

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 15 July 2019 from 2:31pm to 4:01pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Cheryl Barnard (Chair)
Councillor Jay Hayes (Vice Chair)
Councillor Nicola Heaton
Councillor Phil Jackson
Councillor Neghat Khan (items 10-14)
Councillor Rebecca Langton
Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Maria Watson
Councillor Cate Woodward

Absent

Councillor Maria Joannou

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Helen Blackman - Director of Children's Integrated Services
Nick Lee - Director of Education Services
Adrian Mann - Governance Officer
John Matravers - Service Manager, Safeguarding Partnerships
Audrey Taylor - Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption
Jordan Whatman - Project Officer, Children in Care

10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

12 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2019 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

13 PATHWAY PLANNING

John Matravers, Service Manager for Safeguarding Partnerships, presented a report on the Council's statutory duties to the children in care eligible for a Pathway Plan, to ensure that these young people have a robust plan to aid their transition into adulthood. The following points were discussed:

- (a) every qualifying young person in care should have a Pathway Plan to help map out their future for training and work as an adult, and this should include both interim and long-term goals for realising their potential. The Plan must be owned by the young person to be meaningful and be responsive to them, in addition to being compliant with the relevant legislation. Preparation for the Plan begins once a young person reaches 15 and it must be completed no later than 3 months after their 16th birthday. The transition into adulthood for children in care can be a challenging period and the Plan is intended to support young people in developing the life skills and providing the health information for moving towards independence, successfully. The 'Life Skills' booklet is being reviewed and a fully electronic version will be made available;
- (b) packs are given to young people at the appropriate age to explain what they have the right to expect from the Council as part of the Leaving Care process, and close support is provided if needed. Although some young people do not want to engage with the Pathway Planning process, all children in care should be aware of it. It is important for the young people to be able to exercise self-determination and participate in the planning of their own future. Council officers meet with the Children in Care Council to talk with the young people and hear their input and priorities, and there are opportunities for them to explain what it is like to be a child in care;
- (c) it is a challenge to ensure that all of the Pathway Plans are produced and reviewed within the required timescales. The current target is to ensure that 85% of the Plans are reviewed within six months and a working group is taking this forward. Internal, peer and Ofsted reviews of the process are carried out regularly and work is being done to address identified improvements across the Leaving Care Services, which will be subject to a further audit programme this year. To help spread information on Pathway Plans, foster carers should be provided with appropriate briefings on them at their meetings;
- (d) the Pathway Plan process can be particularly complex for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), whose right to remain as children extends until they are 17 years and 6 months old, making them particularly vulnerable. Regular meetings are held with the expert officer on UASC cases, though there can be budget issues when asylum seekers are not able to access public funds. Support is offered in completing immigration paperwork and specialist legal advice is available. UASC in care eligible for leaving care services who reach 18 are always treated as care leavers rather than as adults with no recourse to public funds and, although they do not qualify for social housing, it is possible for the Council to rent properties from Nottingham City Homes for their accommodation in groups while they search for training and employment. Engagement is underway with the Home Office to try to seek more public funding for these cases;
- (e) it is important to ensure that children are not moved to the Leaving Care Service too quickly. Young people are given a Personal Adviser as part of the Pathway Planning Process to help them plan as they progress to 18 and a 16+ Service is being developed – but the independence process for a given child will start at the age most appropriate for them, rather than being prescribed. There is a statutory requirement for certain procedures and processes to be in place, but those working with the young people show great skill in ensuring that these are

implemented in a flexible and sensitive way that is responsive to individual needs. It is also extremely important that there is an overall framework to ensure that all children in care are treated in a consistent and equal way.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) continue to understand and support the required duties of Corporate Parents in relation to Pathway Planning for children in care and care leavers;**
- (2) review the progress of the Pathway Plan process at a future meeting.**

14 FOSTER CARER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

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

- (a) most of the 619 children in care are in fostering placements, and 52% of these are Council placements. As internal fostering represent better value for money, enables young people to remain within the City more frequently, and make it easier for social workers to provide support, a recruitment drive is underway for Council foster carers. Engagement is taking place with faith and community groups (including the LGBT community) to promote fostering and adoption, and City churches have started a '100 Homes' campaign to establish 100 fostering homes over three years. Information is also being circulated through the NHS, schools, police and fire services, and social media. Leaflets on fostering will also be provided to councillors to give to their constituents;
- (b) generally, the main reasons for foster carers leaving the Council are that they retire completely or their life circumstances change, so that they no longer have room in their home for foster children. A very small number move to private providers. As such, to be as competitive as possible, there is a substantial focus on retaining foster carers and helping them to develop in their vocation, which includes increasing the social worker support available, forming support groups, introducing buddy systems and giving access to the Council's 'Works Perks' scheme for employees. A primary aim is to do everything possible to ensure that the experience of fostering is a positive experience, which includes providing effective and ongoing training. Discussions also take place with Nottingham City Homes to ensure that foster carers who are their tenants are in the right properties.

RESOLVED to note the recruitment and retention performance of the Fostering Service and its activities to recruit and support foster carers.

15 CHILDREN IN CARE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Helen Blackman, Director of Children's Integrated Services, presented a paper on the Children in Care performance indicators from October 2018 to March 2019. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the statistics in the paper represent key performance indicators, but do not reflect the full range of the data gathered. The City and comparable urban Local Authorities have areas with relatively high levels of social deprivation, where there are a number of vulnerable children. The drive to improve performance continually is a challenge, but the Council has a vital responsibility to make things better for the children in its care;
- (b) there is a reasonable balance between the number of children in care and those taken into protection, and a great deal of work is carried out at the early intervention stage to help children remain with their families whenever possible and appropriate. The numbers of children entering care are reasonable, though it is slightly over budget;
- (c) there is a good level of adoption and there is a determination to provide children in care with a sense of permanency and security by ensuring that their short- and long-term placements are stable. Short-term stability is good, but long-term stability can be improved, so funding bids have been made to generate further investment for supporting and creating long-term fostering placements;
- (d) the review process is progressing well, with the majority of reviews carried out within the appropriate timescale. Most children engage with the process and it is the aim for all children to participate in all of their reviews (though some chose not to do so), but care is taken to ensure that control over their lives is not removed from them. The number of children with up-to-date health assessments is good and the percentage of children with up-to-date dental checks is improving after a slight drop, while the completion rate for wellbeing questionnaires is on target. In future, statistics on the Pathway Plans will be added to the performance indicators reported in this section;
- (e) the percentage of 19-21 year-olds in education, employment or training has exceeded its markers in most cases, following a slight dip in the second quarter. This is a vital area for supporting these young people in creating a good future for themselves, and a number of have now gone on to university;
- (f) performance is strong for ensuring that young people have suitable accommodation – though some enter the system because they are remanded in custody, which is never considered to be suitable accommodation for a child. The target is to ensure that 85% of children in care are placed within 20 miles of the City, where this is appropriate and safe. Currently, the figure stands at 82.4%, so a recruitment process is underway to find more foster carers within this area, including more with space to accommodate groups of 4-6 siblings. The data can be investigated further to show what number of children needed to be placed more than 20 miles from the City for their safety, and what number were placed beyond that distance because closer accommodation was not available.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the Children in Care performance indicators from October 2018 to March 2019;**

- (2) recommend that statistics on Pathway Plans are included in the indicators reported regularly to the Corporate Parenting Board;**
- (3) recommend that the indicator on child placement distance from the City included a breakdown on what percentage of children are placed at a greater distance by active choice, due to their particular needs and circumstances, if it is possible to extract this information from the current data.**

16 CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL

The Chair noted that the intended Children in Care Council report would be deferred until the next meeting of the Board, when the results of the 'Have Your Say' survey for children in care and care leavers will be complete.

17 FORWARD PLANNER

The Chair introduced the Board's Forward Plan for the coming municipal year, which will be updated to include a review of the ongoing progress of Pathway Planning.