

CORPORATE PARENTING FORUM

Wednesday 13 September 2023

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

Also in attendance (virtually): Lynette Jones-Jardine and Jennifer Hardy

Officers: Nikki Craig, Matthew Edwards, Lin Ferguson, George Holder, Laurence Ellis and Mikey Lloyd

Officers (virtually): Sarah Moran and Marie Bell

Welcome, Introductions and Apologies for Absence

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

Apologies were received from Suzanne Parrott, Executive Headteacher of Virtual School (AfC), and Councillor Cross, who was substituted by Councillor Taylor.

Declarations of Interest

George Holder, RBWM Policy and Projects Officer, declared he was a governor at Cox Green School.

Councillor Da Costa declared that she donated some her Councillors allowance to Kickback.

Minutes

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 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."

Deep Dive - 'Your Education, Training and Employment' Workstream

As the relevant officer, Suzanne Parrott, Executive Headteacher of Virtual School (AfC), was not available to attend the meeting, this item was postponed and skipped during the meeting.

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

Marie Bell, Associate Director for Corporate Parenting, gave a verbal update to the 'Your Safety, Stability and Permanence' Workstream in which she chaired. She explained that the

Workstream had a particular focus around the safety element of children in care and care leavers. This was divided into 3 sections: personal safety, housing/environmental safety, and the vulnerability and exploitation element.

On the progress that had been made, Marie Bell informed that AfC (Achieving for Children) had managed to add a section to the Care Plans and Pathway Plans which focused on safety, which had helped improve discussions with young people in care and care leavers on their views of safety. Feedback from this would be brought back into the Workstream with common themes being identified.

Additional progress included an element of safety being added as part of quality assurance within the Commissioning Services. Therefore, questions on safety were part of that Q/A process to ensure that the placements that were offered and sourced had a focus on safety for young people. This was also linked to the work with the 'Independence' workstream. Marie Bell opined that her 'Safety' Workstream fitted with other Workstreams; and mentioned that there had been suggestions in joining the 'Safety' Workstream with other Workstreams as some of its work was related to, for example, the 'Education' and 'Independence' Workstream.

Some stable connections had been made with colleagues. This included links with a designated community police officer who was available to provide training sessions for children in care and care leavers. There was also an opportunity made available from the Windsor and Maidenhead libraries. With some Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) money, Marie Bell and the libraries sought to create safety spaces in the libraries to allow practitioners and Council employees (e.g., Fire and Rescue Service) to allow Q/A sessions and clinic sessions with young people in care and care leavers on, for example, safety issues.

Connections had also been made with housing providers, namely Abri and Housing Solutions, whereby there was consideration to include a question regarding the young person's care experience as part of their interviews and communications with young people on housing. This was to ensure the young person was still connected to services (e.g., PAs) or not if they decided not to use the services, as well as to consider the young person's vulnerability. Further work with the housing providers was required to add the question.

As part of the connections with housing providers, there were also links within RBWM, namely the Strategy Enabling Projects Team which covered housing.

In terms of outstanding tasks, there were plans to create a leaflet to inform them at a glance on who they could reach out to in regard to safety and security as well as any available offers. However, there was a consensus amongst young people that they would prefer something accessible on their smartphones, possibly a QR code. As this would be more complicated than a leaflet, additional work was required to figure out how to produce this.

Marie Bell sought to build connections with local business which offered tangible items (like ringing doorbells) for children and young people in care. She asked whether any meeting attendees had any connections with local businesses.

Another outstanding action was identifying care leaver friendly tradesmen, with consideration required on what it meant for businesses to be listed.

There was a big section within Care Leavers' Week which covered on safety, including sessions with Fire and Rescue Service, environmental health, home safety with Abri, and personal safety with the community police officer.

On doorbells, Councillor Del Campo wondered whether Thames Valley Police (TVP) could help with this as they had a security scheme for elderly people. She then asked what made a trades person 'care leaver friendly'. Marie Bell answered, while it was still in development, suggestions included care leavers having a preferential treatment and possibly a discount. In

addition, there was consideration on the language and communication being used when interacting with care leavers.

As Suzanne Parrott, Executive Headteacher of Virtual School (AfC), was unable to attend the meeting, Lin Ferguson, Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help (AfC), conveyed that Suzanne Parrott had forwarded a report to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) on what more the Council could do on corporate parenting, in which Stephen Evans, RBWM Chief Executive, had an interest in.

Lin Ferguson also informed that there were discussions on Suzanne Parrott and the Virtual School arranging another 'Better Futures' event which would target local businesses and trades people. It was planned to take place in Legoland in February 2024. She added that Suzanne Parrott had linked up with the Place Directorate at RBWM to make use of the Borough's connection to local businesses. Lin Ferguson suggested that Marie Bell could link up with Suzanne, Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place Services and the Place Directorate to make use of the Council's connections and link up with businesses.

Lin Ferguson then asked for some elaboration on the stability performance. Marie Bell replied that the focus on stability had generated a lot of proactive activity within the services. This was a significant change at AfC, where the stability process had been instigated. As a result, there was an improved framework which react according to issues of instability. Overall, stability and permanence were much higher on the agenda for practitioners and the new commission services.

Sarah Moran, Deputy Director Children's Services (AfC), highlighted that a stability report from Marie Bell had been presented at a Performance Board meeting, and suggested that this could be added to the next meeting agenda. Marie Bell agreed with the idea.

ACTION: Bring the Stability Report to the next Corporate Parenting Forum meeting.

Based on the last time she looked at the data, Lin Ferguson commented that the Borough's stability was improving, whereby children in care were staying in care for much longer. She then asked Marie Bell whether she wanted to explain more about the Permanency Panel which reviewed the permanency of children and young people in care. Marie Bell explained that the Panel was held weekly every Thursday afternoon and was composed of the Virtual School and adoption agency. The Panel would be held when a child was in early stages of care and potentially in care proceedings, and thus focused on the permanency of the child at the very beginning. The Panel would reach a conclusion once the child had reached permanency. The benefit of the Panel was that it generated the actions and activities, not just from social care but from other workers in order to stimulate stability. Marie Bell added that long-term and short-term permanency was better than the Borough's statistical neighbours and fared well compared to the national average.

On the ring doorbell scheme, the Chair raised that she managed to acquire funding from Thames Valley Police in 2022 for a Community Safety Fund which awarded ring doorbells and door chains to elderly people. She stated that it was a simple process (an online form) and could something worth applying for. She added that the Neighbourhood Watch provided some security, and that Valerie Pike was one of the coordinators.

Lin Ferguson suggested to invite the Neighbourhood Watch during Care Leavers' Week. The Chair also suggested community wardens.

Marie Bell commented that she had contacted the head of the community wardens, Andy Aldridge, and had received recommended individuals who would be best to attend. Some had been confirmed, while there were a couple of others which Marie Bell hoped to invite, such as Andy Aldridge. She said she would follow up with this. Marie Bell also liked the suggestion of inviting Neighbourhood Watch to Care Leavers' Week.

Councillor Gosling said she could get in touch with the relevant people. Lin Ferguson requested for the details to be forwarded to her, and then she would then forward them to Marie Bell.

ACTION: Acquire the details for the Neighbourhood Watch and forward them to Marie Bell.

Sarah Moran made a couple of points. Firstly, she commented that there needed to be some more work with housing providers on what was working or not working for young people, particularly as there was an issue with one of the commissioning services, Frogmore Court. Secondly, she informed that she recently joined the Fostering Team meeting in which there were some discussions on the challenges in recruiting in-house foster carers. Some factors included foster carers needing spare bedroom space for the fostered child. This then led to speculation on what the Borough could do with one suggestion including foster carers being prioritised for bigger properties. She then asked Matthew Edwards, Associate Director for Provider Services (AfC), if this was worth revisiting.

Mathew Edwards replied that there were some risks with mainstream carers being offered a property before approval as it could lead to the idea that becoming a foster carer was a potential route to securing larger accommodation. However, he believed that there needed to be more proactiveness in supporting friends and family (kinship) carers by, for example, helping the carers acquire property if they were caring for multiple children.

Councillor C. Da Costa, Vice-Chair, commented that people who wanted to do foster caring were not always in a position to move into a larger property; and that there were people who would like to foster but did not have a spare bedroom in their current house and therefore do not put themselves forward. She added that residents being part of a housing association would be easier as they could get priority bidding, in contrast to residents who were homeowners or privately rented.

Matthew Edwards responded that fostering babies under 2 years of age did not require a spare room. The Chair commented that she was unaware of this and that many people would not have known about this.

Lin Ferguson highlighted that Stephen Evans was keen to do a fostering campaign at around Christmas 2023.

George Holder, RBWM Policy and Projects Officer, explained that when his wife wanted to do foster caring at Wolverhampton, the fostering agency stated that her salary could not be taken into account and that his salary was reviewed on whether he and his wife were financially viable to foster. This was despite their combined salaries and the receipt of fostering allowance meant that they would be fine to foster. He wondered what the policy was in Windsor and Maidenhead. Matthew Edwards commented that approved carers received a fee and an allowance.

Councillor Del Campo asked whether there were lower cost methods to help people with foster caring, particularly with their current home property, such as decluttering or discounts for 6 months.

Councillor Gosling asked if there was a limit on fostering children, to which Matthew Edwards answered that carers could foster up to three children.

Going back to babies being fostered, Lin Ferguson clarified that babies up to the age of 2 may share the foster carer's bedroom.

Going back to Sarah Moran's point on the provisions at Frogmore Court, Marie Bell commented that the provision was providing supported living accommodation which was funded by the Council. There had been some changes in the last few years, including the funding as well as the calculation in relation to benefits. As a result, Frogmore, as a provider, had to increase rent which forced some young people into a benefits cap. As a result, care leavers would be unable to live at the accommodation and be supported, even if they were in employment, because the rent would be too high as they would not be entitled to claim those benefits. Overall, a provision was lost as AfC could not be allocated there if they were in employment.

When asked by the Chair that young people could only live at Frogmore Court if they were in education or unemployed, Marie Bell confirmed this.

The Chair then asked whether Frogmore Court in Maidenhead was only supported living accommodation in which young people in care were allocated. Marie Bell replied that Frogmore Court was only place that was promoted by the Borough, which would use other supported accommodation in Windsor, Slough and other areas that would be a separate commissioned provider that would be sourced and then find placements for young people. Marie Bell added that the idea of Frogmore Court was that it provided accommodation for any resident of the Borough which required support and not only care leavers.

Councillor C. Da Costa asked whether the Borough should be covering the shortfalls as it had a duty of care toward care leavers up to the age of 25 years. Sarah Moran responded that funding for shortfalls were reviewed and approved by AfC at a case-by-case basis. She sought to meet up with housing and commissioning colleagues and consider solutions to manage the shortfall. The solutions, Sarah Moran explained, should involve young people being employed and close to carers as well as the solutions being financially viable.

Matthew Edwards informed that AfC managed two semi-independent accommodations in Richmond and Kingston which was very cost effective. He added that AfC was working with Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place Services, to find a space suitable for a children's home, and that there were considerations on whether there might be something suitable semi-independent accommodation. This depended on finding a site which was suitable.

The Chair asked whether the Council commissioned places at Wellesley House in Windsor, stating that it used to house mothers and babies. Lin Ferguson was uncertain but stated that she would investigate this. Councillor C. Da Costa believed that it originally provided temporary accommodation for homeless pregnant mothers.

Marie Bell conveyed that Wellesley House in 2018 was supported living accommodation for single mothers, but it did not house under-18s.

After thanking Marie Bell for her update, the Chair sought to assign Forum members to the workstreams. Councillor Del Campo stated that she was happy to be attached to 'Your Safety, Stability and Permanence' Workstream with Marie Bell. Councillor C. Da Costa was keen to be assigned to 'Your Health and Wellbeing' Workstream with Lynette Jones-Jardine, Safeguarding Lead for Children and Young People in Care (NHS Frimley).

While she was originally assigned to the 'Your Education, Training and Employment Workstream with Suzanne Parrott, Executive Headteacher of Virtual School (AfC), she suggested that she could have an oversight over all the workstreams as there were five CPF members and four workstreams.

Councillor Gosling opted to be assigned to the 'Your Voice' Workstream with Elaine Keating, Youth Engagement Officer (AfC). When she asked what the Councillors assigned to a workstream did, the Chair explained that they attended workstream meetings, learn what the workstream was doing and consider how they themselves could help out.

The 'Your Independence' Workstream with Sarah Moran would continue to go through the other workstreams.

The Chair assigned Councillor Cross, who was not present at the meeting, with the 'Your Education, Training and Employment' Workstream with Suzanne Parrot as it was the final workstream with no assigned CPF member.

In summary:

- Councillor Cross – 'Your Education, Training and Employment' Workstream (Suzanne Parrot),
- Councillor C. Da Costa – 'Your Health and Wellbeing' Workstream (Lynette Jones-Jardine),
- Councillor Del Campo – 'Your Safety, Stability and Permanence' Workstream (Marie Bell),
- Councillor Gosling – 'Your Voice' Workstream (Elaine Keating),
- Councillor A. Tisi (Chair) – Oversee all the workstreams.

Members Training

Lin Ferguson opened the update on members training by saying that there needed to be a discussion about what training was put on. Lin Ferguson said she did some training for all new Councillors on corporate parenting a little while ago and said she believed some thought should go into doing something again for the wider group of Councillors. Lin Ferguson said instead of setting up something new, could there be something done within the Councillors existing training events. Lin Ferguson said it could be of use for Councillors to bring concerns they might have.

Nikki Craig, Assistant Director of HR Corporate Projects and IT, spoke about how at the last CPF meeting, it was discussed about how all employees for RBWM completed online iHasco training in safeguarding for adults and safeguarding for children and there was a request for elective members to acquire access to the training. Nikki Craig said a member of her team had been speaking to Kirsty Hunt, Service Lead – Electoral and Democratic Services, about other courses being available, not relating to safeguarding, such as cyber security. Nikki Craig said there were live conversations at the moment and the overall answer was that this was possible but it was just about how to organise it.

Cllr C. Da Costa asked Nikki Craig if these courses could be mandatory.

Nikki Craig said this would be a question to Kirsty Hunt but believed this could be possible.

Nikki Craig said the training was mandatory for colleagues and staff, but it would be for Democratic Services to work with Councillors.

The Chair said she believed Councillors had access and she had done safeguarding training.

Lin Ferguson said the training probably would not be specific to RBWM, to which Nikki Craig confirmed.

Lin Ferguson asked if there was something already set up so officers could do some training with all elective members on how to refer and Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

The Chair said Councillors received training, but it was always on a specific topic, such as having some training on finance and scrutiny. The Chair mentioned that there had been some discussions on doing an event and having young people come in but was unsure if these events could be combined. The Chair suggested to have a social first and then some training, rather than having the training before a Council meeting.

Lin Ferguson asked if there could be an action to give thought about when to do training.

Nikki Craig believed that there needed to be a conversation with Kirsty Hunt, as she had planned for some training, to see what could be lined up and then see if it could be combined with a social event.

ACTION: Discuss with Kirsty Hunt and Democratic Services on corporate parenting training.

The Chair said that Councillors had to go through mandatory training if, for example, they wanted to sit on a Licencing or Planning Panel.

Lin Ferguson said she believed there needed to be regularly training rather than one-off session, stating it was a key issue.

Cllr C. Da Costa said that Councillors being able to recognise what would be a safeguarding issue was important, as it was not for them to decide whether something was a safeguarding but if they could report it and let the experts make the decision.

The Chair said there could be a flow chart on the wall in Members' Room of who to contact.

Cllr C. Da Costa said it could also be added to the Members' Hub.

Lin Ferguson said that it would be helpful to link up with Kirsty Hunt and get something in the Forward Plan.

Lynette Jones-Jardine said, on training, that she would be happy to support from a health side if there were particular things Councillors wanted to cover off.

Diary Dates

Sarah Moran spoke about Care Leavers Week which ran from 25 October to 1 November 2023, in line with the national Care Leavers Week. Sarah Moran said it was a full week of events culminating to a barbeque on 1 November 2023 between 6pm-8pm.

Sarah Moran said she was unsure if Elaine Keating had circulated any communications about activities happening during the week.

ACTION: Sarah Moran to speak to Elaine Keating about circulating activities to Corporate Parenting Forum members.

Sarah Moran said the week was shaping up nicely, namely 'Parenting as a Care Leaving' and 'Independent Living'. Sarah Moran said as part of the Care Leavers Week, the Senior Leadership Team had been linked with two personal advisors who were linking with the care leavers allocated to them. They had also set up individual meetings with the care leavers and senior leadership team. Sarah Moran said they would be talking to them about how they could better engage with care leavers going forward as AfC had not been as successful as they wanted.

Sarah Moran said a few of AfC officers had managed to meet with some young people. Sarah Moran said she met with her first young person about three weeks ago and had some brilliant feedback which was being written up. Sarah Moran said that in the CPF meeting in October 2023, Laura Roche, team manager for the care leavers, would present some of the findings and some recommendations.

Sarah Moran said an example of some feedback from care leavers was to separate the participation aspect and questions with the fun social events. She said she believed there was going to be some interesting feedback which was great.

The Chair asked if Care Leavers' Week would take place at the end of half term and Sarah Moran confirmed this.

Lin Ferguson said that young people had said they wanted an opportunity to meet with councillors more regularly, and she asked if there would be an opportunity to offer something at that week.

Marie Bell said that it was a full packed week, but the last activity would be the barbeque, in which the last event at the barbecue was the social event, which was going to be used for any *ad hoc* things or allow questions from young people. Marie Bell suggested that Councillors could be available for young people at the social event. Marie Bell asked Lin Ferguson if that would work of if she wanted something more structure within the week.

Lin Ferguson said it would a good opportunity to have something in that week where young people could meet with councillors and that could be the barbeque as it was more informal.

The Chair asked what Councillors had to offer, and what would young people want from them.

Lin Ferguson said she had met with representatives from all young people participation groups; and when she met with them last time, they said they wanted an opportunity to meet some of the new Councillors and see who they were.

Lin Ferguson said that after the barbeque in August 2023, there were a number of Councillors who managed to get there, and the young people were really impressed with this. Lin Ferguson said the young people did not just want to be heard but to feel like people cared. Lin Ferguson said that Councillors may not have had to say anything exciting or enlightening but it was about just being there and being visible.

The Chair emphasised that the barbeque was not just for the CPF members but for the wider members and that you were allowed come as well.

Cllr C. Da Costa said it was like a family event, where attendees may not speak to everyone at the event, but they know people would be there and they were a part of their 'family'.

Cllr Del Campo said that Councillors received a lot of emails, and they may miss an invitation that came via email; therefore, she suggested to send out calendar invites so that they were in Councillor calendars.

Lin Ferguson asked Marie Bell to take on-board the feedback so invites could be sent out. Marie Bell confirmed this.

The Chair said that if dates were passed onto Democratic Services, they could help send out invites.

Marie Bell said that if Elaine Keating had an invitation list of core CPF members and wider members, she would be able to send out invites for everything they had.

The Chair said it would be helpful to have a list of dates for Kickback as Councillors receiving a list of dates at the start of the year could be easily forgotten.

Dates of Future Meetings

The Forum noted the next meeting on 17 October 2023.*

Mikey Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer, noted that the meeting in April 2024 had been moved back one week and would be taking place on 23 April 2024.

*After the meeting, the CPF meeting schedule had been changed to the following dates (all at 5:30pm):

- 23rd November 2023
- 10th January 2024
- 21st March 2024
- 7th May 2024

Forward Plan

The Chair noted that the deep dive with the 'Your Education, Training and Employment' Workstream would need to be rescheduled to the next meeting in October 2023.

Matthew Edwards asked if the Annual Fostering Report could be added to the agenda for the next meeting in October 2023. He also suggested to have a regular update with the sufficiency work.

The Chair asked Democratic Services to look into the Forward Plan.

ACTION: The Forward Plan to be amended.

Laurence Ellis, Democratic Services Officer, informed that Suzanne Parrott may present the annual Virtual School Report if it was ready. Lin Ferguson stated it was fine to move this item to the next meeting in December 2023.

Lynette Jones-Jardine added that she was doing her deep dive with 'Your Health and Wellbeing' Workstream and the Annual Health and Wellbeing Report.

Due the next agenda having a lot of content, the Chair suggested that the agenda may need to be amended.

Marie Bell gave reminder that there were care leavers out of borough and for the Forum to think if there was there anything it could do to support its children in other areas, such as linking with other local authorities.

Lin Ferguson asked who could do the vlog. The Chair then gave a brief explanation that after each meeting, Elaine Keating arranged for a CPF member to do a short video which gave a brief summary of the meeting to young people. Councillor Del Campo offered to do it this time round.

The meeting, which began at 5.31 pm, finished at 6.42 pm

Chair.....

Date.....