

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

7 January 2020 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present

Councillor Wilson (Chair)
Councillor Jukes
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor Jeavons
Councillor M. Nazir
Councillor Neville
Councillor Statham

Officers Present

Colleen Male	Assistant Director for Children's Social Care
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services
Zoe Morgan	Group Manager – Corporate Parenting
Michelle Cummings	Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement)
Nicola Denning	Head of Performance Improvement and Quality
Lorraine Thompson	Head of Virtual School
Sarah Shingler	Clinical Commissioning Group
Alison Jones	Clinical Commissioning Group

Representing Young People

Lee Mohammed Ali Portia	Co-Charing the meeting
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98/20 Apologies

None.

99/20 Substitutions

None.

100/20

Minutes

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on 11th November, 2019, were submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th November, 2020, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record subject to Sue Walters being added to the list of attendees.

101/20

Young People Engagement

The co-chair led on this item.

At the request of the co-chair, the Children and Young Persons Champion presented the report.

(Annexed)

The Board heard that the annual survey had been completed and analysed. Catch 22 had delivered 2 workshops to corporate parenting staff and transition and leaving care teams, to consider new and creative ways to increase the level of involvement and reach a wider range of young people. Catch 22 had also met with young people.

The Board noted that:-

- Work was underway to develop champions across the service to promote engagement and participation of young people;
- 'Whatsapp' was being trialled;
- Staff visiting residential homes promoted the young people champions role and who the champions are to encourage engagement;
- The vacancy for a participation apprentice was being re advertised;
- A Newsletter had been completed and circulated;
- Work was being undertaken with Sandwell to learn from their Children in Care Council;
- A Reece café had been held with the Rees Foundation that offer emotional and financial support.

Members congratulated staff and young people on the work that had been undertaken. A conversation followed regarding the meeting venue and the Chair agreed to hold meetings alternatively at The Council House and The Hub. In doing so, he asked Board members and officers to dress more causally at future meetings.

The Chair sought clarity as to when the Participation Apprentice may be appointed. The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services advised that they appointed an individual but were unable to progress. Work was underway to consult with the councils lead on apprenticeships to identify the best way to advertise and raise awareness of the role.

In response to a question relating to Walsall children's experience in care compared to Sandwell, the Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services explained that Walsall had appointed its Children's Champion in 2018 and the journey was developing. Neighbouring authorities had a good offer but work was required to develop regional connectivity and share resources collaboratively. Partnership arrangements were working well so far with Sandwell and working collaboratively was positive. Walsall was part of a benchmarking forum and attended 6 monthly events to share ideas.

The Chief Nursing Officer/Director of Quality explained that there had been changes across the 4 Clinical Commissioning Groups. A single executive team was now in place which would foster learning and encourage Local Authorities to work more closely.

The Chair referred to Whatsapp and asked how long the pilot would last, whether young were aware and, if so, what their view was. Officers explained that this was a new offer. Meetings had been held with ICT before Christmas and all Transition and Leaving Care Service Personal Advisors, together with 1 Corporate Parenting Team, had now downloaded Whatsapp. The plan was to expand the offer to LAC over the next 3 months and sign up to business use. Other Corporate Parenting Teams were trialling different applications to see which worked best. In essence, Whatsapp was up and running but in its infancy. There would be a further meeting with ICT at the end of January. By the end of March, 2020 a decision would be made on which platform Walsall will adopt. Young people advised that they used a variety of social media including Whatsapp, Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok.

The Chair thanked the officer for the update and noted that this was an issue which the Board had made a demonstrable impact to improve the service received by young people.

In relation to the annual survey, the Chair asked when the Board would receive feedback. In response, Officers advised that there had been a good response. In future, surveys would be electronic to increase take up further. The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services confirmed that the Board would receive feedback at its February Board. This would inform the Boards work plan for future years and assist with refreshing pledges.

The Chair asked for clarity regarding transport being a barrier for some young people attending Council for Kids meetings. The Children and Young Persons Champion confirmed that they now had access to a minibus and residential help (as they have a people carrier) which was helpful. However, often Foster Carers looked after several children and so commitments could overlap which meant that they were unable to provide transport. The Chair asked how many young people may want to attend but were unable to. The Children and Young Persons Champion advised that an exact number wasn't available but it was clear that more would attend if transport wasn't a barrier.

The Chair and members thanked young people for coming along.

Lee stated that when he first met Michelle she introduced him to Children in Care Council. He found it challenging initially but then realised that it was a new way for children to get their voices heard. He also thanked Michelle for helping him secure a part time job.

Resolved

That the Annual Survey be submitted to the Board in February, 2020.

102/20

Children Living Out of Borough (Council Tax)

The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services presented the report.

(Annexed)

Officers explained that efforts were made, where appropriate, to bring young people back into Walsall. Offering to pay for their council tax provided an incentive. For some young people, such as those with families living outside the borough or those who have gone to college/university the incentive may not be attractive.

The Board considered the options in relation to funding council tax for those living outside the borough noting that if the same entitlement was applied at 100% (matching the offer to those within the borough) it could cost circa £30k per year. Other models were considered, such as graduated offers. Officers sought clarity from the Board as to whether the discount would apply up to the age of 25 or restricted to 21, as that was the age many young people discuss whether to become independent.

The Chair explained what council tax was to young people and confirmed that a decision was taken some years ago to pay council tax for care leavers that live within Walsall, as the Council is responsible for them. However, young people that attended the Board 18 months ago

had highlighted that young people living outside the borough did not get the same support. The Chair clarified that it was his view that the Council should support young people outside of the borough by providing the same level of support with council tax up to the age of 25. He explained that a graduated scheme would be unfair.

Members of the Board supported the view of the Chairman stating that offering the same level of support to all care leavers whether in or out of the borough was the right thing to do.

Resolved (unanimously)

1. That Walsall Council matches the exemption of council tax for its care leavers, up to the age of 25, irrespective of where the individual resides; and;
2. That a detailed and fully costed report be submitted to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity for determination.

103/20

Operation Work Streams (Oversight)

The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services presented the report.

(Annexed)

She explained that since the creation of the workstreams 2 years ago, a number of issues had been addressed. However, some remained as 'ongoing' or were subject to a refresh and were no longer relevant or appropriate.

In relation to the respect and influence workstream, the Chair asked young people whether they felt able to share their wishes and feelings and whether they felt they were taken into account. Young people confirmed that they felt able to share their wishes and feelings and that they felt that they were listened to.

The Group Manager – Corporate Parenting referred to use of social media and stated that an application named 'MoMo' was used in other authorities. Use of social media enabled services to capture young people's feelings and communicate in a different way. Work would be carried out over the coming few weeks to look at different ways of gathering the views and wishes of young people.

Officers then drew members' attention to actions in progress, which had been transferred to the Participation and Engagement Plan and stated that reports would be submitted to future meetings to provide an update on the Plan.

In relation to the 'Home' work stream – a Permanence Steering Group had been established and an update would be provided to a future meeting of the Board. A member of the Board referred to articles in the national press regarding children in unsuitable accommodation and sought assurance that Walsall was fully compliant and that children were in suitable accommodation. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care advised that all Foster Carers were registered. There were different types of placements and the council always seeks to place children under 16 in registered placements. There were occasions, as part of care plan, that go into unregistered accommodation but the definition of 'unregistered' included camping/caravans and other activity based settings, which would not be recognised by Ofsted. Currently, there were no young people under 16 in unregistered accommodation. There were some 16-18 year olds in semi-supported accommodation which is unregistered and that's acceptable practice. The Board were assured that a protocol had been agreed that sets out different types of accommodation arrangements. The commissioning team and Social Workers had undertaken quality assurance visits and the new protocol confirmed that visits would continue. The Assistant Director for Children's Social Care confirmed that all requests for unregistered accommodation had to be authorised by her.

In relation to Personal Advisor caseloads, the Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services confirmed caseloads were at a manageable level of 22/23.

The Board then considered the Education, training and employment work stream. They were advised that this had now been integrated into the management board of the virtual school. The Head of the Virtual School advised that there were 7 priorities in Virtual School and provided an overview of performance. In doing so, it was highlighted that there was a good school attendance in Walsall and that schools were now responsible for personal education plans. As a result there had been a significant improvement in quality and timeliness with 98% completed by the end of term.

The chair asked whether the performance in reception had declined. The Head of the Virtual School advised that it was a small cohort of 12 but agreed that whilst there was year on year improvement there had been a drop last year. A 'deep dive' followed but there were no specific issues that led to the dip.

In respect of the Lifestyle and Leisure workstream, the Board were advised that this had been integrated into the Virtual School and Respect and Influence workstreams. The Chair asked what the level of demand had been for the leisure card. Officers advised that they didn't have specific numbers but confirmed that all young people had them and that the offer was being looked at.

The Chair queried whether children in care and care leavers still got priority with passport applications. The Board were advised that there was a very efficient process in place. There had been issues with adult passports but these were now tracked as part of the transition phase and part of planning. Passports were renewed at best point. The Chair sought assurance that everyone that wanted a passport received one. Officers advised that this was the case but caveated that some were very complicated and took time which, understandably, was frustrating for young people. Specialist lawyers were appointed to help where necessary.

The Chair then asked about the contact policy as he was aware that the budget had been reduced but was assured that it wouldn't affect provision. Officers advised that the family time service had been redesigned. It was previously contracted out but was now in house and based at Fallings Heath. Training had been provided to deliver it in a different way. It was acknowledged that demand could outstrip supply and that, when that happens, other options were explored, but that this was not a new issue. Officers advised that family time was now more therapeutic and delivered in such a way that was less observational. The Board were assured that it was a much better service and that but could always do better. The Chair questioned whether families were missing out and sought clarity as to what happens when there is too much demand. Officers advised that they mobilised support differently at times to meet demand.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

104/20

Corporate Parenting Board Refresh

The Board received a report providing a summary of the work to date undertaken by the multi-agency operational steering group which oversees the work of the various work streams.

(See Annexed)

The Group Manager – Corporate Parenting advised that the existing 17 pledges were not promoted well and confirmed that a meeting would be held to focus on work in other authorities to identify best practice. In addition, a meeting with the Children in Care Council to discuss the pledges including the possibility of having 2 sets of pledges focussing on older/younger children. Workshops had also been arranged with young people and partners and a member workshop was expected to take place in March, 2020.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

105/20

Health Report

The Designated Nurse (Looked After Children) gave a presentation to the Board during which it was explained that an annual report would be submitted to the Board in April.

Following the presentation, and in response to a question on key areas of focus, the designated nurse advised that there was a need to focus on mental health services and subsequent recommissioning. Members of the Board noted that there was a gap in provision which needed to be addressed. The designated nurse assured the Board that this formed part of the workplan and that the structure within the health service enabled issues such as these to be debated. It was also explained that the service was more proactive rather than reactive. The Senior Responsible Officer from the CCG advised that transition was a real issue. The CCG would work with providers to ensure that the CAMHS service would assist individuals up to the age of 18 from April, 2020. The FLASH service was also being reviewed.

The Chair questioned why some initial assessments had not been undertaken on time and asked why there was a lag in the system. The Designated Nurse stated that these areas were her initial focus and they aimed to improve quality and timeliness. The Board would be updated when the Annual Report was submitted but there should be a marked improvement. The Chair clarified that the Board took the health of young people very seriously and that a below par service would not be accepted and so they were pleased that matters were being addressed.

The Chair asked whether young people attended the health clinic held at the Transition and Leaving Care Hub. It was explained that drop in clinics were held every week to coincide with care leaver drop in sessions. More work would be carried out to raise awareness of the drop in clinic.

Resolved

1. That the update be noted; and
2. That the Annual Report be submitted in May, 2021.

106/20

Adoption Annual Report

The Chair reported that this item had been withdrawn.

107/20

Work Programme

The work programme was noted.

Meeting closed at 8.00 p.m.