

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

18 February, 2019 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present

Councillor Wilson (Chair)
Councillor Jukes (Vice Chair)
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor Nazir

Officers Present

Sally Rowe	Executive Director – Children’s Services
Debbie Carter	Assistant Director – Social Care and Safeguarding
Jivan Sembi	Group Manager – Corporate Parenting
Michelle Cummings	Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement)
Lorraine Thompson	Head of the Virtual School
Neil Picken	Senior Democratic Services Officer

42/19 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Nawaz and Neville together with Sarah Shingler and Jackie Haden from the NHS Walsall CCG.

43/19 Minutes

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on 8th January, 2019, were submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings held on 8th January, 2019, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

44/19 Substitution

There were no substitutions.

45/19 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

46/19 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

47/19 Young People Engagement

The Board considered a report of the Children and Young Persons Champion (annexed) which provided an update on the development of the Children in Care Council.

The Children and Young Persons Champion explained that the Children in Care Council is a forum where young people looked after by Walsall are able to shape and influence the parenting they receive at every level. The Board expressed their interest in attending meetings of the CiCC on dates which were preferable to the CiCC. The Children and Young Persons Champion confirmed that she would circulate potential dates to members of the Board.

In relation to activity of the CiCC, the Chair enquired as to the deadline for setting 'The Pledge' to which he was advised that the deadline would be set imminently. The Assistant Director – Social Care and Safeguarding advised that the Pledge would be refreshed and confirmed that the Board would be consulted.

The Chair sought an update as to the number of individuals that had been supported financially to undertake driving lessons. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that two to three individuals had received assistance. Debate ensued as to whether assistance with driving lessons should be included within the Local Offer. Members considered the financial implications of doing so and alternative options adopted by other local authorities such as offering taster sessions. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) explained that the Council did support a number of young people with travelling arrangements through the Pathway Plan. The Chair explained that the issue of funding driving lessons should be considered in more detail at a future meeting.

In relation to the benefits drop in service at The Hub, the Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that it would be operational for 6 weeks. Officers would monitor take up before re-assessing the provision. The Chair requested an update to a future meeting.

Discussion followed on housing advice given to young people. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that she would be discussing this with young people to gain clarity on what they required. Transition planning had been re-considered and young people would be fully involved. Staff are aware of those individuals that would be seeking tenancy arrangements and staff support those young people with housing providers. In response to a question regarding sufficient places for young people to which it was confirmed that whilst there was sufficient places, work was required to manage choice and preferences. A workshop was being developed with housing providers to make the process clearer for young people.

Discussion followed on the reasons care leavers may start their tenancy before they turned 18. The Board were advised that a number of unaccompanied asylum seekers had been placed with the council as tenant which had worked well. In addition, young people that were about to become parents were keen to have a home and space to raise their children. Work was continuing with housing providers to establish whether this arrangement could be used more but it was stressed that it was only used when it was right for the young person. The Chair requested a full report on this matter to a meeting in the new municipal year. In closing, the Chair sought clarity as to what assistance was afforded to young people moving home. Officers advised that all young people were provided with support to move which was tailored to their needs.

In relation to the budget for the Children in Care Council (CiCC) the Chair asked whether five thousand was sufficient. Officers advised that this was the first year of the CiCC and so agreed to provide an update at the end of the year.

Resolved

1. That the Children and Young Persons Champion circulates dates to member of the Board for them to attend Children in Care Council.
2. That an update be provided to a future meeting on:-
 - driving lesson support;
 - the benefits drop in service;
 - housing provision for young people under the age of 18;
 - the budget for the Children in Care Council.

48/19 Quarter 3 Performance Information

The Board considered the performance scorecard for quarter 3. The Chair re-iterated previous requests that the data should be presented in a more accessible format.

The Assistant Director (Social Care and Safeguarding) explained that the number of children ceasing to be looked after was reducing and the rate

of admissions had stabilised. The overall care population was on a downward trajectory whereas other authorities were increasing.

The Chair referred to the number of health assessments undertaken. Whilst mindful that work was underway to improve this, he stated that it needed to be resolved. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that a number of meetings had taken place with health colleagues with a further meeting scheduled for 19th March, 2019 at which is expected that the situation regarding recording health assessments will have improved. In addition, the Looked After Children Nurse now held drop in sessions at the Transition and Leaving Care Hub as many young people did not wish to attend GP surgeries and preferred a conversation with the nurse in familiar surroundings. Validation processes had also been improved which would start to show in statistics in May, 2019 due to a lag in the figures. The Chair noted the improvements but made it clear that the Board needed full assurance that the work was happening and would monitor the scorecard as submitted to the Board for evidence. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) assured the Board that work was underway noting that health colleagues data now fed into the dashboard.

The Board then requested clarity on the number of people in care living out of borough to which the Assistant Director (Social Care and Safeguarding) stated that the figure was low. Often out of borough placements were necessary if the individuals needs were complex and could not be accommodated within the borough.

Resolved

That the scorecard be presented in a more accessible format in future.

49/19 Virtual School

The Board considered the report of the Virtual School and Vulnerable Groups Lead (annexed) which outlined the activity of the Virtual School and report on the 2017-18 educational outcomes of Walsall's looked after children.

The Board were advised that Virtual School staff were funded through pupil premium and were employed on fixed term contracts. These contracts were due to expire in October 2019.

The Virtual School and Vulnerable Groups Lead highlighted the progress made particularly in KS1. She also explained 97% of pupils in the virtual school had up to date Personal Education Plans.

Members asked how many of the young people were in inadequate schools. Officers advised that each case was considered on its merits. If a child was already within the school which became inadequate it would be reviewed straight away. This may lead to the child being moved or decided that it was in the child's best interest to remain at the school with their peers.

In response to a question regarding children at university, officers confirmed that there were 18 at university and it was hoped that this number would increase.

In relation to the several vacant posts within the service, officers explained that whilst they are reviewed, government funding for pupil premium had only been agreed to 2020. The Chair stated that this needed to be considered in future as the provision was important for young people in care.

The Chair queried how the impact of pupil premium was measured. The virtual lead stated that it was challenging but with the introduction of electronic personal education plans (epeps) in November, 2018 it was becoming easier through both hard and soft data. That said, the national association of virtual leads were continuing to consider ways to evidence impact.

The Chair explored any further developments for the service to which the lead explained that epeps would be a crucial tool to develop as it would enable further analysis such as plotting impact on performance. It would continue to evolve and improve as users become more proficient in using the tools available.

In response to a question regarding engaging parents, it was confirmed that foster carers were well engaged with links to foster services. Annual celebration events were also held to acknowledge the achievements of young people.

The Head of the Virtual School stated that the excellent night out was well regarded but that identifying an appropriate venue had proved challenging. She confirmed that Bescot Stadium was of sufficient size but would be more costly than other venues. The Board stated that the venue should be suitable with the Chair highlighting that he had identified a sponsor for the event.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

50/19 Council Tax for Care Leavers

The Board considered the report of the Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) setting out the options and implications for extending council tax exemption to care leavers residing outside of the Borough.

The Chair advised that he had written to the three MP's representing Walsall Constituencies to request that they raise the matter nationally, having regard to the legislation passed in Scotland and Wales which meant young people in care are exempt from paying council tax. He read out the responses

received noting that one of the MP's had committed to pursuing the matter in Parliament.

The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) presented the following options:-

1. Walsall retains the current position that the exemption is only applied for care leavers in Walsall and seeks to secure an agreement across the region or lobbying Government to legislate to exempt all care leavers irrespective of where they live.
2. Walsall matches the exemption of council tax for our care leavers irrespective of where the individual resides.
3. Walsall offers a graduated contribution to council tax bill and if agreed than a policy and criteria would need to developed and consulted upon

The Board considered the options and confirmed that option 2 was the preferred option. However, the Board requested that options 2 and 3 be explored further with a detailed report submitted to the Board in the new municipal year.

Resolved

That options 2 and 3 be explored further with a detailed report submitted to the Board in June, 2019

51/19 Work Programme

Members considered the work programme for the 2018/19 municipal year.

Resolved

That the work programme be noted.

52/19 Date of next meeting

The Board noted that the next meeting would be held on 18th April, 2019 at 6.00 p.m.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.40 p.m.

Signed:

Date: