

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11 JUNE 2019

Present: Cllrs Toni Coombs (Chairman), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chairman), Ryan Holloway, Andrew Kerby, Andrew Parry and Elaine Okopski

Apologies: Cllrs Stella Jones and Cathy Lugg

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

Antonia Dixey (CEO Participation People), Lynn Giles (Children's Services Manager, Dorset Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service), Ann Haigh (Participation Worker, Participation People), Madeleine Hall (Corporate Parenting Officer), Tanya Hamilton-Fletcher (Service Manager Care & Support), Sarah Parker (Executive Director of People - Children), Claire Shiels (Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships), Mary Taylor (Acting Assistant Director for Care and Protection), Tim Wells (Senior Manager Placements & Resources) and Liz Eaton (Democratic Services Officer)

1. Election of Chairman

That Toni Coombs be elected Chairman for the year 2019/20.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

That Richard Biggs be appointed Vice-Chairman for the year 2019/2020.

3. Declaration of Interest

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

4. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference were noted.

The Chairman understood that new Terms of Reference were being drafted and would be considered at the next meeting of the Board.

One member asked for the draft Terms of Reference to be circulated so that members of the Board could make comment.

Resolved

1. That Officers circulate the draft Terms of Reference to members of the Board for their comment.
2. That the new Terms of Reference be considered at the next meeting of the Board on the 15 July 2019.

5. **Children's Placements - Use of Unregulated Placements**

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a report by the Executive Director People – Children on Children's Placements – Use of Unregulated Placements.

The Senior Manager Placements and Resources explained that unregulated placements were temporary in nature. The challenge had been ending the placements and moving young people to regulated settings. Dorset was not unique and the picture was improving, it was hoped that in about a week's time the authority would only have 3 young people in unregulated placements, previously there had been 9. There were, however, 2 young people for whom it was extremely difficult to find a suitable placement.

An unregulated placement was defined by government as caravan type accommodation or bed and breakfast accommodation, Dorset avoided using bed and breakfast, or holiday rental cottage accommodation. On occasion an agency may be contacted to provide a placement and staff.

The Executive Director for People – Children explained that on occasion there would be a placement break down and a child had to be placed somewhere very quickly the best option would be to place them in a placement with Dorset staff.

The Senior Manager Placements and Resources confirmed the Council had acquired the Caretakers Bungalow at Colehill First School which had been refurbished and redecorated and would soon be ready for use as emergency accommodation within Dorset. The Council was also inviting foster carers to become retained foster carers to provide short term accommodation. The Executive Director for People – Children mentioned not all unregulated placements were in county. Two placements were, at present, in Somerset. Officers were working closely with Somerset County Council to look at what could be achieved around placement providers and sharing.

The Executive Director for People – Children confirmed they were currently developing re-establishing a children's home within the county to hopefully reduce the need to use unregulated placements.

The Senior Manager Placements and Resources explained one young person had a number of placements which had broken down and they had been placed in an unregulated placement and had been there for 8 months now and want to stay where they were. They had a good relationship with the staff and they wanted to stay where they were, any change would be extremely disruptive and harmful to them at present. A review plan of unregulated placements was regularly undertaken and officers visited weekly. They were constantly reviewing the search to ensure the best welfare of the child.

One member referred to one of the case studies in the report where the young person had 22 placements to date and asked over what period of time were the placements.

Officers explained in that particular case several arrangements had broken down over a period of time.

The Chairman asked how long the young person had been in the care system and how many moves had taken place. Officers mentioned the Psychologists had advised the young person should not be moved and that reviews were undertaken every 4 weeks. The young person had provided a pen picture of what he would like.

One member, although very pleased to hear the bungalow would be used for emergency placements was concerned about the quality of the accommodation inside the bungalow and whether it was safe.

The Chairman mentioned that whatever the authority did had to be right for that young person and Corporate Parenting Board had another remit, not only the young person's safety, but also the reputation and safety of the Council. The Executive Director for People – Children commented that Ofsted at the annual conversation held during March 2019 reported they were pleased with Dorset's transparency regarding placements.

The Corporate Parenting Officer suggested she and one of the members of the Board visit the caretaker's bungalow to ensure the accommodation was in a good condition.

Councillors Andrew Parry, Toni Coombs and Richard Biggs all agreed they would like to visit the bungalow.

The Executive Director for People – Children explained the authority were looking into establishing 3 residential homes located in close geographical area to one another as it would be more sustainable, and also looking at one of the authority's farms where therapeutic treatment could be provided.

One member commented that he had visited Shropshire County Council's farmhouse, the location was quite isolated and resulted in low level absconding. He commented that the authority needed to have a much more open conversation with Ofsted regarding unregulated placements.

Officers confirmed they would ensure that Ofsted were regularly updated regarding the authority's use of unregulated placements. This would include the numbers, the duration, those ended and those commenced.

The Chairman commented that if a young person was in an unregulated placement for 300 days, and if that placement was deemed to be suitable and it was working, what could be done to make it a regulated placement.

Officers explained the challenge was that there were some young people who were placed in unregulated placements because they abscond and take very risky actions. The current providers of regulated placements were not prepared to offer accommodation to these young people, which left no alternative other than to place them in unregulated placements. Ultimately the authority required more foster carers and its own residential placement.

The Children's Services Manager, Dorset Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service asked if it would be possible to have the names of the young people to ensure they were being provided with Advocacy. Officers agreed to let her have the names.

The Chairman referred to page 46 of the report and asked why the EHCP had been declined and what could be done to ensure this was not repeated. Officers informed the Board there had been a request for an EHCP unfortunately the request from school was not supportive and school felt they could manage the young person in school. Mum appealed and officers were in dialogue with SEN as they felt the young person should have an EHCP assessment.

The Executive Director for People – Children thought the majority of Dorset schools were quite liberal with the requests for EHCP's.

One member referred to the Care Plan and asked whether that was on course to happen in July 2019. Officers commented that unfortunately it was not as the builder had let them down. One officer confirmed he would look into the builders the Council used to see if they could assist with the work.

The Chief Executive of Participation People thought it might be a good idea for Care Leavers (and Children) in Care Council (CLICC) to start a campaign regarding placing young people in unregulated settings and felt the young person attending the Board meeting might like to start the campaign. The Board thought that would be a good idea if she was happy to do so.

The Chairman asked for a progress report on action taken at the next meeting of the Board.

Resolved

1. That the Corporate Parenting Officer arrange a visit to the caretaker's bungalow at Colehill School with Councillors Richard Biggs, Toni Coombs and Andrew Parry.
2. That officers regularly update Ofsted regarding the authority's use of unregulated placements. This would include the numbers, the duration, those ended and those commenced.
3. That officers provide the Children's Services Manager, Dorset Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service with the names of the young people in unregulated placements to ensure they were being provided with Advocacy.
4. That the Senior Manager Placements and Resources contact the builders used by Dorset Council to see if they could assist with building work.
5. That the CLICC start a campaign about placing young people in unregulated settings.
6. That officers provide a progress report on action taken at the next meeting of the Board on 15 July 2019.

6. Children in Care Council Update

The Chief Executive of Participation People introduced a member of the Care Leavers (and Children) in Care Council (CLICC) who introduced herself and mentioned she would circulate dates for the diary of activities for 2019 which she hoped members of the Board would be able to attend.

She informed the Board of the activities CLICC had been involved in; one of which was face mask painting and African drumming. The awards ceremony was held in October. In May they had visited London and attended Children's Rights and talked to a poet who had been in care and discussed his experiences.

The Chairman mentioned she thought that everyone coming into Dorset was told about their rights. CLICC thought it might be easier if they received a sheet with their rights written on.

The Chief Executive Participation People confirmed during the past year they had produced a Looked After Children (LAC) Pack which was given to all young people coming into care. She referred to the annual satisfaction survey, and how they had spoken with young people about advocacy and how to complain and to the Board meeting held in February 2019 where CLICC had discussed being called LAC. The problems they had with travel arrangements and, as a result, she had been working with officers to resolve some of the issues. CLICC had produced a magazine and moving forward they would produce homework for CPB members to be given at every meeting of the Board. Training sessions on "What does it mean to be a child in care?" were being held during July, August and October which CLICC would like Board members to sign up to. An email would be circulated to members for them to respond.

The Corporate Parenting Officer discussed how to engage members who were not on CPB and suggested that CLICC offer some training days and asked CPB members to encourage other members to attend.

The CLICC member mentioned the Happy Dorset video and what would make Dorset a better place to live. The Chief Executive Participation People confirmed the aim was to inspire Corporate Parents to remind them of what it was like to be a young person, she would email Board members a link to the video.

Looking to the future CLICC informed the Board they would be performing Shrek the musical to be held at Stratton Village Hall on 31 July 2019, they were having a day of exercise and a CLICC logistic operation and problem solving afternoon. How to contact a social worker when they were on holiday and could not speak with anyone was proving a real problem as was broken promises. A day out for CLICC was to be arranged, probably to a theme park.

The Chairman referred to broken promises and changes of staff, it was not the first time she had heard this.

The Executive Director for People – Children mentioned the challenge was that social workers wanted to do their best but things were not easily followed through.

One member asked if the Board could receive a list of the broken promises, for example “We did promise an advocate and that was not forthcoming.”

The CLICC representative gave an example regarding her social worker and that it took her about 2 weeks to get back to her when she requests to see her family. She had mentioned her birthday but hadn’t heard back from her social worker. Officers confirmed that someone would get back to her regarding visiting her family and that the social worker would be able to make those decisions, there were other requests that would need to go to the team manager for consideration.

One member asked the young person what happened if she could not get hold of her social worker to make a complaint and who was it easier to get hold of her advocate or her social worker and how did she communicate with her social worker. The young person confirmed her advocate helped her a great deal and it was easier for her to get hold of her advocate. She did not have a direct way of communicating with her social worker.

Officers confirmed young people should have an email address to contact their social worker.

One member thought there must be better ways of communicating with the social worker even out of the office. He mentioned the timescale of 2 weeks for a social worker to get back to the young people was unacceptable and that 3 days turnaround seemed more reasonable.

The Executive Director for People – Children thought it would be interesting to hear what service standards young people would like.

The Chief Executive of Participation People confirmed that 3 days was what they were asking for.

Resolved

1. That CLICC provide training days for members of the Board and they encourage members not on CPB to attend.
2. That the Chief Executive Participation People email a link to the video Happy Dorset.
3. That CLICC provide Board members with a list of broken promises.
4. That officers provide young people with an email address to contact their social worker and ensure communication between the Social Worker and young people improves.

7. Children in Care and Care Leavers Performance Overview

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

The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships informed the Board the report provided an overview of children in care and care leavers that looked back over the last 6 months and compared Dorset's performance against other councils nationally as well as with its statistical neighbours, which were councils that had similar characteristics to Dorset. As well as providing an overview of the numbers of children in care, new entries to care and children who had left care, the report showed different legal status of young people with a high proportion accommodated under Section 20. 10% of children in care had a disability and 86% of children had their review completed on time.

On page 30 the graphs showed the movement within the children in care cohort and looked at new children in care. 80 new children had come into care in the last 6 months and 93 had left care which included those children living in Christchurch. 16% of children left care due to adoption. Special Guardianship was low.

One member asked what Special Guardianship was and officers explained the Special Guardianship Court make an order when a child cannot live with their parents but can live with a member of the family or a friend. It was a legal order and people were assessed to ensure they were suitable to look after the child.

Page 31 showed that 70% of children were living in foster care, a reduction from 76%. Almost half of Dorset's children in care were living in the Council's own provision. It was explained that some Children Looked After (CLA) were placed out of county and in some cases that would be Bournemouth or Poole and others would be further away. Officers wanted to avoid too many placement moves and work was being undertaken on placement stability.

The Chairman thought it would be useful to have unregulated placements shown in the table.

One member asked why the information showed very low numbers of children being placed for adoption. The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships agreed to investigate the accuracy of the data.

The CLICC representative asked why so many children were placed in Dorset for 2 or more years. Officers informed her that was because for some children staying in care it was the right thing to do and for various reasons being in a long-term foster placement was also the right thing, some young people would stay in care until they could live independently.

The Chairman asked if officers were receiving reports of those children not being seen why were there reports for 12-18 weeks. Officers informed the Board sometimes there was a time lag between someone inputting the system and the visit. This was being addressed. The Chairman commented that if there were outcomes of the visit to be written up and they were not being written up we were failing the young person.

It was noted that the number of missing placements episodes had increased and the Board discussed performance relating to Return to Home interviews. These needed to be completed within 72 hours. Performance needed to be improved both in terms of recording practice and timeliness. Officers explained that multiple teams were undertaking these and that the process required improvement and best practice was that these interviews should be carried out by someone independent to the child's care plan. Officers would consider a range of options to make the improvements.

There were 221 young people leaving care. The Chairman raised concern at the number of young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET) and mentioned the possibility of apprenticeships for young people.

Officers confirmed that they were looking at apprenticeship schemes for LAC young carers and there had been a commitment this would be going forward for Dorset young people from the Chief Executive. Local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce would need to be involved.

The Dorset Parent Carer Council member mentioned she could not see any data on those children with EHCP and asked for that to be provided in future reports.

The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships asked the Board when they would like to see further reports. The Board and Chairman agreed the report should be submitted every quarter.

The Children's Services Manager, Dorset Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service referred to page 34 and asked what constituted homeless, was it a period of days. The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships thought it would be useful to know if the authority was in touch with the young person concerned.

One member asked what was meant by other accommodation. The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships confirmed that in some cases this was a recording issue, with social workers not clear about how to categorise some forms of accommodation. For example, Dorset no longer had Foyer accommodation, but it was common for social workers to use that category to describe supported accommodation.

One member mentioned that the previous authority had looked into obtaining Council Tax exemption for Care Leavers but unfortunately that could not be agreed with the District Councils. He asked that officers look into the feasibility of obtaining Council Tax exemption for Care Leavers. The Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships confirmed she would look into how this was undertaken in other areas and work with others to develop a proposal for Care Leavers in Dorset.

The Chief Executive of Participation People asked if they could work with officers on the language used in reports to make them youth proof.

The Executive Director People – Children asked when producing performance reports for the next quarter comparisons with the previous quarter's performance be included.

The Corporate Parenting Officer enquired of the Chairman whether the Board meeting should be a public meeting. The Chairman felt the intention was to be as open and transparent as possible although there would be some areas of the Board meeting which would go into closed session for the protection of young people.

The Chief Executive of Participation People considered that from their perspective it would be a barrier as young people would be nervous if members of the public were present. The Chairman explained that if young people were attending the meeting that would be in closed session and not open to the general public.

Resolved

1. That unregulated placements be shown in the table in future.
2. That data relating to the number of children with an EHCP be provided in future reports.
3. That future reports be considered by the Board every quarter.
4. That the Assistant Director for Commissioning and Partnerships develop a proposal for Council Tax exemption for Dorset Care Leavers.
5. That future performance reports include comparison with previous quarters.
6. That all meetings of the Board be open to the public although some areas of the Board meeting would go into closed session for the protection of young people.

8. Initial Health Assessments

Resolved

That this item be deferred until the next meeting of the Board on the 15 July 2019.

9. Update Report IRO Service - Annual Work Programme for April 2018 - March 2019

Resolved

That this item be deferred until the next meeting of the Board on 15 July 2019.

10. Pathway Plans

Resolved

That this item be deferred until the next meeting of the Board on 15 July 2019.

11. Children Who are Disabled

Resolved

That this item be deferred until the next meeting of the Board on 15 July 2019.

Duration of meeting: 3.00 - 5.35 pm

Chairman

.....