

Lancashire County Council

Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 22nd July, 2020 at 1.30 pm in Skype Virtual Meeting - Skype

Present: Members

County Councillor Ian Brown	- Lancashire County Council
County Councillor Stephen Clarke	- Lancashire County Council
County Councillor David Foxcroft	- Lancashire County Council
County Councillor Jayne Rear	- Lancashire County Council
County Councillor Julie Gibson	- Lancashire County Council
Marieta Birt	- Fostering Forum
Liz Donnelly Nelson	- Adoption
Barbara Bath	- Fostering, Adoption, Residential and YOT Team, LCC
Jake	- LINX Representative
Callum	- LINX Representative
Georgia	- LINX Representative
Bobby	- LINX Representative

Co-opted members

Brendan Lee	- Children's Social Care, LCC
Tracy Smith	- Residential Providers
Caroline Waldron	- Clinical Commissioning Groups
Jenny Donnelly	- Virgin 0-19 Service
Audrey Swann	- Headteacher, Vulnerable and Looked After Children
Amanda Mansfield	- Independent Reviewing Officers
Roxanne McAllister	- Leaving Care, LCC
Stephen Young	- Corporate Management Team, Lancashire County Council
Mia Leyland	- Barnardo's
Judith Gault	- Child and Family Wellbeing Service
Umer Khonat	- Business Intelligence Team

Other Attendees

Kirsty Clarke	- National Youth Advocacy Service
Shell Arliss	- National Youth Advocacy Service

Sharon Hubber	- Director of Children's Social Care
Cathy Trengove	- Barnardo's
Sam Gorton	- Democratic Services

1. Introductions and Apologies

All were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were received from David Barrow, Nicola Bamford, Terri Crossland, Jane Hylton and Sarah Jones.

2. Notes of the Meeting and Matters Arising from 30 January 2020

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and there were no matters arising from them.

3. Terms of Reference and Membership

The Board agreed the membership and terms of reference for the municipal year 2020/2021.

4. COVID-19 - Impact response of the pandemic for Lancashire's Children in Care and Care Leavers

Michael Nunn, Residential Senior Manager and Frankie Hearty, Residential Child Care Worker, Fostering, Adoption, Residential and Youth Offending Team Services were welcomed to the meeting and gave an insight on how lockdown and social distancing measures had changed the lives of young people across Lancashire's in-house residential services.

Michael updated the Board on the Outreach Adolescent Support Unit which has been run by the Outreach Service who have been working diligently with families that have young people on the edge of care in order for them to keep together, meet their individual needs and challenges and also find ways of having some fun during lockdown and taking some of those pressures away from families that are really struggling through this difficult time.

Some Mindfulness packs have been collated by the Council's Community Outreach Teams and were put together for parents with young people and young people themselves that were struggling during lockdown. The packs contained activities/sessions/help booklets/contact details and were left on the doorsteps of families in need across Lancashire to reach out to them. Private meetings on Zoom were also offered so parents/young people could speak to professionals on a one to one basis and all were given key contacts. Colouring books and art supplies were also donated from a number of businesses across Lancashire and the Council's Overnight Short Break Units to enable parents to do activities with their children and hopefully alleviate some pressures.

Examples of other activities carried out during lockdown were highlighted below:

- Sunflower competition where young people were provided with all the equipment and a virtual celebration event will be held shortly.
- Live baking sessions – dropping off ingredients so young people could participate. This is also a great upskilling activity and something that will be taken forward in the future which has been well received.

Over a 1000 tins of shortbread biscuits were donated from Royal Edinburgh and these were distributed far and wide across Lancashire and gave an opportunity to drop these on the doorsteps and engage in conversation with young people and families in need.

The Adolescent Support Unit have continued to receive young people into the service and have been managed in separate groups to aid social distancing and minimise the impact of COVID-19 on the group.

Frankie guided the Board through the presentation that was attached to the agenda where it was reported that despite the challenging times everyone was experiencing, the homes and outreach services had continued to go above and beyond for the children and young people they cared for. It was noted that many of the young people had turned the experience into a positive one by developing better relationships in their homes with other young people and staff who care for them and learnt new technology to maintain contact with friends and family whilst being in lockdown. Young people have also received communication/contact during this time from many professionals and services including social workers, independent reviewing officers, teachers as well as many others which were detailed further in the presentation along with facts and figures and how they have supported each other and services that have supported them.

Young people have also been offered regular COVID-19 testing and the majority of young people have accepted the offer and been tested regularly, helping homes to best protect and safeguard their young people. Staff are also undertaking regular testing too.

Nine young people have been placed into Residential homes during lockdown, so they are continuing to receive young people into their settings and access the support that they need.

Young people also felt that calls, Facetiming and messages received by professionals were less intensive than face to face and felt that more of a relationship had been built also. Calls made were not always on a professional basis, keep in touch calls just to say hi were really well received.

Staff and young people have been incredibly adaptive and resilient to this new way of living, which has included staff balancing the risk of coming into work and working closely with young people and staff have risen to those challenges and maintained those relationships.

Some of the activities across the network that have been carried out during lockdown were as follows:

- Supporting the NHS on a Thursday night.
- Camping in the backgarden.
- Indoor activities booklet.
- Memory of lockdown – handprints.
- Yoga.
- Walking in the local community.
- Exercises in the garden.
- In-house knitting blankets and patchwork quilts to see which home could make the biggest. 624 knitted squares currently are being donated to each of the NHS Trusts and displayed in each of the homes and at County Hall.
- In-house cooking – all young people have taken part in some way, whether it is basic to more specialised cooking skills.
- DIY skills – decorated bedrooms, painting fences, improving their living environment and took lots of pride in it.
- Relationship building between young people themselves and between young people and staff has been welcomed.

Feedback from some of the comments detailed in the presentation from the young people were welcomed by the Board and from 1 June 2020, the Residential Service has been offered an amazing and exclusive opportunity to be able to utilise the outward bound centres at Borwick Hall and Hothersall Lodge. As a result there has been an ever increasing number of children looked after experiencing a number of activities including mountain biking, tree climbing, archery, kayaking and many more.

Caroline Waldron, East Lancashire Clinical Commissioning Group shared work that they had been doing in relation to how they have been communicating in a different way with young people within the NHS in terms of facilitating their statutory health assessments virtually and young people have commented they preferred this and wanted it as an option going forward.

In terms of lessons learnt during lockdown and what will be taken forward in the future was received. This included digital communication instead of face to face with professionals, continuing to embrace home life, planning and strategy meetings being held digitally instead of travelling across the county and cooking classes as a way of upskilling young people will certainly continue.

An issue was raised around further support around mental health needs to be increased and work around this is in progress. There needs to be a better connection with the Transition Services and link up individual workers to ensure that everybody has a contact they can reach out to when they are struggling. Schools have a project called Emotionally Friendly Schools and this is something that could be used in the residential homes to ensure they are emotionally friendly places to be and train staff up to deal with mental health and signpost young people.

Michael informed the Board that there is a saying within the in-house service that "Every child deserves someone who thinks the world of them" and that is what is promoted and wants every young person to have a care worker they can reach out to and have any conversation they want with that worker. When young people have something they need support with, not only is it recognised, it is responded to and the right response is given at the right time. A lot of that is down to the key relationships that young people and care workers have.

Support for carers and staff in-house has been difficult as they have put the needs of young people ahead of staff. Workers have face to face discussions and supervision and are signposted to Employment Support and also SCAYT sessions offered to support staff to be physically and emotionally well to ensure the needs of the young people in care of the Authority are met.

Within the wider service, there has been a lot of support for foster carers from social care and social workers and families who look after young people which is incredibly wide. Within 72 hours over 700 Children's Services staff were mobilised to work from home to ensure they could keep in contact with young people and carers. The Fostering Services ensured all foster carers knew where to access help from and a weekly newsletter was produced so that everybody knew what was happening and kept up to date. There are lots of lessons to be learnt from the whole pandemic within different services should this ever happen again. Foster carers have supported each other within their own forums and done an amazing job in extremely difficult circumstances. Everybody is learning as the pandemic continues and adapting as required. Newsletters have also been sent to adoptive parents which has been greatly received as well as additional support offered.

The Board thanked all of the residential staff as well as fostering and adoption staff/carers who have been committed to supporting young people in care throughout the pandemic.

5. Young People's Experiences of Living through the COVID-19 Pandemic

LINX (Lancashire's Children in Care Council) provided a report to the Board that was circulated with the agenda of the experiences of 22 children in care aged between 12 and 18 years which was captured during two weeks in lockdown.

The report gave examples of what those young people would be doing usually if not in lockdown, how they were coping with isolation, what are the positives to come out lockdown and what the key themes were. Feedback can be found in the presentation.

Mia Leyland gave an update on the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum during lockdown where they had continued to deliver the groups albeit virtually, and have also increased the frequency too from monthly to fortnightly.

Care Leavers are an isolated group anyway and Barnardo's wanted to ensure there was an extra layer of support for them. Membership has also increased during lockdown with new young people attending which has been good. Attendance at the Care Leavers group meetings have also increased as well which is positive and by making them virtual meetings, has removed some of the barriers of physically attending the meetings and travel issues which before would prevent young people from attending. Therefore going forward this is something that will be taken forward in the future offering hybrid meetings (some in the building and other members virtual). For the Children in Care meetings, the younger people find digital meetings more of a challenge, especially if they are new members and prefer the face to face meetings and the social contact they get from this meeting. The groups have changed slightly with more of a social aspect to them during lockdown, with quizzes, cook and eat sessions, art sessions (supplies sent out and vouchers also so they can get what is needed to participate). Barnardo's have supplied an emergency fund during COVID-19 which has enabled vouchers to be given to young people who have been struggling buying food, paying bills etc.

Young people are still taking part in consultations for example with the Department for Education so their voices are still being heard, CC Brown and Sharon Hubber joined a Care Leavers Forum meeting where young people were able to ask what was happening with social care and support. Barnardo's have distributed care packages which includes mental health information, mindfulness support and been a point of contact for young people during the pandemic.

Young people commented that they have found online meetings better than not having any meetings at all due to the social distancing aspect and that the meetings have been adapted to make them fun as well as provide them with information that they need. Young people found it less isolating and enjoyed seeing different faces and helped them to stay positive and connected.

It was noted that Children's Services are now looking at different ways of meeting up with young people ie meeting in parks, going for a walk, meeting for a coffee and making social bubbles and Barnardo's were encouraged to look at this also within their different groups. It was confirmed that discussions are also happening with the Health and Safety Team at Barnardo's around this on guidance.

One of the young people has been working on a recipe book for young people and care leavers which includes vegan and vegetarian meals, so caters for everyone and will be available digitally.

Action: Barnardo's to send a copy of the recipe book to Sam Gorton who will share with Roxanne McAllister who will promote it within Children's Services.

6. Any Other Business

Brendan Lee, who will be the new Head of Service for Children Looked After and Care Leavers gave an overview on what work has been done during lockdown.

The Board were encouraged to watch the video below of care leavers experiences throughout this pandemic.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_k9BoM4qkc&feature=youtu.be

Roxanne McAllister, Children's Social Care Team Manager gave an update on how colleagues had called-in to young people just for a chat, nothing formal which had been received really well with young people and it has been proven that this has developed more meaningful relationships between young people and their workers.

Young people have kept themselves up to date with what has been happening throughout COVID-19 and following guidance and changes when announced and have been really responsible which is a credit to them.

In terms of what has been happening with support, all young people were risk assessed to see who needed face to face support and who could be contacted over the phone. This had to be balanced with keeping young people safe as well as the care workers whilst ensuring that social distancing guidelines were adhered to along with making sure young people did not feel isolated throughout and to support them and be there for them as much as possible.

Extra financial help has been available for young people and personal advisors have been shopping for them and making sure they have everything they need. Lots of social engagement work has taken place on social media, video diaries, games, online activity days, a cook-a-long session virtually making vegetable lasagne. These are just some of the ways staff have been interacting with young people.

Housing has been a particular challenge during this time due to landlords not letting accommodation. Housing protocols for care leavers are being produced and also there are also plans to expand the housing offer and working is underway with Procurement on this.

A Mental Health Strategy is also in the process of being written and engagement from stakeholders is being sought to enable a multi-agency approach to support our young people and ensure this piece of work is bespoke for care leavers.

Some big strategic pieces of work that will need to be brought to future Corporate Parenting Boards are:

- Housing and working with District Councils to ensure there is an offer which is not only equitable but that quality housing is provided for our care leavers and improves lives and has an impact on them too.
- Work on Homeless protocols.
- ASDAN work.
- Delivering a different leaving care service going forward.
- Ensuring all staff are upskilled to support young people/care leavers in mental health and development an Improvement Plan.

Brendan and Roxanne were thanked for their update.

7. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, 10 September 2020 at 6pm virtually via Zoom.