

Time Commenced: - 6.00 pm  
Time Finished: - 8.05 pm

## **CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMISSION 4 SEPTEMBER 2007**

Present: Councillor Rawson (Chair)  
Cllrs Ginns, Higginbottom and Poulter

### **12/07 Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **13/07 Late Items to be Introduced by the Chair**

In accordance with Section 100(B)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Chair agreed to admit the following as a late item to enable Members' visits to Children's Homes to commence as soon as possible:

- **22/07: Visits by Elected Members to Children's Homes**

### **14/07 Declarations of Interest**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Type of Interest</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Councillor Higginbottom	Personal	Vice Chair of Governors – Ashgate Primary School
Councillor Ginns	Personal	Volunteer Youth Worker
Councillor Rawson	Personal	Governor – da Vinci Community College
	Personal	Trustee / Management Board Member – Umbrella
	Personal	Trustee / Management Board Member – Derwent Stepping Stones

### **15/07 Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Commission – 19 June 2007**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2007 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## 16/07 Call – In

There were no items.

## 17/07 Statistical Information on Children Looked After

The Commission received a report from the Corporate Director for Children and Young People which provided the Sub-Commission with statistical information on Children Looked After.

Keith Woodthorpe presented the report. It showed that performance had improved or been maintained in all areas despite a significant increase in numbers of Children Looked After. There were 410 Children Looked After at 1 August 2007, an increase of 19 since 1 May 2007.

The in house placements were currently fully stretched, and the use of Independent Agency Foster Carers was increasing. At 1 August 2007, eight children were placed with Agency Foster Carers within the Local Authority boundary. A further 47 children were with Agency Foster Carers outside the boundary. The cost of these placements was around three times higher than placing children with Local Authority Foster Carers.

Councillor Rawson asked for reasons why the number of Children Looked After was so high. Keith Woodthorpe confirmed that 2007 has been a very busy year. The number of Children Looked After was the highest it has been since at least 1997, and this number was increasing. Numbers were increasing nationwide, especially within city authorities.

Councillor Poulter asked about the increase in children staying with relatives and friends. Katie Harris, Head of Service – Fostering and Adoption, replied that the Council had to consider the extended family first. Government guidelines suggest that approximately 20% of children should be placed in this way. A range of safeguards were in place before relatives or friends could be approved as foster carers. For example, all children subject to interim or full care orders must be placed with approved Foster Carers.

Councillor Rawson pointed out that only 5.4% of Children Looked After aged 10 or above offended between 1 October 2006 and 31 July 2007. This compared very well with other authorities.

**Resolved to note appendix 2 of the report.**

## 18/07 Fostering Service Report

The Commission received the yearly report informing them about the activity of the Derby City Fostering Service. This covered the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007. In addition, updated figures to July 2007 were provided.

Katie Harris presented the report. The Service continued to improve during the period, despite demand pressures increasing further since April 2007. There has been a rise in demand for Foster Carers, and also an increase in both enquiries from prospective Foster Carers and in the number of assessments.

The Sub Commission were advised that there were 181 Foster Carers as of 3 September 2007, compared with 175 at March 2007. Although numbers were increasing, there was a lack of carers able to take large sibling groups or troubled children. The change in age profile of the children was also highlighted. There were 113 Children Looked After under the age of four at the last count, which was more than double the figure of three years ago.

The role of Independent Fostering Agencies was then discussed. Councillor Ginns asked how these agencies were funded. Katie Harris replied that they charged the City a flat rate regardless of the age of the child or the experience of the carer. This was currently about £800 per week. As the cost was much higher than using Local Authority carers, there was a need to use Local Authority carers where possible.

Councillor Rawson asked if the rates paid to Local Authority carers could be varied. Katie Harris advised that the budget was increased by £500,000 two years ago, bringing the rates paid to Derby's Local Authority carers close to that recommended by the Fostering Network. Only inflationary increases had been made since then, which meant that Derby's payments were falling behind private rates again. Keith Woodthorpe added that budgetary pressures were predicted in 2008-09 as well. Although few existing carers had been lost, it was suggested by Keith Woodthorpe that more applicants may come forward if higher rates of allowances were payable.

Councillor Ginns enquired about the publicity campaigns conducted by the Fostering Service. Katie Harris replied that there was an advertising campaign on Ram FM. Also, the Derby Evening Telegraph published a two-page article about four times a year. GMTV also support the Service, but a TV campaign would be double the cost of the annual publicity budget and so would be unaffordable. Other campaigns involved posters on Arriva buses starting in October, and a leaflet in the annual Council Tax mailing. Current Foster Carers were encouraged to be ambassadors for the service, both through word-of-mouth and by appearing on radio advertisements.

Councillor Rawson asked if anything else should be done to improve further the retention of existing Foster Carers and the recruitment of new ones. Katie Harris believed that a serious uplift in fees would be needed. More staff were now required to further speed up the application process, which were not needed a year ago.

## **Resolved**

- 1. To continue to receive an annual report from the Fostering Service for the period from 1 April to 31 March, and to review the Statement of Purpose as required by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.**
- 2. To produce a monthly highlights report for managers to track key indicators of performance.**
- 3. To note the work and developments of the Fostering Service as outlined in the report.**

## **19/07 Adoption Agency Report**

The Commission received the yearly report informing them about the activity of the Derby City Adoption Agency. This covered the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.

The report was presented by Katie Harris. She highlighted an increase in activity and a corresponding number of Adoption Panel meetings, achieved by creating a second panel. Councillor Rawson asked if the increase in meetings has solved capacity issues. Katie Harris replied that it was very helpful, as it was much easier to deal with cases in a timely fashion. However, it was too early to tell if all issues had been solved.

The PAF indicator of adoption orders made decreased during the period of the report. This had been traced to the implementation of further sections of the Adoption and Children Act on 31 December 2005. The process slowed down while all parties learned to work with the new legislation. The resulting 'ripple effect' led to a decrease in adoption orders between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007. Improvements had been made in the last few months. Despite the decrease, Keith Woodthorpe pointed out that the Derby Adoption Agency was still in the top quartile nationally and still met its targets.

Katie Harris mentioned that the Adoption Agency budget included an expected £110,000 income from recharges, where approved adopting families based in the Derby City Council area take a child from another Local Authority. This represented the cost of processing the applicant. This target was met in the period detailed in the report. However, this may not be possible in this financial year because of the amount of Derby children awaiting placement.

There was now an agreement with Doncaster Adoption and Welfare Society to take control of inter-country adoptions. This was recognised as a very detailed and complex field, and Doncaster Adoption and Welfare Society were nationally recognised as specialists in the area.

Councillor Poulter congratulated the Adoption Agency on a successful report. Councillors Rawson and Ginns both praised the Statement of

Purpose as being well laid out and easy to read.

## **Resolved**

- 1. To continue to receive an annual report from the Adoption Agency for the period from 1 April to 31 March, and to review the Statement of Purpose as required by the Adoption Minimum Standards.**
- 2. To produce a monthly highlights report to track key indicators of performance.**
- 3. To ensure that the Agency continues to develop adoption support services in line with the National Adoption Standards.**
- 4. To note the work and developments of the Adoption Agency as outlined in the report.**

## **20/07 Adoption and Fostering Inspection Report**

The Commission considered a report from the Corporate Director for Children and Young People resulting from the first joint inspection of the Fostering and Adoption services, conducted by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in November 2006. The report was referred to the Commission by the Council Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

Katie Harris advised that the final report was published by CSCI in March 2007. She reported that the inspections were very positive in both adoption and fostering. The minor shortfalls identified were due to process rather than a deficiency in outcomes. The inspection was earlier than expected, and involved two fostering inspectors and two adoption inspectors scrutinising services in the same week.

One of the shortfalls identified in Adoption was the lack of a written Children's Guide as required by the Regulations. Materials were available to children, but not in the prescribed format. A Children's Guide had been prepared in the correct format since the inspection, and was now in print.

Another Adoption shortfall related to departmental practice in the recording of personnel files. Changes had since been made in line with recommendations.

Minor shortfalls in Fostering related to the recording of risk assessments on carers' files, and also about a lack of specialist nurse time available to Children Looked After. Changes had since been made to risk assessment forms to meet recording requirements, and discussions with the PCT had led to the creation of a second specialist nurse for Children Looked After.

Discussions were continuing about the security of adoption files and archives, following concern expressed by inspectors in this aspect of the Disaster Recovery Plan. One possibility was electronic scanning of

papers; another was more fire-resistant cabinets for housing unique and confidential items. There were cost implications in both cases, and it was agreed that a scanned copy could not replace unique papers such as letters from a birth mother to her child.

Councillor Rawson asked if actions had been taken to cover all areas of concern. Katie Harris confirmed that action had been taken in all areas. Councillor Poulter then asked how progress could be reviewed. Katie Harris replied that Ofsted has now taken over the job of inspecting from CSCI, and no contact has been made by Ofsted as yet. It is therefore unclear at this point how external inspectors would track progress.

Councillor Rawson thanked the Fostering Service and Adoption Agency for their in-depth reports. He also congratulated them for the very good results shown in the reports, on behalf of the Sub Commission.

**Resolved to note the report, and also acknowledge the positive process made in the two service areas as outlined therein.**

## 21/07 Care Matters – Time for Change

The Commission received an update on progress with this major policy initiative, previously discussed by the Sub-Commission on 19 December 2006. This was presented by Keith Woodthorpe.

The recommendations contained in the report had been reviewed by the Children Looked After strategic group meeting. Eight of the recommendations had already been achieved.

One of the recommendations achieved was singled out by the Sub Commission for particular praise. This was *'Preventing local authorities from discharging young people prematurely from their care placements until they are properly prepared and ready to move on to the next stage of their lives'* (page 11 of Summary). Keith Woodthorpe reported that Derby was a nationally recognised example in this field, improving the chances for the young people in adult life. The last ten years had shown improvement on improvement in Leaving & Aftercare, and the indicators showed this.

The national funding amounts had been announced for the financial years 2007-08 to 2010-11. However, the funding announcements for individual councils would not be made until early December. Although initial plans could be made, no movement was possible on resource-dependent projects until this time. The 2008-09 budget would be completed as soon as the funding was announced.

**Resolved to recognise the encouraging progress made in meeting the recommendations made in the Care Matters – Agenda for Change report.**

## 22/07 Visits by Elected Members to Children's Homes

The Commission agreed to receive an update on the re-instatement of unannounced rota visits by Members to children's homes. One Member of the Sub Commission would lead these inspections, and they would be accompanied by a Member from the ward the home was in and one other Member of the Council.

Councillor Poulter advised that the timetable for visits would be two visits per Sub Commission Member per month in October, November and December. There would be one more visit per Sub Commission Member in early 2008. Councillor Higginbottom asked if the availability of Sub Commission Members would be a priority when drawing up the timetable. Councillor Poulter replied that this would be the case.

Councillor Poulter suggested that a standard form be used prioritising one or two areas in the home to inspect.

Keith Woodthorpe, Assistant Director – Specialist Services, informed the Sub Commission that Rod Jones, Head of Service – Residential & Leaving Care and Kevin Fletcher, would be happy to give their input. Councillor Rawson welcomed their involvement.

**Resolved to note the report**

Minutes End