

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**  
**Tuesday 28 March 2023**

Present:- Councillor Cusworth (in the Chair); Councillors Browne, Z. Collingham and Pitchley.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Burnett.

**68.           DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**69.           EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Minute 78 (Fostering Health Check and Recruitment Action Plan) was exempt from the press and public. The Chair moved the following resolution:-

That under Section 100(A) 4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of such Act indicated, as now amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 (information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual/financial information).

**Resolved:-** That members of the press and public be excluded for this item.

**70.           MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 31 JANUARY, 2023**

There were no matters arising.

**Resolved:-** That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 31 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

**71.           LAC UPDATE REPORT**

The Head of Service (Safeguarding Children and Families) gave an update from Rotherham's Looked after Children's Council (March 2023). He outlined activities over the previous months which included:

- 16 + accommodation and support contract consultation to determine what should be included in the service specification.
- Director of Children Service's interviews
- LAC Council participation sessions
- Planning for residentials
- VIP summer fest 23 and awards

- Lil' LAC Club activities for 6 - 10 year olds.

The Chair invited comments on the update and noted that no looked after children were able to attend this meeting. A discussion took place on how young people could be encouraged to attend, including those from diverse groups such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Clarification was sought on how young people's identities and personal details could be protected should they wish to attend a meeting. A commitment was given this would be explored and a response would be circulated prior to the next meeting.

In respect of the issues raised at the previous meeting, assurance was given that the issues referred to had been picked up and sampling had been undertaken to ensure consistency in approach.

**Resolved:-**

- 1) That the update be received.
- 2) That clarification be sought on how young people's identities and personal details could be protected should they wish to attend a meeting of this Panel.

**72. INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Head of the Independent Reviewing Service presented the report covering the period 2021/22. The report provided details on the following areas:

- The purpose of the service and legal context
- Governance arrangements
- The responsibilities of the IRO
- The development and make-up of the IRO service
- Information relating to performance and children and young people's participation
- Information in relation to disputes and IRO challenge
- Resources
- Areas for development

It was noted that the period covered by the report was during lock down. This had had a significant impact on service delivery. The service had worked creatively and flexibly to address challenges as a result of the pandemic.

In a short presentation, the following issues we raised:

What's working well?

- Review meetings held within statutory times scales maintained at

above 94%

- The offer of virtual reviews for some children has provided flexibility in the service to meet the needs of individual children
- IROs have continued to prioritise quality and compliance, utilising the challenge and resolution process

What are we worried about?

- We need to work with children and young people on how they want to participate in their reviews, virtual or in person
- We need to improve performance and challenge around the timeliness of social work reports for the meeting, and whether these are shared with children, families and carers in advance of the meeting
- Impact of Covid upon visiting children

Key metrics were outlined, which included-

- 01 April 2021 596 children and young people were looked after by 31 March 2022 reduced to 551 children - a reduction of roughly 7.5%
- 106.1 children per 10,000 of the population and sits in comparison to a statistical neighbour average of 92.0 and a national average of 65.0
- 216 children ceased to be looked after in the reporting period, compared with 186 in the previous year
- The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population in Rotherham in 2011 was recorded as 8.1%. At present Looked After Children from BME backgrounds represent 29% of all children in care, with those from a Gypsy/Irish Traveller background being representing 0.049% of the population but 8% of children in our care
- 1753 LAC reviews held in 2021/22, with full time IROs holding 216 reviews in the year on average.
- 94.4% of reviews were held in time, equating to 1687 reviews undertaken.
- Children participated in 91.4% of reviews.

It was noted that the team had also undertaken regulation 44 visits in liaison with relevant stakeholders. The team also had oversight of Section 20 reports. It was outlined that there had been improvements to health and dental checks due to IRO intervention. All children in unregistered care settings were subject to monthly reviews, with issues escalation as required.

In respect to future plans, the following issues were raised:

- Ensure that quality and compliance were embedded in minutes and reviews
- Attendance data to be embedded into electronic records,
- Aspirational pathway plans
- Coordination of Section 20 reporting alongside a practice reports,
- Questioning care plans and the rationale for the child remaining in LA

care.

The Chair invited questions from the panel and a discussion on the following issues ensued:

- It was noted that professional attendance at review meetings had improved because of the move towards virtual meetings.
- Maintaining consistency in social work reports remained a challenge however it was noted the additional process had been put in place and improvements were being made.
- The over representation of black and minority ethnic children in the looked after cohort was noted. A piece of work would be undertaken to understand what lay behind this.
- It was clarified that adoption time scales were less of a concern now the Court Service had opened up post pandemic. Assurance was given that children had been placed in “forever homes” and the delays in issuing final orders had not had an impact on their placements.
- It was anticipated that the report for 2022/23 would be received in June/July 2023.
- The Virtual Head confirmed that the team provided early identification of educational needs.
- It was noted that work would need to be undertaken to support advocacy for BME children looked after and families. A discussion took place on appropriate role models and independent representation, particularly to support workforce development and educational achievement.
- Workforce development and recruitment.
- Details were given of how the voice of the child was captured in the review process, including using the signs of safety structure.

**Resolved:-** That the report be noted.

### **73. CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL/LITTLE LAC - PLANS FOR SUMMER FESTIVAL**

An update was given by the Service Manager on the plans for the VIP summer fest for the Children Care Council and Lil' LAC.

The festival would be held on 21 July 2023 and would be combined with the Pride of Rotherham awards. It was outlined that a project group had been set up which was meeting weekly. Funding was in place and sponsorship was being sought from external agencies.

Formal communications would be issued shortly and foster carers had been already informed of the date. The same venue as last year had been booked.

The Chair welcomed progress made and looked forward to the event.

**Resolved:-** That the update be received.

## 74. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Acting Head of Performance introduced the report which provided a summary of performance for key indicators across Looked After Children Services. This included a summary of service performance in comparison to the same period in 2021/22 and trend data, graphical analysis and latest benchmarking data against national and statistical neighbour averages (where possible).

- It was noted that at the end of quarter three, there had been a small increase in the number of looked after children. However, compared with the same period in 2021/22 there had been a decrease. A key area of increase was linked to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) arriving via the National Transfer Scheme. This continued to be a pressure.
- The numbers of children in care per 10000 population remained significantly higher than the national average.
- 90.4% of eligible LAC had an up-to-date plan. This was a slight decrease on the previous is performance.
- The percentage of LAC in a family based setting has remained stable during the quarter at 77%. placement stability is an area of focus of relevant teams to prevent placement breakdowns. Work is underway to identify support needs and expanding their support offer.
- It was noted that there had been a decrease in the number of in-house foster carer households registered at the end of the quarter. However, prospective foster families were engaged in the recruitment process. Work was underway to increase placement sufficiency.
- In respect of youth justice services, it was noted that of 551 children looked after, eight were known to the Youth Justice Team.
- 19 children have been adopted since April 2022, which was a decrease compared to the same period in the previous year. Data was provided on average number of days and matches with adoptive families. It was suggested that the performance measures were directly linked to the court delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The overall percentage of LAC having an initial health assessment within time scale has improved had improved in the year to date. Dental assessments had also improved, however this continued to be an area of focus and review.
- 92.2% of reviews during 2022/23 were completed within the time scale set. At the end of the quarter, 96.4% of visits were up to date and within time scales of the national minimum standard.
- Termly refresh of personal education plans was at 91.9% which is

a decrease compared to the autumn term 2021/22. Virtual School Advisors continued to escalate concerns and provide high levels of support and challenge to schools to ensure timely completion of PEP meeting records.

- At the end of quarter three, there were 322 young people in the care leavers cohort which shows an increase of 31 compared to the same point in 2021. This included 20 UASC. The service was working closely with the wider partnership to ensure there was a clear pathway of support recognising the additional vulnerability of the UASC cohort.
- Almost 75% of care leavers had an up-to-date pathway plan at the end of the quarter and 97.2% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation. 73% of care leavers were in education, employment, and training (EET). There is a steady improvement in the numbers of our young peoples actively engaged in EET.

The Chair thanked officers for the comprehensive report and its new format highlighting key performance areas.

**Resolved:-** That the report and the accompanying dataset (Appendix 2) be received.

#### **75. SAMANTHA SYKES FOUNDATION TRUST**

The Vice-Chair requested that contact be made with the Foundation to request their attendance to outline their work at a future meeting of Improving Lives Select Commission.

**Resolved:**

- 1) That this item be deferred to a future meeting.
- 2) That contact be made with the Foundation to request their attendance to outline their work at a future meeting of Improving Lives Select Commission.

#### **76. ROTHERHAM FOSTERING SERVICE 2021-22 ANNUAL REPORT**

The Marketing Manager and Service Manager for LAC (Residential, Fostering and Adoption) introduced the report on the business and activity within Rotherham Councils Fostering Service in 2021/22. It provided performance and activity data on the service, the activity and functioning of the fostering panel and detail service developments.

The report outlined the regulatory framework in which the fostering service operated. Details were given of the teams; these focus on recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers and supervision of mainstream foster carers under those providing more specialist care, private fostering

and connected caring and the Mockingbird Project. In line with regulations, the fostering panel was chaired by an independent social work professional.

The report outlined the following:

- The functions of the Panel;
- Process and administration;
- Composition;
- A report from the Panel's Chair, which confirmed that the panel had continued to operate efficiently and effectively.

In respect of Fostering Panel business, it was outlined that the continued use of a dedicated Panel Advisor gave greater scrutiny and challenge to the service which ensured continued improvement in the quality of reports presented to Panel. Obtaining placement reports from children's social workers for fostering reviews continues to be a problem at times. The report has been moved onto the LCS and escalated for action.

Details were given of the range of fostering placements offered. These include:

- Day care: for foster carers who need to attend meetings or training
- Second home care: placements that offer support to primary foster carers
- Family and friend foster care: (connected carers) enabling children and young people who are unable to live with their parents to be cared for by extended family members friends or other people connected with them
- Step down from residential care: a RMBC initiative to accommodate Rotherham's most vulnerable children
- Aiming high for disabled children families together scheme: providing short break care for children with disabilities
- Mockingbird family based-model of fostering: an innovative method of delivering foster care using an extended family model which provides respite care, peer support, joint planning and training and social activities.

Of all enquiries received in 2021 – 2022 from prospective foster carers, 35.79% progressed to a follow up visit. The figure the year before was almost identical and for the two years back to 2018 the conversion rate was around 28%. It was noted that in 2021/22 there was a significant drop in approval of fostering households. It is acknowledged that the impact of COVID-19 had a detrimental effect on recruitment of carers.

Details were provided on the number of deregistrations, with an analysis of the themes identified as reasons for leaving fostering. It was noted that 29% of carers who resigned had fostered for less than two years. This was in line with national data. It had been concluded that the majority of the registrations for 2021/22 were unavoidable and as a result of natural

changing circumstances. Where other issues resulted in the resignation or deregistration, it was thought that the service had generally done what they could to support the carers.

It was noted that alongside initiatives to recruit foster carers, that a strategy would need to be developed to retain them in the longer term. This was a key area for development in the forthcoming year. The innovative work with bright sparks was outlined and had led to increased interest in fostering across the board.

Whilst COVID-19 had continued to make an impact, the service had responded flexibly and creatively to meet the needs of carers. Assurance was given that the service was well sighted on required areas of improvements and remained committed to recruiting and supporting carers.

The Chair invited questions from the panel and a discussion on the following points ensued:

- The importance of developing placement sufficiency;
- Developing a balance between the independent fostering market and in house offer;
- Ensuring that the right placement was offered to meet the child's need;
- The positive response from foster carers about the Rotherham 'offer';
- The importance of honest feedback to enhance performance;
- Understanding the number of deregistrations within two years
- Educational representation on the panel adding value to processes;
- Embedding exit interview for foster carers;
- Improving children's input into reviews;
- Recruitment and retention of staff and how a diverse workforce can be achieved;
- Engagement with parents/carers.

The Chair thanked officers for the report.

**Resolved:** That the report be received.

## **77. FOSTERING HEALTH CHECK AND RECRUITMENT ACTION PLAN**

The Chair advised that as the item contained restricted information and as resolved in Minute 70, that the Panel would go into private session for the consideration of this item.

A presentation was given to the panel by the Service Manager and Marketing Manager outlining the findings of a recent survey:

- Confidence/ worries of foster carers



- Preparedness to foster
- Learning and development opportunities
- Support and networks
- Cost of living concerns

Details of the recruitment strategy were shared, which had received positive press coverage. Also outlined were future marketing opportunities to raise the profile of in-house foster caring in Rotherham. Details of the enhanced offer to foster carers had received Cabinet approval previously

Details were sought on the frequency of future surveys. It was outlined that these would be conducted at regular intervals. Assurance was given that the impact of the strategy would be measured and reported on.

**Resolved:-** That the item be received.

#### **78. DRAFT LAC POSTERS**

The draft posters for the big sister and Big Brother projects and VIP swimming 2023 were circulated.

Details of take up would be monitored during the course of these projects.

**Resolved:-** That the item be noted.

#### **79. FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS**

This item was deferred to the next meeting.

#### **80. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business to consider.

#### **81. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

**Resolved:-** That the next meeting be held on 13 June, 2023, commencing at 4.00 p.m. to be held in the Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham