

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL SUFFICIENCY AND COMMISSIONING FOR CHILDREN IN CARE TASK AND FINISH GROUP HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 28 JUNE 2012 AT 2.00 PM

Present:

Councillors

J Pike (Chairman)

C Riley

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Vivien Door, Principal Committee Officer

Lou Williams, Head of Externally Commissioned Placements & Family Support Commissioning and Procurement

1. Election of Chairman

The Committee Officer opened the meeting and asked for nominations for Chairman. The Committee Officer stated that she had received a request from Councillor Madden that he nominated Councillor Pike and thereby presented this nomination to the Group. Councillor Riley then seconded this nomination. It was therefore **Agreed** that:

Councillor J W Pike be elected Chairman.

2. Membership

The Membership was confirmed as:

M Fisher

C Riley

R Madden

J Pike (Chairman)

Councillor J Deakin would be a substitute Member.

3. Apologies

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of apologies from Councillors Fisher, Madden and Deakin.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children in Care in Essex 2012-15

The Panel considered the Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children in Care in Essex 2012-15, CPP/11/12 presented at the Corporate Parenting Panel on 21 June 2012 and the extract from minutes on this item, CPPSC/01/12, presented by Lou Williams, Head of Externally Commissioned Placements & Family Support Commissioning and Procurement.

Lou Williams informed the Group that he was leaving Essex in August and that Suzie Goodman, Interim Head of Practice Review would continue this work. The purpose of this report was to provide analysis of where Children in Care had been placed and ascertain gaps in the types of provision required to house children within the county rather than being placed far away from home.

When children were placed far from home, the Social Worker made the statutory visits (six weekly) unless there were specific issues. If a child was placed within Essex it would be easier for a Social Worker to visit more often. More Foster Carers were required for children with disabilities and teenagers. High specification residential care was also required for children with challenging needs.

This report was aimed at suppliers/providers looking into two different groups of children and young people.

The first group had been in care outside of the County, with less District Council housing funding for 18 year old young people, more young people were being sent back to their original County for interaction with Adult Services. This could then cause problems for the young person, who may no longer be familiar with their original area thereby feeling disorientated as well as moving to a different service with different Social Workers/ professionals.

The second group were the children and young people with complex needs, for example, Autism or who had challenging behaviour who were placed out of the County. When these young people become 18 years old the parents were concerned regarding their future and very often the residential homes want to keep the young people at a high cost to Essex. If the County had educational establishments within the Essex border these children and young people could live at home whilst attending the schools, which would be better for the children and young people.

This report and appendix would provide the information to providers of specialist care giving them clarity on the County's needs which would aid negotiations. The statistical analysis provides population trends, children's needs and gaps in services provide the County and any prospective company with all the information for the County's Children in Care.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- That the Quadrant analysis was very useful information but should form an appendix to the document to give the report more clarity at a strategic level, the Executive Summary and Background Information would therefore be expanded in the new report;
- All Local Authorities should have a Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children in Care by 1 April 2012, although most Local Authorities were still producing the strategy;
- These documents would form part of the suite of documents used and inspected by Ofsted;
- The County had strength in its size and proximity to London which providers would find attractive, as they could use their specialist homes to care for both the County's children and other surrounding Local Authorities;
- Members were concerned that culture change should be automatic. The Group were informed that historically, Essex had relatively high rates of children in care, and some of this was because some Social Workers have used risk adverse practice by bringing the child into care rather than working with the family to try to improve the situation. This was sometimes because social workers could see real challenges and difficulties for children in their own families but did not always recognise that harm was also caused when children were removed from home and placed in care;
- By working to keep more children in their families the number of Children in Care would reduce although the children who would be taken into care, would in the main, have more complex needs;
- Currently there were too many young people aged 16 to 17 years old in care, rarely could the Service enhance/improve the young people's lives at this age if taken into care;
- The ideal would be that the Service would identify children who needed to come into care at very young ages, when their chances of being adopted were highest;
- That now the Service was broken down into quadrants it is easier to promote good practice by social workers, particularly in their assessment of risks faced by children;

The Group **Agreed** that:

- i) The report would be split into two for the next meeting with the analysis details provided in an appendix;
- ii) That Lou Williams would search again to see if other Local Authorities had produced a similar report;
- iii) That Suzie Goodman be invited to the next meeting.

The Chairman thanked Lou Williams for his presentation.

6. Urgent Business

There was no urgent business

7. Dates of Future Meetings 2011/12

The Panel **Agreed** the next meeting would be held on 18 July 2012 at 2.00 pm in Committee Room 2.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 2.50 pm.

Chairman
18 July 2012