

Corporate Parenting Board

Thursday 1st July 2021 at 6.00 p.m.

Board Members Present:

Councillor T. Wilson (Chair)
Councillor. R. Worrall (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ferguson
Councillor Hicken
Councillor Murphy
Councillor M. Nazir

Officers Present

David Hughes	Children and Young Persons Champion
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse LAC (Clinical Commissioning Group)
John Dunning	Interim Children's Commissioner for Walsall CCG
Colleen Male	Director, Children's Social Work
Mick McCarthy	Group Manager (Corporate Parenting)
Helena Baxter	Apprenticeship Programme Lead
Helena Kucharczyk	Head of Performance Improvement and Quality
Elise Hopkins	Director – Customer Engagement

Note: This meeting was held in the Council Chamber in accordance with s.102 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's Constitution. In order to comply with social distancing requirements as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the meeting was conducted via Microsoft Teams in accordance with the Council's Standing Orders for Remote Meetings.

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. It was noted that a Shadow Board was held directly prior to the meeting to seek the views and experiences of young people. Members confirmed that they could both see and hear the proceedings.

1/21 Introductions and Apologies

There were no apologies for the duration of the meeting.

2/21 Substitutions

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

3/21 **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meetings held on 22nd March, 2021 were submitted.

(see annexed)

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd March, 2021 copies having previously been circulated to each Member of the Board, be approved and signed by the chairman as a correct record.

4/21 **Young People Engagement**

The Children and Young Persons Champion spoke to the report (annexed) and highlighted the salient points.

Members were informed of the following updates:

- There were new recruits to the Children in Care Council (CiC), and efforts continued to expand its membership further.
- Young People would be provided with the opportunity to work towards ASDAN accredited awards in mentoring.
- Young people will be involved in the development of new children's homes in the Borough.
- There was a continuation in developing champions in areas such as health and social care.
- A young person had drafted a letter, which expressed concern about the local environment. This was escalated to council management and as a result a litter pick had been arranged.
- There had been one-to-one mentoring, by a 19 year old care leaver, to a younger looked after child.
- The Chair of the Board attended the CiC and young people had the opportunity to influence the Corporate Parenting Board work programme. This was positive as young people felt that they had been listened to.
- A promotional video had been produced to encourage young people to participate in the Children in Care Council.
- A need for a 'care leavers' group had been established to focus on specific issues.
- A meeting had taken place on 30th March in relation to the Care Leavers covenant and as a result of this, there would be a 70% discount on water rates for care leavers.

Members congratulated the 'Children and Young Persons Champion' on the success of the promotional video. A Member asked how many young people took part in the CiC. Officers clarified that the full list of young people who had been referred was around 35-40 people and there were around 20 young people who consistently attended the CiC.

The Chair thanked the young person for taking the time to write the letter to the relevant authorities and to Officers for acting on the request. It was also suggested that the Board should be invited to the litter pick.

The Health representative informed the Board that the health team had been working with the Young Peoples Champion and it was hoped a video introducing health checks would be produced in the future.

An Officer responded to a question from a Member to confirm that the resources for the Care Leavers Ambassador had been agreed, and the recruitment to this role would be progressed. The Chair fed back on the CiC to inform the Board that young people reported that they were not aware how to access services. A Member formally moved that a report on options for an app should be taken to the Board. This was moved, seconded and agreed unanimously by the Board.

The Chair thanked young people for attending and participating in the Shadow Board.

Resolved:

- 1. That the Young People Engagement report was noted.**
- 2. 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 in care.**

5/21 Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board July 2021 Quarter 4

The Performance Lead for Children's Services presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). Members were informed the report presented performance at the end of March 2021 and for the previous 12 months. This data was submitted to the Department of Education, some of which was used to benchmark the Authority against other Local Authorities. There had been a reduction in children entering care, however, backlogs in courts due to the Covid-19 pandemic meant that this reduction had not translated to a reduction in the total number of children in care in Walsall. It was hoped that the reduction in these backlogs would address this issue. Members were informed that had been an increase in the number of children placed outside of the Local Authority boundary. This was due to fewer placements available, which had impacted placement sufficiency. Short-term stability had reduced, which was positive, and was lower than comparators. There had been an improvement in initial and annual health checks, which were improving and continuing to improve. It was noted that dental checks had been impacted by the pandemic. Another impact of the pandemic had been a reduction in the number of young people in education, employment or training. However Members were assured that this was an improving picture. It was noted that there was only one care leaver not in suitable accommodation.

A discussion ensued on the 'percentage of visits undertaken to timescale', it was noted that the statutory timescale for this was 0-6 weeks and a Member asked how this

compared to neighbouring authorities. Officers agreed to seek out this information and bring this information back to the Board.

A Member asked for assurance that the percentage of initial health checks completed in timescales would continue to be improved. The Health representative stated that this was monitored on a monthly basis. The Board were assured that everything was being done to improve the percentages. The Board sought assurance that the percentage of children coming into care that had received dental checks would be improved, acknowledging that this was impacted by the pandemic. The health representative stated that this was a national issue, and where there were issues in local dentists this was escalated to NHS England to progress the issue. This was an issue that was monitored, however the backlog may take a few months to improve.

Officers informed Members the service aimed to work with families to overcome issues which could impacted on their ability to have their children remain in their care. It was hoped that the impact of this work had led to a reduction in the number of children coming into care.

The Director (Customer Engagement), asked if it was likely that unaccompanied asylum seeking children would be accepted in to Walsall. The Group Manager stated that children would be accepted in line with the national transfer scheme. In the last month, two children had been received, and two more would be accepted in July, this would not put the authorities' resources at risk. The Board were assured that the Authority was not being put under pressure and national formulas were used. A Member queried how these children could be accommodated if local children were being sent outside of the Borough. Officers responded that this was often about the individual needs of children which meant the most appropriate placement would be identified, whether that be within or outside of Walsall.

Assurance was sought that action was being taken in relation to the one young person who was not in suitable accommodation. It was noted that this was due to the definition of 'suitable accommodation' and that personal advisers were carrying out all necessary checks and were satisfied that the young person was safe and well.

Resolved

That the Walsall Children's Services Corporate Parenting Board July 2021 Quarter 4, report was noted.

6/21 Increasing Employability for Care Experienced Young People

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board were advised that the report provided an update on care experienced young people that were not in education, employment or training.

Figures relating to care experienced NEET, compared favourably with the England and West Midlands average. The reasons for young people not being in

employment, education or training were described. The NEET action group would concentrate on those young people who would benefit from extra support to make use of opportunities in Walsall. The Board were advised of successes within the Team in placing care leavers.

A Member highlighted a point raised in the Shadow Board, this was the suggestion of a mentoring programme for care leavers. This was supported.

A Member questioned if care leavers would benefit from additional education, Officers confirmed that this was the case and there was a challenge in persuading young people to take up these opportunities due to personal difficulties faced by this group. It was confirmed that this was being progressed, and work was being done with young people to ensure they could access and maintain education, employment and training. The Board were advised that young people's interests were matched with opportunities available, and they were referred on. Officers were asked that the Board were kept updated on this situation. It was acknowledged that care leavers had lived experiences which were beneficial to employers.

In response to a question from a Member, Officers explained that referrals to the NEET Action Group (NAG) would only be made if young people were happy for this to happen, this would allow the Black Country Impact Workers to be more focused. Members stressed to importance of hearing the child's voice at all times.

The Kickstart programme was discussed and in response to challenge from Members, Officer explained that it was 'Walsall Works' who were coordinating this and that there were care leavers who were taking advantage of this scheme.

Recommendations that:

1. The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board writes a letter to West Midlands Police to request that a proportion of apprenticeships are ring fenced for care leavers.

2. A care leaver mentor scheme, for those LAC who are interested in attending university, is developed. A report is provided to the Board detailing the supported provided to those LAC interested in attending university.

3. The Board receives a report providing information in relation to the 'dip sample' of young people leaving custody.

7/21 Virtual School Annual Report

The virtual school annual report was annexed. Those Members with any questions should contact Democratic Services.

8/21 Forward Plan

The Board were advised that this detailed the work of the Board for the following two meetings.

Resolved

That the forward plan be noted.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 7.30 p.m.

