

DORSET COUNCIL - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 12 NOVEMBER 2020

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

Apologies: Cllrs Andrew Parry, Elaine Okopski DPCC, Antonia Dixey Participation people, Liz Plastow CCG

Also present: Cllr Val Pothecary, Cllr Jane Somper, Smith, Jan Hill, Martin Hill and Cllr David Taylor

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

Miriam M Leigh (Principal Education Psychologist), Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children), Mark Blackman (Corporate Director - Education and Learning), Claire Shiels (Corporate Director - Commissioning, Quality & Partnerships), Matthew Chislett (Service Manager - Corparenting Board and Permanence), Kate Critchel (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Megan Rochester (Democratic Services Officer Apprentice), Sarah Jane Smedmor (Corporate Director - Care & Protection), Lisa Reid (Consultant Quality Assurance), Simon Fraiz-Brown (Service Manager - Adolescent Services), Penny Earney (Designated Nurse for LAC), Lynn Giles (Children's Services Manager, Dorset Advocacy and Independent Visitors Service), Ann Haigh (Participation Worker, Participation People), Maddy Lewis-Smith, Karen Elliott (Head of Quality Assurance & Partnerships) and Louise Drury (Quality & Assurance)

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed all those present and noted apologies.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a date in the future.

3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest to report.

4. Public Participation

There was no public participation to report.

5. **Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report (2019/20) and Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officer "how to capture a child's voice in a review"**

The Executive Director for People – Children introduced the report and explained that this was an opportunity for members to hear about the important service of Independent Review Officers that hold the council to account on a case by case bases in respect of its function in relation to looked after children. A Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer was also in attendance to explain how this role was delivered at the present time and answer any questions of the Board.

The Head of Quality Assurance & Partnership set out the report and advised that it identified the context of the service, where the service was performing well and areas for further development including where urgent action was required.

As at the 31 March 2020 there were 474 children and young people in care that Dorset was responsible for and this had steadily increased during the last 12- month period. She further advised that 8% of the children in the care population were from black and minority ethnic groups which reflected the diversity of the Dorset school age population. Members were advised that sometimes children were coming into care at points of crisis in their family life where with earlier intervention this might be prevented.

It was noted that although there were some areas of good practice this was not consistent and social work practice needed to be strengthened. Members welcomed the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) report which was detailed and informative.

The following observations and responses were made:-

- Concern was expressed regarding the delay in receiving the report with the information available out of sync/date making it difficult for the Board to scrutinise actions. It was hoped that the report could come forward in a timelier manner in the future.
- The Independent Reviewing Officer was not responsible for defending the authority's decision or actions. That was the Board's responsibility as corporate parents to consider the issues and their lines of enquiry to deal with and address issues. In response the Executive Director for People – Children thanked members for their comments and confirmed that the situation with unregistered placements had not got worse for Dorset but a very clear plan of action was now in place to resolve these matters.
- Members welcomed that officers were working hard towards having all children back in the Dorset.
- It was noted that some of the references to SMART plan objectives were inconsistent.
- Concern was expressed in respect of the diagram at 5.15 of the report in relation to being safe and happy. In response the Head of Quality Assurance & Partnerships advised that these comments were made

around housing provision, in respect of the neighbourhood or the environment. However it was agreed that further conversations were needed to be carried out to gain a better understanding of what that means to young people. An update to a future meeting on progress was requested.

- Acknowledged the importance to focus and concentrate on early intervention into the family as a whole.
- Members were advised that the long term permanence plans should be reviewed every 6 months. Tracking meetings were held regularly to deal with this.
- The QA managers were focusing on improving and creating quicker access to review meeting outcomes.
- In response to a question regarding the number of children in care in Dorset, the Executive Director of People – Children advised that this was concerning and putting pressure on the system. There was historic lack of significant early intervention as a factor but also too many children had been drifting. Now almost 90% had Permanence Plans with children departing the council's care, but it was important that any change was the right move for them.
- In respect of large families, the Executive Director of People- Children advised that this was complex work, where it was important to see the individual child. Important to manage the risk within the family where there were more children the greater the risk to be managed.
- The Board welcomed the wish list and asked how this would be actioned, in response the Executive Director of People – Children confirmed that all the actions were within the “strengthening service plan” and these were reported to the partnership plan group monthly. A excerpt was reported to the Board with the data set information.

The Board also heard from an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who explained how an IRO captured young peoples' voices particularly over the last few months during COVID. It was the IRO's role to ensure that each child was able to say what they wanted to say and explain how they engaged with them to build trusting relationships.

Decision

That the content of the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report be noted.

6. **Financial arrangements for Children in Care and Care Leaver Finances**

Members noted that as corporate parents, Dorset Council must ensure that all eligible young people leaving care must receive the financial help and support to which they were entitled. The report set out how Dorset Council financially supports those that leave care, including the provision of savings whilst children and young people were in the councils care.

The policy for all children was that there be commitment to set up a savings account and this was reviewed as part of Children in Care Review. However,

the amount to be saved was agreed between the child's social worker and the foster carers social worker.

Additionally, the ability to open a savings account was not included in the Delegated Scheme of Authority, which meant that foster carers required the specific permission of the child's social worker in order to open a savings account.

The service intended to undertake a review of existing policy and processes relating to savings for Children in Care through coproduction with Children in Care, Care Leavers and carers.

Members were further advised of the additional financial support to care leavers. Presently there was a range of financial support available through the care leavers budget to support things like housing, learning, training, documentation and emergency financial assistance. The support was currently allocated on a case by case basis as there was not a clear framework for financial entitlements. The aim was to shift financial support provided to Care Leavers from an ad-hoc basis to a consistent and equitable offer than could be easily understood by care leavers.

The Executive Director of People – Children confirmed that this was still a work in progress and members involvement in shaping the policy would be welcomed.

Members discussed the report and considered that it was important to have a fair and equitable saving system and financial support package in place. They supported the proposed approach to the review and to provide support to financial management.

Decision

- (a) That the review of existing policy and processes relating to savings for Children in Care be noted.
- (b) That the development of a Financial Support Framework for Care Leavers be support.

7. **Action for Children update**

The Board received a presentation from Lynn Giles, Action for Children setting the Dorset Advocacy and Independent Visitors report update.

This was a PAN – Dorset service providing two different elements. The Advocacy Service provided support to children and young people to ensure that their voices were heard when decisions were being made about them. The Independent Visitors role offered support, friendship, mentoring and positive activities.

Members received an update on the service provision for the period 1 December 2017 to 30 September 2020 which in particular highlighted how to service had adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic.

8. **Key Data Overview**

The Service Manager for Corporate Parenting and Permanence set out the Key Data pack and highlighted the areas that needed improvement and where progress was being made.

In respect of Initial Health Assessments that had been some issues with medical consents which had led to delays, however Dorset Council and health partners were working together to ensure better consistency in data. In terms of the Review Health Assessments there were also issues with inconsistencies and these were now being addressed

Permanence planning continued to be improved with permanence panel meetings being held fortnightly; this ensured that there was less drift and delay. Placements stability remained positive in comparison to the councils statistical neighbours and national trends. Stability or support meetings were occurring early to ensure placement stability

Members discussed the gender gap of children in care, the higher number of boys in SEND and questioned what caused this issue? Challenging how it should be addressed. It was agreed that this matter did require further discussion and exploration as it was important to consider how these children presented to the service. This matter would be discussed further at a future meeting of the Board.

In response SDQ's and the lack of initial assessments being carried out in a timely manner, the Executive Director of People - Children proposed to set up a rapid response to complete SDQ's within "teams". She stated that members were right to challenge this matter and be concerned; as this delay could not be entirely because of the Covid- 19 pandemic.

Decision

That the Key Data Overview be received and noted.

9. **Young people's Challenge Cards**

The Service Manager for Corporate Parenting and Permanence updated the Board on the Young People's Challenge cards. The following matters were raised in detail:-

- Item 1 The Transport Review outcome to be reported to the Board in January 2021.
- Item 2 Identity cards were issues, but not consistently used. Reminders would be sent to staff.

- Item 3 Officer were working with Participation People to deliver training
- Item 4 Access to records was now in place
- Item 5 In respect to Relationships with schools. It was considered that this was good and unless there was further information is was proposed that this challenge be closed.
- Item 6 Delegated Powers were considered to be no longer an issue.
- Item 8 One page profiles were being produced and this was a work in progress
- Item 9 Children in foster placements wanted to be treated as part of the family. This was on-going work re: consider the use of terminology, planning arrangements and understands the needs of the whole family.
- Item 12 Activity days for corporate parents to attend were to be arranged post Covid-19.

In response to a question, it was agreed that some of the language and terminology used on the challenge cards was difficult for young people to understand and it was agreed that this should be in the future written in plain English.

Decision

That the current position with the Challenge Cards be received and noted.

10. **Items brought forward from last formal Corporate Parenting Board**

It was suggested that future meetings of the Board should start at the later time of 5pm to support young people being able to attend. The Service Manager – Corporate Parenting and Permanence also suggested that the Board’s future membership should include a representative from the Police and a head teacher representative.

Decision

- (a) That all future meetings be held at 5pm
- (b) That the membership of the Board be amended to include a Police and Head teacher representative

11. **Urgent items**

There was no urgent items to report.

12. **Exempt Business**

It was proposed by Cllr k Wheller and agreed by the Board

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 paragraph 2 of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

The public Microsoft Teams ended and the Board members moved into closed business.

13. **Unregistered placement provision**

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director – Commissioning, Quality & Partnerships on current position regarding unregistered provision and the actions being taken.

Decision

That the position and action be noted.

Duration of meeting: 17:34pm

Chairman

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