

**CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY
PANEL
25 JUNE 2014
5.00 - 6.55 PM**



Present:

Councillors Heydon (Chairman), Mrs Birch, Ms Hayes, Mrs McCracken and Mrs Temperton (Substitute)

Also Present:

Councillor Dr Barnard

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Ms Brown

1. Election of Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Heydon be elected Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel for the municipal year 2014/15.

COUNCILLOR HEYDON IN THE CHAIR

2. Appointment of Vice Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Mrs McCracken be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel for the municipal year 2014/15.

3. Apologies for Absence/Substitute Members

The Panel noted the attendance of the following substitute member:

Councillor Mrs Temperton for Councillor Ms Brown

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2014 be agreed as a correct record.

6. Panel Announcements

Staffing Update

The Panel were advised that it was Sheila McKeand's last week in post as Head of Service for Looked After Children as she was due to retire. Heather Brown had joined the team on an interim basis to cover this role. Panel members expressed their appreciation to Sheila for her help over the years.

Helen Fenton had left Children's Social Services at the end of May 2014, and Kim Harris was Acting Team Manager in the Family Placement Team.

Christine McInnes was the new Chief Officer: Learning and Achievement, replacing Bob Welch who had retired.

Member Development Session

Councillor Mrs McCracken expressed an interest in taking part in the Member Development Session. Councillor Dr Barnard advised that he would send out an e-mail encouraging participation in the event, as all councillors were corporate parents.

Research in Practice Leaders Briefing

Sarah Roberts was the lead on this and there were leaflets regarding Research in Practice. Bracknell Forest Council were members of Research in Practice; much of this was cutting edge and involved new developments. This could be linked with training and if members would like further information on developments, this could be sourced.

Corporate Parenting and Children in Care Councils Event

These events were being held between 2 August and 13 December 2014 in different locations in the UK, such as Newcastle and Bristol. Some dates were full, for example, 13 December 2014 in London. If Members were interested in attending one of these events they should contact Sarah Roberts. A poster would be circulated with further information.

(Action: Sarah Roberts)

Card from Care Leavers

Care leavers signed a Thank You card for CPAP Members which was shown at the meeting. A PDF of the card would be circulated to all Members and it would be checked as to whether the messages inside of the card could also be shared.

(Action: Sarah Roberts / Amanda Roden)

7. Pupil Premium Initiatives in Bracknell Forest Schools

The Panel considered a report on Pupil Premium Initiatives in Bracknell Forest Schools. The Panel noted the work of the Virtual School in supporting schools appropriately using the Pupil Premium Grant for Looked After Children.

Janette Karklins, Director of Children, Young People and Learning advised that the system had changed from April 2014. Previously funding went directly to schools and was possibly used in more general ways. The standard of achievement of each pupil would be monitored, and there had been more rigorous monitoring by Ofsted. The aim was in future for funding to benefit individual children as well as the school as a whole. Parents were now more involved and due regard was given to parents wishes.

There would be an update on pupil premium in the annual report at the December meeting of the Panel.

8. **Verbal Update on Refresh of Looked After Children Commissioning Strategy**

Sheila McKeand, Head of Service for Looked After Children gave an update on the refresh of the Looked After Children Commissioning Strategy. Parts of the Strategy had been updated and consideration was given to how other papers fell within the Strategy. The Strategy would be reviewed fully in two years time.

9. **Fostering Annual Report**

Kim Harris, Acting Team Manager Family Placement presented the Fostering Annual Report and Statement of Purpose. The Family Placement Team was responsible for all aspects of fostering and adoption. Following an Ofsted inspection in March 2011, the team had continued to develop the service. A new two stage process for fostering assessments had been introduced. There was an emphasis on making sure that processes and procedures were all in place.

The Looked After Children (LAC) cohort had increased and Children's Social Care was continually recruiting to keep up with this demand for service. There was a need to allocate where work was needed, and the number of connected persons or relatives in cases involved much work, particularly in relation to those going through the court process which had new tighter timescales for completion of work. All foster carers were reviewed annually and there was a need for them to be considered by a foster panel or be signed off by an agency decision maker.

Challenges involved waiting for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and medicals. Some foster carers would take up to three children, and there was a revised recruitment strategy in place. A major recruitment campaign was underway with local churches, led by the Kerith Church. There had been 61 enquiries this year. People might contact neighbouring authorities or a private agency before deciding.

Some people felt fostering was not right for them after undertaking the skills and family training. It needed to be right for everyone involved and to meet the needs of the children. Some people were unable to be flexible with work hours and a level of commitment was needed which was different from looking after your own children. Expectations needed to be understood and shared by everyone involved but the process was robust. Health assessments were also needed for foster carers and sometimes DBS checks could be prioritised, for example, if there was a delay due to someone having spent time living in another country. If DBS checks were delayed, there was usually a good reason for it.

Cllr Mrs Temperton suggested that issues could be taken up with the police on the Community Safety Partnership.

(Action: Cllr Heydon / Sarah Roberts)

There was a capacity issue; the Family Placement Team would aim for a certain number of foster carers but if just one became ill, it meant one less which could be used. Skills and family training was held approximately six times a year and during the first stages usually, so that foster carers knew what they were taking on. Local foster carers had really developed over the past few years into working more as a fostering community where events and different activities were offered and carers were interested in developing resources.

There would more of a focus on development and recruitment next year, as a key priority for the service and this included short break carers amongst others. There was an annual fostering conference for carers on 15 November 2014 to which

members of CPAP were invited, and a celebration held every two years. There was a communications programme and a marketing recruitment officer who worked closely with the Council's Communications team.

Press releases and foster carers themselves were the best ambassadors for promoting foster caring. The Chairman would look into communications for fostering.

(Action: Cllr Heydon)

10. **Adoption Annual Report**

Kim Harris, Acting Team Manager Family Placement Team presented the Adoption Annual Report and Statement of Purpose. Many people had been moved through the adoption process this year with 20 adoptive families being recruited, more than double the target. The activities undertaken and functions of the adoption panel were included in the report.

There had been many legislative changes over the past year with a more streamlined process for recruitment. There were monthly preparation groups across Berkshire and a quarterly scorecard monitored activity. Adoption activity days were being undertaken for hard to place children and the next one was due in the autumn. Members discussed the impact of the activity day held in February 2014 on the children presented and heard details of the extensive preparation of children, carers and adopters needed prior to such events. Expressions of interest had been received as a result of these days and the children enjoyed them. The team were limited in how they could use the fostering to adopt scheme but this had been used. There was good training for adopters and the need for ongoing support post-adoption. The 'SPLAT' group for adoptive children met four times a year.

The demographics of the Looked After children population had changed over the past two to three years with more young children coming into the care system. This had resulted in an increase in the number of children needing Adoption or Special Guardianship arrangements. Members were pleased to note the higher number of children being granted Adoption or Special Guardianship Orders during the year and that there were clear permanency planning arrangements in place. Monitoring of cases was undertaken from the Edge of Care Panel to try to predict when children may need to come into care but this was not always possible. The child remained the focus whilst a family was sought for them. Individual cases were assessed with regard to where to place children geographically.

A Pan Berkshire (four Local Authority) Adoption service was being planned. This would include Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham, West Berkshire, and Bracknell Forest. A report regarding this would be considered by the Council's Executive. Discussions would be held with staff and overarching monitoring would be undertaken by Bracknell Forest Council.

Post-adoption was a growing area of work and there was an expansive service for adopted adults who came back for information. There was a need to handle these situations sensitively. Staff needed time to think about what they were writing in records as these could later be seen by the adopted person.

The aim was for a streamlined process for step-parent adoptions, and thorough sibling assessments were undertaken. Families of four to six were too big to keep together and sometimes there was a gap in age range.

Inter country adoption was managed by a local Voluntary Adoption Agency, PACT, under an agreed arrangement.

11. Verbal Progress Report on 'Staying Put' Strategy

Sheila McKeand, Head of Service for Looked After Children gave a verbal progress report on the 'Staying Put' Strategy. There were statutory requirements on local authorities now in relation to young people in foster placement when they reached the age of 18 years. It was not considered to be a foster placement after this age and there was an effect on tax and benefits depending upon where the young person lived after the age of 18.

Support arrangements could continue if the young person remained with foster carers after 18 and there was a requirement for the local authority to provide this support. There was a complication regarding financial support but the team had been able to negotiate on an individual basis with some cases. The policy was being finalised. It was a consistent transparent arrangement, and young people should be contributing financially after 18 if staying with foster carers.

All options were considered and young people had a choice. Any arrangement was formalised with respect to the expectations of the carer. This would be a small budget pressure but some additional funding might be available and there would be an announcement in July regarding this.

Once young people had left the 'staying put' arrangement, they could not return to the 'staying put' arrangement. There was a trend in general at present where young people were moving out and returning several times.

12. Life Skills Programme Update

Sheila McKeand, Head of Service for Looked After Children gave an update on the Life Skills Programme. Members of SiLSiP had requested formal training to help them to live independently and this programme had been developed in consultation with them and foster carers. Research had also been undertaken as to what other people had done and how this could be developed in Bracknell Forest. There would be contribution to a teaching programme and a project worker, funded by Bracknell Forest Homes, would develop and monitor the programme over the next year

Foster carers and organisations such as Adviza were contributing to the process. It was queried what skills Members could offer to young people, such as cooking. Cllr Mrs Temperton expressed an interest in helping with CVs. There could be a skills audit of Members at the Borough Council and the Chairman would look into this.

(Action: Cllr Heydon/ Sarah Roberts)

13. Research Commissioned by the Regional Corporate Parenting Network

Janette Karklins, Director of Children, Young People and Learning discussed Research commissioned by the Regional Corporate Parenting Network.

All 19 local authorities in the South East had funded a project in relation to the voice of looked after children. The study looked at how children's views could be captured and how service development could be influenced. It was queried how the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel (CPAP) could develop their work programme in light of this.

Seven research questions were asked by a group and the outcome could be used to inform the planning of the CPAP work programme. Much work was being undertaken in this area already, such as with SiLSiP.

It was suggested that Sarah Roberts, Louise Hopkinson, and Heather Brown meet with the Chairman to discuss this further.

(Action: Sarah Roberts)

It was queried as to whether all Members in the Borough Council should be involved in this and how this could be undertaken. The research report gave examples of good practice and a small group from CPAP could look at this in more detail. It was queried what the impact of the resource put in would be and it was suggested that a State of the Nation update regarding young people in Bracknell Forest could be undertaken at a future full Council meeting.

14. Exclusion of Public and Press

RESOLVED that pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and having regard to the public interest, members of the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the following item which involves the likely disclosure of exempt information under the following category of Schedule 12A of that Act:

- (1) Information relating to any individual (Items 15 & 16).

15. Life Chances Team Annual Report

Sheila McKeand, Head of Service for Looked After Children presented the Life Chances Team Annual Report.

The overall impact on looked after children was included in the report and there were examples of the team's co-ordinated plans of intervention and the impact of these. Foster carers cared for some young people who would otherwise be in high cost placements. There was an educational psychologist and a mental health specialist; any gaps in provision would be noted and evaluated. Members were pleased with the examples of impact given in the report and noted the good working together of agencies for Looked After Children.

16. Performance Management Information (Year End)

Lorna Hunt, Chief Officer: Children's Social Care presented the latest performance management information.

The report showed placement stability and the numbers had decreased between March 2013 and March 2014. Reasons for this were discussed, six young people had been matched with long term foster carers, and figures were generally on track except for three young people who were challenging and had several moves earlier in the year.

The Child Sex Exploitation Strategy had an impact on children in care and police would now place children overnight at a crisis centre until social workers had evaluated the situation. The aim was limit time at crisis centres or emergency placements as these were expensive. These children were well known and were monitored.

There had been ten adoptions and five special guardianship orders, taking fifteen young people out of the foster care system. Recruitment of foster carers was a high priority and much was being undertaken regarding placements. Contract arrangements were important. Some young people refused to have health

assessments but 90% were undertaken on time. Young people who were NEET and care leavers proved to be challenging.

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

24 September 2014	Educational Outcomes LAC and Care Leavers Virtual School Head Annual Report Health of LAC Annual Report Regulation 33 visits IRO Annual Report Larchwood Statement of Purpose and Annual Report
10 December 2014	Pledge to Looked After Children Participation and SiLSiP Annual Report
25 March 2015	Regulation 33 Visits