

DORSET COUNCIL - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2020

Present: Cllrs Richard Biggs, Ryan Holloway, Andrew Kerby, Cathy Lugg, Andrew Parry and Kate Wheller

Apologies: Cllrs Stella Jones

Also present: Cllr J Somper, Lead Member for Safeguarding

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

Elaine Okopski (Dorset Parent Carer Council), David Alderson (Senior Advisor, Schools and Learning Service), Antonia Dixey (CEO Participation People), Louise Drury (Quality & Assurance), Karen Elliott (Head of Quality Assurance & Partnerships), Simon Fraiz-Brown (Service Manager - Adolescent Services), 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), Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children), Stuart Riddle (Senior Manager), Kate Shelley (Communications Officer), Sarah Jane Smedmor (Corporate Director - Care & Protection) and Liz Eaton (Democratic Services Officer)

1. Election of Chairman

That Cllr. Kate Wheller be elected Chairman for the year 2020/2021 but it was noted that Cllr. Andrew Parry would be Chairman for this meeting.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

That Cllr. Richard Biggs be appointed Vice-Chairman for the year 2020/2021.

3. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Stella Jones.

4. Declaration of Interest

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

5. Terms of Reference

The Board noted the Terms of Reference referred to the former Dorset County Council and needed to be amended to read Dorset Council. They agreed to the amendment of the following paragraph:

“The Board will ensure the voice of children and young people influence decision making and service development and delivery.”

To read:

“The Board will ensure young people know how their voice, insights and lived experiences have impacted decision making and service development and delivery.”

Resolved

1. That the Terms of Reference be amended to read Dorset Council and not Dorset County Council.
2. That the Terms of Refence be amended to read: “The Board will ensure young people know how their voice, insights and lived experiences have impacted decision making and service development and delivery.”

6. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2020 were confirmed and would be signed when the opportunity arose.

7. Public Participation

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

8. Care Leavers Update

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

Officers informed the Board they were in touch with 98% of care leavers who had a team of Personal Advisers (PA's) making contact with them regularly. During COVID-19 lockdown contact had been made weekly. There were 5 young people who did not want to have contact. A customer satisfaction txt message service had been set up, officers had received 100% positive feedback from care leavers using that system. The Authority had also received feedback on the New Belongings programme with engagement from approximately 70 care leavers which was positive.

The Authority was in line with the national trend and had approximately 56% of care leavers who were not in education, employment or training (NEET). This was an ongoing challenge as until recently there had not been enough PA's employed but that had now been addressed and currently a PA was allocated when a young person was 17½ years old. The Care Leaver Local Offer and Finance policy had to be finalised and established. There were approximately 94% of care leavers in suitable accommodation and about 6% who were not in suitable accommodation, housing for care leavers had to be a priority for the Authority.

One member asked whether there was any way that care leavers could get priority on the housing list. Officers confirmed there was a draft policy out for

consultation which would increase the priority on the housing list for care leavers.

Officers mentioned it was challenging for young people to have their first tenancy which could quite easily go wrong. A range of options and offers was required to ensure young people did not take a tenancy before they were ready to do so, officers needed to ensure the processes and procedures with housing colleagues were right. There were 8 young people in bed and breakfast at present which officers were unhappy with but it was noted there was a significant number of units being made available for care leavers in Weymouth.

One member asked whether officers had drafted an acceptable standard of bed and breakfast accommodation for young people. Officers confirmed housing colleagues were very cautious and mindful about when and where bed and breakfast accommodation was provided. It was acknowledged that some young people liked being in bed and breakfast accommodation even if the Authority did not like it for them. A consultation regarding this should be considered by the Corporate Parenting Board.

One member thought that perhaps the Authority should think about loans and how young people could get onto the property market. It was noted that Foster Carers received money they were supposed to save for the young people and perhaps the training foster carers received ought to highlight that they should be saving for the young people or helping them to save.

The Executive Director of People – Children commented she knew that some young people had savings and would report back to the next formal meeting of the Board regarding the current position on how many young people had savings.

Members referred to the Child Trust Fund which young people reaching the age of 18 were eligible to access and asked whether there were other monies available for young people that they were not aware of. Officers would report back at the next formal meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on the financial wellbeing of Dorset's care leavers aged 18 during this month and going forward.

The Executive Director of People – Children mentioned that leaving care children had access to a leaving care grant and would report back to the Board with the financial position of Dorset's care leavers and what funding/grants were available to them

Officers confirmed that members should have been invited to a presentation from Coram Voice to be held on 23 September 2020 relating to the New Belongings programme. As some members had not received an invitation the Service Manager – Adolescent Services would ensure they had.

One member asked if the Authority's procurement policy could include providing apprenticeships for LAC as it was a large organisation and should be doing something to help young people obtain employment.

The Executive Director of People – Children summed up that officers were concerned about the number of young people that were NEET but a number of young people had apprenticeships and also moving to higher education.

Resolved

1. That the Executive Director of People – Children provide a report to the next formal meeting of the Board on the 12 November 2020 relating to the financial position of young people and care leavers aged 18 during this month and going forward.
2. That the Executive Director of People – Children would report back to the next formal meeting of the Board on the 12 November 2020 on the financial position of Dorset's care leavers and what funding/grants were available to them.
3. That the Service Manager – Adolescent Services invite members of the Board to a presentation from Coram Voice to be held on 23 September 2020 relating to the New Belongings programme.

9. Corporate Parenting Data Set

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

The Executive Director of People – Children informed the Board there was a much larger population of older young people in care than younger and the number of young people who had been with the Authority for a long time was larger than those who had not. The numbers who had come into care were managed on a monthly basis a large number were younger and coming into care through the courts. The Authority had not seen the same number of young people leaving care due to COVID-19 and received a directive not to exit 18 year olds due to COVID-19. A number of court hearings had been delayed and deferred significantly with several young people waiting to hear the outcome of their final hearing.

Officers informed the Board there was a little bit of disparity between information held on MOSAIC and health colleagues. A health liaison group was being set up to ensure the data held was replicated by health colleagues. In terms of emotional wellbeing an Emotional Wellbeing Group had been established. During October the focus would be on the health of our young people.

In terms of safety focus had been on missing children and child exploitation. In Dorset both absent and missing episodes were recorded as a missing episode which meant there might be an over-representation on missing episodes. Since the last meeting 14% of young people had a missing episode which was higher than the national average. Officers would be offering more meaningful interviews for those young people who went missing in an aid to reducing the missing episodes.

The Executive Director of People – Children mentioned that officers continued to see a challenge where children were moving from one placement to

another which was not what officers would be looking for. For those placed too far away from home it was hoped to have a strategy in place to have them closer to home. Work was underway to increase the number of Permanency Plans in place for children.

Officers were concerned about the difference between the National and Dorset rate for young people in Education which was being focussed upon and considerable work was ongoing with schools to improve the outcomes for Dorset young people

The Executive Director of People – Children confirmed Dorset had a Regional Adoption Agency in operation which they were looking to review. The Authority needed to be confident enough adopters were being recruited for young people. With COVID-19 there had been real challenges around the number of children being available for adoption. She mentioned the data for Care Leavers – Pathway Plan would be available at future meetings of the Board.

Members were concerned that the Initial Health Assessments were not all completed within the statutory time and confirmed there was disparity between the east and west of the county on this.

The Executive Director of People – Children considered going forward the Corporate Parenting Board needed to be a multi-agency Board to ensure both aspects of medics were available. She confirmed this was on a risk register owned by her and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

One Member asked why clinicians couldn't visit the young people in their own home or give them the choice to have the visit in their own home or a medical setting. It was noted that young people would not want clinicians coming into their homes to do this and better to look to a nurse led service away from the home where young people could talk about what had happened to them. There would also be a problem around timings with clinicians travelling to appointments where focus was required on getting appointments completed on time.

One member noticed the number of carers that had resigned had risen from 44 to 64 and asked if carers had actually resigned or whether they were no longer fit for purpose. The Executive Director of People – Children commented the figures would be a mixture of people where concerns had been raised it was not uncommon that some carers who were significantly older had poor health or died and independent fostering agencies would take over.

One member asked whether officers drilled down on the accusations against foster carers as it looked as though most were unfounded and it would be good to know why they happened and whether they could be pre-empted.

Officers confirmed that all allegations were investigated and drilled down and looked at very carefully. Regarding health assessments officers confirmed

what they were looking at in the data sets were children placed at a distance and how a stronger health agenda was brought forward for the young people.

One member asked whether any data was collected on the parents of children coming into care as to whether they had been in care themselves and whether that care was in Dorset.

The Executive Director of People – Children confirmed that some care leavers did become parents and officers worked hard to support them. The average age of parents where there was an issue was the over 25-30 year old parents. Some care leavers stayed in touch until they were 26 years old.

Noted

10. Sufficiency Strategy

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

Officers mentioned the information in the report indicated the approach being taken by the Authority. Dorset had a lot of children in care and far too many of them were sent outside of Dorset which was not good for them. The Authority needed to improve the number of foster carers that were available for Dorset children, that related to how the Dorset Fostering Service was developed and how we worked with fostering agencies that operated within Dorset. Officers were also looking at specialist schemes and short break schemes for disabled children. The Harbour Scheme was a way of providing this. Work was well underway to convert a building in Dorchester Road, Weymouth to become a children's home. Currently there were 60 children in residential care placed with external providers.

There were a number of providers who were in the grey area of providing unregistered care for children and wanted to move into becoming registered children's home providers.

Officers were looking at a blended approach for disabled children and support for them as outlined within the report. Supported housing in Kirtleton Avenue would provide a quality base for care leavers.

The contract arrangements and quality assurance had been strengthened with a Quality Assurance Officer starting in September who would address issues with providers.

One member referred to access to out of county placements an example being where some young people were placed in Somerset, access was quite easy as opposed to those placed further away in Blackpool where it was more difficult to gain access to them. Officers explained the exploitation issues that surfaced in Rochdale were due to a lot of vulnerable people being housed in one place and that was why the Authority wanted to bring young people back into Dorset where they would be less vulnerable.

One member was very pleased to hear that another unit was going to be provided for young people in Weymouth but felt the Authority should think about providing a unit in the north of Dorset as it was unacceptable that so many young people were so far away from the county.

The Executive Director of People – Children commented she had inherited 62 children in residential care which was far too many and would like the number to be nearer 25. Things would change but not overnight.

Officers confirmed they were looking at permanency planning and getting those young people who were placed out of Dorset back into Dorset.

Members liked the progress made so far but thought one aim should be that unregistered accommodation should not be used at all for Dorset children and young people. It was asked who decided that independent agencies and unregistered provision could move into Dorset to provide registered accommodation as this would require agreement from Ofsted. Officers confirmed that was the approach being adopted and it was seen as compliance rather than an aim. Officers had extensive conversations with Ofsted regarding the registration of accommodation and Ofsted were working the Authority on acceleration of approval for Dorset's applications.

One member confirmed that a positive statement was required that Dorset would not and did not sanction using unregistered providers.

Noted

11. Corporate Parenting Strategy

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

Officers informed the Board there were 479 children in Dorset's care and that everyone employed by Dorset Council and Councillors were Corporate Parents. The strategy set out key priorities and how success was measured. In terms of values Dorset Council was collaborative, strength based and restorative. The six priorities and ambitions to being an effective Corporate Parent were set out in the report.

Channels of feedback and communication – it was important how officers received feedback from young people. In terms of measuring success that would be relevant in how successful young people were.

One member considered the Strategy was the way forward as he thought the Corporate Parenting Board were siloed as a body and that the whole of Dorset Council and the staff should be aware of their legal responsibilities. When looking at policies there was nothing on looked after children and everything had an effect on the children. They thought the policy should go to full council and be adopted by full council.

Officers confirmed that in terms of Corporate Parenting it should be throughout the Council. When new staff joined the Authority Corporate Parenting should be part of their induction so they were aware of their Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

The Executive Director of People – mentioned the Corporate Parenting Strategy was to be signed off by the Corporate Parenting Board and the pledges were areas where we would want greater join up within the wider council from the point of governance and process it was important the Board signed this off.

Officers confirmed the challenge was to recruit foster carers and what opportunities could be offered by having apprenticeships.

Members asked how this was all to be measured. The Board would be looking at data sets comparing national data.

One member thanked officers for the strategy commenting that it was something all councillors should be aware of and felt it should be discussed at one of the all council briefings with perhaps Councillor Parry informing all councillors of the work of the Corporate Parenting Board and that it was everyone's responsibility.

Discussion was had on how best to inform councillors of the strategy. Councillor Parry thought it would be better to inform members through a Webinar and was also happy to have young people attend a full Council meeting. The Chief Executive of Participation People wondered if it would be useful to ask young people about their experiences of being in care and ask care leavers to speak at full Council, this would have more of an impact on people. She had placed a link on the chat bar to a film which was about fostering carers and shown to young people on induction days, she would email the link to members of the Board.

Members agreed the Strategy.

Resolved

1. That Dorset's Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2020 – 2023 be approved.
2. That a Webinar be held to inform councillors of the Strategy and arrangements made for care leavers to attend a future meeting of full Council to share their experiences of being in care.
3. That the Chief Executive of Participation People email the link to the film to members of the Board.

12. Exempt Business

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 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

13. Annual Report from Virtual School

The Corporate Parenting Board considered the Virtual School Head's Report 2019/20.

The Corporate Director for Education and Learning explained the virtual school used to work as an individual entity within the Directorate but now worked with all sections of Children's Services.

The Virtual School Head referred to the Dorset STAR Awards being held virtually on the 10 October 2020 to which all members of the Board were invited. He mentioned the report highlighted the work of children not on full-time timetables. There were about 40% of young people with an educational need, EHCP or fixed term exclusion. Section 3 looked at reducing NEET and transferring from year 11 to year 12. The unvalidated GCSE results were looking positive for a number of young people and 7 young people would be moving to university this year. More young people would be attending colleges this year with 20 attending Weymouth College from September 2020. Eight young people had gained employability skills awards. Section 7 of the report looked at Pupil Premium and the quality of Pupil Education Plans (PEP) ensuring that objectives were focussed and targeted. The report highlighted the excellent work of the Governing Body.

One member thanked officers for a detailed report but had a question around Pupil Premium and Pupil Premium Plus and was concerned that some of that money was not being spent properly and asked if that had now been addressed. The Virtual School Head confirmed that it was with a full action plan and issues being addressed in an ongoing way. An audit review had been undertaken and outcomes that had been highlighted were work in progress. The auditors would return the early part of next year and it was anticipated the Virtual School would be in a stronger place with actions completed.

Noted

14. Unregistered/Unregulated placement provision

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

The Executive Director of People – Children updated members on the current position regarding unregistered placements. Planning permission for one placement to become registered had been refused but all other placements were moving towards registration. She explained the placements were all houses and bungalows that were perfectly clean and tidy places where young people could have a good positive time although some of the young people had extremely challenging behaviours.

Members registered their disappointment that planning permission had been refused as they knew how hard officers had worked at trying to obtain registration. They asked the cost per week of a placement. The Executive Director of People – Children confirmed the cost would be anything from £8,000 to approximately £14,000 per week.

One member suggested writing to all foster parents to thank them on behalf of the Board for the way they had coped during the lockdown period. Officers confirmed they had already been thanked. She went on to inform the Board that a number of young people in care enjoyed lockdown and benefitted from not being at school and also formed a stronger bond with their foster family.

Noted

15. CLICC Update and Challenge Cards

The Participation Worker from Participation People updated the Board on what the young people had been doing during lockdown. There had been come cookery sessions carried out over ZOOM and as a result a care leavers cook book had been put together to give to every child leaving care, it was also hoped to sell the book to raise funds. They were publishing a bi-monthly newsletter for a trial period. Carey Camp had taken place, albeit on the wettest day in August, 20 young people turned up about 40% of whom were new and had not attended before. A consultation event had been arranged for the 21 October 2020 and on Wednesday evenings pet care sessions will be held for the young people. The Children in Care and Care Council had made a film the link to which had been placed on the chat bar to this meeting.

Members were pleased to note that Carey Camp went ahead despite the weather, it was important for young people to be able to enjoy themselves.

One member asked if there had been any progress in respect of previous challenge cards that had been issued. Officers confirmed they were currently looking at the spreadsheet to see what was outstanding and would ensure they were back on track and report back to a future meeting of the Board.

Cllr Wheller asked for a copy of the updated spreadsheet.

Resolved

That officers send a copy of the updated spreadsheet relating to the challenge cards to Cllr Wheller.

Before the closure of the meeting the newly elected Chairman thanked the Board for electing her and explained she had a lot to catch up on during her time absent from the Corporate Parenting Board. The Executive Director of People – Children confirmed she would liaise with the Chairman regarding agenda setting.

Duration of meeting: 3.00 - 5.47 pm

Chairman

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