

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

11 November, 2019 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Committee Members Present

Councillor Wilson (Chair)
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor M. Nazir

Officers Present

Sally Rowe	Executive Director – Children’s Services
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services
Michelle Cummings	Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement)
Helena Kucharczyk	Head of Performance Improvement and Quality
Carol Boughton	Head of Strategic Safeguarding
Sue	CCG

Representing Young People

Lee
Marek

85/19 Apologies

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

86/19 Substitutions

None.

87/19 Minutes

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on 2nd September, 2019, were submitted:-

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd September, 2019, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

88/19 Substitution

There were no substitutions.

89/19 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whips.

90/19 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

There were no items to consider in private session.

91/19 Children in Care Council Update

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

(Annexed)

The Chair welcomed young people to the meeting and stated that he appreciated them giving up their time to attend. He provided an oversight of the role and function of the Board, and encouraged them to participate whenever they wished.

The Chair then clarified that the item should be entitled 'Children and Young People Engagement' on future agenda as previously agreed. The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services agreed to ensure that this was actioned.

The Board were advised that the annual survey, to look at what the Council as an organisation does well and what it could do better for young people who access service, had been sent out for consultation to services and children and young people. It was anticipated that the survey would be completed on 14th December, 2019. Work was also continuing with the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum to look at further ways to increase the level of involvement and reach a wider range of young people. A meeting of the forum would take place on 26th November, 2019 to look at participation with social workers and personal advisors. Officers confirmed that work was required to improve the level of involvement.

The Chair enquired as to whether any concerns had been raised by young people which could be relevant to the Board. The Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement) explained that consistency of staff had been discussed which is an issue raised at all authorities. The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services confirmed that this would be discussed as part of the 'big

conversation'. She also confirmed that, as the workforce stabilised, there would be greater consistency. In relation to the services at the present time, the board were informed that consistency was better in the leaving care service as four new personal advisors had been recruited. In child protection, a number of social workers had left the authority or commenced maternity leave during the summer. It was emphasised that every effort was made to maintain consistency, ensure good quality handovers and explain to young people when and why their social worker moves on. It was acknowledged that this was work in progress but work was being undertaken to improve matters.

The Chair asked why this was not standard as there would always be a turnover of staff. The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services advised that when there is a planned leave date it is undertaken and a handover is planned. However, that isn't possible when individuals leave unexpectedly. In child protection, there isn't a high turnover and so managers are aware of staff proposing to leave and so are able to plan. Where a planned handover is not possible, the team manager should provide an explanation to the young person affected.

The Chair asked whether handovers were recorded on the system and whether this was monitored. The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality advised that there was a short handover form on Mosaic which could be used for tracking purposes. Independent Reviewing Officers' would also check as part of participation work. The Executive Director – Children's Services stated that it would be preferable to check via the participation checklist undertaken by the Independent Reviewing Officers and report back to the Board in a years' time.

In closing, the Children and Young Persons Champion (Participation and Engagement) advised that there was an event on the 28th November, 2019 at Expressions café in Walsall with the Rees foundation and invited members to attend.

Resolved

1. That this item be entitled 'Young People Engagement' on future agenda and
2. That Independent Reviewing Officers, includes 'handovers' as part of the participation checklist, and that a report on the outcome presented to the Board in September, 2020.

92/19 Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report

The Board considered the report of the Group Manager (Safeguarding & Review).

(Annexed)

The Head of Strategic Safeguarding presented the report highlighting that reports were now written as a letter to young people and that there had been an increase in the number of children chairing their meetings. With regard to the latter, it was stated that this still needed to be increased and ensure that children and young people feel supported by their social workers. Work had been undertaken to provide an introduction card from the IRO to all young people to explain their role.

Lee stated that when there was a change in professionals young people should be told straight away by the social worker that's leaving. The Chair agreed that, wherever possible, that should happen.

The Chair stated that it was great that more young people had taken control of their meetings but asked what the authority did to encourage them to attend and chair the meetings. The Group Manager (Safeguarding & Review) explained that, ideally, a review should be about sharing information on an ongoing basis and so not seen as a huge event. There had been a significant uplift after the IRO went out to team meetings and explained what the meeting was about. To improve attendance, young people needed support from social workers. This happens more in corporate parenting, as there was more stability in the workforce and so relationships had been formed with children and young people. Work was being undertaken to improve awareness for children new to the system.

The Chair asked how often a child or young person should see an IRO and how many numbers of cases an IRO should have. The Head of Strategic Safeguarding stated that it depends on the individual child and that national caseloads were between 50/70. Additional staffing had been employed at Walsall to bring numbers to a more manageable level.

The Chair referred to managing exploitation noting that an agency worker had taken on the role. The Head of Strategic Safeguarding confirmed that this had now been resolved and advised the Board of the revised staffing arrangements.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

93/19 Review of FLASH

The Board considered the report of the Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services.

(Annexed)

The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services advised that the service was commissioned by the Council to provide specialist mental health services for Looked After Children. It was set up in

2015 and has been rated as outstanding by the Care Quality Commission in 2018. A service review was being undertaken as part of a normal cycle of reviewing commissioned services and to ensure that the service specification is aligned to the changes in Children's Services.

The review was at the stage of pulling the information together and undertaking analysis. In addition:-

- Discussions would be held with young people that use, or have used, the service;
- A focus group will be convened;
- Officer will visit neighbouring authorities with similar services;

It was expected that recommendations would be developed by the middle of December, 2019. A report detailing the recommendations would be submitted to the Board in February, 2020.

The Chair asked whether other authorities had a similar service. The Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services advised that most had a commissioned service through CAMHS or their own in house service. Others had a mixture of the two. In terms of service there was a mix of those providing the bare minimum and others with a much bigger offer. The Chair asked where Walsall were in terms of service provision. Officers advised that there were advantages of being in CAMHS but also some challenges as young people with low level/tier needs may not be eligible for the service. As such, a balance needed to be achieved and so the review also provided opportunity to be clear about pathways as there was a need for low-level intervention.

The Executive Director – Children's Services stated that the health service are responsible for all young people not just those looked after. As such, it was important to be clear about what service FLASH would provide and for whom. In addition, the Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services explained that the support offered to foster carers also needed to be clarified as part of the review.

The Chair noted the update but stressed that the review had been going on for some time. He emphasised the need for an effective service to ensure looked after children were supported.

A representative from the CCG clarified that it was important to ensure that children and young people were not in the service longer than required. It was important to help them as soon as possible to enable them to return to their daily lives.

Resolved

That the update be noted.

94/19 **Quarter 2 Performance Report**

The Board considered the report of the Head of Performance Improvement and Quality.

(Annexed)

The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality provided an overview of the performance data noting that the number of children looked after had increased and now stood at 641 whilst the number looked after at home had reduced from 55 to 44.

In terms of visits undertaken to timescale, the board were advised that a few were overdue but that there was a push to rectify this. The Chair stated that work needed to be carried out to ascertain how late the visits were to which the Head of Performance Improvement and Quality advised that this could be established via a 'deep dive'. The Chair stated that the percentage of visits undertaken needed to be improved. The Executive Director (Children's Services) agreed that it should be in the 90% range but that recording issues often skewed the figures. She confirmed that the Assistant Director (Children's Social Care) would work with the Head of Service – Children in Care, Provider and Care Leaving Services to improve the position.

In terms of Reviews, the Board were advised that there had been a recording issue and so the position was better than reported. The number of children and young people attending reviews was increasing. The chair sought clarity as to the recorded codes, particularly what was recorded if young people were asked but declined a Review. The Head of Strategic Safeguarding advised that the codes were set nationally. The code used when young people say they don't want to take part was 'No participation code reported' but the Board were advised that this was very few individuals. It was explained that older individuals sometimes placed less importance on taking part and so it was key to have a good relationship with social workers to encourage and push the value of attending reviews.

The chair referred to the fact that 26 children had 4 or 5 social workers in last 12 months and asked what the rationale was for this as consistency was crucial for children and young people. The Executive Director (Children's Services) explained that consistency was important and that efforts were made to reduce the number of changes. However, there was a degree of transfer and movement with social workers which meant that changes did occur. Work was being undertaken to adopt a locality model to decrease changes built into the system.

Referring to education, the Chair questioned why 20% of children were not in good or outstanding schools. The Executive Director (Children's Services) explained that children wouldn't be placed in inadequate or require improvement schools. However, if they enter the system and are already settled in a school it's important to retain stability. In addition, sometimes schools could be good or outstanding initially but then have a poor

inspection. Again, it was about stability for the child and so they wouldn't move schools.

The Board considered the data relating to personal education plans and sought clarity as to why 22% had been rated as requiring improvement. The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality advised that the Head of the Virtual School was working on this and took a firm line with schools that were not producing plans that were up to standard to ensure that they improved. The Chair asked whether there were particular schools that would benefit from assistance. Officers advised that they would need to review this. The Board asked that an update be provided in April, 2020 to which officers agreed.

In relation to health checks, the Chair noted that there had been a drop from 2018/19. The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality advised that there were a combination of factors contributing to the drop. These included reporting and late notification of when a child enters care. The issue was being discussed with the CCG who had undertaken audits. An item on health was to be considered by the Board in January and this would form part of that report. The Chair stated that this been going on for a while and it was important that the issues were identified and rectified.

In closing, the Chair requested that, rather than percentages, the performance report in future refers to number of children. The Head of Performance Improvement and Quality agreed to present the information in the way requested in future.

Resolved

1. That an update on the number of EPEPS completed and the number requiring improvement be reported to the Board in April, 2020; and
2. That future performance reports include the number of children.

95/19 Operational Work Streams and Review of Pledges

Deferred to the meeting to be held in January, 2020.

96/19 Work Programme

Members considered the work programme. The Chair confirmed that he expected a report setting out options for council tax support for children living out of borough and a report on the regional adoption agency to the January meeting.

Resolved

That the work programme be noted.

97/19 **Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting to be held on 7th January, 2020

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 7.57 p.m.

Signed:

Date: