Corporate Parenting Board

4 April 2022

Agenda Item No. 7

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

Report:

The terms of reference for the Corporate Parenting Board state that an annual report shall be produced for submission to Council.

The draft annual report is appended to this report for the Boards consideration.

Recommendations:

That the Corporate Parenting Board comment on and approve the annual report for submission to Council.

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Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report

2020 – 2022

Walsall Council

Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the annual report of the Corporate Parenting Board which covers the 2020-21 and 2021-22 municipal years. As corporate parents, we take our duties toward looked after children and care leavers seriously and are committed to providing the best possible support to meet their needs.

The Corporate Parenting Board provides a welcoming forum for children looked after and care leavers. We have endeavoured to ensure that the way we engage with young people is meaningful. As meetings moved online due to the Pandemic, we introduced a Shadow Board held in private to capture feedback from young people, to inform the Board which met in public and streamed on YouTube. It appears that this was a success as a representative of the Children in Care Council has said:-

"I really enjoyed the Shadow Board, I found it interesting and it was nice to meet the people, I felt it was good that people was listening to my views" - Representative of Children in Care Council.

Within this report are details of the issues considered and outcomes achieved are set out. It is important to acknowledge that the Shadow Board has effectively contributed to these outcomes and shaped the Boards thinking around many of the items considered. -. It is my view that the Board has made great progress and continues to influence services available for young people who are looked after and leaving care.

Councillor Tim Wilson
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

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The Corporate Parenting Board

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to assist the Council fulfil its legal obligations and responsibilities towards children looked after and leaving care by providing strategic direction to ensure they are effectively supported to reach their potential. Walsall's Corporate Parenting Board provides a welcoming forum for children and care leavers to discuss and influence the full range of services available to them. The Board convenes six times a year and comprises seven councillors (as below) together with the following advisors:

- The Designated Nurse LAC (Clinical Commissioning Group)
- The Head of the Virtual School.
- The Director Customer Engagement.

Advisors provide crucial contribution and expertise, in relation to their specialist areas, which are important to the lives of all young people in care/care leavers. Other attendees include the Executive Director (Children's Services), the Director of Children's Social Care and the Children and Young Peoples Champion together with officers from children's services and other directorates whom attend when requested to discuss key issues. By including these advisors we are helping to ensure that Walsall Council and Partner agencies have a joint commitment to corporate parenting in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for our children and young people in care and care leavers.

Councillor Wilson
Chair of the Board

Councillor Worrall
Vice Chair

Councillor Ferguson

Councillor Hicken

Councillor M. Nazir

Councillor Murphy

Councillor Mazhar

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Hearing the Young Persons Voice

The Covid-19 pandemic provided emergency legislation to enable Council Committee meetings to operate virtually. Once the legislation expired on 6th May 2021 elected members were required to attend committee meetings physically.

In Walsall, meetings recommenced physically but in a hybrid way to allow physical attendance by Committee Members and remote attendance by presenting officers, with meetings streamed to You Tube.

This presented a challenge for the Corporate Parenting Board as young people are invited to attend each meeting to ensure they have a voice. It was agreed that it would not be appropriate for those young people who were looked after or previously looked after, to be part of the meeting which was broadcast onto YouTube.

In order to ensure that engagement with young people continued, the Corporate Parenting Board met as a Shadow Board in private. The Shadow Board included all elected members and young people (via Teams) directly before the full Board meeting. This provided Members of the Board with the opportunity to listen to the views of young people and this influenced the work of the Board.

This arrangement was revised to be more effective and engaging for young people. The Shadow Board continued to focus on the voice of the child with a reduced attendance to facilitate a more open discussion and be more welcoming to young people - the Chair and Vice-Chair are the only Member attendees. All young people are encouraged to attend the Shadow Board, and a representative of the 'Children in Care Council' attends the formal Board to represent their views, Co-Chair the Young People Engagement item and provide feedback and challenge.

Work Programme

The Board has considered a number of matters during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 municipal year. All reports and associated minutes are available to view on the council's website. Items considered have included:-

Young People Engagement	The Regional Adoption Agency
Quarterly Performance information	The Fostering and Adoption Annual Reports
The Local Offer	CCG Assurance report
Health History document	Performance of the Virtual School and NEET
Housing and accommodation needs for Young People	Increasing Employability for Care experienced Young People
CAMHS and emotional wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers	Independent Visiting Service Annual report
Development of a website and app for Children in Care	Corporate Parenting Strategy

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Outcomes

Young People Engagement

The Board is passionate and strive to improve engagement with young people. The Children and Young Persons Champion supports the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and provides a valuable link between the Board and young people. The CiCC is the forum where Walsall's looked after children, young people and care leavers are able to shape and influence the parenting and support that they receive. The forum enables young people to build friendships, peer networks whilst learning new skills. The Chair was fortunate to be invited to a CiCC meeting via 'Teams' in July 2021 and had the opportunity to participate in discussion with young people.

A number of Board Members attended a litter pick in Willenhall on 15 January 2022, which was organised by one of the young people that attends the CiCC, as a result of a letter she wrote asking the Council to do more about her local community making it cleaner and nicer, this has further developed the relationship with young people.

A report on 'Young People Engagement' is taken to each Corporate Parenting Board meeting, the report highlights activity at CiCC, key updates, partnership working and it also details celebrations and achievements of young people.

Walsall Local Offer

It is a requirement for Local Authorities to publish information about services offered to care leavers and other services that may assist care leavers to transition to adulthood and independent living. This is done through the Local Offer and includes financial support, housing, health, education and training, Members received information on the current offer for care leavers and were consulted on additional support in the future. In Walsall the Local Offer covers the following main areas:

- Health and well-being
- Relationships
- Education and Training
- Employment
- Accommodation
- Participation in society

The Board had received feedback from young People at the Shadow Board that the 'setting up home grant' of £2000.00 was not adequate and needed to be increased to support young People. Subsequently the Board were assured, that as a result of this feedback, that the grant received by care leavers to equip new homes would be increased to £2500.00.

Housing accommodation needs for Young People

The Board received the findings of a joint audit undertaken by 'Money, Home, Job' and Children's Services in respect of children leaving care as they transition in adulthood. The key findings of which would be used to inform the Local Offer for Care Leavers. The Board were advised that fifty young people who had left/were

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leaving care had been reviewed, and taken part in focus groups. This has resulted in the identification of key areas for improvement for transition planning for care leavers. In considering the findings of the audit and the feedback received form young people, the following recommendations were approved and demonstrate the influence and the importance of gaining feedback from the Shadow Board.

1. The development of a training flat is costed and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration. This has been progressed and the training flat will be integrated into the Local Offer in 2022/23.

2. The decision to evict a care leaver from local authority housing accommodation will only be made by the Director of Customer Engagement (or a delegated substitute) following consultation with the Director of Children's Social Work. Whenever safe, and practical to do so, these Directors will jointly develop a plan, with the aim of preventing the eviction from occurring. It was agreed to implement this recommendation.

3. The Board asks Walsall Council to develop a rent guarantor scheme with Registered Social Landlord/s in Walsall and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration. A rent guarantor scheme has been developed with Walsall Housing Group, and has been included in the Local Offer.

4. The Local Authority meets the first month's rent for young people to reduce the risk of young people entering debt and a report is presented to the Directorate Management Group for consideration. There are number of measures in place to ensure that young people were financially supported.

5. The Board asks the Housing and Welfare Team to explore the costs associated with improving the offer to young people leaving care to help support them with the expense of setting up and managing their home. A business plan will be developed, and taken to Cabinet, to seek approval for any additional funds that may be required to support the development of this scheme. The 'Setting up Home Grant' was increased from £2000.00 to £2500.00 and applies to all young people leaving care and irrespective of where they choose to live.

6. The Corporate Parenting Board visit the range of accommodation options provided for children leaving care and care leavers, when it is safe to do so. Plans are in place to progress this recommendation from March 2022 due to restrictions related to the pandemic.

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Performance

A quarterly performance report is taken to the Board with a dashboard of measures detailing the direction of performance.

Members provided challenge on those measures where performance had dipped and sought reassurance that action had been taken to rectify any issues. An example of this was the percentage of Children in Care with an up to date dental check. The Board were informed that this was a national issue caused by the pandemic and national lockdowns. In order to ensure this issue was resolved the Board requested, a briefing on data relating to dental appointments for children in care. Subsequently, at the request of the Board, the Chair wrote to NHS England to highlight the importance of dental checks for looked after Children. The most recent report demonstrated that performance in this area had drastically improved.

Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Corporate Parenting strategy outlines the priorities for supporting looked after Children and sets a framework for the council and partners to be held accountable on their promises. The previous Corporate Parenting Strategy was published in 2017, following the approval from the Corporate Parenting Board. Building on the foundations of the existing strategies vision, aims and priorities, the council has developed a proposed corporate parenting strategy which aligns with the Corporate Plan and the changed legislative and national policy context. The Corporate Parenting Board received the revised Strategy at its meeting on 11 January 2022. Delivery against the strategic priorities within the strategy will be monitored by the Corporate Parenting Board. Further consultation and engagement will take place with children in care and care leavers with publication planned for March 2022.

The following priorities within the strategy were agreed, a list of commitments to children and care leavers, developed and agreed by the young people themselves and endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Board.

- Safety and Permanency
- Mental and Physical Health and Wellbeing
- Education and Employment
- Transitions and Independence
- Influence and Involvement

Every Elected Member and officer within a council has a statutory responsibility to make good decisions for children in care and care experienced young people (also known as care leavers) as a parent would for their own child, in this context councillors are Corporate Parents. Members of the Board considered the importance of Elected Member being effective corporate parents and in recognition of this the Board recommended that a programme of mandatory training for Elected Members in developed to support them in their role as a corporate parent.

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Fostering and adoption service

The Board receives an annual report of the adoption service, which is provided through adoption@heart – a regional adoption agency, providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by Wolverhampton City Council and became operational in April 2019. Information provided to Members included the number, type and age of children waiting for adoption and the length of time waiting and the number of children adopted. Reports provided detail of recruitment of new adoptive parents. Members provided challenge to this information and sought assurances.

The Board also receives an annual report of the fostering service. The Walsall Fostering Service is located within the Children's Services Directorate of Walsall Council. A range of information is provided to the Board, including the challenge of recruiting new foster carers. In response to this the Board recommended Walsall Council review the advertising of independent fostering agencies on traffic islands and that Walsall Council identify advertising space for the Council fostering service (free of charge). The Director Customer Engagement agreed to raise this issue at the appropriate Proud programme work stream.

Employability for care experienced young people

Care leavers have poorer educational and life outcomes than the general population on average, and are underrepresented in higher education. All universities and colleges must now consider care leavers in their access and participation plans in order to encourage and support them into higher education. However only 6% of care leavers nationally (and from Walsall) going into higher education. In regards to training and employment opportunities, many of our care leavers have not been afforded the stability that allows them to gain the skills that would make them more employable within the job market. This often leads to poor outcomes in all areas of their lives including maintaining suitable accommodation, experiencing poverty, mental health issues and involvement in criminality. The Board considered the data and the range of activity which aimed to improve this in Walsall. It was recommended by Members that a care leaver mentor scheme, for those looked after children who are interested in attending university, is developed. Members were informed that a number of young people had expressed an interest in joining the police or armed forces. In response to this, at the request of the Board, the Chair wrote to the West Midlands Police to request that a proportion of apprenticeships were ring fenced for care leavers. Further to this a positive response was received from West Midlands Police to confirm that they would be happy to work with looked after and previously looked after young people, and suggested that a Cadet Unit could be opened. There was also a commitment to offer volunteer opportunities for 17-18 year olds as Cadet Leaders. Further to this a proposal the response stated that a proposal would be taken to the governance board requesting that looked after and previously looked after children have opportunities to work with the police in Walsall in a similar way to other areas.

Assurance report CCG

The assurance report provides an overview of the statutory health responsibilities of the CCG in relation to children in care and provided further detail of action taken to deliver on-going improvements to health outcomes for looked after children.

As a result of the information presented the Board recommended that the CCG are asked to review the KPI's for 'Initial Health Assessments' and 'Review Health Assessments' to ensure that measures were ambitious enough to deliver on-going improvements for looked after children.

The Chair, on behalf of the Board, wrote to NHS England to highlight the importance of dental checks for looked after children.

Health Passports in Walsall

The Board received a report detailing the findings of an audit of the views of young people in relation to the health passport. The health passport provides a concise account of a young person's health and any significant health issues. The Health Passport is a quick reference guide to confidential details about a young person's personal health. It is a unique document, which holds individual confidential information and can only be viewed with the permission of the young person who owns it. It is recommended that Care Leavers have access to their health history and that they are enabled to be equipped to manage their own health needs wherever possible. As part of the process young people had given feedback that they would prefer a digital passport rather than a paper copy and suggested that the format needed updating. Currently this document was not shared with Children's Services and was provided for young people's use only. It was suggested that greater involvement with Personal Advisors and Social Workers in relation to the health passports would be beneficial in the future. At a subsequent meeting assurance was provided that the Trust had taken on board the feedback from young people and were considering a 'health passport app' (on trial at Sandwell Council).

Independent Visiting Service Annual report

An Independent Visitor is described as a trained volunteer who is there to "befriend and support children and young people in care" The statutory guidance states that the appointment should be considered as part of the development of the care plan and looked after review process. The child's wishes and feelings should be ascertained as to whether or not an Independent Visitor should be appointed. 'Change Grow Live' is the Walsall's Independent Visitor provider and this is a sub-regional contract in partnership with Dudley, Sandwell and Telford & Wrekin.

Walsall's contribution has been £10,000 for at least 6 years; this reflects the target number of children for Walsall, which is 10. In consideration of the information presented, the Board recommended that the annual target of 10 children (accessing the Independent Visitor Service) was reviewed and that the revised target is reported back to the Corporate Parenting Board.

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Virtual School Annual Report and those Young People Not in Educational Employment Training (NEET)

The Corporate Parenting Board has responsibility to promote the educational achievement of looked after and previously looked after children, to this end Members considered the Virtual School annual report which outlined the activity of the Virtual School and reported on the educational outcomes of Walsall's looked after children and the work carried out to support the education of looked after children during Covid19.

It is acknowledged that, on average, care experienced young people had significantly poorer educational outcomes and life outcomes in comparison to the general population. They are also underrepresented in higher education. Lower levels of stability meant that young people had not always gained skills, which made them employable. The Board considered data on those young people who were not in education, employment or training. The Committee considered this data in comparison to neighbouring authorities, and were assured that the NEET data was comparable regionally. Information was also provided on in house programmes for NEET. Further reports are scheduled to monitor the support provided to looked after and previously looked after children.

CAMHS and emotional wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers

The Board invited a representative of Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Trust to present a report describing the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in Walsall. Included as part of this report was a description of the Fostering, Looed-After and Adoption Supporting Hub (FLASH) which is a therapeutic service provided by Walsall Children's Services, that offers a range of interventions and support to children and young people, foster carers, residential Children's homes, Transitional Care leavers, adopters and Adoption/Fostering Teams. The Board had sought feedback from young people prior to the meeting, and raised these issues with the Mental Health Trust representative to ensure that their voices were heard.

Development of a Website and App for Children in Care

As part of the young people engagement item feedback was received from young people that they were not aware how to access services. Discussions were held on the development of a specified website or app to resolve this issue. The Board recommended that a report is taken to a future meeting of the Board detailing the options for an app to include functionality and accessibility for young people.

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Looking Forward to 2022 - 2023

In 2022/23 the Board will continue to deliver its remit and in particular:-

- Build relationships with young people in care and care leavers and be an advocate for them.
- Attend future events and activities with young people to further develop relationships.
- Challenge services and partners to ensure that young people are receiving the best services and given every opportunity to succeed.
- Monitor the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, and set the Boards remit around its priorities.
- Consult with young people on the refresh of the Local Offer to ensure it is meeting their needs.
- Further promote the development of a website/app for young people.

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Appendix 1

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD TERMS OF REFERENCE

Membership

7 Members of the authority as determined by the Council to include:-

- The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services (Chair);
- The Chair of Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Note: A representative from the NHS shall be invited to each meeting as an advisor.

Substitution

Substitute members may be nominated to the Committee in accordance with paragraph 4 of the Council procedure rules (Part 4), subject to them having undertaken the relevant training as detailed below.

Chairman and Vice Chairman

The Chairman shall be the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

The Vice-Chairman will be appointed at the Annual Council meeting for the municipal year.

Quorum

The quorum of the Board shall be one third of the membership, subject to a minimum of two.

Meetings

The Board will meet every eight weeks or thereabouts and will usually meet at the Council House, Walsall at 6.00 p.m.

Access to information

The Board will comply with the Access to Information Rules set out in Part 4 of the Constitution.

Purpose

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To assist the Council fulfil its legal obligations and responsibilities towards children looked after and leaving care by providing strategic direction to ensure they are effectively supported to reach their potential.

Remit

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board shall:

(1) Provide clear strategic direction in relation to corporate parenting to improve the outcomes and life chances of looked after children and care leavers.

(2) Ensure that Walsall Council and Partner agencies have a joint commitment to corporate parenting in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for our children and young people in care and care leavers.

(3) Make a demonstrable commitment to prioritising the needs of looked after children and young people.

(4) Set objectives for monitoring the work of and evaluating the progress of the Officer level 'Operational – Corporate Parenting Steering Group'.

(5) Develop and sustain clear linkages with Children in Care Council, 'Council 4 Kids', Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board, Walsall Foster Care Association and Partners to include the Police, the NHS and education providers and others.

(6) Approve a work plan with clear aims and objectives which reflect the terms of Walsall's Corporate Parenting pledge.

(7) Monitor progress on outcomes and performance indicators for looked after children.

(8) Submit reports to the Council, the Executive, Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee or such other body as the Board considers appropriate or necessary.

(9) Submit an annual report to Council in April each year.

(10) Listen to, consult with and involve looked after children and care leavers and their carer's in the assessment, development and delivery of services, including inviting them to act as advisers to the Committee on a regular basis.

(11) Develop knowledge and be aware of the experiences and concerns of looked after children and care leavers.

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(12) Promote achievement and acknowledge the aspirations of children and young people and show ambitions and aspirations for all looked after children and care leavers.

(13) Champion the provision of Council based work placements and apprenticeships for looked after young people.

(14) Monitor the effectiveness of the Virtual school.

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