

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

15 April, 2019 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present

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

Officers Present

Debbie Carter	Assistant Director – Social Care and Safeguarding
Jivan Sembi	Group Manager – Corporate Parenting
Michelle Cummings	Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement)
Sarah Shingler	Chief Nursing Officer / Director of Quality, Walsall CCG
Alison Jones	LAC
Lee Allen	Performance Officer (Children and Young People)
Bev Mycock	Democratic Services Officer

Representing Young People

Hannah Armstrong
Angel Wheatley

53/19 Apologies

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Kudhail.

Due to the number of attendees, the Chair asked everyone to introduce themselves.

54/19 Minutes

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on 18 February, 2019, were submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings held on 18 February, 2019, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of Andy Street as having been written to alongside the three MP's representing Walsall at paragraph 50/19.

55/19 Substitution

There were no substitutions.

56/19 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

57/19 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

58/19 Young People Engagement

The Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement) introduced Hanna and Angel to the meeting. The young people thanked the Board for having invited them to the meeting and said they had welcomed the opportunity to speak about their own personal experiences and thoughts on Walsall's care system. Both young people praised Children's Services but they stated that on occasions, the physical, mental and emotional needs of each individual child/young person could not always be met due to the restrictions placed on the service and they gave the following examples:-

- monitoring of young people before, during and after transition into their own homes from foster care, ie. helping and advising on what needed, even with the little things such as the purchase of a kettle prior to moving into their own homes,
- having to borrow suitcases and holdalls, which is embarrassing to young people when that happens but much better than recent use of black plastic bags to transport a child's worldly possessions

One of the young people gave an overview of the time she had moved between foster carers five years ago and she had been provided with black plastic bags to collect up and transport all of her belongings, which had subsequently made her feel that her belongings were worthless and unimportant.

The Chair asked the second young person about her own personal experience transitioning from a CLA into independent living and what help had been provided. In response, the young person advised the meeting that she had been settled in her own flat for a number of years and that between the ages of 16 and 18 years, she had received support from 'Future Horizons', who had helped to find her a home, they visited her weekly and offered help and support with everything up until the point when she moved into her home and from that time onwards, there did not seem to be any help around. She had felt that as she had reached the age of 18 years old, she had been left on her own with no support network to help or advise on even simple activities people take for granted such as sorting out her furniture, carpets, repairs, etc. and that unfortunately she was aware that similar issues were still being experienced. She added that some of the onus should be with the final foster carers.

The Assistant Director (Social Care and Safeguarding) advised that new duties on local authorities had extended assistance up to 25 years of age.

The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised the meeting that four years previous there had been a change to the procedure and that all children looked after are now allocated a personal advisor (PA) who they work closely with and together they devise the best plan for their future needs in advance of their 18th birthday, for example whether they should remain in a home environment or live independently, to give them a sense of developing their skills at which time their application for housing and benefits would be in place. Once a young person has settled within their home, their PA will attend the property and work with them to equip them in accessing available home grants, and she further added the PA's are now issued with 'pay cards' which enables them to take the young person shopping so the young person can choose their preferred items, as opposed to an officer 'presuming' what they would or should like.

The Chair asked both young people if they felt they had a good relationship with their P.A.'s and whether they believed there were adequate steps in place to ensure all young people were aware of who and where to contact should urgent help be required, particularly out of hours? A young person informed the meeting that her own experiences with her PA were very positive but she was aware that some young people had experienced inconsistency from their PA's.

The young people informed Committee of a forum event they had attended entitled the Quorum, part of which had provided a platform for young persons in care to have their voices heard and to give them the opportunity to share their personal experiences within the care system with each other and with social workers. Some valuable feedback that had been shared by young people at the Quorum had included:-

- young people are never made to feel that the houses they are being looked after in are their homes;
- young persons had felt more intervention between the foster carers and Children's Services was required;
- not enough of a young person's personal information is provided to them;
- children and young people feel they are never treated quite the same as a foster carers own children;
- the potential 'caring' element was missing with some foster carers, which gave the young person in their care the impression they were regarded as merely a 'job' and they needed to be treated differently to their own children, which should not be the case;
- foster carers should care (human element) and we are not 'just a job', lack of empathy

At this juncture of the meeting, one of the young people read out a very poignant poem she had composed about her life experiences in the care system and which had subsequently been published in the Quorum publication. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) commented on the powerfulness of the poem in bringing a young person's views and experiences into fruition and she recommended that the poem be used in the future training and engagement of foster carers and Council staff. A Member requested that the poem be distributed to all Council Members to remind them of their role as a Corporate Parent.

The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that standards had been set to ensure foster carers must meet not only a child's physical needs but also their emotional needs and should a foster carer fail to meet these needs or be deemed to not have respect or compassion for a young person, this may even lead to them being de-registered. She added that Social Workers now saw children and young people more regularly, as a minimum every six weeks.

The Chair enquired how Walsall was monitoring the situation and what assurances were in place to ensure the similar situations such as the use of plastic bags when a child moved foster home never arose in the future. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) advised that due to all the interventions now in place, it was quite rare that children or young people had to be moved at short notice but should that be the case, foster carers have been made aware that they must have suitcases and holdalls available should emergency moves have to be made, to ensure the safe transportation of the child's possessions and to make the transition easier and less stressful for all parties but particularly the young person. She added that the next BC Board had a spot light on foster carers.

The Chair enquired as to what mechanisms were in place to enable young people to feed into the system. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) said it would be expected that social workers pick up any issues immediately and formally raise their concerns and should a young person be unhappy or have concerns, they should be aware of the complaints process and a range of mechanisms in place. A young person advised that she had only been aware of a complaints procedure in the last twelve months. In response, the Assistant Director (Social Care and Safeguarding) advised that there were clear expectations that all young people in care must be informed by their Social Worker of personal information packs which contained relevant contact details and other useful information, which she believed was happening routinely and had been recognised by the recent Ofsted inspection. The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) further added that she would ensure all new Social Workers and foster carers were aware of and were implementing the procedure, and that more importantly, the young people themselves were aware of the procedure and that she would re-circulate the information packs to all young people. A Member felt the PAs should be more pro-active and visit the young people in person to explain exactly what information the pack contained. One of the young people felt the information packs needed to be more user friendly and gave an example of including contact numbers on a fridge magnet to ensure they were always at hand and not misplaced.

Members reiterated the importance of compulsory training for both new and existing foster carers and for the Social Workers and PAs. A discussion then centred around the requirement for mental health awareness training to be a high priority to ensure issues were picked up by foster carers or social workers before potential mental health issues escalated. Members also felt teachers should play an important part in the system; should they pick up on particular or telling mannerisms during their general observations, these needed to be reported immediately to the respective social worker, as even the smallest issues mattered where a child was concerned.

The Chief Nursing Officer/Director of Quality, Walsall CCG advised that some mental health issues were not always easy to pick up with some children. This was corroborated by one of the young people who added that some of the quiet or clever children were overlooked as physically they looked fine but mentally they were holding everything in.

The Chair stated that although the Council had policies and procedures, the key to ensure policies and procedures worked was through the encouragement of feedback from young people, and he extended an invitation to both of the young people to attend a future Corporate Parenting Board meeting. The Chair emphasised that the meeting existed because of and for the benefit of young people, to ensure correct decisions were made which would have a positive impact on their lives and that without the input from young people, the Council could not fully determine whether it was doing the right thing by the young people.

The Chair thanked both young people for their very open and honest overview and for sharing their personal experiences within the care system and he added that he hoped they would both attend a future Committee.

The Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement and both young people left at this juncture of the meeting.

Councillor Nawaz also left at this junction of the meeting.

59/19 Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

The Board considered the draft Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report. The Assistant Director – Social Care and Safeguarding commented on how well the young people's engagement had come across within the report.

There were no further comments and the Board:-

Resolved

That the Corporate Board Annual Report be approved and submitted to Council.

60/19 Quarter 4 Performance Monitoring

The scorecard produced by Children's Services Performance Team, March 2019 – Quarter 4 (provisional figures) had been submitted.

The Performance Officer (Children and Young People) introduced the newly formatted scorecard, which he advised was provisional until the 'Children Looked After' (CLA) return had been completed and the final position, following the submission of the national statutory returns and provided an overview of the information contained therein and he highlighted some of the more salient points, which included:-

- Current CLA - the number of CLA had remained at 610 having been stable for the last twelve months, with the current rate per 10,000 children below our statistical neighbours;
- currently 62 children placed at home on full care orders with 37 of these placed at home for over a year and in March, there were 290 children placed in 176 households;
- Statutory visits and reviews - the number of CLA where a statutory visit has been undertaken to timescale in accordance with the child's plan is at 86.5%, with 77.38% seen within the first six weeks;
- the number of children changing social workers continues to decrease with the number of CLS who have remained with the same social worker for the past 12 months is 201 compared with the previous year's figure of 139;
- Health and well-being data – the data pertaining to health assessments for a child who is over 5 who has been looked after for over a year but 'out of area' is still to be included in the scorecard;
- Health and well-being checks and assessments between 2016/17 and 2017/18 - fluctuating figures potentially due to a change of designated nurse plus the introduction of MOSAIC.
- Care leavers aged 17-21 data – with regard to the 8.6% of care leavers between the ages of 17-21 not in suitable accommodation, 14 x care leavers in custody, 2 x care leavers either with friends or in a bed and breakfast and 13 x care leavers are not currently in touch with the local authority;
- Adoption and permanency – currently 87 children in the adoption 'pipeline'

The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) emphasised their commitment and focus on statutory visits and reviews and she expressed concern that CLA had been visited more frequently than the figures within the scorecard indicated, particularly new CLA and a query was raised as to whether there was a better way of capturing the true picture.

The Performance Officer (Children and Young People) advised that an end of year report would be produced. He further added that the Board needed to agree the languages they wished to use and he gave an example of the acronym 'LAC' which young people felt sounded as though they were 'lacking' in something.

The Chair thanked the Performance Team for the newly formatted, more accessible and preferred scorecard and he requested future scorecards to include the numbers pertaining to the respective percentages plus page numbers.

Resolved

That the Board receive an end of year report to include the national statutory returns data and that the scorecard to included numbers of children and young people as well as the respective percentages and that page numbers are added.

61/19 **Flash Review**

The Group Manager (Corporate Parenting) updated the meeting as follows-

- identified Terms of References
- started process and would like it to be in conjunction with CCG
- aim is to conclude the review by end of May
- report to go to next Corporate Parenting Board meeting

The Chief Nursing Officer / Director of Quality, Walsall CCG added that :-

- CAMHS had looked at the key issue - Crisis Response and have a process in place whilst the review is progress
- Response times ICAMHS - DSH referral responded to within 4 hrs
Urgent referrals between 4 hrs and 24 hrs
Routine referral within a week

62/19 **Work Programme**

Members considered the work programme for the 2019/20 municipal year and the following items were recommended for future Board meetings:-

- i. FLASH
- ii. Foster Carers – Recruitment and Training
- iii. Health Dashboard and Annual Update re: progress
- iv. Assurances that what young people are requesting are being carried out
- v. Feedback from young people
- vi. Children in Care Council feedback
- vii. Update on work schemes
- viii. Spotlight on permanency
- ix. Outcome framework
- x. Suitable housing – providers rd
- xi. Local offer to launch
- xii. Young people feedback
 - Consistency no bags
 - How to complain – clear process
 - Good transition planning
- xiii. Refresh Corporate Parenting Pledge (end of year)

Councillor Ferguson thanked the Chair, the Vice Chair and officers for their dedication, which had been shown in the differences that had been clearly made, which was reiterated by Councillor Jukes.

Resolved

That the work programme be noted.

63/19 **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting to be agreed at Annual Council on 22nd May, 2019.

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.50 p.m.

Signed:

Date: