

# CORPORATE PARENTING SPECIALIST ADVISORY GROUP

## Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2021

**PRESENT** – Councillors: Pat McFall (*In the Chair*), Parwaiz Akhtar, Maureen Bateson, Samim Desai, Katrina Fielding, Jackie Floyd, Julie Gunn, Zamir Khan, Sylvia Liddle, Zainab Rawat and Dave Smith.

### **OFFICERS** –

Jayne Ivory – Director Children’s Services & Education

Judith Fennell – Head of Service Permanence and Corporate Parenting, Children’s Services

Karen Barrick – Adoption Now

Helen Kane – Service Leader Placements, Children’s Services

Lisa Dunkerley – Team Manager Fostering, Children’s Services

Janette Clark – Strategic Head of Social Care, Children’s Services

Joanne Siddle – Deputy Director, Schools & Education

Paula Quinn – FCA Committee

Sam Briggs – FCA Secretary

Elizabeth Clarkson – Participation & Inclusion Manager, Children’s Services  
Care Leaver - Vice Chair

Caroline Waldron – Deputy Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children & LAC (joined virtually)

## RESOLUTIONS

### 1. **Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair Cllr Pat McFall, welcomed all present to the meeting. Apologies were received from the following Councillors: Brian Taylor, Salim Sidat, Mark Russell, Jon Baldwin, Abdul Patel, Stephanie Brookfield, Ron Whittle, Vicky McGurk, James Shorrocks, John Slater, Jean Rigby, Kevin Connor, Jim Smith, Jacquie Slater, Yusuf Jan-Virmani, Suleman Khonat and Jim Casey.

### 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 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

**RESOLVED** – The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021 were approved as a correct record with no matters arising.

### 4. **Adoption Update**

The Chair welcomed Karen Barrick from Adoption Now to the meeting, to provide the Group with an update on adoption.

Karen informed the Group that Adoption Now was a Regional Adoption Agency providing Adoption Services on behalf of a consortium agreement with six Local Authorities; Blackburn with Darwen, Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside.

The Agency went live in the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2017 and was only the 5<sup>th</sup> RAA nationally to go live. The Group heard that the main hub was based in Bolton but there was still some adoption services that operated from the six local authority spokes.

Karen informed the Group how the system worked and how the service was split into three teams – Adoption Support, Recruitment and Assessment and Care Planning and Family Finding. This represented a very different approach to delivering adoption services but it was felt that it was one that would provide greater efficiency in finding families for children, ensuring more adopters were approved annually and provided an adoption support service that boasted a range of skilled professionals able to deliver a variety of therapeutic services across the six local authority Boundary.

The Group heard that as with many things, covid had changed the way the Agency operated, mainly:-

- Adoption panels had gone virtual
- Support groups and training was now undertaken online
- Covid 19 fund (a significant amount of money received to commission additional support services)
- Courts had slowed down meaning that final decisions had been delayed
- Fewer children with new adoption plans (this was the picture both locally and nationally, and it was hoped things were beginning to speed up again now).

Karen informed the Group that the 2021 Annual Report had just been published, and outlined the following:-

- 87 adoptive families had been approved
- 30% considering early permanence
- 79 children placed
- 2 disruptions
- Enquiries from people with an interest in adoption had seen a steady rise
- Social media was being utilised more
- Podcasts with real stories of adopters had proved to be a real asset to the marketing strategy

The Group then looked at the data for placing children in Blackburn 2020/21. It was noted that the figures were less than what they normally would be and that this was due to covid. In summary Karen highlighted the data as follows:-

- 19 SHOOPA (Should be Placed for Adoption) decisions
- 17 children placed with adopters
- 65% children were placed with Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) adopters
- 9 children waiting on 31<sup>st</sup> March
- 21 Children adopted

Karen explained that Adoption scorecards were Government set targets for timeliness of placing children for adoption. The scorecard was produced every 6 months and measured progress against those targets. The Group heard there was a significant backlog with the A2 target being 180 days compared to the set target of 121 days and the A10 target was within the timeframe of 365 days compared to the target of 426 days.

The Group heard that additional covid money had been well received and as a result the Agency had been able to offer packages of therapeutic support and had commissioned a psychologist. In total, 443 families received support in addition to 51 children pre adoptive order who also received support.

Finally, Karen informed the group of developments going forward and highlighted the following:

- Taking on the adoption letterbox service for the 6 Local Authorities – this service allowed information to be exchanged between a child’s adoptive family and members of their birth family. The Group noted that staff would be starting in two weeks and it was hoped this service would be up and running in September
- Developing virtual activity days – virtual support groups and training had already proved successful
- National Adoption Strategy had been published and came into effect on 26<sup>th</sup> July – this was backed by a £48 million investment, and was set to improve adoption services in England by putting in place better recruitment across the Country and would remove any unnecessary delays through more training for front line staff, improve approval process and funding for targeted recruitment campaigns.
- Post covid planning – looking at what worked well and what needed to return to face to face

**RESOLVED** – That the update be noted.

## **5. Participation Update**

The Chair welcomed Elizabeth Clarkson who was joined by the Vice-Chair, and together they gave an update on Participation. The Group heard that over the last few months, meetings had taken place in person at Kaleidoscope Youth Centre. This had been great for both the Junior and Senior voice groups to come together in a safe and fun environment and to meet new friends. The groups had taken part in various activities like archery, drama, mindfulness and consultations such as the Corporate Parenting Strategy, the impact of covid on children and young people’s mental health and the 2021 Participation strategy.

The Vice-Chair informed the Group of a recent visit to Lytham Road, The SEEDS and the Junior and Senior voice groups where young people were spoken to about covid, their care experiences, the participation strategy and were asked if they would like the Vice Chairs to raise anything on their behalf. Feedback from the young people included looking forward to returning to normality, seeing friends again, and face to face sessions with a possibility of them being increased to twice weekly.

At the senior voice group a meeting had taken place with the dedicated children in our care nurses, who explained their roles and how the children could contact them if they needed to. There was also a meeting with Barnardos about the advocacy service that they provide. Both had been very well received.

The Vice Chairs also had the opportunity to attend the Scrutiny Committee back in March which was great to be involved with the Youth MP's from the youth forum and bring the forums together in one meeting.

Young people had been involved in the recent recruitment of the Deputy Director of Children's Services. Unfortunately the Vice Chairs were not available, but they did provide a question. The Group heard that yet again the young people's preferred candidate, was also decided by the professional panel.

The Group heard that the Vice Chair had taken part in some dedicated sessions at YPS for care leavers regarding developing skills in interviewing and CV writing, and applying for apprenticeships within the council. The Vice Chair also informed the Group that he had successfully applied for an IT apprenticeship which he was really looking forward to.

The Vice Chair informed the Group that the Junior and Senior voices had been involved in the co-design of the new improved participation strategy. The old strategy had been designed by professionals, so with the support of YPS, young people took the lead in what they wanted to be included, and how they could hold adults accountable. It had now gone to the design stage and looked great with lots of visuals and graphics and was young person friendly.

Elizabeth Clarkson informed the Group that the participation framework illustrated how the young people's forums across the Borough linked together and fed into the Youth MP's who advocated on young people's behalf. The framework allowed children and young people to participate in various decision making boards.

A draft youth voice impact tool had been developed to capture the impact of children and young people's voices and this had been shared with the participation champions across Blackburn with Darwen for feedback from quarter 1. The tool measured young people's voices, thoughts and feelings in the services that they engaged with, and would also capture key decisions that influenced services which young people accessed. Tweaks to the Youth Voice Impact Tool would be finalised following a meeting with the participation champions.

The Group heard there was an appetite from young people as part of the national takeover challenge to perhaps take over chairing a Corporate Parenting meeting. In addition Young People would like to invite members to future voice meetings and events.

Elizabeth informed the Group that the Youth Forum, with support from YPS, Jo Siddle and Cllr Julie Gunn were in the process of recruiting school representatives to form a Schools Voice Alliance, which would hopefully be implemented in September. This would provide a diverse range of young people's voices from across Blackburn with Darwen.

Young people had also been working with a web designer to update the YPS website. Young people from the voice groups were keen to have a dedicated section for Children in Our Care and would like information about placements, education, and advocacy, health and leisure activities.

**RESOLVED** – That the update be noted.

## **6. Corporate Parenting Dashboard**

The Group was presented with an update on the latest monitoring report of Children in Our Care as of the 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and heard that the total number of children in care was 372. Of those, 45% were female and 55% were male.

Members noted the age profiles of children in care with 90 children aged between 15 to 17 years old. 76 children were aged between 12 to 14 years, 45 children aged between 9 to 11 years, 47 children aged between 6 to 8 years, 53 children aged between 3 to 5 years and 61 children aged between 0 to 2 years. The Group then looked at the age range of children entering care between April 2020 and March 2021. The Group heard that the age of children coming in to care was as follows:- 44% of children aged 0 to 2 years, 15% aged 3 to 6 years, 14% aged 7 to 10 years, 23% aged 11 to 15 years and 4% aged 16+.

Judith informed the Group that 79% of children in our care were of white / UK ethnicity.

Of the total number of Children in Our Care, Judith highlighted that a high proportion of children were placed in the following:- 121 were placed in in-house foster placements, 64 placed with family and friends, 61 placed with agency foster placements.

The total number of children entering care in 2021 was 21 and the number of children leaving care was 22.

The Group then looked at the destinations of Care Leavers with 25% being placed on special guardianship, 21% had reached the age of 18 and 21% had returned to parents.

**RESOLVED** – That the update be noted.

## **7. Fostering Service Update**

The Chair invited Judith Fennell, Helen Kane and Lisa Dunkerley to present an update on Fostering Services.

Lisa informed the Group of the current picture and highlighted the following:-

- Continued commitment of highly valued foster carers
- Exceptional offers of support for children within existing foster carers
- Regular foster carer meetings
- Tipis Event which everyone was looking forward to
- 69 mainstream fostering households
- 34 friends and family fostering households

- 11 family and friends carers households under assessment
- 1 short break only household
- 1 Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) joined in June 2021

The Group were informed of the forecast for the next 6 months and heard that 14 households were currently undergoing assessment for approval. Lisa highlighted that they felt very fortunate to have this number considering the effect of the pandemic. There was also 1 potential IFA household wishing to transfer to Local Authority. Furthermore, it was hoped that assessments waiting for panel approval would be carried out in a timely manner, with an aim of approval within a 12 week timescale.

The Group heard of some of the marketing ideas, mainly community based marketing targeting at public events, marketing support across the digital market, regular information events, profiling of foster carers and media broadcasting (radio, local newspapers).

The Group heard about the development of a flexible agreement between 4 Local Authorities (Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool, Cumbria and Lancashire) and IFAs to improve sufficiency for children and allow for more co-ordinated and planned transitions into care. With a flexible framework it was anticipated that as corporate parents, access to care that children need would be done so in a timely and co-ordinated manner with improved collaboration with the fostering agencies. The Group heard that this would allow for children to be placed within or nearer to their own communities, close to family and friends, accessing services that they know and the continuity of social work relationships.

Discussions also took place around the re-shaping and new management of the team, along with the development of a front door worker which would support the child through their journey into care and be the single point of contact as the face of the fostering service.

Helen highlighted the next steps for the team, which included the following:-

- Action plan to progress and develop the front door worker role
- Improved opportunities for adolescents
- Targeted recruitment of foster carers
- Encourage and improve participation of children to inform the development of the service
- Refresh the referral form so that it captures the essence of the child and what they are about
- Strengthen systemic leadership
- Recruitment and marketing
- Exciting journey out of covid

**RESOLVED** – That the update be noted.

## **8. Foster Carer's Update**

Paula Quinn was invited by the Chair to provide an update to the Group.

The Group heard that Paula and other foster carers had been handing out Mymax cards in advance of the school holidays starting, which had been well received.

Paula informed the Group of an event being held at the Tipis at Riley Green on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September between 1pm – 4pm. Performers Without Borders would be present at the event, with lots of fun activities planned for children, young people and families to participate in. Tickets were still available to purchase and anyone wishing to attend should contact Paula.

The Group heard that Mental Health First Aid England had launched their online training courses and that this training would be beneficial for foster carers and social workers, given the impact of covid-19 on mental health and wellbeing, especially on children and young people.

Paula expressed her thanks to Elizabeth Clarkson for putting her in touch with organisers of the recent fun fair in Blackburn, who kindly provided free tickets. This was greatly appreciated and positive feedback was received from those who managed to go.

Paula informed the Group that the Celebration of Achievement event would be going ahead which was great news, but also expressed disappointment on behalf of the young people whose leaving proms had been cancelled this year. Jo Siddle agreed to make enquiries about the possibility of something being arranged for those Year 11 and Year 13 leavers.

**RESOLVED – That the update be noted.**

Signed: .....

Date: .....

Chair of the meeting  
at which the minutes were confirmed