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Nottingham City Council

Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes of the meeting held at LB 31-32 - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 26 July 2021 from 2.00 pm - 3.40 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Cheryl Barnard (Chair)
Councillor Jay Hayes
Councillor Nicola Heaton
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos
Councillor Maria Watson

Absent

Councillor Phil Jackson
Councillor Maria Joannou
Councillor Georgia Power

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Campbell-Clerk	Observer
Clare Hewitson	Team Manager, Children and Families
Treza Mann	Interim Service Manager for Children in Care
Jasmin Howell	Head of Virtual Schools
John Rea	Engagement & Participation Lead
Helen Watson	Interim Director for Children's Integrated Services
Audrey Taylor	Service Manager - Fostering and Adoption
Ann	CiC observer
Emma Powley	Interim Governance Officer

12 Apologies for absence

Councillor Jackson (sickness)
Councillor Power (personal)

13 Declarations of Interests

None

14 Minutes (for confirmation)

The Board agreed the minutes of the meeting held on the 18 January, 15 March and the 17 May 2021.

15 2021/22 Q1 Performance Report Children in Care/Leaving Care

Helen Watson- Interim Director for Children's Integrated Services elaborated on her report which outlined key performance information for Children in Care (CiC) and Care Leavers (CL) for Q1 period. The following information was highlighted:

- a) There had been strong performance in visiting, the date of which has been reported to the Department for Education (DfE) due to the pandemic.

- b) Staffing issues had occurred due to self-isolation due to Covid and this had impacted on some visits not taking place in prescribed timescales but these instances were being kept to a minimum. Face to face visits have continued unless it has not been appropriate to do so with a number being replaced by virtual visits.
- c) Health Assessments remained lower than the expected targets and work had been undertaken with Health colleagues in order to address areas of delay.
- d) There had been a month on month deterioration in the 90% target of Dental checks expected; currently the figures stands at 59.9%. This was in part due to dentists being shut during the Pandemic which had impacted on routine appointments. As restrictions have lifted improvements in this measure had been seen and the expectation was that these would continue.
- e) There were a number of cases that remained very difficult; placements with a number of children and young people displaying challenging behaviours making it increasingly more difficult to place and as such external residential placements had increased.
- f) The number of children in care (CiC) had increased and this was happening both regionally and nationally, partly due to the effects of the pandemic. Another contributing factor was Court delays within the family justice systems.

In response to questions asked by the Board, the following information was noted:

- g) Pathway Plans had proved difficult during Covid due to some of the restrictions in place, but that there had been engagement with foster carers and residential staff.
- h) In order to improve the number of dental checks for CiCs, a radical approach would be needed and despite recent improvements, dental care and hygiene remained a priority. Foster carers were also being urged to ensure that the looked after children were receiving adequate dental checks.

The Board noted the following:

- i) Social Care will continue to monitor performance regarding dental checks to ensure this improves as Pandemic restrictions reduce, and to address any barriers-impact dental needs identified and met early
- ii) Head of Service to work with the Virtual school to ensure any changes to the PEP for non-statutory school age children are strengthened in line with the Peer Review recommendations-to improve the quality of PEPs for early years children and post 16
- iii) Head of Service and Service manager to identify the reasons for the dip in suitability of accommodation for care leavers and the Employment, Education and Training for Care leavers in Q1-to improve aspirations for our children in care and care leavers.

Resolved to note the contents of the performance report

16 Children in Care Council (Verbal Update)

Jon Rea- Engagement & Participation Lead Officer updated the Board on the work of the Children in Care Council. The following information was highlighted:

- a) There had been a transition to the digital world (particularly necessary during the pandemic) and a number of your people had been recruited in order to enhance engagement through digital platforms.
- b) There had been focused pieces of work undertaken that would feed into the work of the Corporate Parenting Board to help inform and shape future thinking of the Board.
- c) There were 12-14 group members on the CiC Council who were care leavers or currently in the care system. Conversations were pitched very openly and it was led by Children and Young People who spoke about their experiences to identify areas where improvements could be made. The improvements identified included the following:
 - i) More 1:1 time with teachers and support staff
 - ii) Better understanding of the importance for Children in Care to receive consistency e.g having a single person contact rather than multiple people.
 - iii) Additional teaching staff around exam time with more peer support and buddying programmes.
 - iv) Options around academic and vocational education to be fully explained
 - v) Exploring if previous CiCs could be engaged with to be role-models and mentors.
- d) The Board welcomed the involvement of children and young people in their contributions to their own education and recognised the value of the wide range of experiences and aspirations they held.
- e) Mentoring and role models from previous CiCs were championed as they would bring a positive aspect and represent those currently in, or having recently left, the care system.

The Board thanked the work and contributions of those children and young people who been engaged in the care Council.

17 Adoption and Permanency

Audrey Taylor - Service Manager - Fostering and Adoption, Children and Families presented her report and highlighted the following points:

- a) Adoption plans for a significant number of children in care continued to be made. With many of these children having complex medical conditions, belonging to a sibling group, having a range of disabilities, or have birth parents with complex histories made these children “hard to place”. Should children be unable to live with their birth family then a permanency option should be considered.
- b) 24 adoption orders made at the end of the financial year, which was significantly lower than previous years. This was mainly due to Covid and the court availability to hear cases where birth parents had challenged the making of the order; 12 out of the 24 orders granted were challenged.
- c) There are at present, five children waiting to have their Placement Orders rescinded due to their plans changing and adoption not being achieved for them and they have secured permanency through long term fostering.
- d) The Board noted the following data relevant to Nottingham City:

In Nottingham City currently there are:

- 12 sibling groups: 8 are placed for adoption, 1 disrupted, 2 matched, 1 homefinding.
 - 29 Children Placed for adoption (lodged on 18 at present)
 - 6 Children matched with adopters – awaiting introductions (sib group of 4 & 2)
 - 13 children we are currently Homefinding for
 - 4 (1 sibling group of 3, 1 single child)
 - 8 Adoption orders granted since April 2021
 - Children placed with Adoption East Midlands adopters: 14
 - External adoptive placements: 6 (4 of which were siblings groups / children of colour)
- e) 28 Special Guardianship Orders were made in total in the last financial year, nationally courts are favouring the making of SGOs rather than adoption. BME children are still underrepresented in this area and the Board commented that perhaps this could be improved with the provision of additional information and feedback as to the reasons for underrepresentation.
 - f) The making of an SGO could often be quite lengthy due to the birth parents challenging the order, delays in court proceedings and the appointment process.

Resolved to note the performance to date in relation to Permanency Planning for Children in Care, which can be in the form of Adoption, Permanent Fostering or Special Guardianship

18 Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy Review

Treza Mann, Interim Service Manager for Children in Care and Leaving Care Services provided an update to the Corporate Parenting Board against the priorities and actions outlined in the Children in Care (CiC) and Care Leaver (CL) Strategy. The following points were highlighted:

- a) There had been some recent changes in Leadership roles and a number of interim staff had been employed to cover transitions and vacancies
- b) The 'Have Your Say' survey previously identified three specific areas for further focus through Children in Care Council meetings. Progress against these areas has been impacted by Covid but children and young people were still able to access the electronic survey and there had been mixed feedback on access preference.
- c) The 'Mind of my Own' application (app) had been designed to help children to feed into the digital forum. Training on the use of Mind of My Own app was being carried out with frontline staff. Work had been undertaken with foster carers to increase their confidence in the use of the App so that they can support children in care to have their wishes and feelings captured.
- d) ASDAN courses provide young people with the opportunity to achieve employability qualifications (from entry level to level 2), and was anticipated to encourage increased learning opportunities for Care Leavers. Through training being offered to staff and carers, this would be rolled out to everyone, starting with the internal residential homes, fostering carers, semi independence and would extend to other internal agencies.
- e) Since Nottingham City had an established Children in Care Police Officer (CICPO) post (which continued to be jointly funded by Nottinghamshire Police and Nottingham City Council) the Council were able to report a 5 year trend in reducing offending behaviour within the children in care population. It was explained that that data is rounded to the nearest whole number, and figures were now so low that some fluctuation would likely to appear significant.

The Chair noted that there had been a lot of recent successes, specifically with strengthening the relationship with CHAMS and enhancing ways for children and young people to engage and access services.

Resolved to note the report

19 Nottingham City Virtual School

Jasmin Howell - Head of Virtual Schools outlined her report on Nottingham City Virtual Schools. The following information was highlighted:

- a) A recent Peer Review had been carried out and had externally scrutinised arrangements and processes in place to support the Virtual School in meetings its duties in promoting and supporting the educational outcomes of Nottingham City children in care.

The four Areas of Focus for the Peer Review was as follows:

- 1) Effectiveness of the Virtual School structure
 - 2) Benefits of electronic Personal Education Plan (ePEP) for children in Care and partners
 - 3) Changing arrangement for the distribution and monitoring of Pupil premium Plus (PPP)
 - 4) What is the effectiveness of Virtual School arrangements for tracking, monitoring and supporting children who have been excluded (or are without a school place or are on part-time tables)
- b) A number of strengths had been identified through the Peer Review and subsequently, a number of recommendations for areas of improvement were made, none of which were surprising.
- c) All statutory obligations had been met and data collected would influence decisions regarding direct intervention at a case work level.

The main recommendations from the Peer Review were as follows:

- i) Ensure arrangement for Post 16 young people and Early Years in your care are as strong as all other cohorts.
- ii) Ensure there is a balance between compliance and quality of PEPs as you move through this transition period. Both areas require improvement.
- iii) With the planned reduction in DSG support for the Virtual School, explore the most effective ways to maintain staffing levels for the benefit of children in your care.

The Chair thanked the Head of Virtual Schools for her presentation and noted that it was a very positive Peer Review.

Resolved to note the feedback from the Peer Review and confirmed agreement with the recommendations for improvement being taken forward in the Virtual School Self-Improvement Plan.

20 Work Plan

The Board noted the work plan and noted the Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy Review would be presented to Board in September 2021

21 Future meeting dates

Resolved to meet at 2.00pm on the following Mondays, at a venue to be confirmed, during the 2021/22 municipal year:

2021

20 September

Corporate Parenting Board - 26.07.21

15 November

2022

17 January

21 March

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