

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MINUTES

of meeting held on **19 MARCH 2012** at

Loxley House from 2.35 pm to 4.15 pm

- ✓ Councillor Mellen (Chair)
- ✓ Councillor Klein (Vice-Chair)
- ✓ Councillor Culley (from minute 37-42 inclusive)
- ✓ Councillor Dewinton
- ✓ Councillor Heaton
- ✓ Councillor Jenkins
- ✓ Councillor McCulloch
- ✓ Councillor Morley
- ✓ Councillor Morris

✓ indicates present at meeting

Also in attendance

- Mr D Richards) Business in the Community
- Mr J Shrivastava)

- Miss S Barber)
- Mr M Harrison)
- Mr J Garner) Children in Care Council
- Mr D Parish)
- Mr N Smith)

- Mrs L Beedham)
- Ms S Bond)
- Mrs S Clarke)
- Ms E Darragh) Children and Families (City Council)
- Ms Liu-Smith)
- Mr J Rea)
- Ms P Thompson-Omenka)
- Mr K Williams)

- Ms I Denton - Communities (City Council)
- Ms S Thompson - County Health Partnerships Children in Care Service

- Mrs P Brackenbury - Nottingham Citycare Partnership

- Mrs Z West) Resources (City Council)
- Ms C Ziane-Pryor)

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor McCulloch, Carol Arme, Candida Brudenell, Gill Moy, Evonne Rogers, and Heidi Watson. Councillor Cully sent apologies for her predicted late arrival.

35 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were made.

36 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting held on 1 February 2012, copies of which had been circulated, be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

37 PERFORMANCE OCTOBER 2011-JANUARY 2012

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Quality and Commissioning, copies of which had been circulated and that was complemented by an updated performance report which included statistics for February 2012 and which was circulated at the meeting and submitted to the online agenda following the meeting.

Ms Paulette Thompson-Omenka presented the report and provided the following information:

- there were 538 children in care. The number fluctuated around 535 and had been as high as 547. An unplanned event could potentially bring a sibling group of 5 into the system;
- further work was required in regard to the discharge programme for 17 years olds in preparation for their exiting the system at 18 years old. Semi-independent support was a favoured option for many care leavers, with the alternative being support from edge of care services;
- performance indicator NI63 (Stability of placements of children in care: length of placement) had achieved 72.9%, which was considered good compared to most similar local authorities;
- performance indicator NI66 (Children in Care cases which were reviewed within required timescales) was at 96.3% and had shown good improvement;
- performance indicator PAF C63 (Participation in reviews) was at 83.8%. This indicator remained a priority. There was an increasing focus on participation of the young people, including involvement in designing of services;
- there had been a significant increase in participation of the “Strengths and Difficulties” questionnaire, which focused on children’s emotional wellbeing. Replies were at 75.9%, which was up from 63.7% due to the massive efforts of colleagues.

Ms Thompson-Omenka responded to the Board's questions and comments as follows:

- in regard to performance indicator NI61 (Timeliness of placements of Children in Care for adoption following an agency decision that the child should be placed for adoption), the 12 month 'timely placement' period, was not realistic as the adoption process was very complicated. A more relevant indicator would refer to the number of children moving through the system;
- there was some work done on speeding up the adoption process. While babies were easily placed, older children, sibling groups, children from ethnic minorities, and especially children with disabilities, were much harder to place. The process needed to be safe and secure, with minimal disruptions. Nottingham had low levels of adoption disruptions;
- it was believed that the target for performance indicators NI147 and NI148 (Care leavers in suitable accommodation – 100%, and Care leavers in employment, education or training – 95.00%) were unrealistic but could not ethically be set any lower;
- there had previously been discussion on how benefit reforms may affect children in care and people's ability to adopt. It was believed that the benefits reforms may have had a detrimental effect. Local Authorities would have powers to remove tenancies where children had been taken into care but it was suggested that central government first needed to consider the impact of children being taken into care and then returning home at a later date, if tenancies had been removed in the intervening period. Sometimes it would not be in the child's best interests to return to the family home, or the parents would not want the children back. Under these circumstances there would be no reason for over-occupancy, but it would not be known initially if the children were due to return;
- while the Chair aspired to reduce the number of children in care by 5%, greater financial support would be needed for positive reductions in numbers of children in care. The preferred position was for children to remain with or return to their parental home, but this often placed greater strain on other resources such as drug/alcohol abuse services, domestic violence and mental health services which were also under financial restraints. In all cases, the main priority remained the child's safety;
- more support was needed for facilitating people to adopt who currently could not. A lady in a 1 bed council house was not able to adopt as she did not have enough rooms, and could not be provided with a larger house because she had not yet adopted.

The Chair was pleased to greet a care leaver at his ward surgery and that she had felt confident to approach her ward Councillor for assistance in resolving an issue.

Councillor Klein commented that during her 6 years as a member of the Adoption Panel, she had found that there were a multitude of uncontrollable issues which could delay the adoption process at every stage, and also many issues which prevented potentially mutually successful adoptions.

RESOLVED

- (1) that the information provided in the report be noted;**

- (2) that, regarding the complete process of adoptions, Mrs Thompson-Omenka arrange for more detailed information to be provided to the Board at a future meeting;
- (3) that the positive work between Children in Care colleagues and Health colleagues be acknowledged, with particular thanks to Sharon Clarke.

38 NCC FOSTERING SERVICES INSPECTION 2011 – OFSTED REPORT

Consideration was given to the Ofsted Local Authority Fostering Agency inspection report, copies of which had been circulated.

Ms Paulette Thompson-Omenka introduced the report and was very pleased to inform the Board that the Local Fostering Agency was graded good overall in every category, and excellent in some features including support to care leavers.

Recommendations were made which included consistent training portfolios for foster carers and consistent supervision records. As a result, an action plan was to be produced and implemented, addressing all issues raised in the recommendations, by the next unannounced inspection later this year.

RESOLVED

- (1) that the information provided in the inspection be noted;
- (2) that the congratulations of the Board to all staff and carers involved in the fostering inspection be recorded;
- (3) that, at a future meeting, Ms Thompson-Omenka inform the Board of progress made against the action plan.

39 CARE LEAVERS IN, AND NOT IN, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (NEET/EET) AND SUITABLE ACCOMMODATION

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director for Children's Services, copies of which had been circulated,

Ms Sharon Clarke introduced the detailed report. The following information was provided:

- Nationally and locally there was concern with employment of young people. 1 in 5 (16,000) young people were out of work. This was proportionally reflected in care leavers;
- there was a multi-agency focus group in Nottingham, who committed to ensuring that young people were prepared for employment or education by providing practical skills. This included personal advisers providing group sessions on employability and sustaining tenancies;
- there was success with commitment to apprenticeships, and with jobs for care leavers at entry level. PATRA, Nottingham City Council and Nottingham City Homes had provided apprenticeships to care leavers, while the RISE programme

provided young people with a taster sessions in the workplace environment. In the last week, 3 young people had gained employment through RISE;

- suitable accommodation remained a priority with an increased demand in supported lodgings for the most vulnerable young people, including living with a host family. Nottingham City Council had invited tenders from private providers for a range of housing to meet young people's needs, including semi-independent accommodation. This included a menu of options with a tailored support package;

In the discussion that followed, a number of further points were made including:

- training and education was discussed, planned and reviewed with children in care as part of their Pathway Plan and two careers officers worked at the 15+ service;
- there were currently 19 of Nottingham's children in care at university. Young people in care had opportunities to visit the universities and meet with connexions advisors. Some universities offered student mentors at local schools, with children in care a priority and schools were encouraged to engage children in care in university related activities and opportunities and making colleges and universities aware that they were in care;
- it was sometimes difficult to raise young peoples' aspirations and motivation with regards to university. Many young people did not want to go to university but from 280 care leavers (aged 18-24), approximately 5 were due to start university in 2012;
- in the past week 3 young people had successfully gained employment through RISE;
- the six personal advisors were realistic with children in care with regards to their educational attainment and potential careers. Support was also provided if further or higher education was not believed to be the right path for the child or if they were not academically able. Although RISE were focused on local job opportunities rather than education, they could signpost young people to education advice if they were academically qualified;
- pre-employment experience and support helped young people in care to compete 'on a level playing field' where they would have the same opportunities as any other young people.

RESOLVED that the Corporate Parenting Board:

- (1) remain the lead body in driving action across Nottingham City in respect of employment and education for Children in Care;**
- (2) note the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) report and commits to working towards the Quality Mark for Nottingham City;**
- (3) offer commitment in ensuring the on-going multi-agency focus group continues to drive employment and education for care leavers;**

- (4) continue to offer commitment in support of the implementation of the Framework of semi-independence accommodation for 16-18 year olds.**

40 PERSONAL EDUCATION ALLOWANCE (PEA) FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Schools and Learning, copies of which had been circulated, outlining how children in care had benefited from the Personal Education Allowances which could be applied for up to £500 within criteria decided by each Local Authority, to fund activities linked to educational objectives which a parent of a child not in care would normally pay for, such as one-to-one tuition, school trips, vocational training, music lessons, laptops etc.

The report provided the following information:

- PEAs were originally funded through an Area Based Grant, with the amount set at £500 per child in care and approx 72% of Children in Care expected to benefit;
- in 2010 Nottingham City extended its eligibility criteria to include pupils up to 19 years old in further education or sixth form;
- as of February 2012 there were over 120 applications in 2011/12, totalling approximately £50,000;
- although no longer a statutory requirement, as PEAs were having such a positive effect on the outcomes for children's educational attainment, self-esteem and ability to learn, it was felt that the positive effect of the PEAs represented a sound investment for children in care;

The recommendation was to continue PEAs but at a reduced rate of £350 to enable wider access. This amount was enough to purchase a laptop and basic software and it was suggested that donations could be sought for software, including via the Children in Care Christmas appeal.

RESOLVED

- (1) that the increased uptake of Personal Education Allowances (PEA) and the opportunities they offer children and young people, be acknowledged;**
- (2) that the reduction of the individual PEA limit from £500 to £350 for 2012/13 to support a larger cohort of children in care, be approved.**

41 CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL – CHILDRENS CHARTER

Mr Jon Rae introduced the presentation, copies of which had been circulated and which was delivered by Stacey Barber and Dyeater Parish, members of the Children In Care Council which had created the questionnaire, marked and collated the answers and rated them.

The detailed presentation included the following information and 'traffic light' colour coded headings:

- 714 questionnaires were sent out, with 134 usable returns, which gave an 18.8%

response rate;

- 88.5% felt that their social workers treated them with respect; 96.8% felt that their carers treated them with respect;
- 86.6% felt that where they were living was the right care place for them; 41.8% said that waiting time for their care places was less than one month;
- 97% felt safe where they lived; 94.8% felt safe at school and 96.8% felt safe in their neighbourhood;
- 77.5% felt that their social workers had enough time for them. However, this means almost 1 in 4 felt that their social workers did not have time for them; 95.2% felt that their carers had enough time for them;
- 91.6% felt that their social workers listened to what they said; 97.7% felt that their carers listened to what they said; 94.6% felt that their designated teachers listened to what they said;
- 87.9% felt their opinions were heard and made a difference to decisions made in their lives;
- only 65.7% attended their Looked After Review; of those 85.7% felt that they always gave their opinions in their Looked After Review; 84.1% felt that they got help in preparing for their Looked After Review;
- 41.6% worried about their lives all the time or often; 97% felt generally healthy all the time or often;
- 77.7% felt they were doing ok, well, or very well at school;
- for those of school age, 24.1% did not know about their Personal Education Plan; 23.8% were not happy with their Personal Education Plan; 36.1% felt they were not involved in drawing up their Personal Education Plan;
- 68.6% felt they would do better at school with more help;
- 44% of children had experienced a change of social worker in the last 12 months; 33.6% of children had experienced a change of home in the last 12 months; 24.6% of children had experienced a change of carer in the last 12 months; 18.7% of children had experienced a change of school in the last 12 months; 26.9% of children had experienced no changes in the last 12 months;
- for those who had experienced a change, 60.9% felt the help they received was very good or good; 23% felt the help they received was OK;
- 1 in 4 young people (aged 15 or over) were unhappy or very unhappy with the levels of support they received for planning their future; they had the basic practical skills to become independent such as cleaning, cooking, ironing, washing clothes etc. but would like more help preparing for work and further education;

- young people said they would like help with: budgeting their money (44%); writing a CV (54%); preparing for interviews (47%); finding information about a job (53%); applying for higher education (46%); choosing subjects for higher education (44%);
- if young people had a problem with their social workers or their carers they would talk to: their carers (64.3%); their social workers (46.9%); their school (40.3%);
- overall 79% were very happy or happy with the way Nottingham City Council took care of them;

The following issues were raised, comments made and responses given at the meeting:

- the “red” rating for advocacy was a known 'red' indicator which was being addressed to have an understanding of who this applied to i.e. internal/external providers;
- further investigation using unique identifying numbers on returned questionnaires would take place for those who were unhappy or very unhappy;
- commentary was only sought when children were unhappy, it would be useful to ask for positive commentary on the areas in which children were happy;
- the positive feedback on having a healthy lifestyle reflected well on carers;
- activities that children took part in read like normal childhoods and the free time activities reflected well on the support from staff;
- consistency of support and time was a common theme and when asked if there was one single theme to focus on, the Children In Care Council representatives said that consistency of social workers was a very important issue and of ways in which changes in social workers could be reduced, should be considered;
- in addition to learning basic skills it was felt that managing social relationships was an important skill towards achieving successful independent adulthood;
- consideration should be given to enable a representative of the Children In Care Council to attend the Corporate Parenting Board, but this may mean a change in future meeting times, as meetings were typically held during school hours;
- information regarding the Advocacy Service had been sent to both young people in care and their carers for them to highlight with them;
- separate safeguarding issues had been identified from the survey and there was concern at some of the views expressed regarding social workers. These would all be followed-up.

The Chair asked that if the Children In Care Council representatives wished to raise any issues for the Corporate Parenting Board to consider, they speak to John Rea who would ensure that an item was listed on the agenda.

RESOLVED

- (1) that the results of the Children in Care and Care Leavers 'Have Your Say' survey, as identified in the presentation, be noted;**
- (2) that one of the main issues raised in the survey of the importance of consistency of Social Workers, be noted;**
- (3) that the hard work and contribution of the Children In Care Council be acknowledged and thanks of the Board be recorded;**
- (4) that the original response information of children in care be made available to Board members.**

42 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the proposed date of the next meeting of Monday 18 June 2012, at 2:30pm in Loxley House, be noted.