

## **Corporate Parenting Board**

**Monday 9 January 2024 at 6.00 p.m.**

**Conference room 2, Walsall Council House**

### **Board Members Present:**

Councillor S. Elson (Chair)  
Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor A. Hicken  
Councillor V. Waters

### **Officers Present**

Colleen Male	Executive Director, Children's Services
Rita Homer	Director, Children's Social Work
Jenny Cockcroft	Interim Head of Practice, Quality & Improvement
Alison Jones	Designated Nurse LAC (Walsall ICB)
Catherine Masterson	Designated Children in Care Nurse - Black Country ICB
Jivan Sembi	Head of Service
Donna Green	Group Manager
Lorraine Thompson	Head of Virtual School
Elise Hopkins	Director, Customer Engagement

19 **Apologies**

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Harrison and Worrall.

20 **Substitutions**

There were no substitutions for the duration of the meeting.

21 **Minutes**

A copy of the minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2023 and 13 November 2023, were submitted.

(see annexed)

**Resolved (Unanimous)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2023, copies having previously been circulated to each member of the Board, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

22 **Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report**

The Group Manager introduced the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board was informed that the IRO Manager was responsible for producing the annual report for consideration by the Corporate Parenting Board and for publication on the Council website.

Members were informed that IRO's currently had an average of 51 children allocated to them in their role and an average of 17 children on child protection plans. This was within expected workload and provided them with the capacity to provide a good quality service to children in care.

Key performance indicators were presented, it was noted that 94.7% of child in care reviews were held in timescale, which was an increase from last year. Participation (by children) in reviews was discussed, Members questioned what the reason for the increase in attendance was - Officers suggested this was due to good preparation by the IRO and work done in conjunction with social workers.

In response to challenge in relation to performance indicators, Officers explained that there would always be issues within a system and that the role of the IRO was to identify such issues and any areas of challenge or difficulty.

**Resolved**

**That the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report be noted.**

**23. Care Experienced Status as a Protected Characteristic**

The Head of Service presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). Members were informed that the report outlined the proposal that Walsall Council treats individuals with care experience as a protected characteristic in all policy and decision making. The advantages of this were described which included reducing the inequalities faced by care experienced young people.

The Board agreed that this was a positive proposal and would benefit individuals with care experience, also agreeing that the outcomes of this proposal to be monitored at a future meeting of the Board.

**Resolved**

- 1. The Corporate Parenting Board support the proposal that Walsall Council treat individuals with care experience as a protected characteristic.**
- 2. That Members of the Corporate Parenting Board submit a notice of motion to Council to allow debate and discussion on the proposal that care experience is treated as a protected characteristic by Walsall Council.**
- 3. The notice of motion should include a recommendation to Cabinet that care experience is treated as a protected characteristic by Walsall Council.**

**24. Health Services Children in Care Assurance Report**

The Designated Nurse (Looked After Children) presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report provided an overview of the statutory health responsibilities of the ICB in relation to children in care, and performance of these responsibilities.

The Board was informed that Walsall Healthcare Trust was responsible for children within a 50 mile radius, and that the same nurse should oversee the same child where ever possible. It was noted that care leavers in the Black Country would soon be able to apply for a pre-payment certificate to allow them to receive free prescriptions – this was a result of a request made at the Corporate Parenting Board.

Further detail was provided on the care leavers health passport app, which provided important information about health, appointments, and health history in one place.

A Member questioned the timeliness of health checks and the data sharing between the ICB and the Local Authority. The Designated Nurse explained that there were some issues with data but that this was in progress.

**Resolved**

**That the Health Services Children in Care Assurance Report be noted.**

**25. Independent Visitor Annual Report 2022 – 2023**

The Group Manager presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board was reminded that Independent Visitors were trained volunteers who befriended and supported children and young people in the care of the Local Authority. Further detail on this process was provided, and it was noted that 386 hours of independent visitor time had been provided to Walsall children, along with 41 indirect hours. Challenges around recruitment were acknowledged, and further to Member challenge, Officers stated that the potential for Walsall Council employees to be volunteers was with Human Resources for consideration.

The Board commended the Team for the improvement in performance of this service.

**Resolved**

**That the Independent Visitor Annual Report 2022 – 2023 be noted.**

**26. Quarterly Performance Report**

The Executive Director presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The report set out the key quarter 2 performance indicators for children's services relating to children in care.

Members were advised that the number of Children in care was stable and that significant work had been done around the recruitment of foster careers – as placement sufficiency was an issue. As a result of this, 4 additional foster careers had been recruited. It was noted that the number of children placed more than 20 miles away had increased, and this remained an area of consideration.

The Executive Director stated that there was a concern that data indicated an issue around placement stability. As such a report would be taken to Cabinet/CMT.

Further to challenge by Members, Officers confirmed that the service continued to promote fostering with staff. Officers confirmed that the costs of caring for children were a national issue and were following a worrying trend of escalation. A discussion was held around high-cost placements, and Members were advised of work that was being done to reduce the needs of such children.

An update on new residential homes was given, including their successes in supporting children.

**Resolved**

**That the Quarterly Performance Report be noted.**

**27. Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022- 2025**

The Head of Service presented the report and highlighted the salient points (annexed). The Board was informed that the 3-year strategy and the action plan were approved by the Board in January 2022. The report provided an update on the progress against the action plan for 2022/23 and the proposed action plan for 2023/24 (tabled).

Members were advised that the Corporate Parenting Strategy had 5 key strategic priorities which responded directly to a list of commitments to children and care leavers.

**Resolved**

- 1. That the progress against the action plan for 2022/23 is noted.**
- 2. That The priority areas and action plan for the delivery of the strategy are agreed.**

A change to the work programme was agreed, this was for the engagement session to be held in April 2024 rather than February.

Members fed back on visits to Bluebells and Hilton Road residential homes, stating that they were impressed with the provision.

There being no further business the meeting terminated at 6.55 p.m.

Signed .....

Date .....