

Corporate Parenting Board

Tuesday 11 January 2022 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference room 2, Walsall Council House

Board Members Present:

Councillor T. Wilson (Chair)
Councillor Worrall (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Elson
Councillor Hicken
Councillor K. Ferguson
Councillor F. Mazhar

Officers Present

Mark Burrows	Group Manager Provider Services
Elise Hopkins	Director, Customer Engagement
David Hughes	Children and Young Persons Champion
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse LAC (Clinical Commissioning Group)
Helena Kucharczyk	Head of Performance Improvement and Quality
Colleen Male	Director, Children's Social Work
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service (Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services)
Debra Silvester	Group Manager
Lorraine Thompson	Head of Virtual School

Peshva Sharif	Team Leader, Black Country, Telford and Wrekin Independent Visitor Service.
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Kaiya Caines	Black Country, Telford and Wrekin Independent Visitor Service
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Young person representing the Children in Care Council.

Welcome

At this point in the meeting, the Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone present. He also noted that the meeting to the papers, which could be found on the Council's Committee Management Information system (CMIS) webpage. It was noted that a Shadow Board was held directly prior to the meeting to seek the views and experiences of young people.

23/21 Introductions and Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillor Murphy.

24/21 Substitutions

Councillor Elson substituted on behalf of Councillor Murphy for the duration of the meeting.

25/21 Minutes

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on 15 November 2021, were submitted.

(see annexed)

Resolved (Unanimous)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2021, copies having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Hicken as present.

26/21 Young People Engagement

The Children and Young Persons Champion described some of the highlights of Children in Care Council (CICC) since the last Board, and provided an update on the activities of the CICC. Members were informed that the CICC had been involved with face to face interview panels. The number of young people participating in face-to-face sessions at the Council4Kids had increased.

Members were informed that a WhatsApp peer support group had been established and was a positive way for children in care to keep in contact and for care leavers to receive support in relation to mental health and well-being. In addition to this seven referrals had been made to the Independent Visitor Service, this was as a result of its promotion at the Council4Kids meeting. A Member suggested that the Independent Visitor service should be promoted to Head Teachers through Schools Forum, Officers agreed to progress this.

The Committee were provided with details in relation to the project 'Language that Cares'. A report on this could be provided to the Board in the future.

Future dates for Total Respect training were shared, however this was conditional on securing venues. Members agreed that Council owned venues should be provided free of charge for this purpose.

The Young Person in attendance described the Care Leavers Group, and noted that the group was made up of local young people. She suggested that it would be beneficial if the group contained young people who had moved out of the area to ensure that they were part of a community.

Resolved

1. That the Young People Engagement Report is noted
2. That the Board request that Council buildings are provided free of charge for Total Respect training.

Resolved

That the Young People Engagement report was noted.

27/21 Fostering Annual Report

The Group Manager introduced the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board were informed that the report summarised the activity of the Fostering Service from 1 April 2020 to 231 March 2021. An overview of the achievements of the service in 2020/21 was detailed.

A Member questioned how new Foster Carers were recruited, and how the service ensured that this reached a wide audience. The Group Manager stated that the service advertised on a range of media, such as a targeted radio campaign, social media, twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Challenge was provided to question how new people were encouraged to engage with this form of advertising. In response Members were informed that the Council's social media accounts were used and all options were considered, and it was noted that it had not been possible to meet physically with people and it was hoped that this could be developed once again.

A Member questioned if it was considered detrimental to the Council's fostering service for independent fostering companies to advertise on traffic islands. The Group Manager stressed that the service worked in a mixed economy and that the service worked well with individual fostering agencies, but acknowledged the issue. The Director of Customer Engagement stated that she would raise this at the relevant Proud (programme) working group and provide them with the opportunity to explore this issue further and ways that advertising could be developed to benefit the service.

In response to a query from a Member, the Group Manager provided more information on training provided to Foster Carers, including an improved online offer, although physical sessions were offered with support for childcare.

A Member suggested that in the future, compliments were also included within the report, and the Group Manager noted this, informing Members that Ofsted had recognised that Foster Cares felt well supported.

Resolved

1. That the Fostering Service Annual Report 2020/21 be noted.
2. Walsall Council review the advertising of independent fostering agencies on traffic islands
3. Walsall Council identify advertising space for the Council fostering service (free of charge).

28/21 Independent Visiting Service Annual Report

The Team Leader (Independent Visitor Service) presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). A short video was played to the Board which detailed the role of the Independent Visitor, this was a trained volunteer who “befriended and supported children and young people in care”. The recruitment process, sessions and activities of the independent visitors were described. The Board were informed by the Group Manager that the service had been quick to provide alternative activities during the lockdown period.

A Member stated that the service was beneficial for young people and questioned the funding to the service. The Group Manager stated that where necessary the Director was able to approve additional expenditure over budget. A Member suggested that the number of young people accessing this service could be higher, and that the target number of children should be increased. The Board agreed that it was important that there should be an ambition to increase numbers of young people accessing the service year on year.

The Director stated that this was discussed at the Shadow Board, and stressed that Participation with young people was a key priority. It was acknowledged that the target for the number of young people accessing the Independent Visitor service had not been sufficiently ambitious, and there was an intention to raise the profile of this service and for Children’s Services to be assured that the commissioned arrangements and capacity were sufficient. Work on this would be considered within the participation strategy to ensure that arrangements were robust, and this would be bought back to the Board.

The Board were informed that a different provider had been previously used, however performance had improved under ‘Change Live Grow’.

A Member asked for more information in relation to the promotion of the service, and the Board were informed that face-to-face promotion had not been possible in the same way since the pandemic. However not all awareness raising was done online, live events and relevant forums were attended.

Resolved

That the annual target of 10 children (accessing the Independent Visitor Service) was reviewed and that the revised target is reported back to the Corporate Parenting Board.

29/21 Performance Monitoring Quarter 2

The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality presented the performance monitoring report and highlighted the salient points (annexed).

The Young Person in attendance asked why 30% of young people were not attending their reviews, and questioned if this was due to their age. Officers responded to explain that some young people did not want to attend, and that there should be no children who wanted to attend and were not able to. However for those that choose

not to attend there are different ways in which their voice can be represented at the meeting.

A discussion was held in relation to 4% of care leavers who were not in suitable accommodation, the Board were informed that 7 of these were in custody and 1 was in supported accommodation.

The Young Person in attendance asked how the Council was encouraging Looked after Children and Care Leavers to stay in education. The Head of the Virtual School provided further information on this which included a 'aspire to university' course, and exposure to university. Work was done with careers advisors to ensure that young people were provided with the right support. This was also considered as part of staying put arrangements, to ensure young people had a home to return to during holidays.

The improvement in the number of Looked after Children attending dental appointments was noted, and Officers and the Health representative were congratulated for this.

The Young Person challenged the number of social workers that a child may have, and the Director responded to stated that as a child moved through the system they would have more than one social worker. However reducing this as much as possible this was a priority for the service.

Resolved

That the Performance Monitoring Report was noted.

30/21 Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Head of Service (Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services) presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The previous Council Corporate Parenting Strategy was published in 2017. Building on the foundations of the existing strategies vision, aims and priorities, the council had developed a proposed corporate parenting strategy which aligned with the Corporate Plan and the changed legislative and national policy context.

To achieve this vision 5 key strategic priorities had been identified. These were:

1. Safety and Permanency.
2. Mental and Physical Health Wellbeing.
3. Education and Employment.
4. Transitions and Independence.
5. Influence and Involvement.

The Board discussed the priorities, and the revised strategy. A Member questioned if the target of 95% of 'pathway plans up to date' was sufficiently ambitious when performance was sitting at 98%. The Head of Service stated that, in consideration of this, this target would be reviewed.

Resolved

1. That the Corporate Parenting Strategy be noted.
2. Agree the priority areas and action plan for the delivery of the strategy.
3. Agree that the delivery of the strategy is monitored through the work plan of the Board.
4. A programme of mandatory training for Elected Members is developed, to include:
 - Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
 - Front door of Childrens social care.
 - Total Respect training.

31/21 **Work Programme**

The Board considered the work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year.

Resolved

That the work programme was noted.

The date of the next meeting was 21st February 2022.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 8.15 p.m.

Signed

Date

