

DORSET COUNCIL - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2020

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

Apologies: Penny Earney (Designated Nurse for looked After Children), Jan Hill (Foster Carer), Elaine Okopski (Dorset Parent Carer Council)

Also present: Cllr Pauline Batstone, Chairman of the Council

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

Paula Bates (Residential Services Manager), Paul Beecroft (Communications Team), Antonia Dixey (CEO Participation People), Jane Edwards (Operational Manager (C&S 13-25)), Lynn Giles (Children's Services Manager, Dorset Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service), Ann Haigh (Participation Worker, Participation People), Mark Blackman (Corporate Director - Education and Learning), Madeleine Hall (Corporate Parenting Officer), Tanya Hamilton-Fletcher (Service Manager Care & Support), Theresa Leavy (Interim Executive Director of People - Children), Stuart Riddle (Senior Manager), Ian Smith (Head of LAC), Kevin Stenlake (IRO Manager for Looked After Children), Liz Plastow (Head of Safeguarding), Kaye Wright (Personal Advisor (C&S 13-25)) and Liz Eaton (Democratic Services Officer)

68. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2012 were confirmed and signed.

69. Declaration of Interest

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

70. Public Participation

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

71. Urgent Items

The Chairman referred to an email from Penny Earney, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children which the Clerk had emailed to all members of the Board.

72. **Corporate Parenting Board Data Set - Verbal Update**

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children introduced the item and explained the blue lines, in the data set that had been circulated to the Board, showed the current rate for January 2020. The greyed area on the first page of graphs on the data set showed where Dorset's good and outstanding statistical neighbours who were Wiltshire, East Sussex and Suffolk were.

More children were becoming looked after than leaving with the largest cohort of children coming into care being aged 0-4 years. During the coming months the focus was to ensure the Authority was faster and better at rehabilitating young people into homes. Historically the age range was 12-15 years, this change had taken place over the last 4 or 5 months due to social workers being able to check on children earlier. During the coming months the focus was to ensure the Authority was faster and better at rehabilitating young people into homes.

Members asked if children were coming into care from birth and if the Board could be assured other age ranges were not being ignored. The Interim Executive Director of People – Children confirmed that officers were working with people in baby units although there was still a very active age range and officers would continue to make the right decision for young people.

Regarding where children were living it was noted that the Authority would want children to be living much nearer to home too many were placed 20 miles or more outside of the authority boundary. The Authority was still taking too long in achieving permanency for young people.

Attention was drawn to the number of children who had moved schools as a result of becoming a looked after child and that Fixed Term Exclusions were reducing in number. Dorset reported on missing and absent episodes whereas some authorities reported solely on missing and not absent episodes – further exploration was required on this.

The Chairman felt it was important that children were placed where they could maintain local connections, if those connections were broken and support was taken away from the child further risks and problems would occur, she asked what the strategy was to ensure children were brought closer to their families.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children confirmed this was one of the biggest concerns, children were having to move schools, get medical appointments and it took staff longer in travelling time to visit the children. We would like to get to the point where children were placed within the Dorset boundary. Unfortunately, there was not enough provision to have all children placed in Dorset.

One member commented that 20 miles from the Dorset boundary was a long way for a child to be placed, but presumably there were some children the Authority would like to get away from the border. The Interim Executive Director of People – Children felt the biggest solution was to support children to live at home with their family by supporting families to care for their children

and where a child became a looked after child to support them within a Dorset foster carer setting. Officers had been working on Life-long links, staff had been trained on mapping important links for children even if they were placed outside of Dorset.

One member wanted to know the reasons for children leaving home as it was understood return to home interviews were carried out. The Interim Executive Director of People – Children confirmed that a return to home interview was always offered although they were not always delivered. Quite often it would relate to a feeling of constraint regarding the arrangements around them. If the interviews were about the care they were receiving, officers would look into this.

One member commented that although we know the figures for children in care why are they concentrated in certain areas. The Interim Executive Director of People – Children confirmed they were looking at where the Authority's adopters were living, at present there were none from the Weymouth and Chesil area and officers proposed to activate those communities.

The Children's Services Manager for Dorset Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service (DAIVS) confirmed they were seeing several children who were placed 20 miles or more from the Dorset boundary, the majority were happy where they had been placed as they had been there for quite a long time. The Interim Executive Director of People – Children mentioned they would not be looking at returning those children to Dorset, the Police would look at where they were and if it was right for them to stay where they were then they would. Permanency Plans had been checked to ensure they were secure.

One member asked what the aspirational target would be between now and where it was hoped Dorset would be in about one to three years' time. The Interim Executive Director of People – Children referred to the Data Set and would take the grey banding as the target as officers could assess ('time' removed) when they thought they would be at that grey target. The grey banding denoting best practice nationally. Some of the Education and Health looked after children were not where the Authority would want them to be. The Virtual School were working to support looked after children in local schools. There had been robust conversations with health colleagues to ensure health checks were completed in a timely manner. This was all costly and significant amounts were being spent at the present time.

The Chairman mentioned that as we move forward with the data, the direction of travel would see a difference between the red and blue lines and the direction of travel in future reports would be useful. The Interim Executive Director of People – Children felt it would be useful to bring audit reports to future meetings of the Board.

Noted

73. **Placement Sufficiency**

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

Officers informed the Board that in 2019 a strategy for placement sufficiency was agreed which enabled a change to the Authority's commissioning approach by becoming more active and bringing more providers into Dorset to ensure that provision was closer to home.

Officers wanted to unlock the fostering provision in Dorset as there were a lot of children who were not in the care of Dorset Council. There was less appetite for block contract arrangements with fostering providers than with residential providers. Officers were exploring the options with these providers to look at first refusal on these places, and possibly the development of specialist schemes.

The Authority was involved in the Better Lives programme whereby it might be better to build a children's home, or housing for foster carers to enable them to have larger accommodation.

One member asked about the additional support for foster carers to enable them to be able to cope with difficult children. Officers confirmed that meetings had been held with foster carers who had come up with some sensible and practical suggestions relating to, for example, delegated authority which has not been in place routinely, short breaks, and the early sharing of information. Officers have been looking at how family support workers can work with foster carers and support them in real time. Martin Hill, Foster Carer thought respite within the foster carers' family was a good idea as his children were grown up and helped with foster children at no extra cost to the Authority. The Chairman thought that was very important because if they were living with their own family they would probably stay with a relative from time to time.

The Chief Executive of Participation People commented that young people have told them that when respite was talked about, they were really talking about troublesome children. Challenging placements can be even more challenging for children when they are shipped off to respite and the family goes on holiday this was something discussed at Children and Leavers in Care Council (CLiCC) regularly. CLiCC have offered training for anyone who would like it.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children mentioned that sometimes when a child was placed with a family, they may have predetermined arrangements. The Authority wanted foster families to become families, the Authority was the wealthiest parent in the county if children could not have a holiday with their foster parent, they could still have a holiday or break, she welcomed the Chief Executive of Participation People's offer of training.

One member thought there should be a policy on how Dorset children were treated to include a package of support they should be entitled to. If carers were having a holiday the children should have one too. He and officers would discuss this with the Children in Care Council to see if a paper could be drafted relating to holidays.

One member suggested free parking for foster carers during holiday periods to enable them to use Dorset Council facilities for example West Moors Country Park. The Corporate Parenting Officer would investigate the possibility of this suggestion. He also mentioned that a large number of Dorset Council employees were probably not aware that they were Corporate Parents which should be included as part of the interview process. The Chief Executive of Participation People mentioned when CLiCC were away on their residential they would be making a video to share with new employees on what it was like growing up in care in Dorset to include a call to action "Have you considered ...".

The Chairman felt if this was being taken to staff there would need to be an incentive in supporting staff in the package of benefits.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children asked for a report to be brought back to a future meeting about the fostering service. Some local authorities gave staff additional leave to acknowledge the extra meetings they would have to attend. Staff should be encouraged to become foster carers.

One member suggested looking at providing bigger housing for foster parents. The Chairman thought that had been taken on board.

Resolved

1. That the Lead Member for Children, Education and Early Help and the Head of LAC discuss with CLiCC how foster children were treated to include a package of support they should be entitled to as well as holiday arrangements and report back to the Corporate Parenting Board on their discussions with CLiCC.
2. That the Corporate Parenting Officer investigate whether free car parking at Dorset Council facilities could be provided to foster carers during the holiday periods.

74. Ofsted Annual Report - Briefing Report for Information Only

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

Officers informed the Board the general theme was that Ofsted were seeing improvements up and down the country and were hopeful for the future with more partnerships working and increased input nationally and financially.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children mentioned this was reflective of Dorset's experience there was still a significant challenge for all local authorities. There was concern relating to unregulated provision, an area Dorset was experiencing difficulties with.

One member asked how Dorset would ensure they worked with partners and who were the partners. Officers confirmed they would ensure they engaged with partners much harder and work harder across the board. It was also for members to work together and understand what the partnership could offer by working together. The partners were Health, Police, Safeguarding Board, Care Leavers etc. Health colleagues attended Board meetings, but Police did not at present and it might be a good idea to invite a wider group of people to attend.

It was asked what vehicle would be used to ensure the Police, Youth Offending, Health etc attended. Officers confirmed a key document would be the Corporate Parenting Board Strategy Document which would give direction to engage with our partners.

Resolved

That the Corporate Parenting Board Strategy Document should include engagement and attendance by partner organisations.

75. Exempt Item

Decision

That the press and the public be excluded for the following item(s) in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

76. Placements Provision

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

Officers informed the Board they were having difficulties in finding placements for a small cohort of children who it was difficult to find placements and residential accommodation for. The agencies were controlling, and financial costs had doubled. Officers met every day to ensure placements were available for these children, there were a few children for whom officers could not find secure placements. Some children who would have been fostered, officers were having difficulty in finding placements for.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children considered it was important the Board were aware of the present situation as it was a particular challenge and necessary to continue to have this discussed at Board meetings.

One member was concerned and felt the private sector had the Authority over a barrel. He understood there was a project team looking at residential homes in Dorset and asked for an update from them.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children confirmed officers were working at pace to build the right provision and had to do this pragmatically, a

Cabinet report was being drafted and she hoped to bring the report to the next meeting of the Board.

One member voiced their concern that in the meantime these youngsters had nowhere to go and less chance of being fostered and asked if officers were looking outside of the county for these children. The Interim Executive Director of People – Children confirmed they were actually looking outside of the country. This was not peculiar to Dorset as those children that were coming into care now were younger and those that were leaving the system were older than previously. It was, of course, important to ensure placements were registered and correct.

One member asked for confirmation that currently there were no new unregistered placements. Officers confirmed that was the case.

The Chairman asked for this to be a standing agenda item for the next 6 months.

Resolved

That the Corporate Parenting Board have Placement Provision as a standing agenda item for the next 6 months.

77. Unregistered Placement Position and Case Studies

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

Officers confirmed the position regarding the number of children in unregistered placements. The Authority was in the process of getting one home registered. The Authority was taking over the lease of the other home, a house, which was in another county, this was progressing well. It was hoped to use a provider to assist but unfortunately that arrangement had not worked out. The Authority would now register the property in its name and employ the staff.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 12.5 of the report and asked what the situation was regarding the transfer of the lease, noting this was with Property Services to sign off, she asked for assurance there were no delays in completion of the transfer of leasehold. Officers confirmed they had negotiated a price, and everything was progressing well, and this would be a residential home for those children already in the house at the present time.

Case studies: Officers mentioned one child had been in the accommodation since August and had problems with the agency staff but despite that had settled well and was attending school and would be staying in Dorset. They were visited weekly by either their Social Worker or the Residential Services Manager and were keen to get involved in Participation, which was all very positive as they had gone through a very unsettling time.

The other child had been in unregistered accommodation nearly 2 years as previous attempts to find somewhere had failed. They now attend education

5 days a week. The young person had settled where they were and as the Authority did not want to unsettle them would be employing agency staff as Dorset staff.

One officer mentioned it was very unusual for the local authority to create a children's home in another authority but on this occasion, it was the right decision.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children explained the situation regarding the accommodation and why they were unregistered. She had spoken with Ofsted who were aware of the current situation. The young people were living on their own and had become more settled living that way. It was hoped the accommodation would be available as care leaver move-on accommodation.

One of the CLiCC representatives asked if supported housing was the same as the "Lily Project" but care housing. The Interim Executive Director of People confirmed it would be similar as sometimes it could be quite daunting for a young care leaver to go out on their own and having a training flat where they could try independent accommodation might give them the confidence they would need. This had yet to be decided upon.

Noted

78. Response to Outstanding Challenge Cards

Challenge No 1 – Transport: Officers informed the Board there had been a transport review and officers had been working with SEND colleagues and SEND cohort as that was first part of the transport improvement review. The second part of the challenge was to review the general transport across the county. The Corporate Parenting Officer was to meet with the Chief Executive of Participation People and the transport review project team. She would be revisiting this with a colleague in March, and nothing would be arranged until March/April of this year. The Corporate Parenting Officer would bring an update to the care leavers session. It was noted this was complicated and important that it was kept on the tracker.

Noted

Challenge No 3 - Foster Care Training: There had been a total of 142 trained and the Chief Executive of Participation People confirmed Dorset was being held to account and suggested the two CLiCC representatives attending the meeting have a conversation about Foster Carer Training and submit a report to the next formal meeting of the Board. This would then tie into the Satisfaction Survey.

A meeting had been arranged to take place on 8 April 2020 between officers and young people to discuss how young people can influence the training.

Resolved

That the two CLiCC representatives submit a report on Foster Carer Training to the next formal meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on the 23 April 2020.

Challenge No 4 - Access to Records: The Challenge was how could young people under the age of 18 have access to their records. Officers confirmed that young people under the age of 18 could request access to their records. Social Care colleagues would ensure the young person was ready and providing it was safe to do so after a conversation with the family the usual application would have to go to the Data Protection Team to process.

The Chairman asked what role the IRO's would have. It was confirmed the IRO's would support and assist young people. Guidance for social workers would be co-produced with the help of young people.

The Chief Executive of Participation People asked for the process to be youth proofed and user friendly.

The Chief Executive of People – Children confirmed officers would want to ensure it was the right time for that young person to access their records and ensure they were helped in reading them as they could be upsetting.

One of the CLiCC representatives asked what the application was they would have to make if a young person wanted to see part of their records and would they be available to under 18-year olds. Would every social worker do life stories. Officers explained how young people could access their records or part of their records and if under 18 that would also be possible. Regarding life stories they would have to be completed at the right time and were more of a day to day issue rather than historical. Records could be very business focussed whereas the life account would be written to the young person and about them and their family.

Noted

Challenge No 2 - ID Cards: Officers confirmed the ID cards had been completed. CLiCC representatives confirmed they would be well received.

Noted

Challenge No 5 - Communications between School and Social Workers: The Virtual School Head had attended the IRO team meetings and emphasised the importance of communication between school and social workers or the Virtual School. The Virtual School Head had set a question for CLiCC asking for them to be more specific about what was not being communicated at school. The CLiCC representatives would ask young people at school.

Resolved

That the CLiCC representatives ask young people at school what was not being communicated at school.

Challenge No 6 - Delegated Powers: The Corporate Parenting Officer confirmed that the delegated powers authority should be discussed at the Placement Planning meeting and team managers were responsible for supervising the process. IRO's would be asking about delegated powers authority at review meetings. Officers were also reviewing how this could be monitored electronically through the IRO monitoring form.

Noted

79. CLiCC Update and Challenge Cards

New Challenge Card 1: "We feel that younger children receive more support for mental health issues than older young people. Do you agree that as we grow older and have take on more responsibilities, the level of support should also grow? How can you make sure older children in care/care leavers get all the support they need with mental health concerns?"

The Designated Nurse for Looked After Children had responded to this challenge which was read out by the Head of Safeguarding, Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group.

The Children's Services Manager, DAIVS suggested young people read Making Mental Health Available to Young People issue 8 February 2020 which was very helpful.

The Chairman was concerned about care leavers and 18 plus year olds as their emotional health was completely different from the emotional health support that young people received. Young people needed emotional support what were the Health Services doing about the transition gap.

The Head of Safeguarding, Dorset Clinical Commissioning confirmed this was about improvement they had won funding for and making that transition. This was a national one year project for care leavers and the health services would be reporting the outcome of the project to the Board.

The Interim Executive Director of People – Children asked if Dorset Council staff were involved in the project and that she would welcome a data set relating to CAMHS at the next formal meeting of the Board on 23 April 2020.

Resolved

That Health Services provide a data set relating to CAMHS to the next formal meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on 23 April 2020.

New Challenge Card 2: "Whilst care leavers get 1 to 1 time with our PA's, it's only to go to the Job Centre or to work our finances out etc. What we need is the chance to have 1 to 1 time where we could just go for a walk or a coffee, something like that, to talk about how things are going, as well as time to do the other things that need to be done. How can you make this happen?"

Officers confirmed the restructuring did include more time with young people and the Personal Advisers who were highly motivated group wanted to see care leavers more. They did, however, have a very large caseload (33) so it was a massive job. They had to see care leavers who were in real crisis and unfortunately that meant those who were fine did not get seen very often. It was hoped for the future that a social setting may be arranged with several care leavers but unfortunately it would be hard for PA's to spend individual time with them. Drop-ins and meetings with care leavers more socially might be a way forward.

One member thought this was an area where caseload management ought to be looked at as some young people would require a higher level of intensity and informal settings could sometimes be the most productive.

Noted

The Corporate Parenting Officer asked for items to be put on the tracker.

One member asked that case loading for PA's and time spent with young people be put in the tracker.

Resolved

That the Corporate Parenting Officer place case loading for PA's and time spent with young people on the tracker.

Duration of meeting: 3.00 - 5.20 pm

Chairman

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