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Nottingham City Council Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes of the meeting held in the Ground Floor Committee Room, Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on Monday 20 September 2021 from 2:00pm to 3:33pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Cheryl Barnard (Chair)
Councillor Maria Joannou (Vice Chair)
Councillor Nicola Heaton
Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos
Councillor Maria Watson

Absent

Councillor Jay Hayes
Councillor Phil Jackson

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance

Mary-Anne - Head of Children's Regulated Services
Cosgrove
Sam Flint - Children in Care Police Officer
Tajinder Madahar - Head of Extensive and Specialist Services
Adrian Mann - Governance Officer
Treza Mann - Interim Service Manager for CIC and LCS
Natalie Pink - Case Manager, Youth Offending Team
Jon Rea - Engagement and Participation Lead Officer
Audrey Taylor - Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption

22 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Jay Hayes - Self-isolating
Councillor Phil Jackson - Council business

Catherine Underwood - Corporate Director for People
Helen Watson - Interim Director of Children's Integrated Services

23 Declarations of Interests

None.

24 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2021 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

25 Care Leavers' Views on Semi-Independent Living

Jon Rea, Engagement and Participation Lead Officer, provided an update on the work being done with children in care preparing for independent living. The following points were discussed:

- (a) engagement has been carried out with children in care in preparing for independent living. This has formed part of the 'Have Your Say' survey, and there has been wider discussion relating to educational opportunities and mental and physical health and wellbeing. Appropriate housing is a vital element of independent living, so the Service is supporting Commissioning and Procurement colleagues in the production of a tender document for the development of more semi-independent living accommodation in the city;
- (b) work is being carried out to ensure that the voice of children in care is brought into the tender process, and discussions have been held with 17 care leavers to set out what is important to them about semi-independent living, what facilities and support they need, and where the accommodation is located in the city. Five of these young people then provided input into a question on the tender form asking providers to set out what positive provision they would be able to bring for care leavers. The successful provider must create the right environment for care leavers to thrive in independent living;
- (c) education support for preparing for the move to independent living is valued, including learning on how to manage a home and household bills, and in claiming available benefits. Care leavers moving into semi-independent accommodation can be concerned about maintaining friendships if they move to a different area, and they would benefit from help in understanding the local area in which they will live;
- (d) care leavers moving into independent living should be consulted and provided with support in overcoming the barriers to transitioning to full independence. Service staff need to know the areas into which care leavers move, and be careful not to push their own values onto the young people with whom they have a relationship. Wherever possible, care leavers should be supported by the same Service staff, to ensure consistency of the relationship;
- (e) the Children in Care Council meeting in October will discuss what 11-15 year-old care leavers want from their independent living placements, and the next steps. The Council has been meeting virtually during the Coronavirus pandemic, but it is hoped that it will soon be possible to return to face-to-face meetings. Social group-type feedback work is important to grow the confidence of children in care and develop creative thinking. The Service must listen and be as responsive as possible, so that every voice is heard. Board members are very welcome to join and participate in Council meetings;
- (f) the Service is working with regional colleagues on a 'home is not a placement' initiative, to seek to make the language around children in care less formal and institutionalised;
- (g) close support for care leavers in preparing and transitioning into semi-independent living is vital, including ensuring their safety and wellbeing. As such, children in care must be listened to very carefully in approaching this significant stage in their lives. The most vulnerable young people will meet the criteria for transitioning to Adult Services for ongoing support, but great care is required for the children who do not meet these criteria, but nevertheless could be at risk. As

such, it is vital that these young people are consulted with closely on developing an independent living strategy that will be successful.

The Board noted the update.

26 Reducing Offending Behaviour for Children in Care

Natalie Pink, Case Manager in the Youth Offending Team, and Sam Flint, Children in Care Police Officer, presented a report on the published data for 2019/20 on reducing offending behaviour within the children in care population, and the activity of the Children in Care Police Officers to reduce offending and safeguard children in care. The following points were discussed:

- (a) joint funding has been put in place by the Council's Social Care Service and Nottinghamshire Police to help address offending behaviour concerning children in care. For 2019/20, this work achieved the maintenance of a 3% offence rate for children in care;
- (b) a multi-agency protocol for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire to reduce the criminalisation of children in care was adapted in 2017. This is being reviewed in light of the National Protocol on Reducing Unnecessary Criminalisation of Looked-After Children and Care Leavers 2018, but there has been some delay in signing off the updated protocol as a national consultation was required;
- (c) a Children in Care Arrest Screening process is in place to proactively divert children in care from prosecution where appropriate, and this is now embedded within the Youth Justice Service. A screening tool has been implemented by Nottinghamshire Police so that all incident reports from children's homes are monitored at the earliest possible opportunity, directly from the control room, to allow timely intervention by the Children in Care Police Officers to keep children in care out of the criminal justice system, wherever possible;
- (d) Practitioner Forums had been held to promote best practice in the sector, and these received good feedback. However, it was not possible to replicate these large-scale meetings effectively during the Coronavirus pandemic. Information packages on key topics have been produced in the interim, and ways of enabling agencies to share information virtually have been introduced. A video package has also been developed for all new police recruits, to develop their understanding and skills for working with children in care;
- (e) three police officers are liaising with care homes and semi-independent accommodation providers to implement the protocol, identify indicators of exploitation and promote the use of tools to safeguard young people, including on how providers identify and report issues to the police in an effective way. The Concerns Network Meeting is used to enable over 20 agencies to meet to share intelligence and implement disruption tactics, though this has been unable to meet in person during the pandemic. However, an associated e-bulletin is sent out every two months to participating agencies and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, to collect and circulate system-wide intelligence that would not necessarily be reported to the police. Due to this City- and County-wide, multi-agency and whole-team approach, officers can respond to potential

exploitation cases very rapidly, and regular and effective disruption measures are in place;

- (f) the Violence Reduction Unit is currently funding a girls-only boxing club, which is an extremely valuable project that helps young women to support each other as a team and grow their self-esteem;
- (g) the Board noted that the work carried out to avoid the early criminalisation of children in care is vital, and that the development of more projects like the girls' boxing club is important and beneficial;
- (h) the Board considered that the joint protocol on reducing offending behaviour is highly important, though it raised concerns regarding how the protocol referred to offences in some areas. It recommended that the language used to describe offences and offending behaviour is appropriate and up to date, and that it is emphasised that children in care are generally victims of crime and exploitation, rather than perpetrators. It noted that the document available currently is the 2017 version of the protocol, so it requested that the revised version is circulated to Board members before a final version is signed off.

The Board noted the report.

27 Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention

Audrey Taylor, Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption, presented a report on the recruitment activity for new foster carers, and the retention of existing carers in the Fostering Service. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the number of children in care is increasing significantly. Most of these children are in foster care, and work is carried out to ensure that foster placements are with in-house foster carers whenever possible, rather than children being placed through an agency. The Service has achieved its target in this regard and is doing well in comparison to many other Local Authorities. Children in care who are not recording as being with foster carers may be going through formal Care Proceedings;
- (b) so far, 15 new carers have been approved and there are a further 15 applicants going through the process, and the appointments panel capacity has been increased to hear applications within the right timescale. There have been several recent resignations and de-registrations of foster carers, but a number of these carers have been 'on hold' during the Coronavirus pandemic and have now made the decision they no longer wish to continue to foster;
- (c) wherever possible and appropriate, the Courts favour placing children with family or family friends. Connected persons are assessed by the Service in the same way as foster carers, and the same level of support is provided to them, with visits carried out on a monthly basis. However, the Coronavirus pandemic has delayed Court processes significantly, so there are currently more children than normal in temporary arrangements, which have lasted for longer periods of time;

- (d) work is underway to recruit more carers, to increase the in-house provision. However, there is no longer an internal recruitment consultant role, so different ways are being explored to manage the recruitment process effectively. Recruitment activity is being pursued online and through social media, and risk assessments are being carried out for the reintroduction of face-to-face processes. Whether the Council's Communications Team is able to provide support for the recruitment process is also being explored. During April and May, a leaflet drop was carried out with support from the ward councillors for Bestwood, Bulwell and Bulwell Forest, to raise awareness of foster caring;
- (e) a joint collaboration is taking place with the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership to compile a video to promote fostering and pool resources across the region. Partnership work continues with 100 Homes / City Prayer to provide support for fostering in the Christian community, and there is an ongoing focus on community support. A 'Supported Lodgings' scheme is also being carried out in partnership with Barnardo's, which is designed to support the transition of young people in care into adulthood;
- (f) during the Coronavirus pandemic, it has been necessary to carry out the Skills to Foster training online. Therapeutic parenting training has been commissioned and has contributed to applicants developing new parenting strategies for fostered children. The feedback from the training has been positive, and face-to-face sessions will largely resume when it is safe to do so. A medical assessment is a statutory requirement for any prospective foster carer, but there have been considerable difficulties in arranging and completing these during the pandemic due to a lack of capacity amongst GPs, and an effective solution is still being sought;
- (g) there have been some staffing challenges in providing the right level of support for foster carers, so it has been necessary to bring in external social workers on a temporary basis. A buddy system is in place to pair new foster carers with more experienced ones. A Therapeutic Support Team is in place to support carers, and a new clinical psychologist has been appointed. However, carers gain a great deal from peer support and networking at face-to-face meetings and training, which has been very difficult to achieve during the pandemic;
- (h) the training programme for 2021 has been reviewed and updated, and all training courses will be run virtually apart from the paediatric first aid course. Currently, only mandatory training is being provided as there have been some challenges in the training team in service delivery. Bespoke training courses for more complex cases will be rolled out later in the year, though it may be necessary for these to be provided externally. The Service pays for all carers to be members of the Fostering Network, where they can receive the latest information and access the services of the Network's Advice and Mediation Worker. Support is also available to carers through the Virtual School;
- (i) it is important that the training and support provided to in-house foster carers is competitive, relative to the offer from the independent sector. As such, it is vital to engage with and listen to carers, to be clear on what it is that they need;

- (j) the Board noted that some people who are interested in becoming foster carers cannot do so because they do not have a spare bedroom, which is a requirement. The Service should work closely with Nottingham City Homes on potential solutions to seek to ensure that this is not a barrier to those who want to become a foster carer if possible, but this is relatively complex work.

The Board noted the report.

28 Work Plan

The Chair presented the Board's proposed work plan for the 2021/22 municipal year.

The Board requested that the data relating to Coronavirus vaccinations rates for children in care is included within the 'Health of Children in Care' report scheduled for the meeting on 17 January 2022, if possible.

29 Future Meeting Dates

- **Monday 15 November 2021 at 2:00pm**
- **Monday 17 January 2022 at 2:00pm**
- **Monday 21 March 2022 at 2:00pm**