

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

**SCHOOLS, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY (O&S) COMMITTEE – PUBLIC MEETING**

**13:00 hours on Wednesday 25 January 2017, Committee Rooms 3 & 4 –
Actions**

Present:

Councillor Susan Barnett [Chair]

Councillors: Sue Anderson, Kate Booth, Debbie Clancy, Shabrana Hussain, Julie Johnson, Cllr Chauhdry Rashid, Martin Straker Welds and Alex Yip.

Other Voting Representatives: Samera Ali, Parent Governor Representative.

Also Present:

Lisa Carter, Rights and Participation Service

Sally Craddock, Head of Service, South Children in Care (CIC) Social Care Team

Sivay Heer, Head of Service, East CIC Social Care Team

Theresa Kane, Head of Service (HOS), Fostering and Adoption

Kalvinder Kohli, HOS, Prevention and Complex

Seamus Gaynor, Head of Strategic Management

Peter Hay, Strategic Director, People Directorate

Natalie Loon, Corporate Parenting Coordinator

Rakesh Mistry, Commissioning & Brokerage Manager

Mel Page, Service Manager, Residential Homes

Shank Patel, Head of Service, Care Leavers and Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers
Children (UASC)

Andy Pepper, AD, Children in Care Provider Services

Manjeet Rai, HOS, North West & Central CIC Social Care Team

Narinder Saggu, Head of Service, Children's Commissioning

Lorna Scarlett, AD, North West Central, Children's Services

Amanda Simcox, Research & Policy Officer, Scrutiny Office

Benita Wishart, Overview & Scrutiny Manager, Scrutiny Office

Andrew Wright, Head Teacher, Virtual School for Children in Care

1. NOTICE OF RECORDING/WEBCAST

The Chairman advised that this meeting would be webcast for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet site (which could be accessed at

“www.birminghamnewsroom.com”) and members of the press/public may record and take photographs.

The whole of the meeting would be filmed except where there were confidential or exempt items.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were submitted on behalf of:

Councillors: Matt Bennett and Barry Bowles [Deputy Chair].

Evette Clarke, Parent Governor Representative; Richard Potter, Roman Catholic Representative and Sarah Smith, Church of England Diocese

3. ACTION NOTES

(See document No 1)

RESOLVED:-

The action notes of the meeting held on the 7 December 2016 were confirmed.

4. CORPORATE PARENTING INQUIRY

(See document No 2)

Cllr Susan Barnett declared an interest as she works in a children centre that facilitates contact.

The Chair reminded Members that a questionnaire has been circulated to all Councillors for this Inquiry and requested Councillors complete this and to encourage other Councillors to do so.

The key question for the Inquiry is “how can Councillors support the service improvement journey for Children in Care through their role as corporate parents?” There will be a report presented to the 4th April 2017 City Council meeting.

Andy Pepper, AD, Children in Care Provider Services explained that there was extensive information contained within the papers and what will be discussed at today’s meeting. The main points for this Inquiry were:

- Throughout today Councillors could look at “how you can engage yourself as Councillors on the O&S Committee and on the City Council and how you might be able to encourage other Councillors on the Corporate Parenting Journey”.
- The term corporate parenting simply is “having the same aspirations and commitment to children and young people in care as any good parent would have for their own children.”
- We should be able to offer excellent outcomes if we have:
 - Commitment and aspiration
 - Are Enabling

- Help to reach their potential
- Improvements have been made and Ofsted have recognised this and improved the rating for the 'Children looked after and achieving permanence' services to 'Requiring Improvement' from Inadequate. For example in the March 2014 Ofsted rated the Corporate Parenting Board was judged as weak and now they recognise the board has a clear focus and is beginning to have an impact on improving services.

Natalie Loon, Corporate Parenting Coordinator highlighted some of the successes for this inquiry:

- Mentoring Scheme - a voluntary scheme that has 100 Council staff and partner mentors (including Birmingham City University (BCU), NHS and Service Birmingham) providing one to one support to CIC.
- Academic Mentoring Pilot – The Birmingham Virtual School developed the role of Academic Mentor in partnership with BCU and Communicate, a software-based literacy and communication teaching intervention designed specifically for use with people who have delayed literacy and communication skills.
- Councillors raised over £1,000 to ensure that 622 children in care received presents at the winter events.
- Celebrating success and events – there are a number of events that reward partners support and Members can attend these.
- The City Council as a Foster Friendly employer will be launched to staff in March. A recognition scheme for businesses will be launched in April.
- District Corporate Parents have a number of sessions planned where they will be looking at how they can support service improvements.
- The Lord Mayor visited 7 residential homes with Cllr Barnett to meet the children and staff and this has meant a lot to those in the homes.

Lorna Scarlett, AD, North West Central, Children's Services is the Strategic Lead for Children in Care with the overview of the operational social work services in the south, east and North West Central. The main points for this inquiry were:

- There are currently 1,834 children in care spread fairly evenly across the teams in the City.
- They have worked with Essex City Council, their improvement partners, on the effectiveness of the CIC service and quality of the practice. As a result there is more focus on the quality of practice and outcomes for the child and young person.
- Members can help support and help improve the service by having an understanding of needs, issues and complexities of the children Birmingham are caring for. For instance, nationally there are issues in finding places for children with very complex needs.
- Independent Review Officers (IROs) check every six months that the child's plan is on track and meet needs.
- The contact and escort service arranges and supervises contact sessions with parents and families for children in care. These are being reviewed to ensure these are appropriate. Cllr Clancy requested that the Committee discusses the Contact Review at a future meeting.

- Members thanked officers for the visit to the South Area Team and visits to the other teams will be arranged.

Lisa Carter, Rights and Participation Service main points for this inquiry were:

- Advocacy is a statutory offer.
- Lisa supports two groups: Children in Care Council (CICC) and the Care Leavers Forum and they both influence the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Most children have joined the CICC via advocacy. The CICC is quite a small group and they are looking at mechanisms so they represent the views of others.
- The Care Leavers Forum was piloted at the end of 2016 and there has been a lot of interest from young people and officers and there is great potential for them to influence policy and practice.
- Consideration needs to be given to how young people influence the decisions and practice within the new Trust arrangements.
- The role of Councillors needs to be clear to young people and the CICC will produce something that explains Councillors role.
- There is a lot of engagement with the Birmingham Foster Care Association (BFCA) and Cllr Yip requested that the voice of foster carers is heard by the Committee.

Theresa Kane, Head of Service (HOS), Fostering and Adoption main points for this inquiry were:

- There are currently 655 children who are subject to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).
- Three key areas:
 - Recruitment for fostering and adoptions and Councillors can help raise the profile and awareness in the communities and at their surgeries. Also, staff are happy to come along to community groups and schools to discuss this.
 - Children who are privately fostered are a hidden and vulnerable group and Councillors can be the eyes and ears. For instance if a child is with someone other than a close relative for more than 28 days then Children's Social Care needs to be informed.
 - Regionalising adoption has the potential to the sharing of skills and expertise and shorten waiting times.

Shank Patel, Head of Service, Care Leavers and Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Children (UASC) main points for this inquiry were:

- They have 702 care leavers and 121 UASC.
- A number of care leavers live outside Birmingham – Scotland, Kent and London.
- They have care leavers aged 28 who have returned to education and entitled to support.
- The Child Poverty Action Group are engaging organisations to ascertain whether they can assist care leavers as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility. For example providing a 15% off loyalty cards.

- Potential risks to the Supporting People funding to assist with independent living skills and supporting the most vulnerable. However, a commitment was given that vulnerable homeless care leavers are allocated supported accommodation that can keep them safe.

The Three Children in Care Social Care Teams: Sally Craddock, Head of Service, South; Sivay Heer, Head of Service, East and Manjeet Rai, HOS, North West & Central main points for this Inquiry were:

- It's difficult to undertake return interviews for children placed outside Birmingham.
- Area Resource Panels have reduced the number of children coming into care.
- All three Social work teams have a principal Social Worker who supports them. They also have a team manager and an Assistant Director. There are approximately eight social workers per team manager.
- Councillors can help support the improvement journey by:
 - Maintaining a stable budget and reducing agency staff. Investment can then be made in permanent staff and there is a stability for the child.
 - Celebrate success, for instance 'good luck' banners around exam times.
 - Help with secure sponsorship with hampers for young people at Christmas.
 - Give officers positive feedback as well as being in contact if something has gone wrong.
 - Councillors could ask Social Workers how well they know the children that are working with and whether the child's voice is heard and involved in the decisions made.

Mel Page, Service Manager, Residential Homes highlighted:

- The service offer permanency and short breaks for disabled children across five sites. The services provide 27 long term beds and 120 short break placements.

Narinder Saggu, Head of Service, Children's Commissioning and Rakesh Mistry, Commissioning & Brokerage Manager main points for this Inquiry were:

- As of 9th January 2017 there were 1,840 CIC. 63% are in planned placements and 37% were unplanned and present on the day e.g. due to breakdown of existing placement.
- Over 1,200 are with foster carers (66%) and 9% are in residential.
- There are 83 providers in the regional supported accommodation framework for 16+ placements.
- The team has accelerated their work on the quality of the care home and they have a dedicated Quality Assurance officer. Also, if Ofsted drop the rating of a Children's home it is the Social Workers decision as to whether the child remains there.

- A lot of money is spent on CIC and therefore there is a need to look at the outcomes. They have started to introduce an outcomes tracker and they could provide overall information or at provider level to Councillors.
- Members provide feedback from their visits to the home which is shared with the home. Responses from providers are returned to Councillors usually within a day of its receipt, or within the week if there is an outstanding query.
- Councillors can support the improvement journey by:
 - Continuing the Reg 44 (should be known as Corporate Parenting Monitoring Visits) to residential homes. Councillors can visit Children's residential homes that are outside of Birmingham and they should inform the Commissioning & Brokerage Manager beforehand.
 - To visit supported accommodation provision in their area.
 - Attend briefings on what provisions are in their areas and could ask questions of providers, e.g. health and leisure to help ensure young people are fully integrated into the area.
 - Councillors could use their partnerships and network e.g. if meeting with the police or health could they include or invite the residential and supported housing providers
 - Support for planning applications for Residential Children's Homes with the local community and residents in relation.

Kalvinder Kohli, HOS, Prevention and Complex discussed the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework and the main points for this Inquiry were:

- The skills for life wheel diagram will be shared with the Committee.
- Would welcome Members involvement in the housing strategy and homeless transformation where Councillors could have an input into the vision and service.
- They were looking at corporate sponsors, for example they are working with a major supermarket towards them providing a welcome pack for care leavers when they move into their own accommodation.
- A training house is provided by the Place Directorate to address the high levels of tenancy abandonment of 16 and 17 year olds.

Andrew Wright, Head Teacher, Virtual School for Children in Care main points for this Inquiry were:

- The Looked After Children in Education Service (LACES) is now known as Children in Care Education Services - the umbrella is the virtual school.
- They have a number of celebration events that Members are welcome to attend.
- They look at the child's education progress whilst they are in care.
- They are working to set-up work taster days.
- Councillors can assist by:
 - Many of the Councillors are governors and they can assist with raising awareness that CIC are vulnerable and can ask that the school is doing to support them.

- Councillors may be aware of partners or businesses that could offer work experience / mentoring and this needs to be nurtured and managed so the experience for both is positive.
- Councillors could attend events at the residential homes and assist with raising expectations.

RESOLVED:-

- The evidence gathered today would be used for the Corporate Parenting Inquiry.

5. WORK PROGRAMME 2016-17

(See document 3)

The work programme was discussed.

RESOLVED:-

That the work programme was agreed and:

- The findings from today's evidence gathering session needs to be discussed and there may be a need for further evidence gathering.
- The Early Years update would be discussed at a later committee meeting rather than 8th February 2017 due to the 'consultation on the changes to the Early Years Funding Formula from April 2017' only closing three days earlier.

6. DATES FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates were noted.

7. REQUEST(S) FOR CALL IN/COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION/PETITIONS

None.

8. OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

9. AUTHORITY TO CHAIRMAN AND OFFICERS

RESOLVED:-

That in an urgent situation between meetings the Chair, jointly with the relevant Chief Officer, has authority to act on behalf of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 17.16 hours.