

Meeting	Corporate Parenting Board
Date	5 March 2014
Present	Councillors Looker (Chair), Runciman (Vice-Chair), Cuthbertson, Scott and Wiseman
Apologies	Councillors Brooks, Funnell and Potter

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## **20. Declarations of Interest**

At this point in the meeting, Members were asked to declare any personal, prejudicial or disclosable pecuniary interests they might have in relation to the business on the agenda or other general interests they might have within the remit of the Board. None were declared.

## **21. Minutes**

Resolved: That the minutes of the last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 2 December 2013 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

## **22. Public Participation**

It was reported that there were no registrations to speak under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

## **23. Independent Reviewing Officers: Manager's Annual Report 2013**

Members considered the draft 2013 Annual Report of the Manager of Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO). The draft report provided a detailed overview of the service in 2013-14 including information on the reporting period, the legal, statutory and national context of the IRO Role, the structure of the City of York Council IRO Service, IRO caseloads and unit performance (including data on the number of reviews, timeliness of reviews, participation in reviews, consultation prior to reviews and the distribution of review records), the profile of Looked After Children in York and the IRO impact on the outcomes for children and young people (including dispute resolution and escalation,

quality assurance audits and referrals for advocacy). The report also outlined the five key priorities for 2014-15.

The Head of Service (Resources), Children's Social Care and the Principal Advisor/Interim IRO Manager attended the meeting to present the report.

Members noted that while the purpose of the report was to meet the statutory requirements established by the IRO handbook (2010), the report also recognised and responded to the findings and recommendations of the Thematic Report in relation to an evaluation of the effectiveness of IRO's entitled "*Independent Reviewing Officers: Taking up the challenge*" published by Ofsted in 2013.

Members were informed that caseloads were currently too high and noted that IROs also chaired child protection conferences which, while enabling them to maintain their skills, took up a significant amount of their time. They were advised that authorisation had now been obtained for two additional sixth-month posts (one full time and one part time) and it was likely that these would be advertised through secondment opportunity and external advert. Members were advised that the posts were temporary to take into account of future Looked After Children projections, which indicated a decrease. Members asked that an update on recruitment of staff be provided at a future meeting of the Board.

Members noted that the Unit was currently located within the Children's Social Care Service however there was a question of where it would be best located to achieve independence. While there were good reasons for the unit reporting to the Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services, the independence of the unit was also a critical requirement.

With regard to the timely review of children, Members acknowledged that reduced capacity had impacted on performance and in turn achieving the timescales in which reviews have to be held. While only 79% of reviews had been completed on time during 2013, officers advised that they were confident that they would be able to meet the performance target of 90% this year.

With regard to participation in reviews, Members acknowledged that it was important to have a number of different methods of engaging with children and young people and to aim for high levels of participation through attendance. Members noted with interest the opportunity for children and young people to partially chair or co-chair their own

reviews. Members asked to see some comparative data on looked after children to enable them to compare York with other authorities and it was agreed that this would be provided at a future meeting. Members suggested that it would be useful if age profiles could be included in Table 6 “Method and Percentage Looked After Children Participating in their Review”

Officers acknowledged that the results in table 8 “Percentage of Looked After Children seen prior to Review” would have caused some concern and explained that they had thoroughly scrutinised the data and reasons behind it. They advised that capacity had caused some difficulties, with the overview of out of area children being most important to address. Members noted the limitations of the database which lead to gaps in data capture and the need to improve the recording of seeing of young people. Officers advised that they hoped to achieve what they felt was an achievable target of 50% principally through increasing capacity but also through more accurate recording.

With regard to the information provided in relation to the IROs impact on the outcomes for children and young people, Members were advised that the Dispute Resolution Process had been reviewed and revised during 2013. They acknowledged that the report did not tabulate a statistical return on the informal and formal resolutions achieved by the Unit in 2013 due to concerns about the validity and credibility of such data collected but that instead case examples had been provided to demonstrate where the unit had made a difference to the lives of children and young people. Members suggested it may be useful to include some examples of IROs in situations which didn't go as planned. They were advised that future reports would include statistical information on informal and formal resolutions achieved by the Unit.

At this point in the meeting (6.30pm), the Chair, Councillor Looker stood down from the Chair as she had to leave the meeting to fulfil another prior commitment. Councillor Runciman (Vice-Chair) took the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

With regard to the number of referrals to the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service, officers expressed the view that four referrals was an under representation in their view. It was agreed that further information be provided at a future meeting on how the council is fulfilling its advocacy role.

Members expressed concern at the number of interim IRO managers who had been in post during the last year and stated that this was

neither beneficial to staff members nor the service. Officers noted these concerns and advised Members that draft proposals for the long term future of the unit would be available shortly and an update would be provided at a future meeting.

Members considered the five priorities for 2014-15 which were detailed in the report.

The Board praised officers for presenting an honest and informative report. They recognised and acknowledged the recommendations contained within the report and noted the challenges faced by the unit and the tough targets it had to meet.

It was agreed that an update would be provided at a future meeting on the following areas which had been raised by Board Members.

- Long term plans for the unit including recruitment of additional staff
- Referrals to the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service
- Comparative data from other local authorities regarding participation in reviews.

Officers offered to provide a regular update on the IRO service if required.

Members acknowledged that the draft report needed to be considered by the City of York Safeguarding Children's Board before it could be finalised but stressed the need to see the final report in order to meet statutory requirements and it was agreed that this be added to the Board's work plan for 2014-15.

Resolved: (i) That the report be noted, with particular reference to the priorities for 2014-15

(ii) That an update on the concerns raised during consideration of the draft report be provided at a future meeting of the Board.

(iii) That the final report be presented to the Board at a future meeting.

Reason: To ensure that the independent reviewing officers are undertaking work which offers appropriate challenges to the care provision for looked after children and young

people and to improve it in accordance with the Looked After Children's Strategy 2012-15

## **24. Corporate Parenting Board Draft Work plan for 2014/15**

Consideration was given to the Board's work plan for the 2014-15 municipal year. It was agreed that the suggested items for consideration detailed at the bottom of the current work plan, and listed below, be fed into a draft work plan for the forthcoming municipal year. These were:

- The emotional well being of looked after children
- Promoting a positive sense of identity for all children
- Update from Service Manager and the elected Member with responsibility for visiting children's homes.
- Feedback from the Glen in the wider context of short breaks.
- A briefing note to be provided to the Board on lessons that could be learned from the Daniel Pelka case in Coventry.
- Profile of Looked after Children in the City – twice yearly update requested.
- Update on Strategic Partnership Arrangements

In addition to the above issues, it was agreed that it would be beneficial for Corporate Parenting Board Members to meet with both foster carers and members of the Show Me That I Matter Panel.

Resolved: (i) That the work plan be approved.

(ii) That a work plan for 2014-15 be drafted to include the suggestions detailed above.

Reason: To ensure that the Board has a planned programme of work in place.

Councillor Looker, Chair

[The meeting started at 5.30 pm and finished at 7.05 pm].

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