

Corporate Parenting Board

Monday 5 September 2022 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference Room 2, Walsall Council House

Board Members Present:

Councillor T. Wilson (Chair)
Councillor. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Hicken
Councillor I. Hussain
Councillor A. Hussain
Councillor Worrall

Officers Present

Colleen Male	Director, Children's Social Work
David Hughes	Children and Young Persons Champion
Helena Kucharczyk	Head of Service
Jo Manning	Group Manager
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service (Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services)
Lorraine Thompson	Head of Virtual School
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse LAC
Lynn Noble	Interim Head of Service – Adoption at Heart

Young people 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.

8/22 Introductions and Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Elise Hopkins (Advisor to the Board).

9/22 Substitutions

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

10/22 Minutes

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2022, were submitted.

(see annexed)

Resolved (Unanimous)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2022, copies having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

11/22 Young People Engagement

The Children's and Young Persons Champion presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed).

Young people had met with locality managers, which provided the opportunity for them to receive information and ask questions. It was noted that this session provided insight for managers and there was a plan to involve young people in future areas of work.

Seven sessions of 'Total Respect' training had been delivered by care leavers with positive feedback received. It was noted that six care leavers were trained to deliver this training, with current recruitment of young people over 14 years of age to further deliver this training.

An update was provided on 'language that cares', this continued to be promoted within Walsall – consideration was being given to how this could be further rolled out.

The Board were provided with the opportunity to review welcome packs that were provided to young people when they came into care.

Members were informed that a request for the development of a regional pass for leisure centres (for care leavers) had gone out to partners, with positive responses received. It was hoped that the offer could be extended to Looked After Children. This proposal would be further discussed at future West Midlands Combined Authority events.

Resolved:

That the Young People Engagement Report be noted

12/22 Adoption Service Report

The Interim Head of Service presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board were informed that Adoption@heart was a regional adoption agency which provided adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. There was a stable staff group and the service was part of a national network. The adoption scorecard performance was described, it was noted that there were less children being taken into the care of the local authority and we needed to consider the impact on adoption numbers. It was acknowledged that more work was needed to further understand the data. The Director stated that the service is focused on keeping families together and permanency planning had been strengthened which partly accounted for the drop in the number of children adopted.

Members asked how the agency was tackling the recruitment of adopters, and were informed that a marketing director had been appointed to lead on this. There was a government campaign for those children who were considered harder to adopt.

Challenge was provided to those indicators that were performing below the national average. Officers responded to explain that although some indicators were below the national average. Early planning permanence was good, and the authority aimed to be aspirational for those young people with complex needs for which the adoption could often take longer to progress.

In response to member questioning, officers confirmed that the agency tried to keep siblings together and that contact between siblings was being further developed in the best interests of the children and young people. Further information could be provided on a national pilot which allowed an improved arrangement for contact between young people and families.

A young person in attendance questioned the support provided to young people when siblings (and foster siblings) were not kept together. Officers described letter swapping and keep in touch process. It was acknowledged that further work on this was needed.

The Board were informed that work was being done to promote adoption to same sex couples. A discussion was held on the number of complaints received by the agency, with a very small number received each year. Lessons were learnt from complaints received and outcomes had included the rewriting of the policy to avoid a high level of assessment in the early stages of adoption.

Future developments of the agency were described and these included:

- The merging of governance boards.

- Early permanence and the reduction of delay.
- Increased diversity of panel representatives.

Resolved

1. That the Adoption@heart report be noted.
2. That a further report be provided to the Corporate Parenting Board describing the support provided to siblings (and foster siblings) who were separated by the care process (this should include the views of children in care and young people).

12/22 Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board Quarter 1 performance data

The Head of Quality and Performance presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report evidenced that the number of children in care remained stable (in Walsall) in comparison to other areas who were experiencing an increase in this figure. The number of children entering the care system was reducing and there was an increase in the number of children and young people who were spending 9 months or less in care – this was linked to family safeguarding.

Members congratulated officers on achieving the child's view in 100% of CiC reviews and an increase in the number of reviews which the child attended. It was noted that progress of health checks was steady within the expected parameters.

Officers addressed an action that was raised at the last Board, in relation to the number of care leavers in supported accommodation.

The Board were informed that different providers of supported housing offered different services, with different levels of staffed support.

A discussion ensued on the performance relating to health checks completed in timescale and the reasons for this, reasons for non-attendance at reviews included parental refusal, home changes, clinic cancellations and illness. It was stressed that of 140 assessments, 11 were completed out of timescale. Members agreed that it would provide reassurance if the Board were able to consider a breakdown of reasons for the completion of health checks out of timescale.

The Board considered the performance data on care leavers in education, employment and training. Officers stated that Walsall's performance was just below the national average. Care leavers were tracked and the service was working alongside impact for change to find opportunities that young people could access. An audit had been completed and barriers for young people had been considered, barriers that had been identified as an individual's emotional health and well-being and unresolved immigration status.

Resolved

- That the quarter 1 performance data be noted.
- That the Board receives a breakdown of the reasons for completion of health checks out of timescale.

13/22 Options for increasing the Setting up Home Grant for young people leaving care.

The Head of Service presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board were informed that the setting up home grant was implemented as part of the Leaving Care Act 2000. At its inception the setting up home grant was set at £2000, and was further increased in April 2021 to £2,500. The report described the options for increasing the setting up home grant in view of the increase in the cost of living. Young people (at Corporate Parenting Board) had questioned if £2500 was adequate to support care leavers when they were setting up home, in response to this members had requested that the Board be presented with further detail and options.

Officers informed the Board that Walsall's offer was favourable in comparison to other local authorities, and that there was significant national conversation around this figure. The Director proposed that an incremental increase be proposed as part of the council's budget setting process - through the Directorate Management Team, whilst monitoring what was happening in relation to this both regionally and nationally. In order to do this, work would be done with the finance team to agree an appropriate increase to take into account the cost of living. It was also stressed that wider support to care leavers should be considered, as this was just one part of a bigger package.

Resolved:

That a mechanism for the incremental increase of the 'setting up home grant' is included in the formal budget setting process, to come into effect in April 2023.

14/22 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and Young People cared for by Walsall Council

The Head of Service presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report provided an update to the Board on the children in care who arrived in the country as unaccompanied children seeking asylum, and the services provided to these children and young people. The Board were provided with details of the national transfer scheme and other routes into Walsall's care – and the specific needs of this group.

The Board were informed that the latest data shows that Walsall was caring for 16 UASC, and there were 37 care leavers who were UASC – all but one of these

were male. It was noted that the needs of this group were met in the same way as other children in care of the local authority, however at 18 years of age this group were not able to access the same support. Personal advisors offered support to young people in resolving their immigration status, and this support is provided up to the age of 25 years. However due to immigration status, access to accommodation, work and training opportunities may not be available, and the personal advisor must then work with charities to secure additional support.

Members expressed dissatisfaction that young people had uncertainty about their immigration status when they reached 18 years of age and suggested that this disadvantaged young people. Officers agreed that this was a difficult area of their work, and sought to assure Members that support was provided until the young person's immigration status was resolved. Contradictions in the home office dispersal service requirements on Local Authorities compared to the way the home office treated young people post 18 were acknowledged. However UASCs in the care of the local authority were treated as part of the local community and supported accordingly.

The health representative described the complex health needs of this group, and informed the Board that health colleagues across the region were considering the level of mental health commissioning required.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 8.05 p.m.

Signed

Date

