

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**  
**Tuesday 23 January 2024**

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

Apologies for Absence:- Apologies were received from Councillor Z. Collingham and Officer Lisa Duvalle.

**124. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved: - That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 December 2023, were agreed as a correct record.

**125. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

Minute 131 (The Looked After Children's Council Update) 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.

**127. VIRTUAL SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022**

This item provided a high-level overview of the Virtual School Annual Report 2021-2022 and the following was outlined:

- The format of the Virtual School Annual Report 2021-2022 had changed significantly to previous reports. This was as a result of suggestions provided by Ofsted, to ensure the report was more accessible, whilst ensuring successes were celebrated within the report.
- In relation to early years and primary education, 100% of two-year-olds were accessing early years provision.
- All children on the Virtual School's register were registered to a children's centre from birth.
- There was a good level of development (GLD) for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and for children

without SEND. The GLD exceeded national averages, this was a result of interventions, support and effective partnership working.

- The reading, writing and maths levels for all children with SEND and without SEND exceeded national averages.
- In relation to Key Stage Three and Key Stage Four, the Virtual School was working closely with schools to ensure a continued effective transition from primary to secondary education.
- The impact of long-term work was evident within the report, in relation to the journey of children throughout all the school. This impact was visible in both GCSE and Post- 16 cohorts.
- In relation to GCSE results, a GCSE Grade Four was regarded as a standard pass, this was the first report post-pandemic that included formal end of year GCSE examinations.
- There was a significant improvement in the Department of Education (DfE) Cohort, 8.1% of Looked After Children (LAC) DfE received a Grade Four or above in English and Maths in 2019, in 2022 this increased to 18.8%.
- There was an increase in the number of young people post-16, accessing higher level courses and applying for University. Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) figures had also reduced.
- The levels of non-attendance and exclusions had increased post-pandemic due to increased anxiety and emotional based school avoidance, however this year was the first year that saw these levels drop under 10%.

The Chair thanked the relevant officers and invited questions, this led to the following points being raised during discussions:

- It was noted that the report was in the public domain which would enable the promotion of the successes of the Virtual School. The report would also be shared with senior management, employees, and partners via the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- The next report for the period of 2022-2023 would be presented at the Corporate Parenting Panel shortly. The Virtual School Headteachers would explore whether this could be promoted through Rotherham Council's Communications Team.
- Early indications for the next report were showing as positive overall, although it was acknowledged that there had been a higher level of exclusions.
- The next report would differ to the this year's report, this was due to the changes required in relation to teaching and learning post-pandemic, it was noted that post-pandemic children were a different cohort to pre-pandemic children and therefore their needs reflected this difference.

**128. QUALITY ASSURANCE UPDATE**

This item provided a high-level update on Quality Assurance in relation to Children in Care (CIC) and the following was outlined:

**Fostering Service-**

- In relation to fostering, there was a new Quality Assurance (QA) framework. This included a new case file audit form, designed for fostering pre-approval, post approval and the supervisory service. It also included a new dip sample template for fostering, which would be embedded over the next three months.
- The Panel Advisor would further develop the QA function of Panel and build this into the QA framework.
- New fees and allowances had been approved and implemented for the fostering service.
- The Elected Members Fostering Working Group had achieved most of their objectives and would conclude in 2024.
- A monthly fostering scorecard was developed to enable the tracking of performance in fostering, this was reported in to the Operational and Strategic Fostering Board.
- Monthly Performance Meetings were scheduled with the Head of Service to track progress and identify development needs.
- The Fostering Annual Report and Plan was now complete. The plan would be reviewed monthly.
- Fostering Form F assessments were of a good standard, the voice of the carer and the voice of any birth children was evident.
- There had been several Independent Foster Agency (IFA) transfers over to the local authority, this was due to the support they had received from the service.
- The IFA transfer reports provided enough information for the panel to make a recommendation.
- Some development was needed with the wider service around the consistency of QA of documents being submitted to the Fostering Panel.
- The QA framework needed to be embedded in the fostering service.
- The voice of the second carer was not always evident in review reports. This had been raised in individual cases with the relevant team manager.

**Residential Services-**

- A high-level update was provided on all currently registered children's homes, this included where in the process of registration they were, outcomes of inspections and the levels of current vacancies.
- It was advised that the homes continued to meet the needs of the children, to a high standard and regulation 44 visits were positive, with some low-level recommendations made to the Residential

Service.

- The residential employees maintained good partnership working with wider service areas.
- One of the residential care employees had won an award for Best Support Worker in the North. Another residential home was nominated for the Children's Home Team Award.
- A high-level overview of recruitment in relation to residential services was provided.
- There had been delays in the process of purchasing, completing work and registering new children's homes.
- Recruitment of residential employees had been slower than expected. There had also been some employee absence, which had impacted upon the wider service.
- It was noted that matching children to vacancies needed to be a speedier process.

#### **Children in Care, Care Leavers, and Family Activity Base Services-**

- There had been a refresh in quality assurance and performance activity, including a monthly performance meeting and a focus of performance in managers meetings.
- There was dip sampling undertaken by the Service Manager and Head of Service.
- A new Permanence Panel was developed, which focused on destination planning for children in care.
- There was step down meetings which tracked planning for children, to ensure that progress was being made in relation to children moving into in-house residential, foster placement or returning to parents where appropriate.
- The Resource Panel had been initiated to ensure accountability over the spend in children's services.
- The Corporate Parenting Strategy was complete.
- The Care Leaver Offer had been renewed and would be finalised alongside the financial offer shortly.
- The Care Leaver Service Plan had been drafted and this would be reviewed monthly.
- A Children in Care and Residential Service Plan had commenced.
- Recruitment had been a success across the service, a number of Personal Assistants had been recruited, alongside a Team Manager for the Children in Care Service and a Social Worker.
- Quality and planning were being driven across the service, with a focus on robust management and oversight.
- Some of the most complex children had moved into in-house placements, better suited to their needs. Some children had returned to the care of their parent, with careful planning.
- Family time continued to meet the needs of children in the locality service.
- Children and young people were able to express their wishes and views, this was evident in their plans.
- Consistency of planning, including pathway plans required further

focus.

- It was acknowledged that it could often take too long to move children into a suitable in-house placement, when this was determined as an appropriate plan.

#### **Next Steps-**

- The Head of Service and Assistant Director would be required to sign off the QA framework for the fostering service.
- Children and Young people would be matched to future children's homes to enable robust planning.
- There would be a focus on the reduction of delays to processes in purchasing and opening new children's homes.
- There would be a focus on destination planning to continue and the timeliness of transitions.
- Performance meetings would focus on compliance and quality across all service areas.

The Chair thanked the relevant officers, and the update was noted.

### **129. CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY 2024-2027**

This item provided a high-level update on the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027 and the following was outlined:

- The strategy was formally known as the Children in Care (CIC) and Care Leavers (CL) Strategy.
- There had been slight revisions to the Strategy which were approved by Cabinet on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024 and were subject to a seven working day call-in period, from the date the decision was published.
- The Strategy had been shared with the Looked After Children's Council and any comments would contribute towards the associated action plans.

During Discussions it was noted that an RMBC child had won the entry to the Coram Voice National Art Competition, feedback from the Awards Ceremony would be provided to the Panel in March.

The Chair thanked the relevant officers, and the update was noted.

### **130. THE PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

This item provided a high-level update on the proposed Terms of Reference (ToR) for Corporate Parenting Panel and the following was outlined:

- Cabinet had approved the changes to the ToR for Corporate Parenting Panel on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January, this was subject to a seven working day call-in period.
- The changes would be implemented from the beginning of the new municipal year.
- The approved changes would see the Corporate Parenting Panel change to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board, the name change would reflect children's wider needs, including health and education.
- The Panel would move from a public panel meeting to an internal board, this would ensure that young people could attend each meeting.
- The frequency of meetings would increase from four meetings a year to six meetings a year, to ensure sufficient capacity for business to be completed.
- There would be an Annual Report presented to the Improving Lives Select Commission on a yearly basis.

### **131. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN'S COUNCIL UPDATE**

The Chair advised that as this item contained restricted information and as resolved in Minute 126, the Panel would go into private session for the consideration of this item.

The young people on the Looked After Children's Council (LACC) gave a presentation to the Panel on the work of Rotherham's Looked After Children's Council, drawing attention to the following:

- Participation in the Big Ambition National Survey for 16–18-year-olds.
- Delivery of the Summer Festival.
- An International Trip to Paris.
- Participation in the Lost Land Project with Grimm & Co.
- Participation in the Remembrance Sunday Service.
- The LACC Pantomime and Christmas Dinner.

A young person of the LACC was redirected to the relevant Head of Service to discuss a matter that arose within the meeting, that was not part of the agreed agenda, but was acknowledged by the Chair and Panel members.

The Panel thanked the young people for their inspirational presentation and noted the updates provided.

### **132. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business to consider.

**133. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

**Resolved:** - That the next meeting be held on 19 March 2024, commencing at 4.00 p.m. to be held in the Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham.