Present: Mark Buckle (chair), Peter Ronan (vice chair), Pam Weyer, Martyn Lovett, Kevin Martin, Keeley White, Carey Cake, Don Evans, Cathy Mouser, Julia Spinks, Antonella Parker, Sharon Donoghue, Michael Rosen.

Apologies: Anja Grau, Anne Ritchie.

Minutes of previous meeting agreed. Action Points checked.

1. **Network Group feedback:**
   North Walsham – Well attended. The speaker was Martyn Lovett who used this as an open forum for carers to discuss worries/concerns.
   CWD – A new venue of Roxley Hall Thorpe Road was used for this. Attendees were pleased with the lay out of the venue.

   The dates of Network Groups for Kings Lynn and Norwich coincide with the advisory partnership dates. We have therefore decided to move the dates for the advisory partnership to the 2nd Wednesday of each month with the exception of May which will be on the 4th May. Future dates as follows: 9th March, 13th April, 4th May, 8th June, 13th July, 10th August, 14th Sept, 12th Oct, 9th Nov, 14th Dec.

2. **Charter**
   Final amendments to the charter are taking place and the final version will be with us in the next couple of days. Amendments were suggested at the meeting and have been fed back to Christine Birchall and her team.
   The charter will be delivered via improving times and at social workers/managers workshops/roadshows in the next few weeks. Starting with Kings Lynn on the 10/2.
   In addition to help raise the profile of the group and spread the logo a newsletter to be devised and “Improving times” to be used for the delivery of the newsletter.
   (Mark, Cathy, Sharon) Liaise with Christine Birchall.
   Newsletter to be printed and handed out at Network Group Meetings. (Sharon/Duty)

3. **CPD:**
   Antonella will be briefing carers on allegations at the upcoming “Stepping Stones” courses.
4. **Team Around the Child:**
Discussion took place about whether carers should be the lead on PEP’s rather than the Social Worker. Following consultations, Keeley advised that whilst carers are a crucial part of the process, statutory duties, accountability and practicalities surrounding PEP’s suggests that the lead should remain as Social Workers. The new EPEP should alleviate any concerns about the PEP being lost. A suggestion that the conference for this year - Good Planning and Education (PEP’s).
TAC group to take forward to next meeting briefing sessions for PEPs, also the role of Social Worker/Carer/Child/School in PEP’s and what a good PEP looks like.  (PAM)

5. **Placements, short term break and use of foster carers:**
- Many carers have fed back to the group their worries regarding the impact of not having been offered placements. Carers are concerned that placements are going to agency carers, when inhouse carers could be used. Peter confirmed that this is not the case and that agency are used only if the inhouse alternatives aren’t viable for many reasons such as the age of the child, the make up of the carers family, the distance from the child’s existing educational provision.
- Norfolk County Council is not recruiting carers who can only offer an U5’s placement. Mike and Peter will be offering a workshop for carers who are effected by lack of placements, the date of this to be advised. In the meantime carer can contact their supervising social workers with their concerns and they will be able to provide solutions and suggestions.
- U5’s carers are the group most affected. Martyn gave an example where a baby needed to be placed in the Yarmouth area. There were 17 carers who were available for this placement. There is a change of strategy in Norfolk – the Sufficiency Strategy makes sure that children in Norfolk have the right resources.
- Other questions raised by carers expressed worries that due to the Ofsted inspection the NCC is going to be taken over. Cathy said that the situation is that Dave Hill has been appointed as a Children’s Commissioner for Norfolk under a directions notice. Dave Hill – Director of Essex County Council is helping a number of LA’s with improvement. Mr Hill has outlined his intention which is to spend time in Norfolk and at the end of March he will provide a report which will identify in the region of 5 key areas for improvement. He is suggesting that he will then oversee the improvement against those key areas. Mr Hill has been open and honest and appears committed to assisting Norfolk to make the further improvements that are needed.
Cathy advised some of the media reporting was unhelpful and fuelled the suggestion of a ‘take over’. Cathy said that there are no plans for a take over.

- Cathy suggested sending improving times to carers to help carers feel more included in occurrences. (Martyn)

6. **Permanency and Long Term Foster Care Panel:**
The Panel has been set up to ensure good matching through good quality assessment and a supportive plan. The role is to quality control and oversee cases to ensure that there are no unduly delay and the case doesn’t drift.

In addition to this is a Transitions Panel; where a young person aged around 16 decides to move on from placement pathway planning will commence and will involve the young person in planning for their future and help them in areas such as housing where they might need assistance. The object being to ensure the young person has a good quality plan for their future ahead of the time. The role of the IRO is vital in this process to achieve good practise.

7. **Strategy for Change:**
Antonella asked if we would find it useful to look at the evolution of caring for children, to understand the history of how we got here and why people have their personal perspectives of carers and social workers. Different standpoints mean some social workers automatically view carers as professionals and want to work in partnership whilst others don’t. From a greater understanding of the past and the effects on us as human beings we can make changes for the future.

Some felt that the reasons for this lie in social workers not knowing enough about the role of foster Carers. Michael added that there is an Independent Review currently looking at this. Carers aren’t employed therefore have different procedures to workers for many matters and this is evident in incidents where carers have had children removed without correct disruption procedures. The rules of natural justice should apply, so carers should be given support to improve and only after this has been proved to be ineffective the child should be removed.

To effect change we should all have the same philosophy with the same basic messages, similar to what we are aiming to achieve with the charter. A starting point for this would be for workers to provide feedback to annual reviews as a matter of course. Cathy will ensure this happens. (Cathy) Could this appraisal system be mutual so carers provide comments for workers?
8. **Ofsted Action Plan:**

Following the inspection there were 19 recommendations, with 6 areas where Norfolk Children’s Services was rated as inadequate there are:

1. A group of unallocated cases in one LAC team.
2. Having "lost touch" with 190 care leavers.
3. Poor quality PEPs.
4. Very low level of Initial Health Assessments completed within timescale.
5. Poor tracking of cases going through care proceedings.
6. Poor quality of planning, including pathway plans.

Steps to improve have already been made, for example with regards to unallocated cases – there are none now.

Written by Sharon Donoghue 3/2/16
Checked by Mark Buckle 8/2/16