

## **Corporate Parenting Board**

**Monday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 6.00 p.m.**

### **Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams**

*Held in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020; and conducted according to the Councils Standing Orders for Remote Meetings and those set out in the Council's Constitution.*

### **Board Members Present:**

Councillor T. Wilson (Chair)  
Councillor. T. Jukes (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor. K. Ferguson  
Councillor A. Nawaz  
Councillor M. Nazir  
Councillor M. Statham

### **Officers Present**

Mark Burrows	Group Manager (Fostering and Adoption)
David Hughes	Children and Young Persons Champion
Colleen Male	Director, Children's Social Work
Zoe Morgan	Group Manager (Corporate Parenting)
Sally Rowe	Director (Children's Services)
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service (Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services)
Donna Smith	Named LAC Nurse (Walsall Healthcare Trust)
Lorraine Thompson	Virtual School & Vulnerable Groups Lead
Mark Tobin	Head of Service (Adoption at Heart)

### **Welcome**

At this point in the meeting, the Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone, and explaining the rules of procedure and legal context in which the meeting was being held. He also directed members of the public viewing the meeting to the papers, which could be found on the Council's Committee Management Information system (CMIS) webpage. Members confirmed that they could both see and hear the proceedings.

141/20

### **Introductions and Apologies**

There were no apologies for the duration of the meeting.

142/20      **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

143/20      **Minutes (by roll call)**

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021 were submitted.

(see annexed)

**Resolved**

**That the minutes of the meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2021, copies having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.**

144/20      **NEET**

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

It was acknowledged that, on average, care experienced young people had significantly poorer educational outcomes and life outcomes in comparison to the general population. They were also underrepresented in higher education. Lower levels of stability meant that these young people had not always gained skills, which made them employable.

In Walsall, 33.3% of care leavers (97 out of 290) were classified as NEET (17 – 24 year olds). The largest cohort of this group was 19 - 21 year olds: further investigation and support was provided in relation to this. It was suggested that young people may not be in a position to engage in employment or training for various reasons. The Board were assured that the NEET Action Group (NAG) included key professionals and tracked young people's progress.

A number of young people were accessing the 'aspire to university' programme offered by Wolverhampton University; this was supported through the virtual school. Care Leavers had successes in apprenticeships. The national 'Kick-Start' programme offered work placed training and support within the local area. Personal advisors offered support and signposted young people to relevant agencies.

A Member asked how lockdown had affected young people's education. The Group Manager stated some families were struggling, which had been evidenced by a greater uptake of attendance at school during the most recent lockdown.

Officers were asked how young people in Walsall were being supported to access higher education. Officers reassured the Board that support is available for all young people.

A Member asked if the 19 – 21 age group was typical in terms of being over represented as NEET. Officers stated that this was typical and confirmed that it was not an anomaly. Members were informed that the figures were a snapshot in time, and it was a constantly moving picture, especially at the time of a pandemic. The role of personal advisors was discussed and the role of bespoke designated PA's.

A Member asked for further information on how the authority helped to young people to become workplace ready, and questioned if the pathway, to achieve this, should be started earlier. The Group Manager stated that the pathway plan was led by an assessment, which targeted independence planning during their transition year.

### **Recommendations (Agreed by roll call)**

- 1. The Board notes the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of the Council with regard to ensuring Children in Care and Care Leavers have access to education and training opportunities that will assist them in their future.**
- 2. The Board note and endorse the proposed recommendations as set out in the report.**
- 3. An options paper is provided to the Board at a future meeting, in relation to careers support (post 18).**

145/20

### **Adoption Service**

The Head of Service (Adoption at Heart), presented the annual report and highlighted the salient points to the Board (see annexed). The presentation of the report had been delayed due to the pandemic.

Members were informed that Adoption at Heart was the regional adoption agency for the Black Country, and was established in April 2019. In summary the four key things the agency did was:

1. Family find for children in care.
2. Recruit adopters, from within the region.
3. Support adopters (as per statutory requirements).
4. Facilitate contact between children with their birth families.

The key headlines were presented, the Board were informed that (at the end of September 2020). The Board were informed that there was not a trend for a reduction in numbers of children placed for adoption in

Walsall. In the first year, the service placed nineteen Walsall children (it was acknowledged that there was an error in the figure stated within the report), it was stressed that there were performance challenges in the first year. The particular challenge for the service was growing the pool of adopters. The Board were informed of arrangements with the interagency market, to ensure that performance was maintained.

A Member asked about the impact of the pandemic, Officers confirmed that there had been a reduction in placement and adoption orders due to court delay. Members were informed that there had been an increase in enquiries in relation to adoption, although this had not translated into formal applications.

In response to a Member query the Board were informed that the service was now well established. A stable workforce, with low sickness rates was benefiting the service. It was noted that virtual working had improved collaboration with partner local authorities.

A Member questioned if there was capacity in the system to deal with an increased demand once courts had recovered from backlogs. The Head of Service stated that it was likely that there would be an increased demand for family finding, but there could be challenges if there was an increase in placement orders in the future.

In relation to the interagency market, Officers were asked when it would be envisaged that Adoption at Heart would be the agency of choice. The Board were informed that this was an important point for the new service. It was key to network into individual communities, in particular this related to lower incomes, and BAME. Members were asked to highlight opportunities for the service to visit community groups. Communication leads in authorities were also working on this.

The Head of Service asked what was being done to work with BAME communities, it was suggested that key dates for communities should be used to advertise the service. The Board were informed by the Head of Service that there was a marketing strategy aimed at reaching into community groups. For a Regional Adoption Agency, the BAME community was quite well represented in comparison to other areas, however further work did need to be done.

The Head of Service was asked for further details on statutory timescales for adoption, Members were advised that stage one was two months for preparation, checks and training, stage two was sixteen weeks and an adopter should be approved through to agency decision in a six-month timeframe. However, there was often a natural level of delay for good reason. The delay was being monitored by the service.

## **Resolved**

**That the Adoption Service report was noted.**

146/20

## **Fostering Service Annual Report 2019-2020.**

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (see annexed). The different types of foster carers were described to the Board.

In 2019, the service was reviewed and restructured this was operational from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. Four distinct teams were created, and the management structure was strengthened. A critical element of developing the service involved assessing and supporting connected persons – there was now a bespoke team that focused on this work. The Board were informed that it was critical to assess connected persons in line with court timescales.

The Board were informed that there was a deficit of foster carers within the Borough, it was expected that improvement would be evidenced in the next annual report. The 'Staying Put' policy was welcomed as the right thing for young people, although it was acknowledged that this could lead to the reduction in available foster placements. The future priorities of the service were described and this included increasing the number of foster careers, maximising the capacity of the internal foster careers, extend the range of in-house fostering provision and increase the range of support available to foster carers.

The Chair thanked foster carers, on behalf of the board, for their efforts during the pandemic. A Member questioned if there was adequate mental health support for looked after children. The Board were informed that the Flash service was under review to determine the needs of this cohort.

The Group Manager was asked what strategy had been adopted to improve the conversion rate (of enquiries) and the benefits of service redesign. The Board suggested that the redesign was fundamental to the services' ability to respond to the demands of the service.

A Member asked if 'exit interviews' were conducted when foster carers deregistered, it was confirmed that this was the case and this information was considered by the fostering panel and agency decision maker.

### **Resolved**

**That the Fostering Service Annual Report 2019-2020 was noted.**

147/20

## **Quarter three performance monitoring**

The Director introduced the report and highlighted the salient points (see annexed).

A Member highlighted that it was positive that in 99% of cases the child's views were recorded, this was commended. It was also noted that there had been a big increase in health checks completed in a timely manner. Concern was raised over the figures relating to dental checks. Officers stated that the restrictions during the pandemic limiting the availability of routine checks. Members were reassured that children coming into care were being prioritised.

A discussion on the suitability of care leavers accommodation was held, Members were assured that this was in hand.

It was confirmed that the increase of children attending meetings was due to them being held virtually. This information would be used in future planning of the service to strengthen participation.

### **Resolved**

**That the Quarter 3 performance monitoring was noted.**

### **Work Programme**

The work programme was considered by the Board. The Chair informed the Board that a report on apprenticeships and the IRO report would be taken to the next meeting.

### **Resolved**

**That the work programme be noted.**

Members thanked young people for attendance at the Shadow Board.

### **Termination of Meeting**

The meeting terminated at 7.45 p.m.

The date of the next meeting would be 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021.