

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MINUTES

of meeting held on **24 FEBRUARY 2009** at the

Council House from 4.00 pm to 5.04 pm

Councillor Mellen	(Chair)
Councillor Collins	(Minute 12 onwards)
Councillor Griggs	
Councillor Ibrahim	
Councillor Klein	
Councillor Marshall	
Councillor Morley	
Councillor Smith	
Councillor Urquhart	

indicates present at meeting

Also present

David Cooke - Regional Director - Business in the Community

Council officers

Lynne Anderson	- Service Manager, Fostering)	
Julie Lewis	- Head of Service, Children in Care)	Children's Services
Kate Marron	- Head of Curriculum and Strategy 8-13)	
Helen Jones	- Director of Self-directed Support	-	Adult Support and Health
Barry Horne	- Corporate Director	-	Environment and Regeneration
Kevin Banfield	- Head of Performance Improvement and Planning)	Resources
Keith Ford	- Committee Administrator)	

8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Katrina Curnow, Area 1 Neighbourhood Manager and Janet Sheard, NHS Nottingham.

9 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were made.

10 MINUTES

(a) Accuracy

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting, held on 26 January 2009, copies of which had been circulated, be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

(b) Matters Arising

RESOLVED that it be noted that the figures about the net gain in mainstream, in-house foster carers for 2007/08 and 2006/07 which were reported to the meeting, and recorded in the first bullet point of Minute 6, were inaccurate.

(N.B. It was confirmed, outside of the meeting, that there had been a net gain of 14 and 8 such foster carers in 2007/08 and 2006/07 respectively, rather than 23 and 1 as reported to the meeting).

11 CHILDREN IN CARE POPULATION AS AT 31 JANUARY 2009

Further to minute 3, dated 26 January 2009, consideration was given to a report of the Director of Specialist Services, copies of which had been circulated.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- the 'Unknown' category in Ethnicity was a result of inadequate data entry rather than a child's ethnicity being literally unknown. The provision of overall ethnicity statistics for the general City population would give further contextual evidence to assist in the Board's consideration;
- the current age range of children looked after was more pertinent than the age at admission;
- the 'None' category in disabilities resulted from social workers recording that a child had a disability but not specifying the type of disability;
- the 71 children placed in neither Nottingham City or Nottinghamshire County schools were in residential or kinship placements, potentially at some distance away. Also, it was underlined that not all in-house foster carers lived in Nottingham or Nottinghamshire;
- members raised concerns about the high levels of abuse or neglect (60.8%), which was the most prevalent category of need. It was underlined that this was, not surprisingly, the most common reason nationally for a child being placed into care, although the City figure was lower than the national average of approximately 68%. Members queried whether the current local figure was higher or lower than previous years. By providing such trend data, it would be possible to link this work into intervention planning and the Council's overall performance management framework;
- the 'Others' category in the placement split figures related to children placed in residential schools, or Youth Offending Institutes in the case of 4 young people out of the 56, again highlighting the very small proportion of such cases, which belied some of the misconceptions around Children in Care;
- it was clarified that the proportion of external registered foster carers had remained constant but numbers were rising due to difficulties in recruiting in-house foster carers and the Council's aim to place children in family setting, although there had

also been an increase in in-house foster carers in recent months. As well as offering more competitive allowances, independent fostering agencies (IFAs) also offered benefits such as events, day trips and health farm visits for foster carers. A number of these agencies were based within the City boundary and advertised on the Council's own website, which also had implications for the Council's potential target audience. The Board could consider the overall issue of foster carers' allowances and benefits in more depth, with a view to possible increases as a means of 'investing to save'. In-house foster carers was the Council's preferred option as it was less expensive, enabled a greater degree of influence, and enabled children to be placed closer to their home environment, recognising their own sense of identity with the City.

The Council had been renegotiating packages of care with IFAs in recent months and it was recognised that it had been paying more for some packages of care, than other local authorities were asked to, by the very same agencies. IFAs were targeting particular niches in the market, such as relatively small ethnic groups and specific types of challenging behaviour. A breakdown of children placed with these agencies, by categories such as ethnicity and disability, would be helpful to clarify whether placements were of a more specialist nature, for which a higher cost could be justified. The Council's 'mixed economy' approach to providing foster care placements had been recognised as realistic. Further consideration could also be given to reducing costs by forming a regional coalition of local authorities, as in Pan-London, using agreed codes of practice and cost weightings.

It was reported that the approach for fostering differed from adoption in that, once a child was adopted, there were potentially no additional costs to the Council if that placement was outside of the City boundary. As such, the search to find the best possible adoptive match for a child could primarily be national in scope;

- with regard to the numbers of care leavers who had children themselves, it would be helpful to know how many of these were teenage pregnancies;
- on the issue of educational attainment, 11 year old children in the care of the City Council who attended City Council schools made, on average, progress of 0.5 levels more than those placed in County schools. Further work was needed to replicate this success with older age groups, at which the relative difference was not currently statistically significant;
- care leavers could remain classed as such up to the age of 25, depending on eligibility criteria;
- the asylum seeking children referred to in the report were those who had entered the country unaccompanied.

RESOLVED that update reports on the Children in Care population, including the following specific issues, be provided on a six monthly basis:

J Lewis

- a) **relevant trend data – for example, 2007/08 figures for categories of need;**
- b) **ethnicity statistics for the general City population, to enable comparison with statistics for children in care;**
- c) **numbers of teenage pregnancies amongst Children in Care / care leavers**
- d) **a further breakdown of Children in Care statistics with regard to independent foster care placements.**

12 EVALUATION OF THE FOSTER CARERS' QUESTIONNAIRES – AUGUST 2008

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Specialist Services, copies of which had been circulated.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- with regard to notice for training events, the responses reflected that, due to a lack of uptake, events were sometimes cancelled at short notice. A lack of uptake also prevented courses being offered at evenings and weekends, which led to the national disgruntlement that carers had to take annual leave in order to attend courses held in the working day;
- the responses regarding out of hours support probably related more to the Emergency Duty Team support than the service offered by supervising social workers at evenings and weekends. The latter service was welcomed although not heavily utilised;
- some improvements had been seen in the issue of treating foster carers as co-professionals;
- the children who foster group was for the birth children of foster carers;
- placement stability remained a major challenge;
- the dedicated stores service offered products such as beds, bedding, baby equipment, cots, and smoke alarms and was welcomed by foster carers as an alternative approach to the vouchers offered by other local authorities;
- prior to the formal Fostering Panel deregistration process, exit interviews were held, via a panel which included the supervising social worker, through which foster carers' reasons for leaving were explored, with a view to finding solutions to problems and encouraging them to stay on. The results of these exit interviews, and questionnaires such as these, would be shared with relevant Service Heads as appropriate in order to address any issues raised. It would also be underlined that these messages would now be shared with the Board. Members underlined the importance of consistency and all Council services being seen to offer high levels of service and support. It was clarified that only very few foster carers had chosen to leave as a result of fieldwork issues and that the necessary primary focus of child social workers would always be on child protection issues;
- foster carers' satisfaction levels with supervising social workers had improved considerably over the last two years. A service level agreement had been made with Fostering Network, which offered support to foster carers, and this organisation had received very few referrals from foster carers in recent months, whilst work had also been undertaken to address long standing issues;
- with regard to the computer questionnaire, foster carers were encouraged to use e-mail but this was not compulsory;
- foster carers were not currently offered a separate contact number for the Emergency Duty Team;

- it was clarified that the Council welcomed same sex foster carers. This had received some positive media coverage recently.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

All

13 WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR CHILDREN IN CARE? OVERVIEW OF RECENT THINKING AND GOOD PRACTICE

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Specialist Services, copies of which had been circulated.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Research in Practice produced Councillor briefings, which, if obtained, could be shared with elected members on this Board;
- the transition into adult life was a critical issue for the Board to consider in future. Adult Support and Health worked with Children's Services as appropriate around this issue. A potential service gap currently existed around accommodation needs. One issue requiring a joined-up approach concerned the return of children in care to their family, as part of the rehabilitation process, being delayed as a result of their families awaiting rehousing. Nottingham City Homes, who were represented on the Board, would be involved in helping to address such issues in future;
- as previously discussed, school performance was intrinsically linked to stability of placement and ways of replicating the success in City Schools for certain age groups needed to be explored;
- the effect of social networking internet sites on contact between birth parents and children in care was queried. Internet access was now available in children's residential homes but such sites were not accessible. A review of contact arrangements had recently been completed and the outcomes could be shared with the Board. Safeguarding children against unwanted contact was difficult, especially due to the size and inter-connectedness of some of the families in Nottingham.

RESOLVED

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| (1) that the report be noted; | All |
| (2) that the Research in Practice Councillor briefings be shared with elected members. | J Lewis
/ K Ford |
| (3) that the issue of transition into adult life and relevant service provision be submitted to a future meeting of the Board for more detailed consideration; | J Lewis |
| (4) that a report on the outcomes of the contact arrangement review be submitted to a future meeting of the Board. | J Lewis |

14 COMMUNICATION FROM COUNCILLORS TO FOSTER CARERS

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Specialist Services, copies of which had been circulated.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Councillors' surgery details, as well as contact details (including e-mail addresses), should be included in the letter;
- subject to the relevant members agreeing, it would be better to send a single combined letter to each foster carer from the relevant Councillors for each ward;
- the letters would be sent centrally from Children's Services, so that foster carers' identities were not shared with Councillors, unless foster carers themselves responded to the letter.

RESOLVED that the letter be redrafted as discussed and sent to all Councillors for comments, with a summary of Corporate Parenting issues and responsibilities and a request that they contact Councillor Mellen to opt out of the proposed approach, if not in agreement.