



Corporate Parenting Board Minutes – 25 September 2013

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	Interim Assistant Director, Safeguarding, Business Support and Communities - Community
Steve Cox	Interim Head of Looked After Children – Community
Sharon Green	LAC Transitions Team Manager - Community
Dr Roberta Fry	Consultant Clinical Psychologist – Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust
Lorna Tull	Corporate Parenting Officer – Community
John Welsby	Assistant Director, Children and Families - 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. 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 (26 June 2013)**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. **Matters arising**

With reference to Minute No. 42(ii) (13 March 2013) and Minute No. 4 (26 June 2013), the Chair, Cllr Val Gibson enquired as to when the report in connection with "Setting Up Home Supports Grants and Support" (Minute No. 41) would be presented to the Board. John Welsby advised that a report on this subject would be presented to the next meeting of the Board.

5. **Consultation Meeting with Wolverhampton Carers', Residential Workers and Other Carers' – 31 July 2013 – topics Identified for further consideration.**

Resolved:

1. That reports on the following topics be considered at the next meeting:
 - Improving Communications between Social Workers' and Foster Carers';
 - The Role of Foster Carers' in the Development of Skills of the Fostering Service;
 - Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers'
2. That a report on Wolverhampton's Learning and Development Programme for Foster Carers' be considered later in the meeting;
3. That the views of Foster Carers' be sought early in the new year on the proposals to improve communications between them and Social Workers'

6. **Wolverhampton Fostering Service Foster Carers' Training**

Daphne Atkinson presented a report which detailed the learning and development programme provided by the Council for Foster Carers' in Wolverhampton.

Cllr Hodgkiss enquired as to how the identity of the person undertaking on line training opportunities could be verified and confirmed. Daphne Atkinson explained that the on line training was only made available via a secure connection to nominated users and that the success or otherwise was established by the Training Co-ordinator and also witnessed through performance monitoring.

Cllr Paula Brookfield questioned whether any Foster Carers' declined to attend training events or to participate in training activities and the remedies available to the Council to address such instances. Daphne Atkinson assured the Board that there were only very few instances when this had been an issue and that in those cases assistance and encouragement were offered. She reminded the Board that certain elements of the programme were compulsory and, that ultimately, Foster Carers' could be referred back to the Fostering Panel and discharged. All Foster Carers' were also subject to an annual performance review.

Cllr Paula Brookfield referred to the elements of the training package which addressed sexual abuse and severe neglect and enquired as to whether both foster Carers' were required to attend these elements. Daphne Atkinson responded that this was an expectation from Ofsted and was one of the reasons that training for all members of the household was offered. Flexible arrangements for training elements were now available to encourage attendance at training events.

Cllr Rita Potter enquired as to whether Foster Carers' were required to enter into any type of formal training agreement which could require fees to be repaid in the event that they left the Council's employment within a specified time period. Daphne Atkinson advised that no such arrangements were in place and that during her employment with the Council there had only been one case where a Foster Carer had left the employment of the Council after obtaining a professional qualification. She explained that the Foster Carers' were a very loyal group of employees and often only left the Council's employment if they went on to adopt a child.

Cllr Paula Brookfield enquired as to whether there were specialist Foster Carers' for such specific groups as young babies or those entering care for the first time. John Welsby reported that this issue would be addressed in the Recruitment and Retention Policy report to be considered at a future meeting of the Board.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That the congratulations and thanks of the Board be extended to all employees involved in the delivery of training to Foster Carers' and to all Foster Carers' for participating in training and development;
3. That the Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, write formally to all Foster Carers' to inform them of the Board's sentiments on this matter

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

John Welsby circulated Performance Monitoring information in respect of Looked After Children and explained the current position.

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre enquired as to whether the rise in the number of Looked After Children was linked to the level of deprivation in Wolverhampton. John Welsby advised that the level of Looked After Children in Wolverhampton was at a higher level than the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) family group and that comparisons had also been undertaken against the %age of the population in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance. Cllr Dr Hardacre expressed concern that the family group was not a reasonable comparison given that some of the Authorities within the group were coastal or port authorities and that only Sandwell MBC could be considered on a like for like basis, in his opinion. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, reminded the Board that the numbers of children in care had risen across the country.

Cllr Paula Brookfield requested that the comparison data in relation to those in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance with children in care be circulated to the Board. Cllr Martin Waite queries as to whether there was causation rather than a correlation between the number of residents in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance and the number of children in care. John Welsby confirmed that to be the case. Cllr Paula Brookfield questioned as to whether any research had been undertaken with regard to the reasons behind the increase in the looked after children population. John Welsby reminded the Board of the independent analysis undertaken by the Dartington Social Research Unit for the Council which had confirmed that the Council was pursuing care proceedings in relation to those children at risk. Furthermore, it would not be possible for a meaningful comparison to be undertaken unless a full case work analysis was carried out by all authorities in the family group.

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre referred to section 5.2 of the Performance Management information (LAC: Starts including journey to care) and expressed his concern that 30% of the children were unknown to the Council prior to referral. John Welsby reported that this was due to an increase in complex cases or cases of great concern which had been drawn to the attention of the Council.

Cllr Martin Waite referred to section 6 of the Performance Monitoring information (Adoptions) and reminded the Board that any difficult to place cases could have a detrimental effect on the performance figures. John Welsby confirmed this to be the case but commented that it had always been a commitment of the Council to seek the most appropriate placement regardless of the effect on the performance figures. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson suggested that the performance of the Council in relation to adoptions was also influenced by the performance of the Court's in dealing with adoption cases. John Welsby advised that the performance in the

Wolverhampton Court's had shown a marked improvement and, in recently published statistics, was the most improved in the country. Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre suggested that in the event of more complex cases and an increase in the number of referrals achieving the target performance would become increasingly difficult. John Welsby confirmed this to be an accurate assumption. Following a further question from Cllr Paula Brookfield, John Welsby advised that it was not challenges to adoptions but requests for further assessments, often in the case of family members, previously unknown to the Council, which caused delays in the process.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

8. **Looked After Children – Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Annual Report**

Dr Roberta Fry presented the Looked After Children – Children and Adolescent Services (CAMHS) Annual Report.

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre welcomed the report but drew to the attention of the Board the statistics in Figure 1 (number of Referrals Referred According to Profession) inasmuch as the number of referrals from the Education Service seemed to be minimal when, given that children should be attending some form of educational establishment from the age of 3, he expected a greater number of referrals via this route. Dr Roberta Fry explained that in many cases referrals would come via Social Services following an initial referral from Education Services. She assured the Board of the great and valuable contribution made by the Education Service to work in protecting children considered to be at risk.

The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, commented on the need for all partners to accept their respective roles and responsibilities in dealing with Looked After Children rather than considering the issue to be the responsibility of the Council.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss enquired as to the measurement of outcomes from the CAMHS and as to whether Dr Fry considered the service provided successful outcomes for its clients. She also enquired as to whether sufficient resources were available to the service. Dr Roberta Fry responded that resources had been reduced and that an increase would be welcomed. With regard to the measurement of outcomes she advised that the standard measurement procedure was utilised but that the degree of success could only be measured by the degree of honesty and openness expressed by the young person and their carers'. John Welsby advised the Board that a reduction in the number of breakdowns in relationships in residential care could be viewed as a testimony to the work undertaken by CAMHS. Steve Cox commented on the

very successful working relationship with CAMHS and also on the existence of the virtual "CAMHS".

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

9. **Wolverhampton LAC Transitions Team Annual Report – April 2012 – March 2013**

Sharon Green presented the LAC Transitions Team Annual Report – April 2012 – March 2013. Steve Cox reminded the Board that the Leaving Care Service had been restructured in July 2013 to form the LAC Transitions Team having previously been provided by external organisations including Shaftesbury Care and Spurgeons. Under previous arrangements planning for leaving care had been targeted at 15 year olds but this work now commenced much earlier. He advised on the close working relationship with supported housing providers which assisted in the identification and provision of suitable accommodation for care leavers. He reported also on work with the Young Men's' Christian Association (YMCA) for arrangements for host placements with care leavers entering into lodgings. Partnership working was also undertaken with employment and education providers to secure appropriate placements for care leavers.

Cllr Rita Potter enquired as to the arrangements made for those care leavers who were not ready to leave care or required a period for adjustment. Sharon Green explained that each care leaver was treated as an individual and their specific requirements were tailored accordingly. She advised that the Council could maintain a relationship with individuals for a number of years after the person left care. John Welsby reported that the Government encouraged local authorities to not discharge care leavers too early and that, historically, Wolverhampton had a good record in this regard. Cllr Paula Brookfield commented that having witnessed the previous system she commended the new system whole heartedly and would watch its progress with interest. Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre congratulated the Officers concerned with the revised service and commented that, in his opinion, it was much better than the previous arrangements.

Cllr Paula Brookfield enquired as to the percentage of care leavers who declined to keep in contact with the Council and also the arrangements for keeping in contact with any care leavers who were in Youth Offenders institutions. Sharon Green explained that regular attempts were made to re-engage with care leavers who had lost contact and that with those in custody contact was maintained. Cllr Patricia Patten questioned whether the necessary checks were undertaken in respect of those who provided lodgings for care leavers. Sharon Green confirmed that all appropriate checks were conducted by the YMCA.

The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, enquired as to the data in the pie charts detailed at Section 7.7 of the report. Sharon Green explained that the charts represented the accommodation situation of young people who had left care in the last 12 months and after a further 6 months. Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre referred to those care leavers who had special educational needs and who would disappear from the system once they had attained the age of 19 years but that the Education Care and Health Bill which was currently progressing through Parliament would require contact to be maintained until the care leaver attained the age of 25 years and enquired as to whether this issue was being discussed by the Council and the NHS. Sharon Green reported that a specialist worker had been appointed in the Adult Services section of the Community Directorate to progress work on transitions from leaving care. John Welsby confirmed that this Officer was looking at the effects of the Bill across the Council.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss reminded the Board that at the meeting with the Children in Care Council held in 2012 concerns had been raised with regard to the different allowances paid to those in residential care compared to those in foster care and as to when a report on this issue would be considered. Steve Cox assured the Board that this matter was being addressed and would form part of a report to be considered at the next meeting. Daphne Atkinson and John Welsby commented on discussions which had been held with young people on this issue and that it was one of a number of issues to be addressed in the revisions to the Recruitment and Retention policy. The issue was complicated further when private fostering arrangements were used.

Cllr Paula Brookfield enquired as to the financial responsibility for the provision of accommodation once a care leaver attained the age of 18 years. John Welsby explained the position inasmuch as the funding followed the individual.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted and that a further progress report be submitted in 12 months' time;
2. That the congratulations of the Board be extended to the LAC Transitions Team for the work it was undertaking.

10. **Exclusion of the press and public**

Resolved:

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business as they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information contained in paragraph 1 of the Act, namely

information relating to any individual.

11. **Members Visits to Establishments**

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

Lorna Tull reported on correspondence with members of the Board in relation to visits to establishments. She advised that a rota of visits would commence in October 2013 and on the information which would be provided prior to any visit.