

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

10 August, 2020 – 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) Regulation 2020; and conducted according to the Council's Standing Orders for Remote Meetings and those set out in the Council's Constitution.

Committee Members Present

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

Officers Present

Sally Rowe	Executive Director – Childrens Services
Colleen Male	Director – Childrens Social Work
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service – Looked After Children
Helena Kucharczyk	Head of Service – Quality Assurance & Performance Information
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse Children Looked After - CCG
Zoe Morgan	Group Manager – Corporate Parenting

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 and officers in attendance confirmed they could both see and hear the proceedings.

117/20 Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received on behalf of Councillor Jeavons and Councillor Nazir.

118/20 Young People Engagement

The Board considered the report of the Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement).

(Annexed)

The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) presented the report and highlighted the salient points therein. She confirmed that children and young people in residential settings were represented on the Child in Care Council (CiCC) and they were happy they were able to participate and provide feedback. She stated that there seemed to be a greater input from the children in care to participate in meetings virtually as opposed to having to attend a particular location and this participation had improved over the months. The team had been creative in engaging children and young people and WhatsApp had been the preferred choice of social media channel for information and support sharing during the pandemic. Examples of this participation included quiz afternoons, cooking competitions, art sessions as well as holding topical discussion sessions around national agenda items such as Black Lives Matter. Children and young people had also had the chance to talk about what life had been like in lockdown. The use of technology had greatly assisted the team in recruiting new members to the CiCC.

The Chair stated it was critical to have Young People's Engagement as a substantive item within the Corporate Parenting Board agenda. He reported that a virtual pre-meeting had been held earlier that had been attended by seven young people. The young people had fed back some of their positive experiences and some of their concerns during the pandemic and he thanked them for having done so.

A member of the Board asked what metric had been used to measure engagement and greater involvement. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that a recent survey had been carried out and 103 responses had been received. She explained how Champion Working Groups had been successfully set up around the participation and engagement of young people and in order to continue the momentum and it was anticipated that Social Workers and other professionals would provide input. She added it was imperative that young people were involved within Children Services to enable them to understand their rights and how they can engage in some of the decisions made about them and their family's lives. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) stated that the service was keen to expand out to care leavers and encourage them to make the service aware should there be any resource implications.

The Chair emphasised the continued importance of engagement and communication and he enquired whether WhatsApp would be the preferred media going forward. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that the legalities around the use of WhatsApp had been dealt around Christmas time and since that time, all PA's and teams had downloaded WhatsApp onto their work phones. She reported that laptops had also been provided to care leavers and the use of Microsoft Teams had ensured that continued engagement and participation had been ongoing.

The Executive Director - Childrens Services acknowledged the importance of Children's Services staff having continued to work throughout the Pandemic. Staff had continued to carry out face to face meetings, attended the offices and schools had continued to support looked after children. She also acknowledged the support from ICT.

The Chair requested elaboration as to how partnerships had been working together. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised the Board that:-

- Health was currently carrying out a further audit in relation to passports for care leavers;
- CAMBS had experienced issues meeting children and young people face to face but were now moving forward albeit the pandemic had had an impact;
- Close contact had been maintained with the Virtual School, which had provided a high level of support to young people unable to attend school as well as offering support and guidance to foster carers home teaching some children;
- No major concerns had been raised around Turning Point during the pandemic.

The Director – Childrens Social Work advised that a presentation had been made at Children's Scrutiny by young people in relation to Turning Point. The service worked with young people and their families to address issues that affected young people, which may then lead them to having to go into care.

The Designated Nurse (Children Looked Children) confirmed that:-

- All health assessments had been carried virtually and had proven very positive;
- Systems had been put into place should there be any concerns regarding a child's health into Rapid Health
- Some children had preferred virtual assessments and had felt more able to open up to medical staff;
- Discussions held around setting up drop in clinics for foster carers should they have any concerns.

A member of the Board enquired of the percentage of LAC who had attended school during the pandemic. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that around 16% of LAC had attended school during the pandemic. She expanded on a number of factors that foster carers would have taken into consideration in their decision as to whether or not to send the children to school and every situation had been considered on a case by case basis. The Director – Childrens Social Work emphasised that not all LAC were of school age. She added that attendance numbers had increased ahead of the school holidays and Walsall's numbers were in line with other local authorities.

In response to the level of support provided to the children and young people who were not in school, the Group Manager advised that the Virtual School had provided tutoring to each child and that Social Workers had carried out weekly check-ins. The Head of Service (Looked After Children) advised that local schools had contacted residential homes and foster carers to ensure the children and young people not in school still received a high level of contact with bespoke packages for some pupils. Pupils had been provided with additional resources when necessary. In relation to returning to school, she advised that the return to school may be phased / staggered for some young people based on their individual needs.

The members of the Board expressed their thanks to the young people who had participated in the pre-meeting and to the staff across Children's Services for the difference they were making to young people and their families.

Resolved

That the Board notes the activity and events of the Children in Care Council.

119/20 Housing and Accommodation Needs for Care Leavers

The Board considered the report of the Housing and Accommodation Needs for Care Leavers, which provided information about the statutory requirements on the Council to ensure that older children in Care and Care leavers had suitable accommodation and support to live independently.

(Annexed)

The Head of Service – Looked After Children presented the report and highlighted the salient points therein. In particular she stated that the protocol had been reviewed around how effectively we were delivering on the respective responsibilities and engaging care leavers were involved in the conversations. Currently the local authority had around 24 care leavers in stable arrangements with their existing foster placement until they were ready to live independently. The work will look at a range of children and what their transition would look like and a key part of that transition is help the children maintain and relationships with their family networks.

To strengthen the current protocol, we need to look at:-

- what is on offer
- what is available in Walsall
- does it fit well with the child
- has the child been able to express choice and have we been able to meet it
- have we looked at support to manage worries, concerns, risk and needs of young people
- have we got what we need or do we need to create something different
- the outcome of the audit to be brought back to the Corporate Parenting Board and it will also inform the refresh of the Local Officer.
- anticipated to be a joint report between Children's Services and Housing, including social housing providers.

The Director of Children's Social Work referred to previous discussions. She stated that unless young people were ready and prepared to live independently they may struggle and therefore the piece of work needed to reflect on how we support a young person to take on a tenancy on their own. We have to recognise there will be specific support needs to enable their transition into adulthood and independence to be as positive and as smooth as possible.

The Chair referred to point 2.4 of the report in relation to care leavers receiving council tax relief irrespective of whether they resided in Walsall or out of the Borough. This had been approved by Council in March 2020 and he thanked Board Members and officers for their support.

The Chair advised that a Housing Officer within the Council and been invited to join the Board to provide joint working with housing colleagues to produce the best outcome. He then sought assurance there were no Walsall care leavers accommodated in bed and breakfast and he enquired whether Walsall's care leavers had the Gold Banding priority status for housing in Walsall. The Head of Service – Looked after Children confirmed there were no care leavers accommodated in Bed and Breakfast. With regard to Gold Banding, the Head of Service – Looked After Children advised the actual Gold Banding was awarded at 18 years of age. During a LAC's 17th year, an alert would be raised to ensure suitable accommodation would be ready for when they reached 18. She added there were certain groups of people who would be considered as vulnerable and therefore considered high priority within the policy. Care leavers would be included within that criteria and partners would work jointly to create the appropriate accommodation packages for young people dependent upon their needs.

A member of the Board referred to a comment raised by a young person at the pre-meeting in relation to being unaware of the scope or flexibility of the policy. In response, the Director – Childrens Social Work emphasised the need for early planning with both housing and the young person ahead of their 18th year to understand their individual's needs and to ensure their views are taken into account to ensure they feel they are part of the planning process and able to engage fully.

In response to whether any young people had been moved into their own accommodation during the pandemic, the Head of Service - Looked After Children confirmed that no care leavers had been moved into their own accommodation during the lock down period. A number of young people had since moved into their own accommodation with full support.

The Chair requested an update report be brought back to the November meeting.

Resolved

- i. That the Board notes the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of the Council with regard to ensuring Care Leavers have suitable accommodation
- ii. That the findings of the audit and the revised joint Housing Protocol and the Local Offer be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board for their scrutiny and approval.

120/20 Children's Services Response to Children Looked After and Care Experienced by Young People to Covid-19

The Board considered the report of the Head of Service – Looked After Children
(Annexed)

The Head of Service – Look after Children presented the report and highlighted the salient points therein. In particular, she reported on actions that had been taken. These included how:-

- Staff had adapted swiftly and effectively during Covid-19 to both remote and home based working;
- Staffing capacity had remained at acceptable levels;
- 2 office bases had been maintained – Fallings Heath and Essington;
- All services had been maintained in line with statutory requirements;
- Adoption panels and foster panels had continued to meet;
- 98% of children and care leavers had been seen or contacted;
- All plans had been reviewed and risk-rated children and young people identified;
- Some young people had needed face to face contact with social workers and PA's and these took place with social distancing;
- Maintained health assessments, statutory reviews and personal educational plans had continued to take place;
- Over 98% of children had received contact either virtually or face to face;
- More young people and family had wanted to be involved in their meetings virtually;
- More children and young people had remained in care longer due in part to Court hearings having to be held virtually and children's plans having to be paused, for example adoptions, final hearings delays and housing accommodation delays. These would change as Courts resumed.

The Head of Service – Quality Assurance & Performance Information clarified that referrals as a result of Covid would be monitored closely over the next 6 to 8 months.

Members of the Board alluded to the earlier pre-meeting with the young people. The young people had provided positive comments with regard to the constant support they had received from Childrens Services during Covid-19, which members felt had been very positive and compelling.

Resolved

That the Board notes the response to the Covid-19 pandemic in relation to children in care and care experienced young people.

121/20 Corporate Parenting Pledge Refresh

The Board received a report providing a progress update on the multi-agency consultation processes including the workshops completed with the Children in Care Council.

(See Annexed)

The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) highlighted some of the processes to date in order to refresh the 17 pledges. In particular, she reported on a workshop event held in February 2020 which had included children in care, care experienced young people and professionals from all key agencies to bring together some of

the previous work and to share ideas. The 17 pledges were broken down into four key main themes:-

- keeping healthy – health and emotional wellbeing
- keeping safe – safety in and out of the home
- Education and training
- Keeping in touch – focussing on family time and ensuring that children and young people do not feel alone and isolated from professionals and those important to them.

The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) drew members' attention to Section 3 of the report, which detailed the overall findings from the workshop and then to Section 4 of the report which included the recommendations from workshop. The Current Pledges were included at appendix 1 of the report. One of the main recommendations from the workshop was to breakdown the pledges into age appropriate ranges and how new pledges would be reviewed.

The Chair emphasised how age specific wording was crucial and needed to be clear and specific. He referred to the pre-meeting with the young people who had indicated their preferred terms being 'Policy' for the older children and 'Promise' for the younger children rather than the term 'pledge'. Going forward with the engagement of the Children in Care Council, he enquired how non-members of the Children in Care Council would be engaged and also a timescale to come back to the Board.

The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that the pledges needed to be embedded wider as part of the Looked After Children review process for young person engagement. Would look to bring back in November.

The Chair requested that when the report comes back to the Board, a separate briefing note is included in terms of the consultation and engagement of young people.

The Chair moved and it was duly seconded by Councillor Ferguson:-

- i. That the Board noted the progress of the work being undertaken in regards to the review of our Corporate Parenting Pledges.
- ii. That the Board receive a briefing note in terms of the consultation and engagement of young people.

The recommendation was put to the vote by way of a roll call of Board Members and was subsequently declared carried with all Members voting in favour.

Resolved

- i. That the Board noted the progress of the work being undertaken in regards to the review of our Corporate Parenting Pledges.
- ii. That the Board receive a briefing note in terms of the consultation and engagement of young people.

122/20 **Review of the Local Offer for Care Leavers 2020/22**

The Board considered the review of the Local Offer for Care Leavers 2020-2022.

(Annexed)

The Head of Service – Looked After Children presented the report and highlighted the salient points therein. In particular, she reported that:-

- The Children and Social Worker Act 2017 placed a duty on the local authority to publish a Local Offer for Care leavers in consultation with young people which provided information about services the local authority offers and developed in line with statutory requirements as set out,
- Needs to be reviewed to ensure offer is evolving, fit for purpose and working well and clear about what need to do better;
- To understand how Council and partners are part of wider offer;
- Legislation requests five key areas as set out in the report which mirror similar areas within our Pledges and Promises;
- Is a need to be able to publish the information and needs to be accessible and relevant;
- Key area around health passwords and how young people digest the information and use effectively.

The Head of Service – Looked After Children concluded that the work was in line with other local authorities albeit Walsall wanted to be more aspirational.

Following the presentation, the Chair enquired of the current caseloads of PA's with regard to the new duties in respect of care leavers and what transitional assistance could be provided to young people over the age of 25 years. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) confirmed the PA's were currently allocated 25 young people each. She stated that once young people reached the age of 25, they could continue to receive support for as long as they required.

The Chair referred to 2.4 of the report in relation to the action in progress and asked for the timescale for when it would come back to the Board.

The Head of Service – Looked After Children confirmed the Housing Protocol would return to the Board in November and the Local Offer may take a little longer so will advise of the timescale for that with regard to apprenticeships and education.

Resolved

That the Corporate Parenting Board reviewed and noted the content of the report and supported the proposal to review Walsall's Local Offer and offer challenge to the service area in their pursuit to achieve the best outcomes for Walsall's care leavers.

123/20 **Quarter 1 Performance Report**

The Board received a report providing a summary of the quarter 1 performance.

(See Annexed)

The Head of Service – Quality Assurance & Performance Information presented the report in detail and highlighted a number of key items, which included:-

- Over 60% of LAC were on a Child Protection Plan before services
- 23% CPC go on to become LAC
- High number of newborn children go straight into care and therefore working to strengthen policies
- Care Orders placed reduced to 35
- Just over 13% of Walsall's CLA are placed 20 plus miles from home address – this had increased but remains lower than regional comparisons;
- 90% of all visits undertaken within the timescales although there had been a reduction in face to face meetings
- In May, 24.6% face to face meetings. Other meetings had been held via telephone or video and this increased to 51% during July

The Chair enquired about the Local Authority's statutory visits and health visits. The Head of Service – Quality Assurance and Performance Information confirmed that 90% of statutory visits had been undertaken on time with only 19 late visits at the end of May. She reported that dental appointments had commenced from 1st August.

Resolved

The report be noted.

124/20 Work Programme

Members considered the work programme.

Resolved

That the work programme be noted.

125/20 Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting to be held on 3rd September, 2020.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.10 p.m.

Signed:

Date: