

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022 – 2023



Walsall Council



Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the 2022/2023 annual report of the Corporate Parenting Board. As corporate parents, we take our responsibilities towards children in care and care leavers seriously and are committed to providing the best possible support to meet their needs and to improve their outcomes.

The Corporate Parenting Board aims to provide a welcoming forum for children in care and care leavers, where we celebrate their achievements and listen to their concerns and challenges. We have endeavoured to ensure that the way we engage with young people is meaningful, and where feedback has suggested that this has not been the case, we have asked Officers to review this and considered how this could be made better in the future. A recent engagement session held at the TLC hub aimed to make young people more comfortable in their engagement with the Board. Moving forward we aim to review the way we engage with young people and to be more flexible in our approach to seeking input from young people.

It is my view that the Corporate Parenting Board has made great progress in listening to the views of children in care and care leavers and that it uses these views to influence services available for young people who are in the care of the local authority and leaving care.

On behalf of the Corporate Parenting Board, I would like to thank the young people, and the families that care for them, for their engagement, time and commitment to the Corporate Parenting Board throughout the year. Without the involvement of the Young People, we would not be successful in meeting its aims.

I would also like to thank council officers and External Partners for their hard work, which has helped the Board to achieve the outcomes that are set out within the report.



Councillor S. Elson
Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to assist the Council fulfil its legal obligations and responsibilities towards children in care and leaving care by providing strategic direction to ensure they are effectively supported to reach their full 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 Corporate Parenting Board convenes six times a year and comprises seven councillors (as below) together with the following advisors:

- The Designated Nurse LAC (Health)
- The Head of the Virtual School (Education)
- The Director Customer Engagement (Housing).

Advisors provide crucial contribution and expertise, in relation to their specialist areas, which are important to the lives of all children in care and care leavers. Other attendees include the Executive Director (Children's Services), the Director of Children's Social Work 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 S. Elson
Chair of the Board



Councillor T. Jukes
(Vice-Chair)



Councillor A. Hussain



Councillor A. Hicken



Councillor I. Hussain



Councillor R. Worrall



Councillor F. Mazhar

Work Programme

The Board has considered a number of matters during the 2022-2023 municipal year. All reports and associated minutes are available to view on the council's website. Items considered have included-

- Young People Engagement.
- Quarterly Performance information.
- National review of children with disabilities and complex health needs.
- Care Leaver Health History Report.
- Residential Homes.
- Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers.
- The Fostering Annual Reports.
- Therapeutic Support to Children in Care.
- Adoption@Heart Annual Report.
- CCG Assurance report.
- Support to Young People.
- Virtual school annual report.
- Participation Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Annual report.

The Board considered it of great value for Elected Members to attend 'Total Respect' training. In order to encourage increased participation, the Board recommended that bespoke sessions be designed for Elected Members – with this later offered out to all Elected Members.

Hearing the Young Persons Voice

The Board is passionate about improving outcomes for children and young people and strives 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 Corporate Parenting 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 care and support that they receive. The forum enables young people to build friendships and peer networks whilst learning new skills.

At its first meeting the Board considered 'hot topics' for young people, which had been identified as issues that they wanted the Board to consider, they were added to the Corporate Parenting Boards work programme for the year:

- Mental Health and wellbeing (Therapeutic Support to Young people).
- Living alone and isolation (Support to Young People).
- Budgeting and getting by (Support to Young People).

A number of Board Members agreed to visit residential homes on a six monthly basis and be the link Member to a residential home – building a relationship with staff and young people. These visits had commenced, and positive feedback had been received.

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. This report is the first item on the agenda as it is critical to the Board meeting its strategic objectives.

Young People raised concerns that the setting up home grant provide by the Council to Care Leavers was not adequate, in response to this, the Board received a briefing paper on the options for increasing the grant. After considering the issue, and the options presented by Officers the Board recommended that a mechanism for the incremental increase of the 'setting up home grant' was included in the formal budget setting process. The Board have been advised that any increases will be considered during April 2023 with implementation in April 2024 due to the 'Government's Response to Care Review. The Board were assured that the household support fund had been used to alleviate cost of living pressures.

Consideration has been given as to how young people viewed their involvement with the Corporate Parenting Board. Because of this feedback, the participation team have worked with the Children in Care Council to refresh the way they operated – the following approach was agreed:

- Young people's priorities for issues considered by the Board would be sought via an engagement session at the beginning of the municipal year (to inform the setting of the work programme).

- Corporate Parenting Board reports should be shared with the appropriate children's participation forum in a child friendly way – with the report amended where necessary (as a result of feedback).
- The Children in Care Council and Care Leaver's Forum would be supported to feedback their views about reports in the most suitable way for the young person.
- A schedule of informal meetings would be held with the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children in Care Council, Care Leavers forum and the Childrens home forums.

Building on this approach, the first informal engagement session was held with children in care and care leavers at the TLC hub in February 2023. This was a positive session, which generated feedback from young people on how support to them could be improved. At a future meeting, an action plan will be considered to respond to issues and feedback given by young people.

Areas of Focus

Performance

The Corporate Parenting Board monitors the progress on outcomes and performance indicators for looked after children through a quarterly performance report. This contains 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. The measures included in this presentation, provided Young People with the opportunity to raise concerns and detail issues they may have experienced. For example the provision of housing to care leavers.

Fostering and Adoption Service Annual Reports

The Corporate Parenting 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 and details of the 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. The Board was advised that there had been an increase in the number of Children in Care in Walsall over the last 5 years, from 645 in 2017 to 648 on 5 December 2022. However, at the end of March 2022, there were 196 approved internal fostering households. In 2021, the Fostering Service introduced a referral fee of £500 which on approval of the applicant by Fostering Panel, was payable to the referrer. The Board was supportive of the Council achieving foster friendly status.

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). This was raised at the appropriate Proud programme work stream and work had taken place to ensure that independent fostering agencies would no longer advertise on traffic islands, and there would be an increase of advertisements for the Councils fostering service.

Integrated Care Board (ICB) Assurance Report

The Corporate Parenting Board has a responsibility to ensure that Walsall Council and Partner agencies have a joint commitment to corporate parenting in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for children and young people in care and care leavers. The ICB assurance report provides an overview of the statutory health responsibilities of the ICB 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.

The Board considered the data in relation to initial health assessments, and the reasons for this included:

- Late notification of coming into care.
- Carers overlooked the appointment.
- Children missing/refused.
- Extended hospital stays.
- Cancellation due to Covid-19.
- An increase of children coming into care.

It was noted that the percentage of dental checks completed had declined due to Covid-19. This continued to be monitored and was beginning to recover. The Board was assured that NHS England were developing pathways for this cohort.

Therapeutic Support to Children in Care

A key concern for young people, as reported to the Corporate Parenting Board, was mental well-being. To respond to this concern, Members requested information on the therapeutic support provided to children in care who are at greater risk of suffering poor emotional well-being or mental health that their peers not in care, often resulting from their early childhood experiences and trauma.

Therapeutic support to children in care is provided through the FLASH service. Foster Carers were empowered to meet children's needs through the Mocking Bird service.

In delivering therapeutic support to children in care, the FLASH Service:

- Undertakes direct work with children and young people who are looked after.
- Delivers support to children and young people living in foster care, children's homes or supported accommodation in Walsall and within 20 miles.
- Provides evidence based therapeutic support.
- Delivers an evidence based therapeutic approach to trauma and attachment if available.
- Provides support in the 'community' or homes where children live.
- Provides drop-in and consultation for Care leavers at transition and Leaving Care Team
- Delivers consultation clinics for carers, social workers and other relevant professionals to support the child in their home.
- Reviews the progress of the intervention and the impact on the outcomes for the children.

Referrals to the service are made by the social workers and are prioritised on the risk of placement breakdown. Young people whose care is at risk of immediate breakdown are classed as priority and followed up with social worker and other professionals involved to determine the nature of the response. All referrals accepted into the service are offered a consultation session for social worker and/or carers to more fully explore concerns and presenting needs.

Challenge was provided from Members in relation to the status of the service, they were informed that a review of the service was undertaken in 2020/2021 and a revised specification has been developed in collaboration with the CCG and the Trust. The specification sets out the requirements for the service to provide a targeted therapeutic service from registered professionals to undertake direct work with children who are looked after and whose early childhood experiences of trauma are impacting on their emotional well-being and secure attachments to carers.

The Corporate Parenting Board received assurance that the service specification included key performance indicators and that these will provide both quantitative and qualitative information about the impact of the service and outcomes for children, this will include children referred to service and stepping down from specialist Child Adolescent Mental Health Service.

Members were supportive of the mental health practitioner funded by the Virtual School (since 2021), to work with children to better support them in school settings. The mental health practitioner who is a qualified social worker is located in the FLASH team.

National review of children with disabilities and complex health needs

As part of their responsibility to monitor progress on outcomes for looked after children the Board received feedback on the review of children with disabilities and complex health needs in Walsall. The review focussed on children who were looked after children with disabilities and complex health needs and were placed in residential specialist schools, which were registered as children's homes. The conclusion of the review was that there were no significant concerns and the quality of care was good. There was evidence that children had developed and there was excellent communication between those involved in the child's care.

Residential Homes

Walsall's children's residential service provides care to children from across the Borough who are unable to reside with their families and for whom foster care is not considered a suitable option at that time. In June 2021, Cabinet endorsed a plan by Children's Services to open and run two new children's homes. These homes would specifically focus on the more complex, hard to place and therefore more costly children, and those who were in the process of being able to return home or step down to foster care. The Board was supportive of this development, as it would improve outcomes for children and young people in care.

Supporting unaccompanied asylum seekers Children (UASC)

The Corporate Parenting Board considered an item on the responsibilities of the Council in relation to children in care who had arrived in this country as unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Members heard that children who had fled and claimed asylum often had additional needs such as language and culture, extreme and traumatic life experiences, fear and uncertainty about the outcome of their immigration proceedings. This group were vulnerable to criminal exploitation and modern slavery. Members considered the services available to this group and the future service development.

This information developed the Board's knowledge and awareness of the experiences and concerns of looked after children.

Virtual School Annual report

The Corporate Parenting Board has responsibility to promote the educational achievement of looked after and previously looked after children, and to monitor the effectiveness of the Virtual School. To this end, Members considered the Virtual School annual report, which outlined the activity of the Virtual School and reported on the 2020-21 educational outcomes of Walsall's looked after children.

Members expressed their satisfaction that the 2021 GCSE results were the best ever GCSE results reported for children in care. The number of young people gaining five or more 4-9 GCSEs (or equivalent) passes has increased from 29% in 2020 to 38% in 2021. Alongside a rise in the number of young people achieving five to nine GCSEs from 15% in 2020 to 19% in 2021. Which was better than regional, national and statistical neighbour reported outcomes.

Looking Forward to 2023 - 2024

In 2023/24 the Board will continue to deliver its remit and in particular:-

- Review the governance and function of the Board to ensure that opportunities to hear from children and young people are maximised.
- Champion a bespoke version of Total Respect training, for Elected Members.
- Refresh the approach to engagement with young people to make engagement meaningful.
- Build relationships with children and 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 associated action plan, and set the Boards remit around its priorities.
- Consider the effectiveness of the Board and revise the approach to its function accordingly.

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

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.
- (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.