

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

17 February, 2020 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present

Councillor Wilson (Chair)
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor Statham
Councillor T. Jukes

Officers Present

Sally Rowe	Executive Director – Children’s Services
Colleen Male	Director – Children’s Social Work
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)
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse, CCG
Mark Tobin	Adoption at Heart

Representing Young People

Lee
Portia
Jamie
Corinne

108/20 Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were received on behalf of Councillors Jeavons and Nazir.

109/20 Substitutions

None.

110/20 Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes be considered at a future meeting.

111/20 Substitution

There were no substitutions.

112/20 Young People Engagement

The Board considered the report of the Children's Champion (Participation and Engagement) (Annexed) together with a presentation by the young people present.

The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that a workshop had taken place earlier in the day with young people and went well.

In relation to the report, the Chair asked how many young people were a part of the Participation Champions Group. Officers explained that 9 were involved and the first meeting had taken place.

The Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement) advised that Lee had attended the YES project. Lee explained that it was about business and clothing and its impact on life. He had designed his own tracksuit based around mental health.

The Chair asked for an update on how young people would be engaged in the foster care selection process. Officers advised that discussions were taking place to identify the best way for young people to get involved and an update would be provided to a future meeting of the Board.

Young people explained that they liked participating in recruitment processes as it made a difference. The Chair fully supported young people's involvement in recruitment and in shaping services. He commented that it was of the utmost importance that young people shaped the services they received.

A member asked whether the Children in Care Council was sustainable. The Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement) said that having Champions would help make it sustainable. The group would also be split into older and younger groups to encourage discussion. Using Whatsapp was helping to communicate and encourage participation.

The committee requested an update on the use of Whatsapp. Jamie explained that he preferred it to texts as it was a free platform – you can also see when people are online. The Group Manager - Corporate Parenting explained that users of Whatsapp had to be 16 or above and that Corporate Parenting Teams were now using it as a method of communication. The Chair requested an update on the use of social media and platforms such as MOMO. The Director – Children's Social Work explained that MOMO may not provide a full solution and had cost implications but all options were being explored including a system used in Liverpool.

In closing, the Chair, on behalf of the Board congratulated those involved which led to the nomination to the 'inspiring youth' category of the Walsall Community Recognition Awards on 19th March 2020'.

Recommendations

1. That an update on young people involvement with foster care selection be provided to a future meeting of the Board;
2. That an update on the introduction and use of Social Media be provided to a future meeting.

113/20 Adoption Annual Report

The Board considered the report of the Adoption at Heart Service Lead (Annexed) together with a joint presentation by the Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services and Adoption at Heart Service Lead.

Throughout the presentation the importance of making decisions in a timely way was emphasised.

Referring to the report, the chair asked for further information on timeframes. The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services explained that it took on average 463 days, an improvement on previous years, better than statistical neighbours and the England average of 486.

The committee enquired as to how many foster carers then went on to adopt. The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services explained that there were two currently going through the process.

A young person then provided some detail surrounding their own experience in foster care whilst their siblings were adopted and enquired as to the possibility of contact. The Adoption at Heart service lead explained that contact would be decided by the judge. The Executive Director (Children's Services) explained that work was undertaken with family and adopters to help with contact and explain why it's important. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) agreed to look into this on behalf of the young person.

A young person asked whether a young person could choose to stay with foster carers rather than be adopted. Officers explained that they would not force adoption unless it was the right thing to do. Where foster carers develop a special bond then they would consider staying put arrangements/special guardianships or adoption with the foster carer. A young person stated that they should be able to have a say. The Group Manager - Corporate Parenting agreed entirely and stated that this happens via the children's guardian who acts on their behalf.

A young person asked what the legal age for adoption was to which the Adoption at Heart Service Lead explained that it was 21.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

114/20 Adoption at Heart – 6 month report

The Board considered the report of the Adoption at Heart Service Lead
(Annexed)

The Board were advised that the purpose of Adoption at Heart was to speed up the adoption process and have a pool of adopters across the Black Country. Nationally there are less children being adopted due in part to more children entering into permanent arrangements with own families which was positive. However, for those awaiting adoption it was important that families are available and that the process was as timely as possible.

In response to a question from a young person, the Adoption at Heart Service Lead explained the process for adoption and confirmed that the adoptive parents could change the child's last name should they wish. However, that young person could change it back once they reached the legal age to do so.

The Board were advised that significant levels of funding was now available from the government to help adopted children whereas previously there wasn't any.

The Board were advised that early permanence arrangements was used in the right circumstances. Fostering to adopt was now an 'opt out' process and should become automatic that successful placements are asked to adopt in the longer term.

Board members asked what was being done to change the perception that adoption is a long and difficult process. The Adoption at Heart Service Lead explained that there was a national campaign #youcanadopt supported by government funding which provides support until the child reaches 18 or finishes their education. He also confirmed that they used social media, papers and adverts to raise the profile of adoption noting that social media such as Facebook and Twitter were most effective.

The Chair enquired whether staffing was sufficient. He was advised that it was year 1 of operating and the number of children they were working with were greater than expected which put pressure on the staffing structure in place. The Executive Director (Children's Services) explained that each of the 4 councils pooled resources into the partnership and further work was being undertaken to understand future requirements, maximise efficiencies and ensure staffing levels were stable. She confirmed that Walsall would contribute and additional posts funded for a year had been identified.

The Chair asked whether the Regional Adoption Agency was viable, to which the Executive Director (Children's Services) confirmed that it was.

In respect of ensuring fairness in terms of placements, the Adoption at Heart Service Lead advised that children from all four councils were treated equally and prioritised according to need. In response to a question from the Chair,

the Board were advised that the number of adopters approved in the first 6 months was below target but this was due to adopters being transferred to the RAA. The true performance of the RAA would be seen in year 2.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

115/20 Quarter 3 Performance Report

The Board received a presentation from the Director (Children's Social Work).

(Annexed).

It was noted that there had been an increase in looked after children and suggested that it would be helpful to show the number of children exiting care. The Board were advised that there was some concern that some individuals had been in the same placement for some time and work was being undertaken to understand the reasons for this.

It was explained that initial health assessments were a key area of focus as timescales were not being met. This was, in part, due to social workers not notifying health colleagues when children entered care. This had been worked on and so figures should improve in future. The Chair expressed concern that just 44% had been completed in time. The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services agreed and assured the Board that they worked hard to review matters so that there were now only a few exceptions. The designated nurse at the CCG confirmed that health were committed to working with the authority to improve the timeliness of health assessments.

Young people provided some feedback on their experiences explaining that often changing social workers meant that they didn't have a good understanding of the young person which was frustrating. In addition, if they moved foster carers they would need to go to new doctors and dentists which could get confusing.

In closing, the Chair asked officers to include numbers rather than percentages in future scorecards as these were individuals rather than statistics.

Resolved

That future scorecards include numbers in addition to or in place of statistics.

116/20 Work programme

Resolved

That the work programme be noted.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.00 p.m.

Signed.....

Date.....