

Corporate Parenting Board

Monday 6th September 2021 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference Room 2, Walsall Council House

Board Members Present:

Councillor T. Wilson (Chair)
Councillor. R. Worrall (Vice-Chair)
Councillor K. Ferguson
Councillor A. Hicken
Councillor K. Murphy
Councillor F. Mazhar

Officers Present

David Hughes	Children and Young Persons Champion
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse LAC (Clinical Commissioning Group)
Mark Tobin	Head of Service, Adoption at Heart
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service (Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services)
Helena Baxter	Apprenticeship Programme Lead
Helena Kucharczyk	Head of Performance Improvement and Quality
Elise Hopkins	Director – Customer Engagement

Welcome

At this point in the meeting, the Chair opened the meeting by welcoming everyone present. 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. It was noted that a Shadow Board was held directly prior to the meeting to seek the views and experiences of young people.

The Chair asked the Children and Young Persons Champion to congratulate a young person who regularly attended the Shadow Corporate Parenting Board, as she had successfully gained a place at University to study medicine.

621 Introductions and Apologies

There were no apologies for the duration of the meeting.

7/21 Substitutions

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

8/21 **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on 1st July, 2021 were submitted. The Chair updated the Board on actions within the report.

(see annexed)

Resolved (Unanimous)

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st July, 2021 copies having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

9/21 **Young People Engagement**

The Children and Young Persons Champion spoke to the report (annexed) and highlighted the salient points.

Members were informed of the following successes:

- The Children in Care Council had been involved in various interview panels. Feedback from this had been positive. Including interviews for 'personal advisors', young people would be compensated for this.
- Recruitment had taken place to the Care Leaver ambassador position.
- Face to face meetings and activities had begun to take place once again.
- The litter pick discussed at the previous meeting hadn't yet taken place, however it would still go ahead.
- There had been a trip for young people to Woodlands Outdoor Adventure centre and a park in Lichfield, and both had been a huge success.

There had been several achievements for young people who were part of the Children in Care Council. A young care leaver had gained employment in the hospitality industry, a care leaver was entering her second year at university and another had been successful in gaining entry to study medicine at university. The Chair congratulated the young people and officers for supporting them in these achievements.

The Board were informed that progress was being made to develop an app for care leavers, and Members would be updated as part of a future report. The Chair stated that it was important for the Board to consider the information collected in relation to the app as it had been raised by young people at Board several times.

The Chair discussed how more young people could be encouraged to join the Children in Care Council, the Children and Young Persons Champion explained that the team tried to make information fun, engaging and more modern.

The Chair agreed with the statement in the report that working 'with' children, capturing 'their' voice and being 'proactive' in every engagement opportunity should not be an add on to the work we do with young people but should be seen as a matter of cause and be a priority for all in shaping the support and services

provided. Young people were thanked for attending and participating in the Shadow Board.

Resolved:

That the Young People Engagement report was noted.

10/21 Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board Quarter 1

The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality introduced the presentation and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board were informed that the number of children in care was reducing and the percentage of children placed at distance also continued to reduce. It was noted that the percentage of children in care with three or more placements in 12 months had reduced significantly, there had also been an increase of the number of children in stable long term placements. It was clarified that in terms of the indicator 'percentage of visits taken to timescales' comparator data had been sought from regional colleagues and although this was often measured slightly differently across authorities, Walsall performed well. There was not a statutory duty to report data on this indicator to the Department of Education, however it was considered by Ofsted. The Health representative questioned if visits to care leavers were face to face, and it was confirmed that the expectation was that statutory visits were face to face, this had been the case since July, although it was appropriate for some to be virtual – 92% had been face to face.

The number of care leavers in suitable accommodation remained high and those care leavers that were not in suitable accommodation were in custody. The number of children placed for adoption was low, however there were a number of children in their adoption placements waiting for the formal process to conclude.

The importance of the child's voice in reviews was considered, and officers confirmed that where this information had not been recorded on reviews it would be followed up.

The Chair questioned health data, and it was noted that there was a discrepancy between CCG data and Local Authority data on timings of health checks - this issue was being clarified. This process would be refined in the future to align indicators and assurance was provided that weekly health check reports were shared with the CCG weekly. The Chair expressed concern that dental appointment data was low. The health representative stated that this was an issue because dentists were not accepting new patients however foster parents were being advised to travel further to secure appointments. It was suggested that NHS England could be contacted for an explanation. Social Workers were being asked to escalate any challenges with dental practices to health colleagues. The Chair asked for a briefing, at the next Board, on the issues relating to dental

services and young people in care, to identify problems and allow Members to determine any actions needed.

It was clarified that the number of care leavers who were 'NEET' often increased over the summer period as they may not have clarity over their education, employment or training destination. This indicator should improve in the next quarter.

Resolved

1. A briefing on performance data relating to dental appointments for children in care is provided to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

2. The Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board Quarter 1 be noted.

11/21 Adoption Service Report

The Head of Service presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board were reminded that 'Adoption at Heart' were the regional adoption agency for the Black Country. Since its establishment the service had worked on the service identity, successful partnerships across the region, and a stable workforce with a low staff turnover. The period described within the report was the COVID-19 pandemic period, which was a challenging time, as it affected many partner agencies and slowed processes down.

The performance of Adoption at Heart was described, thirty-six children in a year had been placed for adoption. This was an increase on the period before Walsall joined the regional adoption agency.

Adoption at Heart had recruited 51 adopters in 2019/20 and 69 in 2020/21. It was noted that there was an increase in number of enquires relating to adoption in the previous year however this had not translated into conversation to adoptees.

In relation to inter-agency placement of 56%, the Chair asked if this was anticipated at the inception of the Regional Adoption Agency. The Head of Service stated that it was hoped that this would be lower, and good progress was being made against current targets (40%). It was also stressed that it was important that the best match for families and children was achieved, which sometimes meant that agencies were used.

In response to a query from a Member, the Board were informed that the use of inter-agency placements did not cause financial instability as it remained within budget.

The Director of Customer Engagement questioned if housing was a barrier to recruiting adoptive and foster parents. The Head of Service stated that the 'adoption strategy' had recently been published and included the issue

of housing. It was stressed that individuals were not able to apply to be rehoused until they had been matched with a child. It was agreed that more effective work across the sector was needed.

Foster to adopt was described and the benefits of building attachment as early as possible in a child's life. It was hoped that the number of children placed this way could be increased, however it was stressed that this was not right for all children.

A Member asked for assurance that there was adequate resource for therapeutic support. It was clarified that the in-house provision was a small resource and was not adequate, however national funding was accessed to commission therapeutic support for families however the sustainability of this funding was questioned.

The terminating of marketing activity during the pandemic was questioned, and it was clarified that this related to physical face to face information sharing activities that had been planned and could no longer take place due to national restrictions.

Resolved

That the 'Adoption at Heart' report was noted.

12/21 Work Programme

The Board considered the work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year. It was suggested that the next meeting was a health focused meeting. It was noted that the views of the Children in Care Council would be sought on items considered by the Board.

Resolved

That the work programme was noted.

The date of the next meeting was 15th November 2021.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.35pm.

