

# minutes



Meeting CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Date Monday, 16 April 2012 (commencing at 2.00 pm)

## Membership

Persons absent are marked with `A`

## COUNCILLORS

Allen Clarke (Chair)

A	Fiona Asbury	A	Keith Girling
	Joyce Bosnjak		Philip Owen
	Ged Clarke		Stella Smedley
	Bob Cross		Lynn Sykes

## Officers in attendance

Rachel Coombs	-	Group Manager, Children, Families and Cultural Services Department
Christine Marson	-	Governance Support Officer, Policy, Planning & Corporate Services Department
Jayne Austin	-	Service Manager, Fostering
Michelle Lee	-	Children's Service Manager (Aftercare)
Steve Edwards	-	Service Director, Strategic Services, Children & Young People's Department
Shelagh Mitchell	-	Children's Service Manager (Adoption)
Rebecca Bowring	-	Employment, Education & Training Adviser (Care Leavers)
Dawn Clements	-	Foster Carer Representative
Elaine Liddy	-	Foster Carer Representative

## MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting held on 16 January 2012 having been circulated were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

## APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Councillor Fiona Asbury (other reason)  
Councillor Keith Girling (other reason)

## **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

None

### **LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGY 2012-15**

Rachel Coombs, Group Manager, Regulated Services & Corporate Parenting gave an updated progress report on the Strategy stating that it covered the range of activity and aspirations for Looked After Children with measurable outcomes. She reported that the draft Strategy had an important role in monitoring the Strategy for Looked After Children. It would be going to the Policy Committee in June and also to the Childrens Trust Executive and District Councils for consultation. Rachel Coombs reported that the Strategy would be an evolving document with an Action Plan. The final draft would be brought to the next meeting of the Panel in July.

### **SPRING TERM REPORT FROM THE CO-ORDINATOR OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

Rachel Coombs, Group Manager, gave a progress report in the absence of Sue Denholm, Co-ordinator, Virtual School. She reported that the virtual school was making good progress. She stated that monitoring of Looked After Children would be an important part of the Virtual School Co-ordinator.

Councillor Joyce Bosnjak asked how many children in the Behaviour Units were Looked After Children. Rachel Coombs would investigate and respond to Councillor Bosnjak.

A full discussion of the Virtual School would take place at the July meeting.

### **AFTERCARE SERVICE: UPDATE**

Michelle Lee, Aftercare Manager and Rebecca Bowring, Employment, Education & Training Adviser (Care Leavers) jointly gave an update on the Aftercare Service. Michelle Lee stated that the Aftercare Service becomes involved with Looked After Children at 16 years of age. The Service helps develop skills for adulthood and independent living. They are currently working with 240 young people in the county. The majority of young people can access college courses or apprenticeships. There are also asylum seeker young people, one of which is going on a gap year to China and will provide feedback on return. 70% of care leavers get involved in further education but concern is raised about the 30% which are a big challenge. Some of these have particular problems involving mental health issues, drug misuse and long term unemployment.

Michelle Lee reported that voluntary work is often a positive step for young people. The County Council are currently in the early stages of negotiations with the Prince's Trust but this would involve an expenditure.

Michelle Lee stated that at 18 years of age the looked after children are legally adult. The "Staying Put" Strategy is to allow young people to stay at foster carers homes. There is then the possibility for this arrangement to be converted into "supported lodgings" for as long as the young people and the foster carers want

to. The County Council have a legal duty to ensure accommodation is available for young people who are attending college or university. This also applies to ones going into the Armed Forces.

Councillor Ged Clarke asked if supported housing was used. Michelle Lee responded that nominations were sent to supported housing associations but that there were insufficient places.

Councillor Stella Smedley asked if there could be positive discrimination for Looked After Children with regard to applying for apprenticeships. Rachel Coombs replied that the Council were looking at setting up "ring fenced" apprenticeships for Looked After Children. She offered to bring an update on this to the next meeting.

Councillor Allen Clarke, on behalf of the Panel, thanked Michelle Lee and Rebecca Bowring for the excellent service they offered.

### **OFSTED INSPECTION**

Jayne Austin, Service Manager, Fostering Service introduced the report by updating the Panel regarding the recent Ofsted inspection. She reported that the department were very pleased with the overall good inspection which had previously been satisfactory. The Ofsted report stated that the key strengths were the amount of money being used for Looked After Children and the strong relationships being between foster carers and young people. The report also stated that the organisation for fostering was efficient and foster carers were well supported. Two recommendations from the Ofsted report were:-

- (1) Each child over the age of 3 to have their own bedroom.
- (2) Foster Carers to have a personal development plan.

Jayne Austin stated that if foster children have to share a room then a risk assessment is always carried out. There would be continued supervision and training of foster carers. A conference programme has been organised for 2013. From April 2012 there would be an additional £20,000 funding available to the Fostering Service.

Dawn Clements, Foster carer said that foster carers had benefited from buddying schemes with more experienced ones helping new foster carers.

The Panel noted the outcome of the Ofsted inspection and the Service's action plan and the positive foster carer recruitment.

### **ADOPTION SERVICE INSPECTION AND ACTION PLAN**

Shelagh Mitchell, Service Manager from the Adoption Service introduced the report following the Ofsted inspection in January 2012. She reported that they had gained a satisfactory rating with many positives for the Adoption Service. The report highlighted where improvements were needed and congratulated the Service on a good, strong leadership team.

Shelagh Mitchell stated that a homefinder post had been created to ensure a speedy response is made to adoptive families. It was hoped that this would reduce any delays in the process for potential adoptive parents. There were tighter systems in place to ensure Adoption Panels operate to capacity but also ensuring that the right placements are found for the right children.

It was noted that the Ofsted report was expecting 100% placements for adoptions and the Panel felt that this was unrealistic considering some young people are difficult to place. Shelagh Mitchell commented that only 2% of adoptions disrupt.

Councillor Allan Clarke thanked Jayne Austin and Shelagh Mitchell for their work.

### **FOSTER CARERS ITEMS**

Dawn Clements and Elaine Liddy reported that training was good for foster carers and they appreciated the information received.

The meeting closed at 3.45 pm

### **CHAIR**