

**CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY PANEL
10 DECEMBER 2014
5.00 - 7.02 PM**



Present:

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

Also Present:

Councillor Dr Barnard

33. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

34. Minutes and Matters Arising

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2014 be agreed as a correct record.

35. Panel Announcements

Cue card for Corporate Parents

The Panel discussed the cue card. It was designed to be A5 like a large post card but Panel Members suggested that it be designed as a double sided fold out credit card. A revised cue card would be drafted and shown to Panel Members before circulation from the Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel to all Members.

(Action: Sarah Roberts)

Larchwood Ofsted

Larchwood received an Outstanding grading from Ofsted at their recent inspection. The Communications team would be liaised with in regard to publicising this good news. It had been a hard inspection. The Chairman congratulated the officers involved.

Foster Care Conference and Fostering Association

There had been a speaker at the conference on challenging behaviour, with many exercises and strong engagement. There were 'contact' sessions and two trainers, one of whom was a young person in care. There had been attempts to re-launch the Foster Carers Association but there had been no nominations for Chairman or Vice-Chairman as yet. There had been volunteers to assist with recruitment activities, to run sub-teams and events. There had been much facilitation by the Family Placement Team who would also support the association once it was up and running.

The Chairman requested an update on this by the end of January 2015.

(Action: Lorna Hunt)

36. **SiLSiP Annual Report**

Louise MacLennan, Participation Development Officer, and Katya Tagon, LAC Youth Worker were present at the meeting to discuss the SiLSiP Annual Report.

An i-Pad had been purchased for SiLSiP after the young people had undertaken training on using ipads to make films. Louise showed three films they had made: summer activities, junior residential and senior residential.

Summer Activities Film

Two residential trips were held in the summer, one for Seniors and one for Juniors. Louise and Katya had worked together and much organisation had been involved in the trips. The Juniors had one night and two days away, and the Seniors had two nights and 3 days away. The young people who participated expressed the wish for trips to be longer in future as this would allow them to do more shopping and cooking for themselves and develop their life skills. There were links in with the life skills programme and opportunities for young people to generate and demonstrate skills. The Seniors had more time to work on accreditation and did their own cooking; a roast dinner and a shepherd's pie. The young people enjoyed the experience of going away and the officers found it invaluable for those who participated. The young people also used the time to start accreditation for ASDAN awards.

The aim was to engage some of the younger children and some were now attending SiLSiP Juniors. £5,000 had been used to fund the trips in 2014 and funding for these trips to be held again in 2015 would be appreciated. Panel Members requested to be made aware of a funding amount needed for these trips for 2015. The aim was for more young people to be involved in future and to increase the trips by one night each.

(Action: Louise MacLennan / Katya Tagon)

Junior and Senior Residential Films

A review of the SiLSiP structure was planned for the new year. A decreasing number were attending the Senior group due to college and other commitments and one possibility was to join the two groups together. When involved over a long period, young people built up their skills. Young people living in care outside of the area continued to be a challenging issue to address. If young people attended activities or Children in Care Council's in other areas, this would not give them a voice in Bracknell Forest.

37. **Family Placement Recruitment Strategy**

Kim Harris, Team Manager, Family Placement gave a presentation on the Family Placement Recruitment Strategy.

This was a three year strategy, April 2014 to March 2017 which outlined how Bracknell Forest Council endeavoured to meet the needs of children in care through good quality resources. It highlighted how the Family Placement Team would achieve resources for adoption and fostering.

There had been an increase in the number and age range of children needing fostering or adoption. Ten children had adoption orders granted during 2013-14 and at 31 March 2014 there were nine Bracknell Forest children with a plan for adoption.

From April to September 2014, 18 children had plans for adoption and the current aim was to recruit a minimum of ten adoptive families per year. There was a 'Foster to Adopt' initiative and at the end of October 2014 there were 106 looked after children; 65.1% had been placed with Bracknell Forest carers, adopters or parents. The current aim was to recruit a minimum of ten foster families per year.

Types of foster care required included:

- Short term foster carers for children eight to eighteen years;
- Short term foster carers for children under five years who would either return to their birth family or move into adoption following care proceedings;
- Mother and baby assessment foster placements;
- Carers who could provide long-term foster care who could care for children into adulthood;
- Foster carers for sibling groups;
- Supported Lodgings provision for sixteen to eighteen year olds, some of whom might be out of the Borough;
- Room only lodgings carers for young people eighteen years plus.

Specialist foster placements needed to be considered to manage young people with complex social and behaviour needs, possibly via solo placements or remand foster carers.

Recruitment Initiatives 2013-14 included:

- Advertising regularly in the local newspapers with dates of sessions and National Events such as Fostering Fortnight and Adoption week;
- Posters displayed in local venues such as community centres, doctors surgeries and schools;
- Monthly Information sessions and regular preparation groups;
- Utilised connections with the 'Homes for Good' scheme with the Kerith Church.
- Advertising specifically for long term placements within and just outside of the borough boundaries;
- Social media advertising including on publications and the Bracknell Forest website;
- Advertising campaign with Tesco's.

New Initiatives included:

- A publicity campaign for children over eight years and sibling groups needing long term foster carers;
- Recruiting Adopters from outside Bracknell Forest;
- Created new Children's profiles and DVDs to establish a streamlined approach to seeking families for permanence;
- Updating Fostering and Information Packs with a new design and updated information pack which included additional information sheets;
- Short break carers who had specific skills and experience and flexible availability. New images and design for promotional items.

Future aims included:

- To recruit a minimum of ten foster carers per year;
- To review and regularly update webpage content;
- To refine the publicity materials and information packs sent to enquirers;
- To continue to hold monthly fostering information sessions;
- To continue to hold regular fostering preparation groups and implement the new 'Skills to Foster' materials;

- To hold targeted campaigns to recruit carers for older children;
- To continue to work to recruit through the 'Homes for Good' campaign in partnership with local churches;
- To create a structured publicity plan for a range of outlets, local newspapers and utilise free editorials available;
- To develop Social Media Advertising;
- To explore new mediums of advertising to increase both fostering local and out of area enquiries.
- To continue to work with Bracknell Forest Foster Carers on recruitment activities and to support all foster carers in order to increase 'word of mouth' enquiries;
- To explore other avenues that would support face to face recruitment for example, approach community groups and local business.

Adopt Berkshire was a new shared service which started on 1 December 2014 and would manage adoption recruitment and find adoptive families for Bracknell Forest children. The Family Placement Team would continue to oversee other services such as: Post Adoption, Private Fostering, Connected Persons Foster Carers, and Special Guardians.

Panel members congratulated the team on recruiting eight foster carers so far this year. The Panel noted that there would be some additional support by the communications department.

The Chairman requested an update on the Family Placement Recruitment Strategy at the next meeting of the Panel.

(Action: Kim Harris)

38. **Six Month Adoption Report**

Kim Harris, Team Manager, Family Placement presented the Six Month Report of the Adoption Service. Members also had a copy of the six monthly update from the Berkshire Adoption Advisory Service which organised and managed the Adoption Panels.

The Six Month Report was a requirement. There had been an increase in the number of children with plans for adoption and over the last six months there had been a fully staffed Family Placement Team. The Team covered areas of post-adoption and step-parent adoption amongst others, and there had been an increase in step-parent adoptions. Monthly information and preparation sessions were undertaken pan-Berkshire. An update on the adoption scorecard was awaited and Bracknell Forest had performed well nationally in the last one.

Fostering to adopt was a key area of development. The two stage approval process had been successfully implemented. Two adopters had been approved and eight were currently under assessment. Some assessments were provided in-house and some were out-sourced. Adoption activity days were used as one of the methods for family finding, particularly important for older children.

The post-adoption social worker worked with approximately 39 families at any one time and some families were caring for very challenging children resulting in much direct work including therapy. The post-adoption social worker role was busy and demanding. There had been an increase in specific guardianship assessments in the team and these guardians, once approved, needed some form of on-going support.

This was a major challenge for the department on-going and would need close monitoring as to the impact on staffing. There had been no complaints in the service.

The Panel congratulated the team on their hard work. The Panel suggested that compliments be noted in the Six Month Adoption Report.

(Action: Kim Harris)

39. **Care Leavers**

Nora Dudley, Assistant Team Manager, Leaving Care Service, gave an update on Leaving Care Services and provided a detailed report.

The Leaving Care Service continued to be part of Children's Services with the same legislation and remit but the team was now based at 76 Binfield Road and had a new Head of Service, Karen Roberts. The team consisted of three people including an Assistant Team Manager. Young people had a named worker but all members of the team worked with young people leaving care. Structural changes were being worked through positively.

The team had a positive attitude toward care leavers and there was good engagement with young people in the service. Work had been undertaken with Louise MacLennan and Katya Tagon to encourage engagement.

There was a standard cohort of young people at present and multi-agency connections were found to be useful in supporting these young people. Credit was given to other workers and teams working with the Leaving Care Services.

There had been a great deal of work undertaken recently to ensure that young people's pathway plans were reviewed and appropriate to the needs of care leavers.

There would be an impact on support work in relation to new 'Staying Put' arrangements but this would be addressed to meet the needs of our young people.

In response to a panel member question, it was noted that care leavers' accommodation was a pressure area. Whilst Rainforest Walk and Holly House were useful, they did not always suit all the needs of young people in the borough. There were just two young people in tenancies with Bracknell Forest Homes. It was difficult finding suitable placements for young people with high needs, and there were also young people in the immigration and asylum process which presented another issue.

Links were being forged with housing associations and the 'Staying Put' was an additional resource. There were no care leavers in bed and breakfast at present and the aim was to support young people to obtain a room in a shared house. Pathway plans were critical and they would be redesigned and improved in 2015.

There would be a further update on accommodation for care leavers at the March 2015 meeting of the Panel and an officer from Housing might be invited to attend the meeting.

(Action: Nora Dudley / Sarah Roberts)

40. **Draft Virtual School Annual Report**

Kashif Nawaz, Assistant Head, Virtual School presented the Virtual School Annual Report. There was a focus on impact and outcomes over the next 12 months. Objectives were a challenge and could be difficult to achieve. Support was needed to

progress in relation to Key Stage 4 results, a focus on early intervention, and a review of the provision as a virtual school would be undertaken.

Links with local businesses would be reviewed and maintaining positive aspirations was a key aim and challenge. There was a focus on provision of necessary academic and life skills. The nature of challenges of young people placed out of the borough was a concern with schools, and the Virtual School Annual Report was a key piece of evidence for Ofsted. There was an overview of the past 12 months and key messages.

In response to Members' questions the following points were made:

- The Key Stage 1 results for one child would have an impact in terms of percentages but overall the outcomes at Key Stage 2 were pleasing.
- The life chances for looked after children were improving and there was a clear pathway through with many positives.
- Not all virtual schools were as well maintained as the Bracknell Forest one but the aim was to make sure that young people placed out of borough received the equivalent support to in borough, although this was a time consuming exercise.
- A member of the virtual school team always attended PEPs. A PEP was undertaken every six months but was monitored termly and contact was maintained during the period of a PEP. There was a more strategic drive, and electronic PEPs were easier to monitor and more consistent. The aim was for smart achievable targets.
- The key worker in residential placements would monitor young people in relation to completion of homework, and additional support could be put in place if needed.
- The action plan was a working document and jointly owned. The aim was to encourage education and health to be a focus for all professionals involved with young people regardless of their role.

41. **Review of the Pledge**

Sarah Roberts, Policy and Research Officer gave an update on the Review of the Pledge.

The aim was to make it more measurable and to make the eight items simpler with standards to expand on the items. There was a survey at the Achievement Awards using new i-Pads which SiLSiP helped with and answers were entered directly into the i-Pads. The young people all understood why they were in care and overall it was a good reflection on the work which was being undertaken.

The survey identified a number of areas where further work should be undertaken with young people, particularly around their understanding of confidentiality and information sharing, and the complaints system.

The Chairman requested that the Review of the Pledge be a standing item on the agenda for future Panel meetings.

(Action: Sarah Roberts)

42. **Staying Put Policy Update**

Heather Brown, Interim Head of Service for Looked After Children gave an update on the Staying Put Strategy.

The preparation of the Staying Put Policy had proved to be complex, highlighting financial implications for Bracknell Forest Council. The Strategy was in draft at present and being considered by CMT.

Background information highlighted that from 18 years of age; young people were no longer legally in care or looked after children. However new legislation came in May 2014 regarding the need for staying put arrangements allowing young people to stay put in their foster placement if they and their foster carers were in agreement. Two young people this year remained in foster care post 18 years of age. The financial implications included foster placement bed blocking post-18. There was a recruitment strategy in place, which was currently being reviewed and various options were being considered in relation to the cost of a staying put arrangement.

There was an anticipation that not all young people would want to stay put in their placements post-18, but some may and could stay until 21 years. There were three financial options being considered by BFC:

Option 1: Match current allowances, less £27.50 weekly payment for transport, personal/pocket money, and clothing.

Option 2: Standard allowance paid to the carer based on cost neutral impact to the Council for a mainstream carer.

Option 3: Reduce the £105 per week market supplement over a three year period. This would see some reduction in income to the carer if a SP arrangement continued beyond the first year. This option was currently being considered as the best option.

In addition alternative arrangements would need to be put into place for young people going to university. It was proposed that £50 per week retainer be paid to carers during the University term, plus an additional £30 per night when the young person returned for weekends and short breaks.

The Government had given a small grant towards the costs of 'Staying Put' but it was anticipated that this would be insufficient to meet demand and therefore may cause a budget pressure.

Bracknell Forest Council had previously put measures in place when looked after children became 18 years old and this would continue until the Staying Put Strategy was agreed.

There would be an annual update on 'Staying Put' at the December Panel meetings in future.

(Action: Head of Service, Looked After Children)

43. **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 (Item 44).

44. Performance Management Information

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

Adopt Berkshire Service came into effect from 1 December 2014. There were a few children on Placement Orders who would go back to court to change these to care orders. Placement stability was being closely monitored and had improved. Health checks were up 97% but dental checks were still a challenge with some young people in care who did not want to see a dentist. Care leavers had moved to be based at Binfield Road and would be able to benefit from the multi-agency working already taking place at that venue.

Peter Hodges would take over from Heather Brown as Head of Service for Looked After Children in March 2015. There was some stability in relation to staffing but a few more staff were due to leave. There would be two manager posts vacant from January 2015, the Duty team manager and an Assistant team manager in the Under 11's team. Changes in team managers could be challenging due to new managers having a lack of local knowledge.

Out of the six local authorities in Berkshire, Bracknell was third in terms of Court case timeliness performance. There was an average of 29 weeks for court cases and the aim was for 26 weeks. Statements and report writing for courts took a couple of weeks to write. It was an ongoing struggle for managers and social workers to fit in court work around their other work commitments. The legal aspect of social work kept the teams very busy.

It had been agreed that there would be 2.4 case managers, based in the joint legal team, to cover four local authorities in Berkshire. Court work was a pressure in the team, particularly for social workers who could be questioned for hours/ days under oath.

The Chairman thanked Lorna for the latest performance management information.

45. Dates of Future Meetings and Forward Plan

25 March 2015	Regulation 33 Visits Children Placed Out of Area Audit Family Placement Recruitment Strategy Care Leavers Accommodation Review of the Pledge
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