

Attendance

Chair Cllr John Reynolds (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Martin Waite

Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Rashpal Kaur

Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Zee Russell

Conservative

Cllr Paul Appleby

Employees

Fiona Brennan
Vanessa Graham
Alison Hinds
Shelley Humphries
Alice Vickers
Lisa Whelan

Designated Nurse, Children and Young People in Care
Family Support Worker
Head of Children and Young People in Care
Democratic Services Officer
Corporate Parenting Officer
Service Manager

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Caroline Siarkiewicz, Councillor Udey Singh and Emma Bennett.

2 Declarations of interests

There were no declarations of interest made.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2019

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2019 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

Resolved:

That the Schedule of outstanding matters be noted.

6 Adoption Annual Report

Alison Hinds, Head of Children and Young People presented the Adoption Annual Report and highlighted salient points. The report outlined adoption performance from April 2018 – March 2019 and provided an update on the work carried out by the Adoption Team throughout this period. It also included an update on the progress made towards the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

It was noted that this would be the last Adoption Annual Report that would come solely from City of Wolverhampton Council. Future submissions would be worked on jointly by the authorities making up the regional adoption agency (RAA) and an interim report was to be provided in the next six months.

It was highlighted that the focus remained on early permanence, meaning ensuring children were settled in long-term or permanent placements at the earliest opportunity.

It was noted that Wolverhampton had performed well by achieving more placements than other neighbouring authorities; 43 adoption orders and six permanent placements had been secured last year.

It was highlighted that although national targets were high, Wolverhampton were performing strongly towards meeting these.

It was queried what the greatest barriers to increasing the number of permanent placements were. In response to this, it was noted that the main barriers were low numbers of people coming forward to adopt and the rise in children needing adoption, although these were not just local but national issues. To make a difference regionally, it was hoped to use the RAA to recruit more adopters.

It was suggested that the Authority could explore other successful adoption processes followed internationally to determine if further inspiration could be drawn from models overseas.

It was noted that a large number of authorities had come together to form similar adoption agencies to Adoption@heart and 19 such agencies existed across the country. It was thought this formed more manageable groups and issues around adoption could be tackled jointly.

It was suggested that, although there were targets for timeliness of adoption, it was more important to take time to ensure placements were of greatest benefit for the children, particularly in cases of keeping sibling groups together or placing hard-to-place children.

In response to a query regarding the matching process, it was clarified that the service was led primarily by the needs of the child and assessment of adopters. It was clarified that a holistic approach was used and time taken to ensure the best match possible.

Resolved:

That the Adoption Annual Report April 2018 – March 2019 be received.

7 **Annual Fostering Report 2018-2019**

Lisa Whelan, Service Manager presented the Annual Fostering Report 2018 – 2019 and highlighted salient points. The report provided an update on the developments, progress and future objectives of the fostering service. It was outlined that the fostering service was responsible for recruiting, supporting and developing foster carers to care for and support vulnerable children placed in their care.

A concern was raised around the potential for foster carers losing enthusiasm for the role after several years and it was queried what was being done to mitigate this. It was recognised that sometimes carers naturally retired upon reaching a certain age or moved away to continue their caring career in another region, but often further training rekindled enthusiasm before it started to wane. It was noted that the training had been rebranded and carers' training was continually updated to keep their skills current.

The Board was also advised that opportunities were available to move to another level of care, subject to approval from a dedicated panel, for which carers would receive a higher income. Experienced carers were encouraged to pair up with new carers to share their knowledge and experience. Foster Families United had also been working to generate interest in foster caring.

Queries were raised around how much need there was for respite care and whether dormant carers were utilised to provide this support. It was confirmed that there had

been some requests for respite care and there were different ways of approaching this. Some carers had their own arrangements with friends or family, sometimes availability of other carers would be explored or caring support could be shared among teams of carers. In terms of holidays, it was advised that it would generally be expected that a cared for child would be included in holidays as part of the family.

A query was raised around separating sibling groups if a good match was made for just one child. It was clarified that separation would only ever be considered for legal reasons or if keeping them apart was in the best interests of the children, otherwise families were encouraged to take all siblings together. It was highlighted that the service had even successfully placed a sibling group of seven children together and this achievement was commended by the Board.

The 28 key achievements as outlined in the report were also commended.

Resolved:

That the Annual Fostering Report 2018 – 2019 be approved.

8 **Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group (WCCG) Health Summary January 2019 - March 2019**

Fiona Brennan, Designated Nurse for Children and Young People in Care (DNCYPiC) presented the Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group (WCCG) Health Summary January 2019 – March 2019. The report provided an interim update on the CYPiC and WCCG's priorities moving forward. It was noted that the update brought reporting to Corporate Parenting Board in line with the WCCG's timeline.

It was highlighted that the main focus had been on challenges around out of city children in Wolverhampton placements. It was reported that work had been undertaken to improve the notification process and channels of communication had been opened with Clinical Commissioning Groups and Designated CYPiC nurses from placing authorities.

It was reported that there had been occasions when Wolverhampton had been unaware that an out of city child had been placed until the child gained access to local services. It was clarified that it was the responsibility of the placing authority to advise Wolverhampton of the placement in advance, however it was noted that there was not always time for advance notification if a child was placed in an emergency situation.

It was noted that on occasion, it had been necessary to utilise unregulated accommodation to place young people between 16 – 25, however it was also reported that central government and Ofsted were investigating ways to tighten regulations on accommodation.

Resolved:

That the Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Group (WCCG) Health Summary January 2019 - March 2019 report be received.

9 **Foster Carers' Forum**

Vanessa Graham, Family Support Worker provided a verbal update on the activities of the foster carers. The Board also welcomed four foster carers as guests.

It was noted that foster caring in Wolverhampton had been rebranded and carer practice was being tied into national practice with restorative practice built in.

It was reported that a specialist scheme called Foster Families United had been introduced. New enhanced workshops and training opportunities were being offered to prepare new carers and refresh skills for existing carers. This included training and advice to enable carers to support children in transracial placements or children with autism and/or learning disabilities. A therapeutic course was also being offered.

It was reported that a buddy support system had been introduced with experienced carers offering support to newly approved carers.

The Foster Carer Conference event was highlighted, which had brought together carers and professionals to focus on fostering relationships. The theme was 'Stand by Me' and focused on supporting sibling placements and transracial placements.

It was reported that scheme had been developed known as Sons and Daughters which aimed to offer support to biological children of foster carers so they felt included and involved in welcoming and supporting a child placed with their family.

It was noted that a website had been developed known as Online Britannia which offered access to education and training to children and young people.

The main goal was to raise the profile of fostering in Wolverhampton and ensure carers were well equipped to manage diverse placements.

In response to a question around access to social workers, the carers present at the meeting stated that they thought their social workers were very good and they felt well supported. In one instance, it was stated that if their social worker was not immediately available, answerphone messages were always responded to promptly. It was reported that there was also a single number to call meaning someone was always available.

It was felt by the foster carers that although foster caring could seem daunting at first, initial training was particularly good and helped them feel prepared for the role. One carer reported that the experience was extremely rewarding and enjoyed looking after the child placed with them.

It was clarified that out of hours support was available and a list of numbers had been provided to carers, although none of those present had used the service as yet.

It was noted that autonomy to resolve any issues or disputes within the family in the first instance was encouraged. Emergency services were offered however few families had needed to use them. The scheme Foster Families United also provided peer to peer support for carers.

Board members took the opportunity to commend the foster carers present and Wolverhampton foster carers as a whole for the significant difference they made to provide children and young people of Wolverhampton with continuity and stability.

Resolved:

That the Foster Carers' Forum update be received.

10 **Participation of Children and Young People Annual Report 2018-2019**

Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer presented the Participation of Children and Young People Annual Report 2018 – 2019. The report provided an overview of the activities of children and young people over the past 12 months with the Council and its partners in line with the Participation Strategy 2016 – 2019. It was also outlined that the strategy was due to be reviewed to consider the participation plans for 2019 onwards.

It was highlighted that the Wolverhampton Care Leaver Offer, which had been worked on in consultation with Wolverhampton's care leavers, was considered one of the best nationally and the care leavers felt immensely proud to have been involved in this.

It was also noted that a Co-production Charter was being developed in conjunction with the Children and Families Together Board.

It was highlighted that a member of the Children in Care Council had been awarded Wolverhampton Young Citizen of the Year 2019 for his work as a member of the Children in Care Council and Youth Council. It was noted that he had been heavily involved in producing an informative video on combatting climate change that was screened at a meeting of Full Council on 17 July 2019 in support of a motion to declare a state of climate emergency in Wolverhampton.

It was noted that members of the Children in Care Council had also been involved in and delivered Total Respect training to various bodies.

Resolved:

1. That the Participation of Children and Young People Annual Report 2018 – 2019 be approved.
2. That the City's continued commitment to children and young people having influence over decisions that affect them and involvement in co-producing services in the City be endorsed.

11 **Performance Monitoring Information**

Alison Hinds, Head of Children and Young People in Care presented the Performance Monitoring Information Report and highlighted salient points. It was noted that the dashboard at Appendix 1 had been updated with data as at 31 May 2019 and that the number of children in care had reduced over the year to date from 624 to 613.

It was highlighted that there are now more children placed with internal foster carers than agency carers for the first time. This was commended as a great success and

attributed to the work undertaken as part of the Family Values Project to reduce reliance on agency staff.

In respect of social worker caseloads, the average was 21.3 cases however work was being undertaken to reduce this to a target of 15.

It was noted that the key stage 2 and 4 attainment information requested at the last meeting had now been added under the Education heading.

It was noted that the number of up to date dental checks had reduced again and it requested that the figures be checked to ascertain whether it was a recording error rather than an actual reduction.

It was also highlighted that 11 adoptions had taken place this year.

Resolved:

1. That the Performance Monitoring Information Report be received.
2. That the reduction in the number of dental checks for children and young people in care be investigated.

12 **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.

13 **Councillor Visits to Establishments - Schedule of Visits**

Councillor John Reynolds provided an exempt verbal update on a visit undertaken to the new Key 2 Inspiration (K2I) facility.

Resolved:

That the Councillor Visits to Establishments – Schedule of Visits update be received.