

Minutes of the meeting of Children and young people scrutiny committee held at Committee Room 1 - The Shire Hall, St. Peter's Square, Hereford, HR1 2HX on Monday 15 July 2019 at 1.00 pm

Present: Councillor Carole Gandy (chairperson)
Councillor Diana Toynbee (vice-chairperson)

Councillors: Paul Andrews, Kath Hey, Phillip Howells and Jim Kenyon

Co-optees: Andy James and Nicola Kinson

Officers: Chris Baird, John Coleman, Liz Elgar and Matthew Evans and Angela McErlane

1. CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION

The Chairperson opened the meeting and welcomed all in attendance. It was explained that Councillor Mike Jones had been appointed to the committee on 12 July and was unable to attend the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mike Jones and Mr Burbidge.

3. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

There were no named substitutes.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting on 11 March 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the chairperson.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

7. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

There were no questions from members of the council.

8. CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL UPDATE 2018/2019

The committee received a report by the cabinet member children and families which provided an annual update on the corporate parenting strategy. The report was introduced by the director children and families who explained that it concerned looked

after children and good progress was reported with the introduction of an exemption for care leavers from council tax and the purchase of accommodation for care leavers. It was recognised that there remained some challenges which the strategy would seek to address in the forthcoming year including the educational attainment of care leavers.

The points below were raised by the committee in the debate that followed:

- It was queried when the care leavers covenant would be available and if an update could be provided to the committee. *The head of looked after children (HLAC) explained that it was likely that the covenant would be considered by Cabinet in September.*
- The latest number of looked after children was requested and the proportion with special education needs. *The HLAC explained that a response would need to be provided with the data.*
- The issue of runaways and offending by looked after children was raised and the strategies in place at the council to deal with missing children including the provision of mentors. *The HLAC explained that the report provided details of 32 children who went missing during the year which was in line with the rate of other local authorities. Mentoring schemes were available and return from missing interviews were conducted to attempt to understand the reasons why looked after children went missing. It was acknowledged that the increase in countylines activity had been a factor in some cases of missing children however it was explained that only a small number of looked after children were involved with the youth offending team.*
- Looked after children accessing mental health services was queried and what work was being undertaken to improve access. *The HLAC explained that a business case was being developed by Wye Valley Trust to be considered by the CCG requesting additional resource to expand the LAC health team. Additionally a multiagency group consisting of the looked after children health team, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and the counselling learning development trust (CLD Trust) was being established to ensure that looked after children had the right mental health support and that extra support was in place for foster carers.*
- It was queried how many looked after children were placed out of county and whether the rate was increasing. *The HLAC explained that 23% of looked after children were placed out of county at the time of writing of the annual report; this compared favourably to the English average of 40%. Some looked after children were just over the border but 13% were out of county and 20 miles away which compared to a national average of 15%. The trend to place looked after children out of county was decreasing and work was ongoing to increase fostering capacity in the county to continue this trend.*
- The role and performance of partner agencies to assist in the advancement of priorities for looked after children was queried. *The HLAC explained that membership of the corporate parenting panel was currently being reviewed. Support from health partners had been positive but it was recognised that greater work needed to be undertaken to involve the police and probation services. Partners also needed to be encouraged to make more work experience and apprenticeship opportunities available for looked after children.*
- The resources available to looked after children health team were queried and the impact this had upon work with looked after children. It was proposed that the scrutiny committee write to the Herefordshire clinical commissioning group (CCG) to request additional resources for the team. *The HLAC explained that the looked after health team in the county was very small compared to other local authority areas. It was confirmed that the Wye Valley Trust (WVT) had prepared a business case for additional resource for the health team which was being considered by Herefordshire CCG. The looked after children health team*

was currently undertaking its statutory obligations and had insufficient resources to work on preventative/early intervention measures and to support care leavers.

- The number of care leavers at supported housing for young people project (SHYPP) was very low and the reasons for this were queried; a briefing note setting out the reasons was requested. *The HLAC explained that a project group was in operation to work with SHYPP to look at improvements to the service. Proposals had included early contact with the looked after children services and to ensure that young people were supported to manage their money proactively. It was confirmed that the contract for the services was to be recommissioned in 2020 when the current contract ended.*
- It was queried what the implication of the funding changes to A Level courses would be on care leavers. *It was explained that a response would be provided following the meeting.*
- The ending of the contract with Refugee Action was raised and what support to unaccompanied asylum seekers would exist in future. *The HLAC explained that the project with Refugee Action was no longer viable and it was felt that there should be a pause in transfer scheme. Currently there was 1 unaccompanied asylum seeker care leaver in county and 12 out of county. There was a requirement to support care leavers until the age of 25 which created challenging financial implications for the council. Work was ongoing with the regional migration partnership and there would be an update to the executive once the Refugee Action service had ceased.*
- The methods and techniques of engaging looked after children to take account of their views were queried. *The HLAC explained that engagement with looked after children was undertaken by social workers, teachers and youth workers; whoever had the best relationship with a child or young person. The advocacy service provided support for looked after children and the mind of my own (MOMO) app allowed users to provide feedback on their experiences as looked after children. The assistant director safeguarding and family support (ADS&FS) explained that biannual looked after child review took place and throughout care proceedings the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) assisted children.*
- A mental health pathway for looked after children with a high score in the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was queried and the inclusion of this data in future versions of the annual report. *The HLAC acknowledged that there was a correlation between high SDQ scores and breakdowns in foster placements. A pathway would be considered by the new mental health multiagency group and an indication of the success of the new group would be a reduction in SDQ scores.*
- It was queried if good practice at key stage 4 could be shared with all schools to improve the performance of looked after children. Mentoring and contact between schools was encouraged and the use of the pupil premium to support such work. *The director children and families explained that it was the role of the virtual head teacher to look at practices in schools and education plans that were in place. The cohort size of looked after children at key stage 4 was small but more was required to make improvement in attainment.*
- The lack of progress with the business adviser to work with the virtual school was queried. *The HLAC explained that the lack of progress was being looked into and work was starting to link Landau (an agency funded to reduce the number of young people not in education, training or employment) with the 16+ team.*
- The priority to reduce the number of looked after children was raised and the role of the edge of care strategy in this objective. *The HLAC explained that the edge of care business case was being developed and it was intended that more intensive support would help return children to families rather than result in entry to the care system. The ADS&FS explained that the service would work with the*

extended family of looked after children to remove children from care quickly, where it was in their best interests.

The committee proposed, seconded and agreed recommendations as below.

RESOLVED: That:

- **A briefing note is provided concerning the multiagency panel relating to looked after children mental health services;**
- **A briefing note is provided on the introduction of the care leavers covenant;**
- **A response is provided to the question relating to the implications of the national funding changes on A Levels undertaken by looked after children;**
- **A letter is sent to Herefordshire clinical commissioning group to seek clarification regarding the resourcing of the looked after children health team; and**
- **A briefing note is provided on SHYPP referral levels.**

9. FOSTERING AND ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORTS 2018/19

The committee received a report by the cabinet member children and families which provided the annual reports from the fostering and adoption services. The report was introduced by the head of looked after children who explained that the annual reports showed that the two services were performing well. The council's recent membership of the Adoption Central England (ACE) regional adoption agency was raised as a recent achievement but it was confirmed that the adoption service remained in Herefordshire.

The committee raised those points below in the discussion that followed:

- The reasons for the decrease in adoption orders was queried? *The HLAC explained that it was only a relatively small number of children that were the subject of an adoption order and was therefore prone to fluctuations. There was no one answer regarding a decrease in adoption orders but there were a variety of reasons why an adoption order was not appropriate for an individual child; it may not be appropriate for the child and the possibility of care from other family members was explored. The ADS&FS explained that viability assessments of family members to provide care were undertaken at an early stage.*
- How special guardianship arrangements were deemed appropriate and financial support for family members was queried. *The HLAC explained that special guardianship arrangements could be appropriate for a child depending on their care plan. Financial support in line with the level paid to foster carers was provided to special guardians but with respect to adoption it was very unusual for an allowance to be paid and it was more likely that any financial support would assist initial set-up costs.*
- The issue of recruiting sufficient numbers of foster carers was raised and the recruitment and retention strategy currently in place was queried. *The HLAC explained that work was ongoing with communications at the council on a campaign which included use of social media to target potential foster carers. The campaign had increased the number of enquiries and applications. With respect to retention the children's social work manager explained that work was ongoing to investigate the support provided to carers and there was a review of the fees and allowances paid.*
- The training that was provided to foster carers was queried and how training was kept relevant and up to date without over burdening carers. A briefing note covering the training that was undertaken was requested. *Themed training was undertaken and online training. Mandatory training was provided in order to keep*

carers up to date and upskilling was also important with training in areas such as understanding attachment and trauma. The ADS&FS explained that foster carers were caring for the most vulnerable children in the county therefore it was essential that their training was kept up to date.

- The lack of capacity in the occupational therapy service at the Wye Valley Trust (WVT) was raised and the need for the purchase of private assessments on a case-by-case basis. It was proposed that the scrutiny committee write to the WVT to understand the provision of occupational therapists in Herefordshire.
- It was requested that details were provided of the process that was undertaken to determine what form of care was appropriate for a looked after child. *The ADS&FS suggested that the service could take members of the committee through some case examples to demonstrate the processes followed and decisions taken.*
- It was queried why the council had responsibility for young people up to the age of 25. *The HLAC explained that after the age of 18 young people became care leavers and the council was required to keep in contact and support until the age of 25.*

The committee proposed, seconded and agreed the recommendations below:

RESOLVED: That:

- **The achievements in the adoption annual report and the compliments in the fostering report are recognised and the officers working in those teams and carers of the council's looked after children are commended;**
- **A briefing note on proposals to increase the retention of foster carers and details of the training provided be provided;**
- **A letter is sent to the Wye Valley Trust to request details of the provision of occupational therapists in Herefordshire; and**
- **A session is organised to look at case samples of how appropriate forms of care are determined for looked after children.**

10. WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

The committee considered its work programme for 2019/20. In addition to the items of business listed on the schedule it was proposed that a spotlight review concerning peer-on-peer sexual harassment and abuse was convened in the autumn and a scoping document brought to the next meeting of the committee.

It was proposed that a task and finish group concerning child exploitation was convened and a scoping document brought the next meeting of the committee. It was felt that the task and finish group should include child slavery, child sexual exploitation and online exploitation.

The committee proposed and seconded those recommendations below.

RESOLVED: That the committee agrees:

- **The work programme 2019/20 as attached to the agenda;**
- **The convening of a spotlight review in autumn 2019 to focus on peer-on-peer sexual harassment and abuse with a scoping document to be presented to the meeting on 16 September 2019.**
- **The convening of a task and finish group concerning child exploitation with a scoping document to be presented to the meeting on 16 September 2019.**

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The meeting ended at 2.51 p.m.

Chairperson