

CORPORATE PARENTING FORUM

Thursday 15 June 2023

Present: Councillors Amy Tisi (Chair), Carole Da Costa (Vice-Chair), Catherine Del Campo, Suzanne Cross and Genevieve Gosling

Also in attendance (virtually): Care Leaver Champion, Kickback representative, Lynette Jones-Jardine and Jo Neale

Officers: Nikki Craig, Sarah Moran, Matthew Edwards, Umu Conteh and Laurence Ellis

Officers (virtually): Suzanne Parrott, Rebecca Hatch, Elaine Keating, Lin Ferguson and Shungu Chigocha

Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

Apologies were received from Marie Bell, Associate Director for Corporate Parenting (AfC).

Councillor Cross informed that she and Councillor Taylor had swapped places whereby she was a member of the Forum while Councillor Taylor was the substitute.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Carole Da Costa declared that she donated some of her Councillor's allowance to Kickback.

Minutes

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th April 2023 be approved as a correct record.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

To consider passing the following resolution:

"That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting whilst discussion takes place, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1-7 of part I of Schedule 12A of the Act."

Kickback Activity and Care Leavers Hub Report and Activity

Before starting on the agenda, the Chair made some requests to officers:

- Forward their reports as early as possible so Forum attendees would have enough time to read them.
- Summary front sheet for large reports.
- Explain the meaning of acronyms before using them throughout a report.

The Care Leaver Champion gave a presentation. She started off with the Kickback activity by asking the Forum attendees state a single word they would use to describe what made a 'stable home'. The Forum stated their descriptive words.

Referring to a government paper ('Stable Homes Built on Love'), the Care Leaver Champion explained that it was critical for the care system to provide stable, loving homes close to children's communities as well as provided consistency, stability and warmth. The current method of planning, commissioning and providing homes for children in care was inadequate, whereby children were placed far away from what they would call home or in the wrong type of home for what they needed. As such, care leavers may face barriers to having a stable home, a good job, strong relationships and good health. Therefore, the procedure needed to change, according to the author's government paper.

The Care Leaver Champion then listed on what needed to be done based on the paper. These included:

- Prioritise loving relationships.
- Strengthen corporate parenting responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers across the public sector.
- Create opportunities for children in care and care leavers to achieve their potential through education, employment and training.
- Have a universal offer of wrap around support and accommodation for all care leavers.
- Decrease mental health and physical health disparities and increase life expectancy for children in care and care leavers.

(Matthew Edwards, Associate Director for Provider Services (AfC), entered the meeting at 5:45pm)

The Care Leaver Champion then asked the Forum what position RBWM and AfC were at the moment with the aforementioned objectives.

Sarah Moran, Deputy Director Children's Services, informed that AfC had been involved in responding to the government's recommendations. She also added that an AfC Children's Social Care and Early Help Transformation Board had been established with herself and Lin Ferguson, Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help (AfC), representing on there. The next steps were what to do next.

Lin Ferguson highlighted that the Corporate Parenting Forum had its workstreams which were actively making a difference rather than receiving reports during every meeting. She also believed that the Borough was taking corporate parenting seriously, with the inclusion of Rebecca Hatch, Head of Strategy, and Nikki Craig, Head of HR, Corporate Projects and IT (RBWM); and the new Chief Executive, Stephen Evans, who, according to Lin Ferguson, talked about the importance of corporate parenting and was going to make this one of his top priorities. In addition, some training for new members had taken place. While work needed to be done, Lin Ferguson believed that a difference was being made.

Nikki Craig stated that herself and Rebecca Hatch attending the Corporate Parenting Forum meetings meant they could take feedback away from the meeting to the Resource Development Management. In addition, she also informed that every new employee in the Borough would do online learning through E-Learning as part of their induction which included safeguarding adults and children. Nikki Craig also informed that a care leaver had been employed on a temporary contract within the HR services.

Councillor Carole Da Costa, Vice-Chair, commented that the Forum's format had changed compared to previous Forums whereby the RBWM as a whole had responsibility in corporate parenting.

Lynette Jones-Jardine, Safeguarding Lead for Children and Young People in Care (NHS Frimley), informed that NHS Frimley were planning to sign up to the Careers Matters and

Lived Experience Charter to work with care leavers as well as incorporate work experience. In addition, NHS Frimley were working with its senior leaders and HR to look into a culture change around looking at employment and recruitment. She also informed that NHS Frimley had put in place a plan on looking into supporting prescription charges for care leavers who were unable to pay for it.

Councillor Del Campo asked if the E-Learning was something that Councillors could or should access. Nikki Craig replied that she would take that question away.

ACTION: Nikki Craig to answer the question on whether E-Learning was something that Councillor could or should access.

The Care Leaver Champion concluded by listing things which make a stable home for children in care:

- Safe
- Secure
- Clean
- Know our favourite food
- Space to study and chill out
- Be treated equally to biological children and don't compare us
- Have breakfast/cup of tea ready in the morning for them
- Supply good hygiene products and not have to purchase our own out of pocket money
- Put up our own decorations
- Help us adjust to their new situation
- Respect their privacy
- Let us actually live there and be part of the family
- Grow our own herbs and BBQs
- 'Family nights'
- Staff cook dinner 2 times a week
- Rota for chores/DIY
- Staff board with pictures and their rota
- Have somewhere to go other than your room
- Be affectionate
- Respect my space

Matthew Edwards suggested to use the Care Leaver Champion's list as a checklist for children in care.

The Kickback representative presented the Kickback and Care Leavers Report. He reported that Kickback had two regular Kickback sessions, an activity day and a Total Respect Training session. Other activities included:

- Some paintballing during the May half-term, as well as crafts for those who did not participate.
- A BBQ in the Windsor Family Hub Centre with 17 Kickback members and 20 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children.
- A site visit to a renovated semi-independent residential home.
- Bowling during the April 2023 Kickback session
- Cooking as part of the Kickback Cooks series during the May 2023 session.

The Kickback representative then informed that a Total Respect Training took place during the May half-term but unfortunately only 8 people turned up with the remaining attendees not giving any apologies. No members from RBWM turned up. He also highlighted that 'Kickback Friendly' reports were not being received and therefore Kickback attendees were not prepared to contribute to the meeting.

Regarding planned activities, the Kickback representative informed that 6 children in care were going to Goslar, Germany in July 2023 with funding acquired from the Twinning

Committee. In addition, there would be the regular summer camping trip in August 2023, the summer BBQ on 16th August 2023 and more Total Respect Training.

Moving onto the Care Leavers' Hub, the Kickback representative informed that the next Care Leavers Hub was scheduled for 26th June 2023. There had been attempts to encourage care leavers to attend the Hub, including offering £20 for them to attend as well as sending a reminder.

The Kickback representative then informed that 6 young people were taking part in a research project with Joanna Chur Year 1 doctorate Educational Psychology trainee, a project to capture care leaver voices and understand their journey.

The Kickback representative then informed that he would bring to the Forum their 'Kindness Kit' when they next attend in-person.

Nikki Craig asked for the dates for all the Total Respect Training in which she and Rebecca Hatch could circulate to potential attendees. Elaine Keating provided the dates:

- 22nd August 2023
- 26th October 2023

When asked by the Chair to explain to the Forum what Total Respect Training was, the Kickback representative explained that it was training for social workers to become better, such as not using jargon words, improve communication towards young people and ensure their voices were being heard. RBWM and AfC officers were allowed to attend.

Councillor Da Costa asked if she could attend the training again even though she had already done the training. Elaine Keating replied that it was preferable for the spaces to be filled by people who had not taken part of the training, but she would be welcomed to.

The Chair asked Elaine Keating to circulate the new Total Respect Training dates to the new Forum members.

Rebecca Hatch suggested that the Total Respect Training dates could be added to the Borough Bulletin so that it could be circulated to new staff members.

ACTION: Circulate the Total Respect Training dates to Forum members and RBWM staff.

Deep Dive - 'Your Safety, Stability and Permanence' Workstream

This agenda item was skipped due to the relevant officer, Marie Bell, being unavailable.

Annual Adoption Report

Jo Neale, Assistant Team Manager (Berkshire Adopt Thames Vally), started off by explaining that Adopt Thames Valley was a regional adoption agency which covered Windsor and Maidenhead, Bracknell, Oxford, Swindon, West Berkshire, Wokingham and Reading. She explained that the report covered the period of 2022-23 and included nationally collated data on adoption as required by government.

Jo Neale explained that when children were in care proceedings and adoption became their plan, a placement order was granted once care proceedings had been completed. Within Windsor and Maidenhead, there were two children where placement orders were granted in the previous year. Before a placement order was granted, during the care proceedings, agency-making decision needed to take place whereby all the papers were reviewed and then it would be decided whether the criteria for adoption had been met and therefore would apply

for a child. Adoption was only usually considered if all other options have been considered, such as the child was unable to go to a family member or was not able to return to their family.

Jo Neale then discussed Early Permanence, whereby by children were allocated to foster families that hopefully would be permanent. There were three Early Permanence had been made in RBWM in 2022-23.

In terms of the adoption process, Jo Neale explained that there was a 2-week period of introductions and the development of a relationship between the child or children and the adopters. When children were placed in an adopted family, they needed to be placed with them for 10 weeks before the adopters could submit an adoption order application. There were 6 adoptions in Windsor and Maidenhead as well as no disruptions or issues with introductions.

Councillor Da Costa asked why the best interest decisions had increased by 24%. Jo Neale explained that the figures were low in the last few years due to the Covid pandemic, such as causing delays in the adoption process.

The Chair asked if there was any concern about RBWM being above the threshold, with the threshold being 182 days while RBWM was 364 days. Jo Neale replied that it did not, but this was being monitored. She mentioned that one child having a delayed process could affect the figures as RBWM was a small authority. She recalled that there was a two-year delay with the care proceedings with RBWM.

Lin Ferguson asked how Jo Neale would assess RBWM in terms of performance with its children. Jo Neale replied that it was very good with Adopt Thames Valley having a good working relationship with RBWM's social workers and managers.

Shungu Chigocha, Associate Director for Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement (AfC), informed that there was a working group across Berkshire which kept RBWM in check in maintaining good practice when it came to adoption processes, adding that she found this beneficial and that it strengthened how the Borough worked with adoptive carers.

Suzanne Parrott, Executive Headteacher of Virtual School (AfC), asked Jo Neale if she perceived the connections between adoptive families and the Virtual School as not working well, and how the Virtual School could improve this. Jo Neale replied that a link between virtual schools and adoptive families would be very helpful. She suggested to meet up and start a process. Suzanne Parrott agreed.

The Chair asked about sibling placements. Jo Neale explained that Adopt Thames Valley had received some funding to develop the Family Finding Plus Team to provide some additional support for families, elaborating that there were sometimes sibling groups of three which would be challenging for some adoptive families with all the children's different needs. Jo Neale also stated that Adopt Thames Valley ran play dates twice a year whereby children (alongside their foster carers) would engage and play with adopters.

Annual CiC and Care Leavers Sufficiency Report

As presentation was circulated to Forum members at short notice, Matthew Edwards, Associate Director for Provider Services (AfC), suggested to explain the principles of the Sufficiency Report and then elaboratively report on this when discussing the Annual Fostering Report in the next meeting in September 2023.

Matthew Edwards explained that a sufficiency duty was a statutory whereby the local authority had to provide sufficient accommodation and support to all children in care, care leavers and vulnerable young people. Each local authority had a responsibility to place their children locally wherever possible as well as ensure they were not separated from their support network.

Each local authority, Matthew Edwards explained, had to publish a sufficiency strategy to formulate some action around sufficiency. A sufficiency strategy was to ensure local partnerships were developed to ensure more placements for children and young people were placed locally rather than simply spot purchasing, which could get incredibly expensive. Therefore, AfC's commissioning arrangements were critical to having a robust sufficiency strategy.

Matthew Edwards informed that the Borough was not an outlier in regard to its statistics and was in alignment with its statistical neighbours. The only area the Borough was a slight outlier with its data was the number of children in care per 10,000, with the Borough having 38 children in care per 10,000 while its statistical neighbours had 48 children in care per 10,000. While there were not a lot of children in care, Matthew Edwards stated that the Borough needed to ensure that children were not placed on the most expensive placements.

Matthew Edwards stated that an objective was to have 85% of children in Windsor and Maidenhead placed into in-house foster carers from the current 71% so that every child who came into fostering would be placed in an in-house foster carer. A significant part of the sufficiency strategy was to develop fostering, which would be covered in the report in September 2023.

The Chair asked what was meant by in-house foster carers. Matthew Edwards explained that it was when the friends or families of the parents becoming foster carers. This had been increasingly implemented as there was a struggle to recruit mainstream foster carers as well as more preferable to place children in foster families related to the original family.

Councillor Da Costa asked how the Borough would keep children in care close to their communities if it was looking at a nationwide collaboration. Matthew Edwards explained that the nationwide collaboration would be a national campaign for fostering, financed by the government. He stated that people who came forward from Windsor and Maidenhead would become foster carers for AfC.

Councillor Del Campo asked what percentage of children cannot be fostered in the local area. Matthew Edwards believed that it was a small percentage as there was a preference at AfC to not place children outside of their local area so that AfC could monitor them as placing them too far away would make it difficult. Only in certain circumstances were children placed outside of their local area, such as remove them from child exploitation or youth gangs.

Matthew Edwards explained that the model used to retain foster carers was the 'Mockingbird model', which created a hub-and-spoke where a central carer looked after 7 or 8 foster carers and offered respite. AfC were seeking to establish the Mockingbird model in Windsor and Maidenhead from September 2023, hoping to gradually expand this if this proved to be successful.

Matthew Edwards then informed that he and Lin Ferguson were having discussions with the Chief Executive around developing a children's home for Windsor and Maidenhead. Lin Ferguson added that Matthew Edwards would be attending one of the meetings with the executive leadership to start the discussion, but nothing had been set in stone.

Matthew Edwards stated that a big challenge in placing children in a children's home was that it was illegal to place children under 16-years of age in a place unregistered by Ofsted and that the children's minister announced that provisions for 16- and 17-year-olds needed to be registered. As such, AfC had to register their children's accommodation to Ofsted. Sarah Moran informed that AfC used a small number of providers for its semi-independent accommodation whereby there were good working relationships. AfC were supporting them to register their accommodations to Ofsted. She also informed that Ofsted were giving providers from 1st April 2023 to October 2023 to submit applications to register their accommodations and providers registered to Ofsted.

The Chair asked if the intention children's homes were to be specific placements for particular children who would not be placed in foster care rather than as overflow. Matthew Edwards confirmed this, elaborating that there were usually 10-15% of children who cannot be placed into another foster or adopted family for a variety of reasons, such as an adoption breakdown.

Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Service

Shungu Chigocha shared the key highlights on delivering the service to Children in Care. She explained that there was an expectation from the government for RBWM to demonstrate how they were making a difference to Children in Care in terms of the support being offered and the interventions put in place.

Starting with what was working well, Shungu Chigocha informed that Independent Reviewing Officers have been able to pursue and promote meaningful engagement with children and young people in care due to the frequency of their visits, more so than what the government had advised. The Reviewing Officers were expected to meet Children in Care through face-to-face at least twice a year and encourage them to maintain indirect contact. This was to ensure that lasting relationships would develop; and therefore, develop trust.

Shungu Chigocha then explained that AfC sought to improve communication with Children in Care. This was done through using simple language rather than "big words" and discourage the use of acronyms to make them more accessible for children in care.

In terms of stability, AfC was working with the Virtual School to establish 'Stability Circles', whereby a support network was identified for a child or young person in care. From this, children and young people establish meaningful relationships.

Shungu Chigocha then explained the areas which needed to be improved upon and AfC were concerned about. The focus was on developing a more permanent IRO workforce.

Shungu Chigocha informed that the launch of the HaveMySay app was delayed due to the consultation being delayed. In spite of this, as of June 2023, the HaveMySay consultation document had been circulated. Shungu Chigocha hoped to give an in-depth update on the consultation.

Councillor Da Costa asked if the Reviewing Officers were the same as a social worker or something different. Shungu Chigocha answered that, while a social worker by qualification, they were different from a child social worker in that they support the social worker in formulating meaningful and child-focused plans for children and young people and then review them. For example, they investigate challenges and delays in providing the service and seek to resolve it. Essentially, Independent Reviewing Officer ensured that statutory duties were being delivered within government policy.

Key Highlights from other workstreams

Each Workstream Chair gave an update. With the Education workstream, Suzanne Parrot informed that the Better Futures Events hosted 100 different employers/businesses. She was forwarding young people towards various opportunities from the employers. Some opportunities had been offered by John Lewis as well as Wandsworth local authority. Suzanne Parrott also wished to imitate a service model practiced in Scotland and implement it in England to improve support for young people in employment.

Suzanne Parrot informed the Forum about the Attachment Aware Schools Award on 28th June 2023 with 64 schools being part of the award. In addition, a gold award for the Attachment Aware Schools Award was co-created with a local primary school.

With the 'Your Health and Wellbeing' workstream, Lynette Jones-Jardine informed that a meeting in May 2023 did not take place, causing delays in progress, but she hoped to have a meeting in July 2023. Amongst the action plans, the two areas being prioritised were how young people were accessing health information and arranging a health event on the health and wellbeing of young people in care and Care Leavers.

Lin Ferguson informed that a couple of doctorate students had embarked on some research with some of the Borough's Care Leavers on their wellbeing. The Care Leaver Champion then requested for anyone in the Forum to forward any Care Leavers who would like to take part of the study.

Lin Ferguson then informed that AfC's Wellbeing Team had recruited a specialist and systemic therapist who would provide consultations and advice to social workers for Children in Care with mental health and emotional wellbeing issues.

With the 'Your Voice' workstream, Elaine Keating reported that the workstream would have a meeting in July 2023. The Care Leaver Champion had been working with the workstream to engage with Children in Care and Care Leavers.

Elaine Keating requested for new Councillor members of the Forum to complete their 'About Me' mini-biographies so they could be distributed to young people.

Elaine Keating also informed that the workstream also sought to create vlogs within the week of the Corporate Parenting Forum meeting for all Children in Care and Care Leavers. As Lin Ferguson did the vlog last time, Elaine Keating asked the Chair to do the next one, followed by a different person for every new vlog.

With the Independence workstream, Sarah Moran informed that the workstream would be a virtual workstream whereby there were no in-person meetings and its action plan encompassed across the four other workstreams due to duplications of action plans in other workstreams.

Sarah Moran stated that there was positive work in getting young people into employment. One objective was to improve on identifying and flagging early on any issues on citizenship and status with Children in Care. She also informed that the Local Offer was live and was seeking to promote it. The AfC website had four language translations and the cohort could speak multiple languages.

As there were new Councillor member to the Forum, the Chair suggested to allocate Forum members to the workstreams. Councillor Del Campo wanted to be allocated 'Health and Wellbeing'; while Councillor Da Costa retained 'Your Voice'. Councillors Cross and Gosling wished to put some thought into this.

Elaine Keating suggested to share the workstream action plans to the Forum.

ACTION: Elaine Keating to share the workstream action plans to the Forum.

The Chair stated that she was happy to remain on the Education workstream.

Members Training

Lin Ferguson suggested that the Forum consider what sort of training on corporate parenting they would want outside of the meeting as well as additional training for the wider Borough Councillors.

The Chair requested a session on the attachment aware work. Lin Ferguson agreed, and Suzanne Parrott would deliver.

Diary Dates

The Forum noted the summer BBQ on 16th August 2023 at the Family Hub and Total Respect Training 22nd August 2023 and 26th October 2023. When asked on any other dates, Elaine Keating that Kickback had an activity day on 24th October 2023. She also suggested Lynette Jones-Jardine to link up and do a section around the Health workstream. Lynette Jones-Jardine agreed.

Elaine Keating also informed that there were plans for an achievement event, in which a date needed to be finalised. She asked the Forum on what the preferred date would be, whether it be a Wednesday, Friday or Saturday evening. The Chair replied that Wednesday was good, but there needed to be consideration on other meetings being scheduled to avoid clashes and ensure there was a high turnout.

Forward Plan

The Forum noted the Forward Plan.

Dates of Future Meetings

The Forum noted the next meeting on 13th September 2023.

The Chair notified the Forum that birthday and Christmas cards get sent out on a rota from Forum members to young people in care to help connect with young people. She suggested to put the Forum on the rota.

Elaine Keating stated that she could use the old rota and fill in the gaps with the new Councillors.

The meeting, which began at 5.30 pm, finished at 7.35 pm

Chair.....

Date.....