

# CORPORATE PARENTING SPECIALIST ADVISORY GROUP

## Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2022

**PRESENT – Councillors:** McFall (*In the Chair*), Bateson, M Desai, S Desai, Fielding, Floyd, Gunn, S Hussain, Khonat, Liddle, Mahmood, McGurk, Rawat, Riley, Salton, Taylor and Whittle.

### **OFFICERS –**

Jayne Ivory – Director Children’s Services & Education  
Emma Ford – Deputy Director, Children’s Social Care  
Joanne Siddle – Deputy Director, Schools & Education  
Imran Akuji – Head of Service, Partnerships, Intensive Support, Policy and Performance  
Elizabeth Clarkson – Participation & Inclusion Manager, Children’s Services  
Helen Kane – Service Leader, Placements  
Jeremy Wood – Team Manager, Childrens  
Carol Smith – FCA Committee  
Sam Briggs – FCA Secretary  
Amelia Brummit - Specialist Safeguarding Practitioner, NHS Blackburn with Darwen CCG  
Care Leaver

## **RESOLUTIONS**

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

The Chair, Cllr Pat McFall, welcomed all present to the virtual meeting.  
Apologies were received from Martin Eden, Judith Fennell, Paula Quinn and from the following Councillors: Damian Talbot, Julie Slater, Abdul Patel, Mohammed Khan, Jane Oates, Jacquie Slater, Stephanie Brookfield, Zamir Khan, Mark Russell, Dave Smith, Jean Rigby, John Slater and Dave Harling.

### **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 10<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

**RESOLVED** – The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2022 were approved as a correct record with no matters arising. It was agreed that an update on Oral Health would be well received at a future meeting.

### **4. NEET Update**

Imran Akuji was welcomed to the meeting by the Chair, and provided an update on Care Leavers aged between 17-24 years that were not currently in Education, Employment and Training.

The Group were informed of the latest position of Care Leaver activity (17-18 year olds) as at 18<sup>th</sup> February 2022, based on a cohort of 25, that we had a higher percentage of young people in higher education than regional and England averages. For ‘Education other than Higher’ (up to and including A Level) Blackburn with Darwen was lower than the regional and England average. The total EET was the same as regional but below the England average and subsequently NEET was above the England average.

The Group then compared those figures to the Care Leaver activity (19-21 year olds) and it was noted that we had a higher percentage of young people in Higher Education than the England average and the same as the regional average. In training and employment we were lower than the regional average but higher than the England average. Blackburn with Darwen had a significantly higher percentage of care leavers with an illness and disability than regional and England averages. EET continued to be lower, with NEET above England and regional averages

In terms of support and engagement, Imran highlighted the following:

- Covid has had an impact, and NEET figures had increased during the pandemic. This had particularly affected Year 12 students who missed out on the usual transition arrangements such as college/sixth form visits and face-to-face meetings with staff and other students. The virtual alternatives were not as effective. This has resulted in some drop-out (which has also happened for non-looked after young people).
- The Virtual School was working hard to re-engage young people up to age 18, and provide additional support through the New Directions Service
- The reach of the New Directions Service would be expanded to support young people aged 18 years to age 25
- A Virtual College would be established to include Children in Our Care aged 16-25 to prepare for adulthood, working with Adult Services and Children's Services

Finally, the Group heard of the work that was still to be done:

- Raise awareness of the apprenticeship offer from BwD, including pre-apprenticeship work placements and work experience
- More consistent active support, encouragement, advice and guidance for young people to continue their education and training (Virtual School, New Directions Service, Virtual College proposal)
- Develop a better understanding of the factors influencing NEET
- Develop a Care Leavers Service Plan to be shared at the next Corporate Parenting Specialist Advisory Group meeting
- Improve the consistency of routine conversations with care leavers about their ambitions to tailor the support they need to help them achieve (relationship with Personal Advisor)
- Launch the support hub at the Limes- primarily a community Hub for supporting our young people -Children In Our Care, Care Leavers, Foster Cares – the ethos it is their building
- Review and relaunch the 'Care Leavers Charter' to keep young people well informed of their rights, entitlements and responsibilities e.g. financial and practical support (including Bursary, Council Tax support)
- Participation - The Voice group is impactful and ensures that young people's voices are heard and effectively responded to. Recruiting additional members would increase diversity and representation
- Continue to recognise the educational achievements of Children in Care and Care Leavers through our annual Celebration of Achievement Event so they know their success is valued

**RESOLVED** – That the update be noted and that Imran come back to a future meeting to provide a further update.

## **5. Participation Update**

The Group was provided with an update from Care Leaver, and heard that both the Junior and Senior voice groups had met with the Ofsted Inspectors last month at Kaleidoscope Youth Centre.

Care Leavers had also participated in the Senior Voice / Leaving care session where they had been asked about their experience of leaving care service. The Care Leavers informed them that they were working with the Council to co-design an easy to understand document on how children in care could access their information and it was hoped that this information would be given to every child in care in BwD. It was also hoped that this information would be updated on the YPS website which was currently being re-developed and would have a dedicated section for children in care which would have useful information on the services and support they might need.

The Group heard that as a result of low numbers in the senior voice group since Christmas, YPS had been contacting teams and social workers and the foster carers association to promote these sessions.

Funding had been secured to host the circus skills project again which proved very popular last September, these sessions would commence this Thursday for 5 weeks for both juniors and seniors and it was also hoped that a range of outdoor activities in addition to the voice work that takes place, could be offered come Spring.

The Group heard that care leavers, along with the SYA youth forum had been involved in the co-design of the Young Inspectors residential last weekend and whilst the weather had been terrible the group still managed to get outside and participate in some fantastic team building activities.

There had also been an opportunity to participate in a video for the NHS with the youth forum encouraging 12 – 15 year olds to get vaccinated and the importance of still testing and keeping each other safe.

The Group were informed that young people from BwD would be recruited to become young inspectors over the next coming weeks through nominations from schools, colleges and youth organisations and it was hoped that the first inspection would be completed March/April.

Finally, the Group heard that Care Leaver had recently been supporting Elizabeth Clarkson in the recent Youth Elections and the Make Your Mark national referendum in which over 5150 young people had taken part. It was highlighted that the top 3 issues for Make Your Mark in BwD were:

- 1) Jobs, Money, Homes and Opportunities
- 2) Education and Learning
- 3) Health and Wellbeing

The Group expressed their thanks for a comprehensive presentation.

Discussions also took place regarding financial training and assistance that young people would benefit from (HSBC, DWP, Finance department) and it was agreed that this would be looked in.

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

## **6. Corporate Parenting Dashboard**

The Group was presented with an update Emma Ford on the latest monitoring report of Children in Our Care as of the 21<sup>st</sup> February 2022, and heard that the total number of children in care was 389.

Of those, 47% were female and 53% were male. Members noted the age profiles of children in care with 103 children aged between 15 to 17 years old. 73 children were aged between 12 to 14 years, 51 children aged between 9 to 11 years, 46 children aged between 6 to 8 years, 50 children aged between 3 to 5 years and 66 children aged between 0 to 2 years. The Group then looked at the age range of children entering care between February 2021 and January 2022.

Emma informed the Group that 78% of children in our care were of white / UK ethnicity followed by 8% being Asian / Pakistani ethnicity.

Of the total number of Children in Our Care, Emma highlighted that a high proportion of children were placed in the following:- 130 were placed in in-house foster placements, 52 placed with parents, 62 placed with family and friends, 68 placed with agency foster placements. The total number of children entering care so far in 2022 was 4 and the number of children leaving care was 8.

The Group also noted the destination of care leavers with 6% having reached 18, 16% had returned to parents, 12% had moved in with relatives and 20% had been adopted.

The Group then looked at the data for performance compared with national, regional and statistical neighbour averages.

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

## **7. Corporate Parenting Strategy**

Jayne Ivory informed the Group of how the strategy set out how corporate parents in Blackburn with Darwen would work together to ensure that children and young people in care, and those who had left care, could grow up to lead happy, healthy lives and experience success.

The strategy outlined Blackburn with Darwen's priorities as follows:

- Participation – the priority was about empowering children and young people to express their voices and influence the decisions being made
- Placements – this priority was about making sure children and young people were provided with a safe, comfortable and caring home
- Education – this priority was about making sure children and young people could be happy and successful in their learning
- Health – this priority was about looking after the health of children and young people including their physical and emotional needs
- Identity – this priority was about supporting children and young people to build a sense of identity so that they know their own history

- Preparation for Adulthood – this priority was about developing life skills children and young people needed to live independently when they grow older

The strategy also included messages from children in care who has been asked to share their views and experiences of being in care.

Discussions took place around the possibility of a task and finish group being set up in order to ensure that these priorities were being driven forward. It was agreed that this would be discussed in further detail and that an update be brought to a future meeting.

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

## **8. Update on Apple Trees and Lytham Road Inspection**

Jeremy Wood and Helen Kane attended the meeting to provide updates on the recent inspections that took place at Apple Trees and Lytham Road.

Jeremy informed the Group that the Apple Trees inspection took place on 30<sup>th</sup> November and 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021. The overall judgement rating was outstanding. The whole team at Apple Trees felt very proud and were congratulated by the Group for this achievement.

Helen informed the Group that the Lytham Road inspection took place on 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021 and the overall judgement was ‘requires improvement to be good’. The Group heard that Helen and the team were looking to share good practices in order to improve on this and were currently working on an improvement plan. Despite the judgement, there were strengths to be celebrated such as the recent decoration of the games room which had been well received by the children.

Both Jeremy and Helen were thanked for their updates and their continued hard work.

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

## **9. Subject Access Requests for Care Leavers Files**

Emma Ford informed the Group that Zahida Khan and Joanne Grime had been working hard behind the scenes to improve accessibility for care leavers wanting to access their personal files. They had met with young people and key stakeholders in order to better understand what was needed from the request. A full update would be given at the next meeting.

Care Leaver informed the Group that the files needed to be young person friendly so that it could easily be accessed by them. It was noted that once a file had been accessed, support was only offered once to them after they had viewed the file, with no further follow up. Depending on what information was on file, it could be triggering for some care leavers so it was suggested that ongoing support be made available to care leavers.

**RESOLVED** – That the update be noted and a further update be provided at the next meeting.

**10. Foster Carer's Update**

Carol Walsh and Sam Briggs were welcomed to the meeting by the Chair, and together they updated the Group on the following:-

- Approximately 100 children would be taking part in a swimming gala on Saturday at Darwen Leisure Centre and the FCA would be using the time as an opportunity to carry out a recruitment drive
- The TeePees had been booked again for the 10<sup>th</sup> July but the FCA were short of funds. A fundraising event would be taking place at Feniscowles Cricket Ground and any donations / raffles prizes were welcome
- Concerns were raised why the FCA had to pay to use Council venues – it was agreed this would be looked into
- Discussions also took place around preparing young people for adulthood especially around managing money
- Foster Carers had attended a recent Youth Justice training course which had proved very beneficial

On behalf of the Foster Carers Association, Carol and Sam expressed their sincere thanks to both Councillors McFall and Bateson for their hard work and dedication to Children's Services over the years.

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

**11. Out of Hours Services update**

Helen Kane informed the Group that the Out of Hours service was currently being looked into. A couple of options were being explored in order to support foster carers and young people and a full update would be available at a later meeting.

**RESOLVED** – That the update be noted and that an update of out of hours contacts for foster carers be provided at a future meeting.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

Chair of the meeting  
at which the minutes were confirmed