

Attendance

Chair Cllr Paul Sweet (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Obaida Ahmed
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Celia Hibbert

Cllr Welcome Koussoukama
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Clare Simm

Cllr Martin Waite

Employees

Andrew Wolverson
Alice Vickers
Puja Taloy
Habiba Amjad
Shelley Humphries

Head of Service, People
Corporate Parenting Officer
Participation Services Officer
Graduate Trainee
Democratic Services Officer

Tracy Kenny, Foster Carer attended as an adviser to the Board.

The Chair also welcomed members of the Children in Care Council [CiCC] and the Care Leavers' Forum [CLF] attending the meeting as part of a meet and greet exercise with Councillors:

Casey Gavin
Beth Spresser
Amir Shah
Billie Jo Taylor
Alexia Taylor
Elijah Campbell

CLF
CLF
CiCC
CiCC
CiCC
CiCC

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Alison Hinds, Head of Looked After Children and Fiona Brennan, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children.

Andrew Wolverson attended in place of Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services.

2 Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest made relative to the items under consideration at the meeting.

3 Minutes of the previous meeting - 22 March 2018

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2018 be confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

It was recalled that, in the last meeting, thanks had been given to former Councillor Val Gibson for her work as Chair with the Corporate Parenting Board but former Councillor Christine Mills had not been thanked. The Chair agreed this should be on record and that he would write to formally thank her for her services also.

Resolved:

That the Chair pass on the Board's thanks to former Councillor Christine Mills.

5 Schedule of outstanding matters

The report on current progress on matters previously considered by the Board showed that all actions were currently up to date.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6 Introduction to Corporate Parenting

Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer delivered the Introduction to Corporate Parenting presentation to the Board and introduced the main key principles of the Board's responsibility to Looked After Children:

- Is this good enough for my child?
- Would this have been good enough for me as a child?
- Is this the best that we can achieve?

The Board were advised that the Corporate Parenting Strategy had been refreshed in line with the seven Corporate Parenting Principles outlined in the new Children and Social Work Act of 2017 and that Wolverhampton had been the first local authority to do this. These principles were identified as the basis of services and support provided to Looked After Children by the authority as well as the measure of success.

The successes of the authority were also touched on, such as the annual I Awards that celebrates the achievements of looked after children and young people at which the winner received the opportunity of a work placement.

Resolved:

That the presentation be received and noted.

7 Children in Care Council and Care Leavers' Forum Workshops

Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer led a workshop involving members of the Children in Care Council, Care Leavers' Forum and Councillors in attendance. The purpose of the workshop was to introduce the Councillors to the young people and give the new members of the Board a chance to hear first-hand the experiences of the young people.

Two exercises were undertaken with all present, the first of which was an interview style exercise intended to let attendees get to know each other and their lifestyle. The second exercise was the reading of a series of statements relating to experiences of looked after children which had to be placed in either a negative or positive context from the point of view of a child or a professional. These statements were written by looked after children and were designed to give a sense of some of the challenges faced.

Resolved:

That the exercise be noted.

8 Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan 2018 - 2019

Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer presented the Corporate Parenting Work Plan for approval by the Board and explained its purpose to the new Board members.

Following an amendment to an incorrect date and the Leavers' Local Offer item being brought forward to the 19 July 2018 meeting, the work plan was agreed.

Resolved:

1. That the plan be noted and agreed
2. That the amended plan be circulated to the relevant officers

9 Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018 - 2021

Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer presented the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018 - 2021 to the Board and made reference to the Strategic Group for

Corporate Parenting workshop facilitated by Mark Taylor, Strategic Director for People on 17 May 2018.

This workshop was attended by various officers and partners and its purpose was to rework what was known as the Corporate Parenting Senior Officers Group and its terms of reference. Its main focus was barriers faced by looked after children and what the authority and its partnerships could do to remove them.

The resulting draft action plan drawn up from the findings from this workshop was then submitted to the group in the form of a visual presentation.

The main areas where barriers were identified were:

Housing

This included the communities in which looked after children and care leavers were housed and focused on maintaining strong links and networks within that community. It was also identified that young people leaving custody were then considered care leavers after the age of 16 and needed additional, continuing support in order to re-enter the community.

Finance

It was highlighted that one issue faced by care leavers was how to manage their own money and that many young people had experienced problems with debt or accessing benefits. The plan going forward was to ensure young people were enabled to make sound financial decisions and learn how to access financial help or claim benefits.

Career Opportunities

The main key points that were identified here were ensuring young people were receiving a good education, provided with opportunities for work placements and encouraged to have high aspirations. An example given was a collaboration with Zurich, who offered opportunities for paid work placements for children in care.

Health

Removing the barrier to eating well and living healthily was highlighted next, which could be achieved with better access to GPs when placements changed, access to affordable or free leisure activities, more support with transitions to adult services and continuation of support with lifelong illnesses. The Group were advised that there was a statutory duty to provide a summary of health for care leavers, however this could be improved upon further by allowing young people to have access to their health history.

Local Community Support

This was focused on improving access to the local offer of activities, involving young people with their community and improving mental health by engaging in enjoyable activities. Ensuring young people had access to positive role models was also a key point and mentoring schemes such as those provided by the mayor and The Way were given as examples of good ways to provide this.

The importance of the authority's continued engagement with partnerships and the role played by those partnerships to remove the aforementioned barriers was stressed to the Board. How the authority would measure success and how to know what success would look like were also of equal importance.

In addition, a report would be going to cabinet in September with a list of services available for young people and what to expect up to the age of 25. This had been compiled with the three main principles in mind and covered areas related to:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Relationships
- Education and Training
- Employment
- Accommodation

The presentation ended with a visual outline of where the Strategic Group for Corporate Parenting lay in relation to the Governance Structure.

Questions were invited and the following points were highlighted:

- Accessing free leisure services. This was already in place; however it was suggested users could take a friend for free which would encourage young people to use the leisure services and engage with the local community.
- An issue had arisen with care leavers having difficulty claiming benefits if their savings reached a £14k threshold. This issue had been raised nationally with Department for Education [DfE] in order to support young people and ensure their savings could be safeguarded whilst retaining their claim to benefits. A legal team had become involved in order to find a solution.
- With regard to a query about accessing leisure services further afield, a website link to leisure facilities within a 50-mile radius of Wolverhampton could be followed to assure access to a wider range of facilities.

Resolved:

That the presentation and draft action plan contained within be noted.

10 **Performance Monitoring Information**

Andrew Wolverson, Head of Service, People presented the Performance Monitoring Information report and highlighted key points.

There had been a reduction in the number of children in external and internal foster care placements and the gap was closing.

36 children had been placed into residential homes, 80% of which were rated good or outstanding. Any that had not been included in this rating had been working with the authority to improve this.

Key Stage 4 results for 2016 were positive, however looked after children were not achieving the same level as non-looked after children. It was queried why the statistics were 12 months behind and it was clarified that the information comes from the Virtual School Head Teacher's Report.

The number of up-to-date dental checks had decreased. It was better than the general population, but the figures should have been around 90%.

There had been improvements in numbers of adoption places, but again further advances could have been made. Despite this, Wolverhampton was found to be good at finding placements for those children who were difficult to place. One particular case was noted where even a child who had been in the system for 3000 days had been placed successfully.

A trend in the increase of Care Orders being made had been picked up and it was queried why, whether that might continue and what could be done. The number of children becoming looked after children had increased in neighbouring authorities whereas in Wolverhampton, this number has been more static around the 600 – 650 mark. It was found that securing placements for young children was a quicker process than for children around the age of 11-13, whose needs were more complex. It was then suggested that shortening the length of time children are kept out of care could be of greater benefit with the view that the sooner they go in, the sooner they come out.

The demographic representation of BME [Black and Minority Ethnic] was clarified as it appeared that BME children and young people were underrepresented and it was queried whether it was because BME families were more likely to take on looked after children. It was stated that there weren't as many white placements as BME placements.

Resolved:

That the Performance Monitoring Information report be noted.

11 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.

12 Councillor Visits to Establishments

No visits to establishments had been undertaken since the last meeting of the Board.

For the benefit of the new Board members, the purpose of the visits to residential establishments was outlined as a chance to view the premises and to speak with staff and residents about their experiences. A report presented at Corporate Parenting Board meetings usually originated from these visits. Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer was to set dates and compile lists of the establishments.

Resolved:

That a list of establishments be updated and dates set for new Councillors to visit.