

Attendance

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board

Councillor Obaida Ahmed
Councillor Jasbinder Dehar
Councillor Celia Hibbert
Councillor Peter O'Neill
Councillor Caroline Siarkiewicz
Councillor Clare Simm
Councillor Martin Waite

Employees

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| Emma Bennett | Director of Children's Services |
| Fiona Brennan | Designated Nurse, Looked After Children |
| Dawn Deans | Senior Social Work Manager |
| Alison Hinds | Head of Looked After Children |
| Alice Vickers | Corporate Parenting Officer |
| Shelley Humphries | Democratic Services Officer |

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies for absence (if any)**
Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Udey Singh.
- 2 **Declarations of interests (if any)**
There were no declarations of interest made relative to the items under consideration at the meeting.
- 3 **Minutes of the meeting held 19 July 2018**
Resolved:
 That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2018 be confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.
- 4 **Matters arising**
There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting
- 5 **Schedule of Outstanding Matters**
It was noted that the items in Outstanding Matters had all been addressed.
- 6 **Adoption Annual Report**
Dawn Deans, Senior Social Work Manager presented the Adoption Annual Report and highlighted key points. She detailed performance during the period April 2017 – March 2018 and the work done toward forming a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

In respect of point 9.1, it was highlighted that the disrupted placement involved an eight-year-old child and this was queried. The group were reassured that careful preparation for both child and adopter had been arranged prior to the placement, however there had emerged greater challenges than first anticipated.

Emma Bennett added that there were very low numbers of disruption and all placements followed a rigorous matching process.

In reference to a question about the size of the 'pool' of adopters and how Wolverhampton compared to similar authorities, it was stated that there were 31 across Black Country areas and this was the same compared to others. The target for next year was 25 and this was considered achievable.

In response to a suggestion of using similar algorithms used by other matchmaking software to match placements or analyse why placements work or break down, it was stated that there was a marketing officer working on identifying new recruitment methods. These methods included using data gathered from information viewed by service users and it was noted that the current system was adopter led. There had been a matching tool in development at one stage and it was highlighted that the Family Values Project was targeting marketing at people with certain traits and values.

It was queried what the barriers were with regard to the red rating of the adoption scorecard. One suggestion was that delays experienced with court processes could be factor as a placement order from the court was required before a placement could be progressed. It was noted that those children who were difficult to place often took longer and that in some circumstances, in particular when children in long-term foster placements were adopted by their foster family, the figures could become skewed making it appear they were in the system longer. It was noted that Wolverhampton had managed to secure particularly difficult to place children, such as over-fives or sibling groups.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) Report

Alison Hinds, Head of Looked After Children presented the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) report and highlighted key points. The report had informed the Board on the progress of the implementation of the RAA, Adoption@Heart and that the agency had been designed to create a wide and easily accessible pool of adopters to meet the needs of children in care.

In addition to the information contained within the report, the following points were noted:

- That the possibility of going through a trading company had been explored but the Local Authorities had agreed on a hosted model. The Project Board and DCS had agreed Wolverhampton to be the host authority, although it was subject to approval from executives from all local authorities.
- There had been a budget ringfenced for marketing already.

- It was clarified for the Board that a trading company did not mean privatisation and the scheme would have been local authority owned and run.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

8 **Performance Monitoring Information**

Emma Bennett, Director for Children's Services presented the updated report and explained the figures and statistics.

It was agreed that Darren Martindale would bring a briefing note to the next meeting on education results for looked after children, with a full report to follow in January 2019.

In respect of difficulties with staff retention, it was noted that high caseloads may be a factor in people moving on or some leave for more money elsewhere or less commitment on agencies.

It was reported that the notice period for a social worker was currently one month and it was queried whether a longer notice period could be introduced. It was clarified that the recruitment period took six months.

In order to address the difficulty, there was restructure in progress and a new senior social worker role was being introduced to offer opportunity for workforce development. Agency staff were being employed, however it was difficult to ensure continuity of work with transient staff. It was noted that there were the additional benefits of sick pay, support and stability that comes with a permanent job and City of Wolverhampton Council pay was considered the most attractive.

It was taken into consideration that the next generation of social workers and graduates were more attracted to flexibility than permanence, therefore other retention options could be explored such as reducing caseloads and offering progression through a career pathway. It was noted that there was a rolling recruitment programme on WM Jobs advertising for new staff.

Councillor Martin Waite queried the increase in Court applications for care orders and requested that the median figures be added to the dashboard on the Current Adoption Scorecard section.

It was noted that there was a high volume of court proceedings and work was being carried out with the Ministry of Justice and the Black Country Court to manage this and explore reasons why it was so.

It was noted that the review completion figures were good, however the assessment figures were queried. It was clarified that reviews were no longer classed as assessments and the figures would be updated to give an accurate representation.

Resolved:

1. That Darren Martindale, Virtual School Head would provide a briefing note at the next meeting on education results for looked after children, with a full report to follow in January 2019.

2. That timeliness of adoption statistics would be represented as a median figure in future Performance Monitoring Reports.
3. That the Assessment statistics would be refreshed to give a clearer representation of figures.

9 **Exclusion of the press and public**

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information contained in paragraph 2 of the Act, namely information that is likely to reveal the identity to an individual.

10 **Councillor Visits to establishments - Schedule of Visits**

The Chair gave an overview of his visit to Upper Pendeford Farm and a copy of his report was circulated.

It was reported that the establishment was well-run and its manager helpful, passionate about supporting the young people and demonstrably able to diffuse any challenging behaviour.

The rooms were well-kept, personal and welcoming and the establishment itself was well laid out with many facilities and activities on offer.

There appeared to be a good relationship with the neighbouring farm, which permitted the residents to use the land for outdoor pursuits.

The overall impression was reported to be very positive and the Chair thanked Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer for arranging the visit.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.