

Corporate Parenting Board Minutes of meeting- Thursday 5th August 2021

Election of Chairman

It was proposed by Cllr S C Jones and seconded by Cllr R Biggs that Councillor Wheller be elected Chairman for the meeting.

Councillor Biggs was elected Vice-Chairman.

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present.

Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest

Public participation

There was no public participation to report

Introduction and Scene Setting

The Executive Director for Children Services advised members that the number of “looked after” children currently stood at 437. This was a clear indication of the number of children coming into and existing in the council’s care, were doing so in a planned way and into permanency.

In response to questions members were advised that:

- There were still significant challenges and pressures (in line with the rest of the country) around the sufficiency of placements and the offer of “forever homes”.
- There was still a steady interest of people coming forward to foster or adopt, but in the last quarter there had been a decline in those applications.
- In response to a question, there were currently 68 young people in residential care and 70 teenagers that children services would like to see move back to either their families or into foster family care.
- There was an increased challenge in the south-west a gap in the provision for children’s services.

Independent Reviewing Officers Report 2020-2021

The Corporate Parenting Board considered the Independent Reviewing Officers Report 2020-2021 set out by the Quality Assurance Manager. The report aimed to identify the strengths and areas for development that would also strengthen the work of corporate parents.

Members were informed that the information was indicating that this was a developing and quality service which continued to provide good outcomes for children and young people in care.

As at 31 March 2021, 449 children and young people were within the Dorset Council care system. This was a reduction of 31 over the last 12 months and it was confirmed that approximately 114 reviews were completed a month. Members were further advised that that between 72 – 90% of children aged 4 and over were participating fully in their reviews but work was still needed to increase this percentage. Member were also updated on the progress identified from the 2019 report; all but one action had been achieved over the last 12-month period. The outstanding action was linked to practical difficulties related to Covid-19.

Members asked the following questions relating to the following:

- Welcomed the report which was positive and noted that there were several areas that were doing well
- Referred to page 21 of the report (minutes not achieved within 21 days) Members were advised that this was an area which required improvement; this impact primarily related to an increased sickness level relating to Covid. However, it was noted that children did receive written notification of recommendation within the 5 days' notice period.
- Want to see an increased level of formal and informal escalation as this is a sign of independence, as long as issues are dealt with quickly and learning is demonstrated.
- Acknowledged the pressures and challenges across the service
- Look at child engagement, how can we make more children want to engage? Are there any ideas that we can replicate and collaborate with others?
- In respect of qualitative information and SEND, how confident are we that these young people are engaged; what are disability needs? It was agreed that this information would be included in reports going forward. Feedback of child in care reviews would also assist in this area. It was acknowledged that the challenge was around external position.

Annual LADO Report

Laura Ketchen, Quality Assurance Manager set out the Local Authority Designated Officer Annual Report and members asked:

- The positions of a local authority person were discussed, noting that they were currently appointed as a temporary designated authority officer, plans were in place for a more permanent role and position.
- The main three referrals were from social care, foster care and residential
- Their aim was to protect the most vulnerable within society. It was stated that 50% of enquires turn into referrals, 20% of these allegations were within the education sector. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic it had been difficult to evidence because of the lack of face-face conversations.
- Noted that an internal audit had taken place and action had been implemented
- 80% allegations had been found, but this may be because of lack of access due to the pandemic. Therefore, it was reported that it was expected that some of the outcomes may change due to the return of face to face teaching resumes.

- Suggestions were made regarding working closely with local schools and the police to help to ensure the protection of our most vulnerable. Members were advised that plans were in place working towards improving the system. Members also welcomed and encouraged the collaboration with social and sports clubs, acknowledging that it was important to be assured of their good and outstanding qualities. It was important to be alive to these areas.
- Members asked what was the child's perspective of the process as this was not apparent within the report. This was knowledge and agreed to be added to future versions.
- In respect of a question around bench marking, it was confirmed that the service was in line with local authority neighbours. Quarterly meetings were held with South West partners.
- It was also discussed that children are more likely to make allegations once they are out of the situation and therefore it was suggested to ask more students about their experience in schools once they have left.
- Concerns were expressed about foster carers and delays. What causes this delay? Members also discussed and challenged for more detail information to have a greater oversight in the process.
- It was acknowledged that these situations were challenging for all those concerned family and foster carers were supported by "Foster talk" during the investigative process.

Private Fostering Annual Report

The Corporate Director for Children Services Care and Protection presented the annual report on behalf of Paula Golding, Head of Locality and Strategy. The number of children being privately fostered remained a small cohort and joint working arrangements are in place with BCP. (arrangements were joined with BCP Council.) BCP Council would take the lead in relation to children who are fostered from overseas.

The following matters were discussed, and observations made

- It would be expected to see more children privately fostered within the area and it was part of the services responsibilities to ensure children are safeguarded and carry out awareness in this area.
- Members agreed that it was essential that people are alert in these situations.
- It was noted that a fact sheet had been circulated to all schools and partner agencies. It would also be useful to circulate this document to all members of the council in their role as a Corporate Parent.
- Acknowledged that GP practices had received the leaflet, but it needed to be widely circulated and it was important to keep a tight focus on this area.

Final OFSTED Report Hayeswood

The board considered a report from Paula Bates, Service Manager Harbour and Residential on the recent inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service.

Some of the following questions and discussion points included.

- The Service Manger confirmed that she was confident that they were on the right track, but stated that that training was out of date, as identified in the report. Work was being carried to improve this.
- The Board discussed how to make their homes feel less institutionalised and acknowledged that CCTV operations were on order; ring doorbells were also suggested. This was welcomed as it showed that staff cared for those that they were looking after.
- It was further stated that there may be implications with this as some children may have previous experience with multimedia abuse. This could be troubling for them, so it needed to be considered.
- Member recognised that there was a lot of good within the report, progress had been made, lessons to be learned and they looked forward to receiving the statement of purpose.
- Important to reach out to local ward member as it was important that the Board and service be mindful of their involvement and awareness.
- The Executive Director for People – Childrens confirmed that it was a challenge to protect young people, but still ensure that a place felt like home. She confirmed that she would continue to have robust conversations with OFSTED to enable the authority to deliver good and proper care to young people.
- Flexibility was required around registered manger requirements in order that good residential care was provided.
- It was suggested that a future workshop conversation of the Board should discuss “How was the County going to establish and deliver residential care”

Date of next meeting

It was confirmed that the date of the next formal Corporate Parenting Board meeting would be held on Thursday 11 October 2021.

Meeting closed at 3.30pm