were happy to email the link to members of the Board. Question 6 related to the emotions a young person felt when coming into care, there were still places on the course "What does it mean to be a child in care?" which members could book through NEXUS.

The Satisfaction Survey would be launched in the second week of October and would be tested at the Care Leavers Forum but CLiCC wanted to know:

- Will the data collected help you improve your services?
- Is there anything we haven't asked that we should ask?
- Are there any questions that you feel strongly about that need changing?

The Acting Assistant Director for Care and Protection mentioned the New Belongings survey would be launched in September and would welcome a discussion with the Participation Worker to ensure launch dates did not clash and they were not both asking the same questions.

The Participation Worker mentioned the young people were really happy that they received good responses to the Challenge Cards. She had sent the Challenge Cards out to those who had not attended the forum but had not got a response. With regard to the business cards Version 2 was the one young people liked but felt there had been some resistance to a photo being on the business card.

The Chairman referred to one Challenge Card which asked how would Corporate Parenting Board make foster carers more aware of their ability to make decisions and referred to their 'Delegated responsibility'.

One officer confirmed some work was required with the fostering team and the Acting Assistant Director for Care and Protection considered that foster carers should be able to make those decisions.

Resolved

That the Acting Assistant Director for Care and Protection meet with the Participation Worker to ensure launch dates for the New Belongings and Satisfaction Survey did not clash and they were not both asking the same questions.

Duration of meeting: 2.30 - 5.00 pm

Chairman

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