

CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

26 January 2016

Report of Director of Social Services

Member and Director Visits to Front-line Teams

Reason for this Report

1. To enable the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee (CPAC) to receive and consider the reports of visit to front-line Children's Services Teams and services.

Background

2. The CPAC agreed the need to facilitate visits by Committee Members to services and front line teams as an ongoing part of the Committee's Annual Programme of work. In addition to enabling the Council to comply with Recommendation 41 of the Victoria Climbié Report, these visits provide first hand insight into the operation of social work with children in statutory settings, enhance transparency and accountability and promote effective engagement with the workforce.
3. The following report is a simple summary of the visits undertaken since April 2015 and sets out any thematic messages where these are evident.
4. The report does not purport to cover every issue and it may be that individual authors may wish to draw Committee's attention to issues not highlighted in this covering report.
5. Whilst this covering report is not confidential, the original individual reports which are attached at Appendix I for the benefit of Committee members, are confidential and are not for publication.

Summary of Reports

6. During the period April 2015 and the date of this report there were 10 reports of visits, two undertaken by the Director of Social Services and 8 by Committee Members, Councillors Sue Lent, Jonathon Evans, Eleanor Sanders and Sue White. Some of these Member visits were undertaken singly and some in pairs.

7. The teams visited included the Looked After Children Team (under 14); the Looked After Children Teams (14+); the CAP and Intake Teams; the Personal Advisor Service; Crosslands Children's Home; and the Fostering Service. These visits therefore cover a reasonably good cross section of the service overall, from the point of initial assessment when children are first referred, through more complex assessment and court work, through to the Looked After service, and after care; in effect the whole journey of many children in the system.

Thematic Issues

8. In capturing their overall impressions, authors identified positive messages as well as issues that they were concerned about. Over and above the general impact of pressure and external demand factors, no author identified any direct safeguarding issues as the result of a visit.

Positives - all authors were clearly impressed with the commitment of staff teams overall and were complimentary about particular areas of service.

Positive messages included

- Good morale in the Looked After Service
- Significant improvements reported by staff over the last 2 years
- Very positive working relationships with Housing over the last 2 years
- Similar relationships with Adult Services with the comment that "it feels like one council"
- Impact of the increased Leaving Care Grant
- Stability of the team in Intake and Assessment
- Commitment of foster carers
- Good support provided to foster carers
- Greater sense of 'can do' in fostering service
- Very high standard of practice and care at Crosslands
- Good educational psychology support to Crosslands
- Positive view of mobilisation
- Improved recruitment from agency staff and other L.A.s

9. Issues of Concern - these tended to be grouped around particular staff groups, not unlike the positive comments above. The Children in Need Service in particular evidenced some concerns about morale and pressures. Concerning issues included
 - Worries about capacity in the Children in Need Teams
 - Worries about caseloads 'creeping up'
 - Increasing complexity of cases
 - Imbalances in some teams in terms of having higher proportions of newly qualified social workers
 - Increasing 'no recourse to public funds' cases
 - Pressures around domestic violence
 - The need to improve engagement at transitions
 - Views expressed about the removal of the market supplement
 - Concerns about mobile working and implications for team work
 - Delayed allocation of school places in relation to Crosslands and out of

- county returnees
- Reported negative attitudes of some schools and teachers
- Level and accessibility of support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Some issues about practical support for Looked After Children e.g. in obtaining passports and opening bank accounts

Reasons for Recommendations

10. To enable the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee to receive the reports of front-line visits.

Legal implications

11. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Financial Implications

12. There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

RECOMMENDATION

The Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee is recommended to accept the reports of visits to front line teams

TONY YOUNG

Director of Social Services
16 November 2015

Appendix 1 – Member Visit reports.

This Appendix attached to this report is confidential by virtue of paragraph(s) 12 and 21 of Part(s) 4 and 5 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.