

**CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY  
PANEL  
14 DECEMBER 2011  
5.00 - 7.22 PM**



**Present:**

Councillors Mrs McCracken (Chairman), Mrs Barnard (Vice-Chairman), Ms Brown and Ms Hayes

**Also Present:**

Councillor Dr Barnard

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Councillor Mrs Birch

**26. Report from Children in Care Council, Say It Loud, Say It Proud**

Louise Hopkinson, Children's Participation Development Officer, was present at the meeting with three members of SiLSiP.

Activities were undertaken during the summer with funding gained through the Youth Opportunities Fund. Looked after children took part in go karting, a trip to see *Wicked* at the theatre, indoor skydiving, sledging, climbing, and a three day film project at South Hill Park was shown at the Achievement Awards.

A residential trip to Avon Tyrrell with eight looked after children was undertaken in the half term. The children stayed in log cabins, helped with chores and took part in an adventure course and kayaking. The children expressed an interest in undertaking further residential trips as they found the trips a good way to make friends and try new things.

In May, there was a 'handle care' project and creative writing workshops. Poetry from the workshops was aired on Radio Berkshire and a poem entitled 'I Believe' was published in the SiLSiP newsletter. SiLSiP members had attended a South East Regional Care Council meeting where there was discussion regarding Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). SiLSiP members queried how many looked after children there were in Bracknell Forest for IROs to see.

SiLSiP members expressed an interest in undertaking more day trips. The last residential trip cost approximately £2,200. There were budget constraints at present but Panel Members would investigate the possibility of further day and residential trips for looked after children. SiLSiP members suggested fundraising for these trips with activities such as selling cakes, a barbeque, a raffle, and a car boot sale. Fundraising would be discussed further at the next SiLSiP meeting and the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel would attend this meeting. Panel Members would support fundraising activities.

There were 250 looked after children reviews in the last year and there were approximately 97 looked after children in Bracknell Forest at present, although this number varied between 95 and 100 usually.

A SiLSiP member proposed at the meeting that members of SiLSiP should be paid for their attendance at meetings, being aware that other Children in Care Councils were paid. The Chair expressed the view that SiLSiP was the young people's own group, it was for the benefit of all looked after children and payment may encourage young people to attend for the wrong motives. The Chair was also concerned that it would divert money away from other areas which the young people had set as priorities. The SiLSiP members agreed that this issue had been discussed previously at a SiLSiP meeting where they had decided that a group outing or event would be their reward for their contributions to SiLSiP rather than individual payments.

SiLSiP members were invited to attend other panel meetings throughout the year and it was suggested that they could take it in turns to attend meetings during the year.

The Chair thanked the SiLSiP members for attending the meeting.

**27. Minutes and Matters Arising**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2011 be agreed as a correct record.

**28. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**29. Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report**

Carol Lamkin, Independent Reviewing Officer, presented the Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2010/11. The report identified a number of areas of good practice and highlighted areas for development within the service for looked after children.

A new Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) was appointed on 23 March 2011 and in June 2011 a new team called the Conference, Review and Quality Assurance Team was formed. A new team manager working 21 hours a week and an additional IRO working 16 hours a week had helped to build capacity in the IRO role and within the wider system of Conference and Reviews.

Of the 250 looked after children reviews undertaken, 100% were undertaken within the time scale and 97% of young people contributed to their reviews. With the new team in place, the aim was to develop the relationships with looked after children and improve parental involvement.

There would be a focus on practice and some young people were staying on in foster placements on a room only basis over the age of 18 years. There were issues for disabled young people and work would be undertaken on pathway planning and avoiding drift, adoption issues, changes to audit, educational plans for care leavers and more robust planning for destinations.

Support would be given to vulnerable young people in relation to their career and educational choices. Some young people chaired their own reviews and there was an aim to develop this further. There were interpreters for young people with English as a second language and advocates if needed. It was suggested that young people could take minutes at reviews.

The Panel noted the Council's response to the fourth annual report prepared by the Independent Reviewing Officer Service which was approved by the Executive Member for Children and Young People on 15 November 2011.

**30. Larchwood Inspection Report & Regulation 33 Visits**

Simon McKenzie, Head of Service: Learning Difficulties and Disability, and Samantha Whitehouse, Manager of Larchwood presented a report on the Unannounced Inspection of Larchwood Short Break Unit within Children's Social Care in Bracknell Forest Council which was undertaken on 10 and 11 August 2011.

Under the Care Standards Act 2000 Larchwood Short Break Unit was inspected twice a year and this inspection was the first since the introduction of the new framework, Inspection of Children's Homes – Framework for Inspection (March 2011). Previous inspections were based on the five Every Child Matters Framework.

The new framework provided individual grades for Overall Effectiveness, Outcomes for Children and Young People, Quality of Care, Safeguarding of Children and Young People, Leadership and Management, and Equality and Diversity. The Unit was graded as outstanding in all six areas with one recommendation to alter the Statements of Purpose to provide greater clarity on the age range, gender and numbers accessing the unit.

A further suggestion arising from the inspection was that consideration of night time fire evacuations or equivalent needed to be undertaken. Live night time fire evacuations were not considered appropriate at Larchwood as this would cause significant disruption to young people attending. Staff were addressing this through role play within the fire evacuation refresher training and evening fire drills.

The Larchwood Titans, a young people's group at the Unit, met quarterly with managers to facilitate feedback between young people and senior managers. The Titans were asked to look at the new play area at The Lookout and give feedback on what worked for young people with disabilities.

The quality of Regulation 33 visits were highlighted positively within the recent safeguarding and looked after children inspections. The lead inspector verbally suggested that it would be beneficial for Councillors to have some involvement within Regulation 33 visits. Simon McKenzie was asked to present a proposal at the next Panel meeting in March 2012 regarding Panel Members involvement in Regulation 33 visits.

The Panel congratulated everyone involved with the inspections.

**31. Adoption Half Yearly Report**

Sheila McKeand, Head of Service for Looked After Children, presented the Bracknell Forest Adoption Service Half Yearly Report covering the period April 2011 to September 2011. It was a requirement to produce a report every six months with a full report in the summer.

The report gave a brief overview of business. There had been a small increase in the number of young people coming before the Adoption Panel. Traditionally there would be approximately three children but there were seven children at the moment for the Adoption Panel to consider. Children for adoption tended to be under the age of 11 years. Permanency planning and family finding had increased significantly over the last six months along with the number of looked after children.

Special Guardianship was a useful order as it gave greater authority for a family to make decisions where adoption was not appropriate but a level of permanency was needed. There were some reservations with it being used with younger children under the age of 8 years as adoption would be the preferred option for younger children.

### **32. Presentation from Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service**

Alyson Graham, Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service (BAAS), gave a presentation on the Service. BAAS was a joint arrangement with the six unitary authorities in Berkshire and the service was funded proportionally. The BAAS maintained the Berkshire specialism in adoption and was reviewed in 1998 and 2008.

The role of the BAAS was to manage and service joint adoption panels, indirect contact and direct contact arrangements after adoption, to operate the birth relative project, training, advice and guidance to staff, life appreciation days, disruption meetings, exchange days, and to keep records. Advice and guidance was a large part of the work of the BAAS.

The BAAS Panel, made up of people with a variety of expertise, made recommendations which would then be considered by the Agency Decision Maker (Chief Officer) in each unitary authority. The BAAS operated a 'Letterbox' scheme which enabled indirect contact via letters between a birth family and adoptive parents. The aim was to ensure that ongoing Information was available to adopted children to help them to understand their past.

The Birth Relative Project provided a valuable service and information in relation to adoption. Project workers with the project were in contact with birth family members for many years and could signpost people to other services. The project had operated since 2002 and was consistently rated highly in inspections.

There was an Adopters' Conference every year and a course was operated in the Berkshire area for adopters, professionals, foster carers and panel members. Life Appreciation Days gave prospective adopters a chance to meet professionals who had been significant in a child's life whilst looked after. Disruption meetings were held before or after a placement for adoption broke down; the likelihood of a disruption meeting being held rose with the age of a child. There were few adoption breakdowns in Berkshire.

Exchange days provided an opportunity for prospective adopters to meet social workers from a range of adoption agencies and see profiles of children who were waiting to be adopted. The BAAS held closed records in relation to looked after children and adoption records for over 24,000 children dating back to 1911. People would need specific reasons to look at the records.

The Panel commented on the high standard of the BAAS and the value of their knowledge and experience. The Panel considered the proposal for a two hour member briefing seminar to engage members of the council on what adoption really was and understanding the needs of children. Ideas would be put to the Member Development Charter Steering Group in March 2012 and the aim was for the seminar on adoption to be held in July 2012.

**33. Management Information for Looked After Children**

Lorna Hunt, Chief Officer: Children's Social Care, presented a report on the new format of performance management information for looked after children. Placements were being monitored and the aim was for there to be more local placements.

Data included information on the number of looked after children, the stability of placements, the length and number of placements, adoptions of looked after children, timeliness of placements, and cases reviewed within timescales, amongst others. Health assessments were going in the right direction. The aim was for there to be more information on performance in relation to care leavers in future.

**34. Inspection Feedback**

Janette Karklins, Director of Children, Young People and Learning, gave feedback on the Safeguarding and Looked After Children Inspection. The results of the inspection would be in the public domain on 16 December 2011. Comments had been made on the draft report and suggestions had been accepted. A copy of the final report would be circulated to Panel Members.

There were a series of twenty separate judgements on a scale of good, adequate and inadequate. The areas of safeguarding and looked after children had capacity to improve. There were five inspectors and ten days of field work for the inspection. The inspection report and action plan would be presented to the Executive for endorsement. The immediate actions had been undertaken or were in the process of being undertaken.

An inspection in relation to adoption was expected before the end of March 2012. The next Ofsted inspection of Children's Services would have no warning. Inspections with different models were being piloted at the moment.

The Chair congratulated everyone involved in the inspection.

**35. Dates of Future Meetings and Forward Plan**

7 March 2012

Care Leavers – Accommodation  
Academic Achievement  
Employment  
Health of Looked After Children  
Annual Report  
Youth Offending Service

**CHAIRMAN**

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