

Attendance

Members

Cllr Val Gibson (Chair)
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss
Cllr Mrs Christine Mills
Cllr Mrs Patricia Patten
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Martin Waite

Staff

Daphne Atkinson	Fostering Team Manager - Community
Emma Bennett	Head of Looked After Children – Community
Charlotte Johns	Head of Corporate Strategy and Improvement – Chief Executive’s Office
Yvonne Nelson – Brown	Operational Services Manager – Children’s Residential Services – Community
Mark Taylor	Assistant Director (Finance) – Delivery
Lorna Tull	Corporate Parenting Officer – Community
Carl Craney	Democratic Support Officer - Delivery

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

1. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Philip Page and Paul Singh.

Chair’s announcements

The Chair welcomed Councillors and Officers to the meeting including Laura O’Grady who was accompanying Cllr Julie Hodgkiss as part of a Work Experience placement. She invited Councillors and Officers to introduce themselves. Introductions were duly made...

2. **Declarations of interest**

No declarations of interest were made in relation to items under consideration at the meeting.

3. **Minutes of the previous meeting (13 March 2013)**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. **Matters arising**

With reference to Minute No. 42(ii), Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre enquired as to when the report on the analysis of the number of Looked After Children attending good/outstanding schools would be submitted for consideration. Emma Bennett responded that a report on this issue together with a report in connection with "Setting Up Home Supports Grants and Support" (Minute No. 41) would be presented to the meeting scheduled for 25 September 2013.

5. **Strategic Priorities for Corporate Parenting – Delivery Directorate and Office of the Chief Executive**

Charlotte Johns and Mark Taylor presented a report on the developments within the Delivery Directorate and the Office of the Chief Executive that impacted on Looked After Children.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss commented that during her service on the Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny Panel she did not believe that a Looked After Child had ever been appointed as a representative of the Youth Council to serve on that Panel. Emma Bennett advised that this was largely as a result of the high competence levels of the Youth Council representatives which rendered it a difficult role for Looked After Children to undertake. To compensate for this gap regular meetings were now held between the Youth Council and the Children in Care Council. Cllr Julie Hodgkiss reported that the C&YP Scrutiny Panel had recently tasked the Youth Council with carrying out various pieces of work on its behalf and suggested that Looked After Children could be encouraged to assist with this work.

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre queried the differing stances suggested within the report between Work Experience and Apprenticeships. Emma Bennett assured the Board that Looked After Children were guaranteed an interview for any Apprenticeship placements if they fulfilled the necessary criteria.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

6. **Performance Monitoring – Looked After Children**

Emma Bennett circulated Performance Monitoring Information in respect of Looked After Children and explained the current position.

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre referred to Indicator LAC-09 (Percentage of Looked After Children who attend school for less than 85% of available sessions) and

suggested that this information related to the previous Academic Year as the current years' figures would not yet have been validated by the Department for Education. He also suggested that the figures might not reflect the true situation as pupils were sometimes marked as receiving education even if they were absent from school. Yvonne Nelson Brown advised that attendance figures submitted by schools in respect of Looked After Children were challenged by the Looked After Children in Education Team.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

7. **Update / Review of Children's Homes Managed or Commissioned by Wolverhampton City Council**

Yvonne Nelson Brown presented a report on the current status of Children's Homes managed or commissioned by Wolverhampton City Council. She drew to the attention of the Board the revisions to the Ofsted inspection regime which had resulted in all the homes receiving a poorer rating than at the time of the last inspections. Improvement Plans had been produced for those homes designated with a rating of "Adequate". The report included details of work being undertaken currently by the Looked After Children's Transitions Team in respect of older Looked After Children. She explained the use of the Restorative Justice system as a primary way of addressing and reducing crime together with its benefits in avoiding the criminalisation of Looked After Children. With regard to occupancy rates, currently at 93% overall, she advised that this was partially as a result of the phased transfer of Looked After Children to the newly opened Merridale Street West Home.

Cllr Rita Potter enquired as to whether a positive outcome was expected from use of the Restorative Justice system. Yvonne Nelson Brown advised that this was the outcome with approximately 80% of cases. In the event of the Police being called to attend an incident the attempts to make use of the Restorative Justice system would be questioned. Staff received regular training in relation to appropriate use of the system.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss commented that there were many more interventions and approaches made to support and improve outcomes for children than was realised and enquired if further reports and information in relation to these could be presented to future meetings. Emma Bennett advised that Cllrs would be made more aware of the range and scale of interventions during the visits to establishments where the opportunity to discuss these with both staff and children would be available.

Cllr Mrs Patricia Patten enquired as to the number of Out of City placements funded currently. Emma Bennett advised that, at the present time, there were approximately 20 such placements, a substantial reduction from the position

some 4/5 years ago and that some were as a direct result of either where there was no other option , due to, for example, Police bail conditions, or specialist care requirements of particular children.

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre referred to the overall financial cost of placements and emphasised the need for strong working relationships between Social Workers and schools, given that schools were under pressure to address the needs of groups, in terms of particular classes and/or year groups / whole school groups rather than particular individuals. Emma Bennett advised that the Looked After Children Education (LACE) Team worked closely with schools to improve the outcomes for Looked After Children and enjoyed a close working relationship. She drew to the attention of the Board that some placements were funded through Pooled Budget arrangements with Health and education.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

8. **Adoption Scorecard**

Emma Bennett presented a report which detailed an analysis of Adoption Scorecard information.

Cllr Martin Waite commented that he supported the approach adopted in continuing to secure placements for those children who were hard to place rather than concentrating on the easier to place children to the detriment of the former group. Emma Bennett acknowledged the comments and expanded that this approach was being developed further through the use of concurrent placements, where a foster family would go on to adopt the child(ren) and with improvements in the relevant processes. Cllr Rita Potter opined that that it was more important to concentrate on selecting the most suitable adoptive parents rather than achieving target times and rates. Emma Bennett responded that the aim of the service was to achieve as many suitable adoption placements as possible. Whilst acknowledging the improvements in the service Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre commented that a situation whereby children remained in care for a period of 18 months was not beneficial to society as a whole and that efforts should be made to improve further.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

9. **Fostering Service Annual Report – April 2012 – March 2013**

Daphne Atkinson presented a report on the work of the Wolverhampton Fostering Service from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013.

In response to a question from Cllr Julie Hodgkiss, Daphne Atkinson clarified that City Direct took initial calls from prospective foster parents but that the

screening was undertaken by Fostering staff.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted and referred to Cabinet for consideration.

10. **Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2012/13 and 2013/14**

Lorna Tull presented a report which detailed the progress made against each of the agreed actions together with those not achieved, which would be carried over into the current year in respect of the Corporate Parenting Action Plan 2012/13 and which set out the proposed Action Plan for 2013/14.

Resolved:

1. That the Corporate Parenting Action Plan for 2012/13 be received and noted and those Key Actions not achieved be rolled over to the 2013/14 Action Plan;
2. That the Corporate Parenting Action Plan for 2013/14 be approved.

11. **Protocols and Procedures for Undertaking Visits to Residential Establishments – Presentation**

The Board received a PowerPoint presentation from Lorna Tull in relation to the protocols and procedures to be followed when undertaking visits to residential establishments. She undertook to contact individual Members in order to arrange a rota of visits to be undertaken during the current Municipal Year. She advised that the Managers of the residential establishments would assist Members in relation to their respective visits and also provide support in respect of the compilation of the report on the visit.

Following a question from the Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, Emma Bennett undertook to ensure that prior to each visit the relevant Members would be provided with the latest available copy of the Regulation 33 visit report. In response to a question from Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Emma Bennett advised on those Officers who would have received training in relation to physical restraint training. She explained the Risk Assessment procedures which were in place to supplement the training provided.

Resolved:

That the presentation be received and noted.