

CORPORATE PARENTING SPECIALIST ADVISORY GROUP

Wednesday 7th October 2020

PRESENT – Councillors: Whittle (*In the Chair*), Bateson, Connor, Gee, Gunn, Kay, Rawat, Liddle, Marrow, Oates, Riley, Salton, Smith and Taylor.

OFFICERS –

Alyson Hanson – Head of Permanence

Jaffer Hussain - Participation Officer

Caroline Waldron – Deputy Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children and LAC

Joanne Siddle – Head of Education

Janette Clarke – Strategic Head of Social Care

Paula Quinn – FCA Committee

Sam Briggs – FCA Secretary

RESOLUTIONS

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair Cllr Ron Whittle, welcomed all present to the virtual meeting. Apologies were received from the following Councillors: Jackie Floyd, John Slater, Vicky McGurk, Julie Slater, Pat McFall, Stephanie Brookfield, Abdul Patel, Maryam Batan and Jim Casey. Apologies were also received from Jayne Ivory, Angela Allen, Rebecca McPartlan and Charlotte Hesketh.

2. Declaration of Interest in items on this Agenda

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

3. Minutes of the previous Meeting held on 23rd July 2020

RESOLVED – The Minutes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 23rd July 2020 were approved as a correct record with a minor change to the wording under Minute 7 which related to children being RAG rated as a result of fragile placements.

It was clarified that RAG rating had been in place since the start of COVID-19 and was not a result of the increased number of fragile placements.

4. Corporate Parenting Dashboard

The Chair invited Alyson to update the Group on the Corporate Parenting Dashboard figures as of 28th September.

Alyson informed the Group that the total number of looked after children had reduced from 410 in April to 395 at the end of September, which was a reduction of 15. This was really good news given the delays in court proceedings.

Within the Age Profile of children in care and children entering care, Alyson informed the Group that there hadn't been much change in either of those profiles. The only change to note was within the 0-2 age bracket, where there had been fewer children coming in to care and fewer children in care. For children in care, this was down 37%, with 72 children coming into care in April and 61 in September. For children entering care, this had been reduced from 37% in April to 33% in September. The 3-6 age bracket had also seen a reduction from 23% in April to 19% in September.

The Group noted that there had also been very little change with regards to the ethnic profile and gender of children in care. There had been a slight change to note with regards to where children in care were placed, in that the number of children placed in in-house foster care had reduced from 143 in April to 130 in September. The number of children placed with parents had increased from 70 to 79.

In terms of the destination of care leavers, there had been an increase in the number of children leaving care on special guardianship which had increased from 16% in April to 24% in September.

The Group heard that placement stability had been a concern but it was noted that 13% of children in care, in April had had 3 placements or more, and this had reduced to 8% in September, which was really pleasing.

Unfortunately the performance of 19-21 year old care leavers in terms of their entry into education, training or employment had dipped slightly. Councillor Gunn informed the Group that there was a lot of work ongoing to make sure that young people and care leavers were entering education and securing placements.

Alyson informed the Group that adoption performance continued to be strong.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

5. Participation Update

Jaffer Hussain was invited to update the Group on Participation activity since the last meeting.

The Group heard that Junior Voice, Senior Voice and the Care Leavers Forum were finally up and running with Junior Voice now meeting every two weeks, Senior Voice meeting once a week with both having had their first meeting yesterday. The Care Leavers Forum would be meeting monthly and had their first meeting last week. Attendance at the first meetings were quite low with a number of apologies having been submitted. Colleagues across Children's Services were proactively identifying young people who could be a part of the forums.

The Group heard that Junior and Senior Voice were meeting at Blackburn Youth Zone, with the Care Leavers Forum meeting online but were discussing potential venues where they would like to meet.

Both Junior Voice and Senior Voice would be working toward developing an initiative for best practice week in relation to the Corporate Parenting Conference.

Young People had still been involved in the continued recruitment and selection process of personnel online.

The Group noted that unfortunately the Participation Champion's Network had taken a back seat but would be re-established for November, which would then tie in nicely with an initiative linked to Investors in Children and Young Inspectors.

Discussions took place around the venue for Junior Voice and Senior Voice with a question being raised about children from Darwen accessing Blackburn Youth Zone and the possibility of an alternative venue being used. Jaffer agreed that the issue would be looked into and the outcome be fed back to the Group at a future meeting.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

6. Foster Carer's Update

Paula informed the Group that feedback about the return to school had gone well with positive comments saying that it had been good to get back into a routine.

There was some concern regarding contact especially since the new local restrictions had come into place, as contact had started to make progress.

Paula had received a number of recent requests for MAX cards from new carers that didn't have them. This was a positive as it meant people were starting to get out and about. The Group heard that a MAX card was a discount card / free entry card for foster carer families.

Paula informed the Group that having worked in conjunction with the FCA and Virtual School they had managed to do a mop up for any children that had not received a laptop in the first round.

Joanne Siddle expressed her thanks to Charlotte Hesketh for the successful delivery of the laptops.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

7. Health Assessment Audit – Interim Update

The Chair invited Caroline Waldron to provide an interim update on the Health Assessment Audit.

Caroline informed the Group that a joint audit was undertaken in January 2020, the purpose of which was to evidence partnership work from a health perspective between health and social care to understand and ensure that health information informed care planning processes for children in care and also to ensure that the voice of the child was reflected in both health and

children's social care records in relation to addressing their personal health needs.

One of the areas identified that needed strengthening was in relation to ensuring consistent representation of health information to inform LAC reviews. It had been identified that health professionals had not been consistently invited to be a part of that process and wanted to make sure that health information would inform the review and care planning process.

The Group heard that children placed with parents at home had unmet health needs that had not been addressed. As the number of children being placed with parents had increased it would be an area that would be action planned against.

It had also been identified that the SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) strategy did not consistently inform the health assessment process and this was an area that needed strengthening.

Caroline highlighted that there was lots of evidence of good practice and did find that all the children, with the exception of those placed at home with parents, had timely access and did have all of their health needs addressed and that their health information did inform care processes.

In terms of the next steps, the Group heard that an action plan to ensure that any of the areas identified to be strengthened would be addressed in a timely manner had been in progress until COVID-19 hit and that had seen some of the work take a back seat. The action plan had now been formulated and in order to monitor the action plan and drive some of the changes forward, a Health Sub Group had been established, which would feed directly into the Corporate Parenting Executive Board and subsequently this group.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted and that an update on the work of the Health Sub Group be brought to a future meeting.

8. COVID-19 Update

Alyson informed the Group that the areas of concern discussed at the last meeting were still very much of a concern. In terms of Placement Stability, performance had improved in this quarter, but partly because it was an accumulative indicator. Performance in quarter one had been good as things went quiet when COVID-19 first hit. Although performance had improved it would remain a priority as it was subject to fluctuation.

Alyson highlighted some of the things that could affect placement stability, one of those being school in that if children were happy to go to school and were benefiting from the structure and routine this took pressure off placements and carers. A concern was if bubbles at school had to close due to young people being either a close or direct contact.

One of the areas that had started to improve was the REVIVE service. It had taken a while to recruit a new psychologist but the successful candidate was now in post and had been carrying out a number assessments and providing support. A second psychologist was also due to start this week.

The Group heard again that Children had started to have more face to face family time but sadly this had been affected by the rise in cases and subsequent new local restrictions. Risk assessments were in place and this was something that would continue to be monitored.

In terms of placement sufficiency this was still a concern. After a very quiet first quarter where demand had been low for placements, this had increased significantly from 2 referrals in April to 14 referrals in both July and August. With the return to school the number of referrals had dropped to 9 which was good. Also in September some in-house placements had been made which was positive.

Alyson highlighted the difficulties faced when the need to source placements through the independent sector had poor availability, whether that was residential or foster care. Due to the pressure on placements because of delayed court proceedings, a decision had been made to enter into an emergency agreement with Nightsafe where 4 beds had been provided at an empty building on Whalley New Road for 16 and 17 year old care leavers. This had allowed movement in foster care placements and alleviated some of the pressure.

The Group heard of an initiative where Blackburn with Darwen had joined forces with Blackpool, Cumbria and Lancashire around exchange days which was intended to help find long term foster placements for children. It involved pulling together a number of independent foster agencies where the Local Authority present anonymous profiles of children to see if the agencies could provide suitable long term placements. This was a new initiative which had piloted earlier in the year but had been put on hold due to COVID-19. Alyson informed the Group that there would be a meeting next week and was hoping for some successes.

In terms of foster carer recruitment, the Group heard that this had been a challenge this year as recruitment events were normally held over the summer which had traditionally brought in applications and generated interest. The team were now very much reliant on social media to advertise and campaign for foster carers.

Adopter recruitment had not suffered as much and as a result the number of children waiting for adoption was very low, which was good.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

9. Children in Care OFSTED Inspection

RESOLVED – In the absence of the Director of Children's Services, it was agreed that this item be brought to the next meeting.

10. Leaving Care Strategy

The Chair invited Alyson to present the Leaving Care Strategy.

The Group heard that the Strategy had been signed off at the Corporate Parenting Executive Board meeting last week. Young people had been consulted during the production of the strategy and once completed, feedback from the young people had been very positive.

The strategy set out what a Corporate Parent was, who care leavers were and what made them eligible for a leaving care service. It also set out the pledges that were made to care leavers and also contained some statistics of care leavers. The document also identified the vision and priorities for care leavers and how we would help carers achieve those.

The Action Plan focussed on health, education, accommodation, finance, employment and training, communication and introduced the Moving On - Moving Up in Preparation for Adulthood booklet.

RESOLVED – That the Strategy be noted.

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed