

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

**Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development
Committee**

Meeting held 14 March 2016

PRESENT: Councillors Chris Rosling-Josephs (Chair), Katie Condliffe, Aodan Marken, Mohammad Maroof, Karen McGowan, Pat Midgley, Chris Peace, Colin Ross, Ian Saunders, Jack Scott, Cliff Woodcraft (Deputy Chair) and Nasima Akther

Non-Council Members in attendance:-

Gillian Foster, (Diocese Representative - Non-Council Voting Member)

Jules Jones, (Parent Governor Representative - Non-Council Voting Member)

Joan Stratford, (Diocese Representative - Non-Council Voting Member)

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor John Booker and Alice Riddell (Healthwatch Sheffield – Observer).

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 In relation to Agenda Item 8 (Fostering Service – Annual Report), Councillor Ian Saunders declared a personal interest as a foster carer, and indicated that he would leave the meeting during the consideration of that item.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25th January 2016, were approved as a correct record, and the Committee noted the attached Actions Update.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1 There were no questions raised or petitions submitted by members of the public.

6. ADOPTION SERVICE - ANNUAL REPORT

6.1 The Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, submitted the Annual Report in terms of the Adoption Service, which provided an overview of the main developments and priorities relating to the Service during the period April 2015 to February 2016.

6.2 The report was supported by a presentation by Suzanne Whiteley, Adoption and Fostering Service Manager. Ms Whiteley reported on the national adoption agenda and how Sheffield had responded to the numerous Government initiatives and policy changes over the last four years. She referred to adoption statistics for the City, details of outturns and projections regarding indicators on the Adoption Scorecard, and what the various Government initiatives and policy changes had meant for the people of Sheffield.

6.3 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- The measures that were reported included the time from the child being placed with adopters to the time they applied for an Adoption Order. The adopters could apply for an Adoption Order over a 10-week period. Because of this, there were cases whereby if there was some reason as to why the Adoption Orders hadn't been applied for, this affected the average figure across the Local Authority. The Council have had two such cases, one being a child who was placed four years ago. The Council have been working with the adopters to address the issues that had arisen, and had now secured a positive outcome for this child.
- The figure of 34 new adopters related to homes, and not individuals.
- In terms of moving forward regarding the A1 and A2 indicators on the Adoption Scorecard, a number of changes had been made with regard to family finding processes over the last few years, which had resulted in newer cases going through the system a lot quicker. However, the Service needed to be mindful of those cases where there were delays. Whilst the Government had set a threshold, in terms of a number of days it wished to see such targets being met, the Council needed to make sure the assessment was undertaken correctly and that a suitable match was made. It was accepted that the Government's threshold was very low and that in many cases, mainly due to the complex needs of the child, there were delays, making it very difficult to achieve this target. Considerable work was being undertaken, however, in an attempt to address this issue.
- The Council did not wish to see local children moving outside the City, unless it was absolutely necessary. It was important that

the Council had links with the other authorities in South Yorkshire as this helped to ease the process regarding children moving to these areas.

- It was not clear as to why the Government had set such a low threshold, particularly in the light of an increase in the number of children requiring adoption. It was believed that such thresholds had been set simply to ensure that Authorities completed the adoption process as quickly as possible. It was acknowledged that it would be very challenging to meet these targets. The Council, however, would not be forced into quickening up the adoption process if it was not in the interest of the child to do so. There was nothing set down in terms of consequences for the Council, if it did not meet the Government's threshold targets, although there would be a requirement for the Council to explain any delays that occurred. The outturns in respect of Adoption Scorecard Indicator A2, which were all somewhat above the Government's threshold during 2011 and 2014, was considered as a legacy in terms of some of the children who had gone through the process during this period, who had very complex and challenging needs. Considerable work was being undertaken to address the delays, which included holding monthly meetings at a strategic level, as well as out in the community with frontline staff. Whilst the Council did not want to cause any unnecessary delays in the process due to service issues, there had been some service issues, which were currently being dealt with, and it was considered that sufficient safeguards were now in place to enable the Service to make the necessary improvements to address the delay issues. It was believed that the Government set the threshold for local authorities to ensure that any incidents of children 'drifting' in the system were being minimised. There were benefits for the Authority in having such thresholds in that, although the Authority had to be flexible, and strike the right balance in the light of the needs of the children and adopters, they also provided the Authority with the incentive to try and work through the adoption process as quickly as possible. Whilst the Service had to deal with a number of children with very complex and difficult needs, this was not used as an excuse as it was appreciated that other local authorities, some of which performed much better than Sheffield, were forced to deal with children with similar needs.
- There were no barriers in terms of the ethnicity, race or sexual orientation of any prospective adopters.
- Information with regard to the distribution/spread of children in terms of the number of days they had been in the adoption system could be provided in respect of two cohorts – children who had been adopted this year and children currently in the

system.

6.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the information reported as part of the presentation and the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) thanks Suzanne Whiteley for attending the meeting, making the presentation and responding to the questions raised.

7. FOSTERING SERVICE - ANNUAL REPORT

7.1 The Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, submitted a report containing an overview of the main developments and priorities of the Fostering Service from April 2015 to February 2016.

7.2 The report was supported by a presentation from Suzanne Whiteley, Adoption and Fostering Service Manager, who reported on Sheffield Fostering Service, referring to foster carer initiatives, training issues, statistics and key priorities for the Service.

7.3 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- Whilst statistics were not available in terms of retention rates regarding foster parents, such information was presently being collated by the Service's Communications Team, using a demographic-based model. The Communications Team had used social media, with the results of this exercise being awaited, to see if such an initiative had an impact. It was considered that a 'drip drip' method of advertising for foster carers often proved more effective than one-off targeting campaigns. In terms of sharing good practice, officers were due to meet with the Marketing Manager in the Fostering Team at Leeds City Council, which Authority had recently run a very successful recruitment campaign. It was considered that the Council had a very successful brand in terms of fostering, which tended to be more effective for the younger children.
- Whilst the figures regarding the deregistration of foster carers were not available in respect of the last few years, it was believed that, more recently, the number of carers deregistering had reduced. It was believed that the reasons for the deregistration of the majority of such carers was due to general concerns regarding the standard of care provided. In terms of those cases where foster carers had been deregistered by the Authority, of which there have been three, such action had been

taken as the standard of care provided had not been deemed sufficient. The cases did not include any incidences of neglect. Similarly, there were a number of different reasons as to why foster carers withdrew from the fostering process. One of the reasons was due to the complexity of the system, and the consequent difficulties faced by some prospective foster carers in dealing with this. Whilst it was appreciated that such a system needed to be highly regulated, it was considered that the system needed to be simplified, particularly for prospective foster parents for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Officers in the Fostering Service regularly liaised with colleagues in terms of how they could engage better with representatives from different communities within the City. Representations had recently been made at a national level in terms of looking at different regulations with regard to foster placements that were culture-specific, and the outcome of such discussions was still awaited. The reasons as to whether children were placed with permanent foster carers or placed with task carers was dependent on the individual plan for each child. When a child first came into care, they were registered with short-term foster carers, known as task carers. When it was deemed a long-term placement would be suitable for the child, the Council would look at providing a placement, where the foster carer involved was able to commit longer-term.

- Whilst it was accepted that young people remaining to live with their foster carers after the age of 18 could have an impact on the number of foster carers available, the Council was very keen to support the extension of young people's placements in a way that allows them to progress to more independent living, whilst remaining with their foster carers, which was known as 'staying put'.
- There were currently four foster carers who provided out of hours foster provision, and there were very few occasions where the Council was not able to provide any remand provision.
- The details in terms of whether the recent poster campaign in terms of foster carer recruitment had resulted in an increase in enquiries and/or applications were not available at the meeting, but could be provided to Members at a later date. However, there were generally fluctuations with regard to recruitment statistics throughout any given year. Also, there were no details available in terms of the effectiveness of recruitment campaigns with regard to BME and other hard to reach communities. There had been a small number of approvals from BME communities, but it was accepted that the numbers needed to be higher, and the Service would welcome any ideas or suggestions in terms of how such communities could be targeted more effectively in

terms of publicity. The information on this, together with the details relating to the recent poster campaign, were being handled by the Service's Communications Team, and could be circulated to Members at a later date.

- The post of Training and Development Officer in the Service had been vacant for some time as a result of the post-holder being on sick leave.
- Information regarding (a) the impact of the recent poster/leaflet recruitment campaign, currently being analysed by the Fostering Service's Communications Team and (b) the ethnic diversity of current foster carers on the list would be circulated to Members.

7.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the information reported as part of the presentation and the responses to the questions raised;
- (b) thanks Suzanne Whiteley for attending the meeting, making the presentation and responding to the questions raised; and
- (c) requests that any issues of concern regarding the Fostering Service that arise prior to the next Annual Report, be reported to Members.

(NOTE: Councillor Ian Saunders declared a personal interest in this item, and left the room during the consideration of the item.)

8. CARE LEAVERS, INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY SERVICE, CHILDREN IN CARE AND INDEPENDENT VISITOR SERVICE - ANNUAL REPORT

8.1 The Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, submitted a report containing an annual review of the Independent Advocacy Service, Children in Care Council and Independent Visitor Service.

8.2 The report was supported by presentations from Becky Towle, Service Manager, Care Leavers, and Clare Humberstone, Children's Involvement Team Manager, as follows:-

8.2.1 Care Leavers

- (a) Becky Towle commenced by referring to a definition of a care leaver, and reported on the various different categories of care leavers, together with the Local Authority's responsibilities to such people. She reported that, at the present time, there were 324 care leavers in Sheffield, 300 of whom were still in touch with the Authority. Ms

Towle referred to the issues in terms of young people leaving care, and moving to independence, and reported on the various health issues surrounding care leavers and on the transition of care leavers from Not Engaged in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) to Engaged in Education, Employment and Training (EET). Specific reference was made to the educational achievement of children in care, in 2015, which highlighted the fact that whilst the attainment gap between this cohort and the whole City had narrowed since 2014, it still remained a significant difference. Ms Towle reported on the various activities and initiatives care leavers could become involved in, referring specifically to the Care Leavers Council.

- (b) In response a question from a Member of the Committee, with regard to young people who chose to remain with their foster carers after the age of 18 (“Staying Put”), Ms Towle commented that although the Council’s involvement with the carers would not be as detailed, in terms of training requirements and other issues, the Service would still provide a level of support for the foster carers.

8.2.2 Children in Care Council and Independent Advocacy Service

- (a) Clare Humberstone reported on the work undertaken by the Children’s Involvement Team, during the last year, referring specifically to the Children in Care Council. She reported that the Council had now been running for a year, with an entirely new group, comprising eight members. The Council had drawn up a Work Plan for the year, and the first topic had been improving their relationship with Social Workers. The Council had arranged an event ‘Let’s Talk About Social Workers’ to showcase its work and ideas, and get sign-up from Councillors and Council officers from the City Council’s Corporate Parenting Board, to take it forward. Reference was made to the Council’s hopes for the year ahead, which included designing and launching its own website, with Facebook and Twitter accounts, developing the work undertaken around Social Workers into training and practice, and moving on to its next two topics, which would include looking at their money and how it was spent, and foster and residential placements.

Ms Humberstone also reported on the Advocacy Service for children and young people in care and the Independent Visitor Scheme. She stated that the Advocacy Service had been available since April 2015, and comprised issue-based advocacy, which included instructed and non-instructed advocacy. The Team aimed to ensure that children and young people’s wishes, views and feelings were heard and considered in important decisions about their lives, and that from April 2015 to date, the Team had received 37 referrals, with 11 currently open. Reference was made to statistical information with regard to the age of children and young people requesting an advocate, referral routes and advocacy issues. Ms Humberstone reported on the

position with regard to Independent Visitors who, after being matched with a child or young person, would visit them on a regular basis, with the aim of establishing a consistent and positive adult-child relationship. It was reported that 16 matches had been made, and 15 young people were waiting for a match. 13 volunteers had undertaken two days of training and were part-way through the recruitment process, awaiting interview and DBS checks before they would be matched with young people.

8.3 In response to questions from Members of the Committee, it was stated that the age range of the children the Team worked with depended on the referrals its received, although the Team did provide for children from the age of five years old. The Children in Care Council did influence service design, with one example of this being that they had designed a booklet – to be filled in by social workers, and taken to the first meeting with the young person. Also, a number of issues raised by the young people were being discussed by the User Voice Group chaired by the Principal Social Worker.

8.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the information reported as part of the presentation and the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) thanks Becky Towle and Clare Humberstone for attending the meeting, making the presentations and responding to the questions raised.

9. YOUTH SERVICES IN SHEFFIELD

9.1 The Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, submitted a report providing an update on youth services in Sheffield. The report set out information in terms of the current provision of youth services, as commissioned and organised by the Local Authority, and set out the changes that have taken place since 2010, with the start of the Coalition Government's austerity programme. The report also set out the future challenges facing youth services, and included details of a proposal that the Council was developing with partners for the creation of a Youth Trust for Sheffield, from 2017.

9.2 In attendance for this item were Sam Martin, Assistant Director, Lifelong Learning, Skills and Communities, and Gail Gibbons, Chief Executive, Sheffield Futures.

9.3 Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

- There were no firm proposals at the present time in terms of the

Youth Trust, other than it was envisaged that the Trust would sit outside the Council, with the Council having a role in its organisation. There were plans to speak to commissioners in the NHS and the Police and Crime Commissioner, in connection with proposals to potentially pool resources and create a jointly-commissioned provision, if possible.

- It was difficult to demonstrate the impact open access youth work makes, and youth services nationally have struggled with this issue. It had been identified that, with regard to the proposed Youth Trust, there was a need to do something different, particularly with regard to the procurement process, and officers were currently working with colleagues in Legal Services to look at different ways of how this could be done. Whilst Sheffield Futures received funding other than that received from the Council, there would be a considerable impact if Sheffield Futures were to close down, namely with regard to staff, pensions and service continuity. However, the Council also needed to ensure it was spending public money effectively and ensuring adequate competition for contracts. There was a need for an options appraisals process, and having Sheffield Futures as the Youth Trust was one possible option to be considered, along with a range of other possibilities. The youth services contract between the Council and Sheffield Futures was not only about youth work, but also involved casework, one to one support and family support for people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs). It was, and always had been, very difficult to track the impact of youth club provision on young people. It had however, been possible for Sheffield Futures to track casework and group work.
- The reason for the proposed changes was due to a combination of factors, with the Government's austerity measures being the major driver. The Council was trying to improve its youth services, whilst being mindful of the budget position.
- Gail Gibbons agreed to raise the issue regarding the way other providers' services were promoted via the careers information services or Sheffield Futures with the Communications Manager at Sheffield Futures.
- The Service welcomed any suggestions in terms of the wording in the Youth Pledge, accepting that there was a need to have some reference to vulnerability.
- The Council would look at a number of different possible funding models, one of which would include a social investor putting up the money for delivery, with the Council then paying out according to an outcomes-based tariff model which, if

successful, would ultimately repay the original investors. Whilst any new proposed model would not entirely replace what the Council was putting in in terms of funding, it would hopefully result in a system which was favourable to the Council over time. Most schemes of this nature work over a three to five year basis, with outcome payments being set up in a number of different ways, such as payments to investors being triggered when certain milestones were met.

- The Youth Trust should be used as a vehicle to enable discussions with other groups/organisations in the City, with regard to service provision. There needs to be some kind of financial model, which was not just about commissioning a service, but also a wider partnership approach to meeting the needs of the young people of Sheffield.
- Universal careers guidance was now the responsibility of individual schools, and it was acknowledged that careers officers, based in, or employed by schools, should always give impartial advice at all times and should always focus on the needs of the young person. When Connexions ended, schools then had the responsibility of providing their own careers advice. Sheffield Futures now provided a bought-in service for around 75% of secondary schools, with the rest buying in their own service. The Council continued to support a network of lead teachers responsible for careers education and advice, and held a forum to discuss issues, maintain standards for the City and encourage best practice.
- The youth clubs operated by Sheffield Futures at the present time had very high attendance.

9.4 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the responses to the questions raised; and
- (b) requests the Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families, (i) in liaison with a Working Group, including Members of this Committee, to investigate the proposal to develop a Youth Trust and Youth Pledge, feeding in the comments and questions raised at this meeting, and to report back on progress to this Committee by November 2016, and (ii) to submit a report back to this Committee in early 2017, on the final findings and recommendations.

10. WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

10.1 The Committee received its draft Work Programme 2015/16.

10.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the draft Work Programme 2015/16, namely that the next meeting on 20th April 2016 would comprise the Committee's annual meeting with young carers and young people, and which was not a formal, public meeting; and
- (b) requests that a further report on the progress made in respect of the Parent/Carers' Forum "State of Sheffield 2014 Report" be added to the list of topics for consideration as part of this Committee's Work Programme 2016/17.

11. JOAN STRATFORD

11.1 The Chair reported that Joan Stratford, who had been a Diocese Representative on this, and former Education-related Committees of the Council, since January 1998, was attending her last formal meeting.

11.2 RESOLVED: That the Committee places on record its thanks and appreciation for the excellent work undertaken by Joan Stratford, during her time as a Diocese Representative on this, and former Education-related Committees of the Council, since 1998.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

12.1 It was noted that the next formal meeting of the Committee would be held on a date to be arranged.

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