

CORPORATE PARENTING SPECIALIST ADVISORY GROUP

Tuesday 16th March 2021

PRESENT – Councillors: Whittle (In the Chair), Afzal, Bateson, Brookfield, Casey, Connor, Daley, Davies, Desai, Floyd, Gee, Gunn, M Hussain, S Hussain, Jan-Virmani, Kay, M Khan, Z Khan, Khonat, Liddle, McGurk, Oates, Rawat, Riley and Julie Slater.

OFFICERS –

Alyson Hanson – Head of Permanence

Caroline Waldron – Deputy Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children & LAC

Joanne Siddle – Head of Education

Paula Quinn – FCA Committee

Sam Briggs – FCA Secretary

Lisa Tierney – Senior Solicitor, Children's Services

Pamela Price – Service Leader Placements

Elizabeth Mannion – Service Leader CIOC

Elizabeth Clarkson – Youth Work Programme Officer

Janette Clark – Strategic Head of Social Care

Charlotte Hesketh – LAC Virtual Head & Assessment Officer
Care Leavers

RESOLUTIONS

1. **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair Cllr Ron Whittle, welcomed all present to the virtual meeting. Apologies were received from the following Councillors: Jean Rigby, Maryam Batan, David Smith, Jim Smith and Pat McFall. Apologies were also received from Martin Eden and Angela Allen.

2. **Declaration of Interest in items on this Agenda**

RESOLVED - There were no Declarations of Interest received.

3. **Minutes of the previous Meeting held on 11th January 2021**

RESOLVED – The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11th January 2021 were approved as a correct record with no matters arising.

4. **Self-Evaluation Framework Update**

Pamela Price provided an update to the Group on the Permanence and Stability element of the Self Evaluation Framework (SEF). As part of the SEF Summary Report document that had been circulated in advance of the meeting, there was reference to Placement Stability for Looked After Children which specifically focused on the wrap around support. The Group heard that over the past 12 months the need for wrap around support and different ways of promoting placement stability had been paramount to reducing the number of placement disruptions. As a result, this had led to a significant and sustained improvement in this performance indicator.

The Group heard that in November 2020, Corporate Parenting Practice Week Focus looked at an audit of placement stability and matching, which evidenced good practice in this area.

The SEF referred to placements that had remained in place for longer than normal due to covid. The Group heard that proceedings had been taking longer than the usual 26 weeks because of the way the court system was currently functioning due to the pandemic. This had seen a reduction in the number of placements being accessible when undertaking a search. It was noted that this was not just an issue in the Borough, there was a national shortage of placements.

The Group noted that the challenge of recruiting more foster carers continued, as the planned programme of recruitment had been restricted to virtual marketing. Gaps remained for carers with the skills and desire to care for adolescents, children with additional health needs and sibling groups as these were some of the more challenging to place.

On a positive note the Group heard that an additional 11 foster carer households had been recruited whilst there had been some losses of carers due to retirement, ill health and adoption. The status quo for recruitment and retention had largely been maintained and importantly a significant number of children and young people in in-house foster placements had been maintained.

Looking at Quarters 1-3 the Group heard that we had seen a greater placement stability with fewer children and young people having three or more placements. In terms of the Performance indicator this showed we had done reasonably well. Quarter 4 had seen a steady increase in disruptions particularly for adolescents which was in some ways understandable given the duration of lockdown.

Pamela informed the Group of the steps taken to stabilise placements which were highlighted as follows:

- RAG Rated placements – enhanced support via visits / support phone calls for the most vulnerable and at risk of disruption;
- The Seeds - Adolescent Support, outreach and short breaks had continued; and
- Revive – in-house therapeutic and emotional well-being therapies and consultations offered to foster carers, in-house residential, children and young people - focus was for children in our care but also supported edge of care.

There were a total of 31 recorded referrals to the Revive team; 11 of these were from the Assessment and Safeguarding Teams and 20 had been referred from social workers.

Pamela informed the Group that achieving placement stability was one of the main aims of Revive, which not only supported children and young people but looked at the early impact of their experiences and why some of their placements had been disrupted and involved working closely with colleagues in both education and health.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

5. **Participation Update**

Elizabeth Clarkson informed the Group of a development between Participation and Youth Voice which would now be sitting under Young People's Services. This included overseeing Senior Voice, Junior Voice and Leaving Care Forum with a view to widening young people's voices and encouraging them to be involved in more Council and regional meetings to enable their voices being heard.

Elizabeth informed the Group of a plan highlighting how young people's voices would be represented moving forward, but that the plan was in the early stages of development. It was agreed that this would be presented to the Group at the next meeting.

The Group heard that Junior Voice was meeting fortnightly on MS Teams, but would be looking to meet face to face next month, on a weekly basis at Kaleidoscope Youth Centre and with lots of interactive fun activities for them to do. Elizabeth was hoping to engage with more young people and was currently liaising with social workers and foster carers to nominate more young people to come to the meetings. The Group heard that Elizabeth was meeting with partners in the fostering service and CIOC social workers to try and make it as accessible as possible for all children and young people especially for those who might have transport issues.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted and that the plan be brought to the next meeting.

6. **NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) Update**

Charlotte Hesketh and Elizabeth Mannion were invited by the Chair to provide an update on Children In Our Care and Care Leavers who were NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training).

Charlotte informed the group that since the establishment of an Education, Employment and Training (EET) group, they had been tasked with considering the EET needs of care leavers within Blackburn with Darwen which reported to the Corporate Parenting Executive Board.

The Group's remit was to consider gaps in Education, Employment and Training of Care Leavers; to ensure care leavers had necessary equipment to access on-line training; to consider the apprenticeship offer for Care Leavers; working with potential providers in developing pre – apprenticeship training and work experience for Care Leavers who were NEET or at risk of being NEET and to develop on-line training programmes.

As outlined in the presentation, Charlotte and Elizabeth informed the Group what was currently working well, what concerns had been highlighted and what had been put in place to alleviate those concerns.

Discussions took place around apprenticeships / work place opportunities for Care Leavers. Elizabeth Clarkson informed the Group of possible apprenticeship places within the Council and advised that discussions were still ongoing but it was hoped that Care Leavers would be able to gain some work experience throughout the summer, not only at the Council but partners

and other businesses within the Borough that would be interested in supporting these young people.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

7. Foster Carer's Update

Paula provided the Group with feedback from Foster Carers on the following:-

- The return to school had gone smoothly
- Information received from the Virtual School prior to the return to school had been really well received and was very informative
- Foster Carers had been offered the vaccine as a priority group which was also well received
- Everyone was looking forward to summer and it was hoped that a Summer Gala would be able to take place outdoors as well as many other activities
- MyMax cards who were funded by Foster Talk provided discounts for foster families to various venues. It was hoped that these would be utilised throughout the summer
- Paula had been in touch with Blackburn Rover's Community Trust and the National Citizen Service (NCS) and it was anticipated that programmes would be rolled out as planned throughout the summer. Paula had also secured a £40 reduction fee for the NCS membership, which would act as another incentive for people to attend.

Sam informed the Group that they had been linking in with Charlotte Hesketh to get a mental health first aid trainer as they had concerns about Looked After Children socialising again after isolating for such a long period. Sam also expressed her thanks to Pamela Price, Alyson Hanson and Stephanie Badley for the regular meetings and ensuring things continued to go as smoothly as possible. Alyson Hanson took the opportunity to thank all Foster Carers throughout the pandemic for their resilience and invaluable work.

RESOLVED – That the update be noted.

8. Health Sub Group Update

Caroline Waldron provided the Group with background information on the Health Sub Group. The Group heard that it was established in September 2020 on the back of the CQC Inspection on Safeguarding and Looked After Children of Health Services in Blackburn with Darwen in 2019. The Health Sub Group had direct reporting arrangements into the Corporate Parenting Executive Board and also the Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group.

To date, the Sub Group had come together on 3 occasions and had so far established a Terms of Reference and an overarching action plan. In addition a Task and Finish Group to streamline some of the activity had been established and had met recently.

The Group heard that the key function of the Sub Group was to work together as multi-agency partners ensuring there was a robust approach to ensure that the health inequalities of children in care and care leavers were reduced.

Caroline informed the Group that the action plan incorporated the actions from the Care Leaver's Strategy from a health perspective, and also the recently updated Corporate Parenting Strategy. Caroline outlined some of the key priorities of the Health Sub Group as follows:-

- Review and strengthening of processes and procedures between Health and Children's Social Care
- To ensure timely access to health services
- Timely transfer of health provisions
- Collaborative working with colleagues within REVIVE and wider health agencies

The Group heard that the Health Sub Group had good representation but was looking to add a foster carer representative.

RESOLVED – It was agreed that Caroline bring the full action plan to the next meeting.

9. Any Other Business

Members of the Group expressed their sincere thanks to Alyson Hanson, which would be her last meeting, for all her help and support over the years.

The dates for the Municipal Year 2021/22 were submitted.

RESOLVED – That the dates for the Municipal Year 2021/22 be noted.

Signed:

Date:

Chair of the meeting
at which the minutes were confirmed