

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL
Tuesday 13 July 2021

Present:- Councillors Cusworth (in the Chair), Collingham, Cooksey, and Pitchley.

Apologies were received from Cllrs Bird and McClure.

89. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 02 MARCH 2021.

The Chair asked that thanks to Gordon Watson, the previous Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel, and to all the previous Members of the Panel be recorded in recognition of all their work on behalf of Looked After Children and Young People.

Resolved:-

1. That the minutes be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

90. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest.

91. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC.

The Chair confirmed that there was no reason to exclude members of the press or public from observing any of the items of business on the agenda.

92. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR

Resolved:-

1. That Councillor Pitchley be appointed Vice-Chair of Corporate Parenting Panel for the 2021/22 municipal year.

93. INTRODUCTION TO CORPORATE PARENTING

Consideration was given to a presentation to introduce the new Members of the Panel to the goals and aims of the Panel. The presentation emphasised the responsibilities of Corporate Parents and affirmed the need for the Panel to be a platform from which looked after children and young people hold the Council to account.

In discussion, it was noted that having a councillor on the physical/emotional health and wellbeing meetings helped the health service to be transparent and better meet the needs of the young people.

It was noted that previously a councillor championed the various areas of the LAC lives, which was useful.

It was emphasised that the Panel should use the young people's language to be able to demonstrate what the service has done in response to the young people's requests.

It was noted that the Panel should also hold officers to account regarding their commitment to lowering the number of LAC who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

It was suggested that care leavers and care-experienced young people be involved in the Panel, its work, and its meetings.

It was further noted that the Panel can be a touchstone for areas where the Council needs to lobby on behalf of young people where there are policies that are not supporting the young people.

It was suggested that an upcoming item on the Virtual School would be welcome.

The statutory requirements aside, it was suggested that the prioritisation of questions and challenging needs to reflect the priorities of the young people and to allow the young people to feed their priorities into the Panel on a regular basis in an ongoing dialogue.

It was noted that the priority was to get the LAC Council involved in Panel meetings, even if that means changing the format of meetings to make them more accessible to the young people.

It was noted that the Looked After Children's Health team had structured their service evaluations using guiding questions supplied by the young people. It was suggested that this approach could be taken across the remit of the Panel – to ask the young people what they want the Panel to be and do.

It was further noted that ethnic minority populations are overrepresented in the demographics of the Looked After Children, and it would be useful to consider how the service might better support or involve these communities.

It was noted that prioritising the views of the young people was paramount, and that there was a secondary role for scrutiny as part of the Panel looking at the data together to find ways to improve.

It was noted that the meetings might need to be constructed in a different way, with less emphasis on formalities of the professional meeting. It was suggested that the Panel had the opportunity to find out what freedom and flexibility for engaging the young people was available to the Panel. It was suggested that informal settings can be as and even more effective than more formal settings.

It was further suggested that, to facilitate the access and engagement of the young people, the next meeting be held in person.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a task and finish group undertake to review and refresh the Terms of Reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel with a view to developing a Corporate Parenting Strategy and engaging actively with the Looked After Children and Young People and Care Leavers in the future work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

94. YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROMISES

Consideration was given to a presentation regarding the nine Promises that the Looked After Children's Council had developed that they wanted the Corporate Parents to commit to doing for them and what each Promise means. The promises were offered for discussion in anticipation of the young people's reviewing them again in the autumn. It was noted that the promises had remained unchanged thus far and would be used to drive the Task and Finish group and inform the work of Corporate Parenting Panel and to measure its effectiveness in delivering those Promises.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.

95. CORPORATE PARENTING PERFORMANCE REPORT

Consideration was given to a report and presentation outlining performance data regarding Corporate Parenting. The presentation included various figures, including data regarding placement, education, health, and permanence related measures, as well as the trajectory of performance versus the previous year. Emphasis was placed on the elements reflected in the Efficiency Strategy.

In discussion, officers and partners offered clarification as to the exceptions or decreases in performance, which were attributed to the pandemic, for example, delays in health assessments or dental checks. 96-98% have been completed on time for the last few months for those who did not exercise their right not to have a health assessment if they do not want one. It was suggested that the outcome of the LAC Health pilot group work be brought to a later meeting of the Panel.

Members sought clarification around causes of delays in adoptions. It was noted that initial care and legal proceedings took longer last year than would have been desired. An early permanence plan can be used where appropriate. Some very young children can have adoption time extended because a child cannot be placed for adoption until a placement order is received. For sibling groups, the service can sometimes be tenacious about finding an adoptive family where that is appropriate. The adoptive family cannot be sought or the matching process begun until a placement order has been made.

Further clarification was sought around how Rotherham is performing in adoption in relation to other areas. The response from officers offered to reference and analyse the national information as soon as it is available in October. These figures were offered to be circulated as soon as they are available.

Members requested additional information regarding what would help expedite adoption or long-term placement for the percentage of young people for whom an adoptive or family placement would be suitable. The response for officers suggested that there is a real need for more long-term foster carers who are willing to foster older young people who are in challenging adolescent years. Members were encouraged to endeavour to raise the profile of fostering in Rotherham. The service needs Rotherham people who want to foster Rotherham children to register with the Council as foster carers, bringing their skills or being willing to learn new skills to foster these older and adolescent children.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.

96. E.U. SETTLEMENT UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update report regarding the Council's efforts to obtain settled status for Looked After Children who are citizens of the European Union. The report noted that all the applications had been progressed and completed, and that provisions are in place to apply for settled status for any children who may come into care who are citizens of the European Union and have not yet applied.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.

97. LAC COUNCIL UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update from the LAC Council in respect of the young people's recent activities. These included a consultation, assisting with recruitment for the next Head of Safeguarding, providing feedback to the Children's Commissioner, feeding into the Neglect Strategy and the Safeguarding Board, engaging with Looked After Young People who are not members of the LAC Council, electing officers, and future planning. Recent outdoor recreational activities with Affinity were also described.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.

98. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair confirmed there were no urgent items needing to be determined at the meeting.

99. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Chair confirmed the next meeting of Rotherham Corporate Parenting Panel is to be held on 19 October 2021, commencing at 3.30 pm in Rotherham Town Hall.