

Corporate Parenting Board

Tuesday 10 January 2023 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference room 2, Walsall Council House

Board Members Present:

Councillor S. Elson (Chair)
Councillor. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Hicken
Councillor I. Hussain
Councillor A. Hussain
Councillor Mazhar
Councillor Worrall

Officers Present

Colleen Male	Director, Children's Social Work
Elise Hopkins	Director, Customer Engagement
Jo Manning	Group Manager
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service (Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services)
Jenny Cockcroft	Group Manager
Lorraine Thompson	Head of Virtual School
Mark Burrows	Group Manager (Fostering and Adoption)
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse LAC (Walsall ICB)

Welcome

At this point in the meeting, the Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone present. She also noted that the meeting to the papers, which could be found on the Council's Committee Management Information system (CMIS) webpage.

15/23 Introductions and Apologies

There were no apologies or substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

16/23 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest or party whip for the duration of the meeting.

17/23 Minutes

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2022, were submitted.

(see annexed)

Resolved (Unanimous)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2022, copies having previously been circulated to each member of the Board, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Committee agreed to receive item 8 - The Fostering Service Annual Report 2021-2022 prior to item 6 – Young People Engagement.

18/23 The Fostering Service Annual Report 2021-2022

The Group Manager (Fostering and Adoption) presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board was informed that the report summarised the activity of the fostering service from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. The structure of the fostering service was described, along with the changes that had been made to the staffing structure.

The Board was advised that there had been an increase in the number of Children in Care in Walsall over the last 5 years, from 645 in 2017 to 648 on 5 December 2022. However, at the end of March 2022, there were 196 approved internal fostering households. In 2021, the Fostering Service introduced a referral fee of £500 which on approval of the applicant by Fostering Panel, was payable to the referrer.

The Group Manager described the connected foster carer and special guardianship arrangements – many connected foster carers were assessed and approved on the basis that they would go on to apply to be the child's special guardian. This arrangement prompted legal permanence for the child.

The Mocking Bird model was described to the Board; Members were informed that this model was progressive for a Local Authority the size of Walsall.

Officers were congratulated on achieving foster friendly status for the Council. The Board asked for an update on the recommendations made by the Board during the previous municipal year. The Director stated that there had been a recommendation relating to the advertisement of independent fostering agencies

using roundabout advertisement space. Work had taken place to ensure that this would no longer happen, and that there would be an increase of advertisements for the Councils fostering service.

In response to Member questions, the Director stated that the Council branding would be reviewed to ensure that the profile of the service was raised. There had been more in person engagement including, supermarkets, Walsall Pride and leisure centres.

A discussion ensued on the level of interest being expressed by staff in response to the fostering friendly status, and the promotion of this at other organisations. A Member requested a glossary of terms for inclusion in reports where acronyms were used.

Resolved

That the Fostering Service Annual Report 2021-2022 was noted.

19/23 Young People Engagement

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed).

The Board discussed member attendance at 'Total Respect' training and how this could be increased in the future. It was agreed that bespoke training would be offered for Elected Members and consideration would be given to how this can be tailored.

Further information was provided on the children in care council activity, including their input into the future celebration events. It was noted that although the face-to-face group would continue, a virtual group would be restarted to encourage participation.

Members were informed that feedback from care leaver's week had been positive and indicated that young people would welcome the opportunity to interact with senior leaders and elected members.

A Member suggested that opportunities may be available for children in care to use the Bryntysilio Outdoor Centre.

Resolved

1. That the Young People Engagement be noted.
2. That a bespoke 'Total Respect' training session is developed for Elected Members.

20/23 Children's Residential Service

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report provided an overview of changes to the current service model through expansion and aims to improve outcomes for children and young people. The Board were informed that Cabinet had endorsed the plan by Children's Services to open and run two new children's homes. These homes would focus on the more complex, hard to place and therefore more costly placements. They would also be used for children in the process of being able to return home or step down to foster care.

The Board was informed that the Councils looked children population had increased and continued to grow since 2019, there had been a gradual reduction in children in care over the last 12 months. However, the number of children accommodated in residential provision had doubled since 2019, from 37 to 75 in the last three years.

The Board was informed of legislation that made it unlawful to place children under the age of 16 in unregistered accommodation. It was stressed that this was a complex process and a discussion ensued on the process and procedure of placing a child in unregistered accommodation – stressing that a higher level of management oversight was carried out.

It was hoped that the residential homes would be operational in May/June; the service was in the process of applying for planning permission and in the process of registering with Ofsted. In response to Member questions, the Board was informed that where possible children would attend the same school, if the child was out of school, work would be done with the virtual school to identify the most appropriate educational provision. The Head of the Virtual School confirmed that she had met with the Manager of one of the new homes and the Designated Nurse confirmed that she had also provided training to the Manager.

Councillor Jukes provided feedback on her visit to Hilton Road:

- The home was clean and welcoming.
- The staff were knowledgeable.
- Young people were provided with the opportunity to speak in a way in which they were comfortable.
- Requests made by Young People would be fed back to Senior Managers.

The Board challenged if the FLASH service had been restored. The Group Manager stated that a more robust service was being sought and was a work in progress; contingency plans were in place until this happened.

The Young Persons champion had met with young people in residential care to seek their feedback. It was reported that three of the five young people in the home had been spoken with, and expressed that they felt happy and well cared for – they felt that they could speak up about issues

Resolved

That the Children's Residential Service be noted.

21/23 CCG Assurance Report

The Designated Nurse for Looked after Children presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report provided an overview of the statutory responsibilities of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) in relation to Looked after Children and the performance of these responsibilities. Further information was provided to the Board on the ICB, and the benefits that it would bring to Walsall – through equalisation of resources.

The Board considered the data in relation to initial health assessments, and the reasons for this included:

- Late notification of coming into care.
- Carers overlooked the appointment.
- Children missing/refused.
- Extended hospital stays.
- Cancellation due to Covid-19.
- An increase of children coming into care.

It was noted that the percentage of dental checks completed had declined due to Covid-19. This continued to be monitored and was beginning to recover. The Board was informed that NHS England were developing pathways for this cohort. It was confirmed that a health app had been developed for children leaving care, which contained their health summaries.

In response to questions from Members, the Designated Nurse stated that it was difficult to forecast pressures as it was dependent on how many children came into care however extra clinics were arranged where necessary. It was noted that there were situations, which could not be controlled, and it would be difficult to consistently hit 100%. It was also stressed that children with known health needs were prioritised.

It was noted that the next meeting would be an engagement session with young people, and would be held at the TLC hub.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.30 p.m.

Signed

Date