

Attendance

Chair Cllr John Reynolds (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Paula Brookfield

Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Rita Potter

Conservative

Cllr Udey Singh

In Attendance

Fiona Brennan
Michelle Cummings
Alison Hinds
Shelley Humphries
Steven Larking
Darren Martindale
Shaquille Spence
Alice Vickers
Jazmine Walker
Members of the Children in Care Council

Designated Nurse, Children and Young People in Care
Corporate Parenting Officer
Deputy Director of Children's Social Care
Democratic Services Officer
Lead Commissioner for Children's Services
Service Manager – Vulnerable Learners
Participation Officer
Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager
Head of Service, Children and Young People in Care

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Corporate Parenting Board Councillor Martin Waite, Councillor Paul Appleby and Councillor Rupinderjit Kaur. Apologies were also received from Emma Bennett.

2 Declarations of interests

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

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2021

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2021 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 only item on the Schedule of Outstanding Matters had been resolved.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Outstanding Matters be received.

6 Children in Care Council (CiCC) Annual Report 2019 - 2020

The Vice-Chair of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) presented the CiCC Annual Report 2019 – 2020 with an accompanying slideshow presentation. The report provided a summary of the outcomes of the Children in Care Survey and focused on the achievements of the CiCC and their continued commitment to improving Children's Services.

It was reported that attendance for the CiCC Annual Conference had been lower than expected and steps had been taken to explore why this had occurred. It was noted that Children and Young People in Care Team Managers and members of the Fostering Team had taken the feedback on board and agreed to use more avenues, such as the fostering portal online, to further promote all events of interest to children and young people in care.

The presentation also included news and the achievements of the Children in Care Council over the past year.

The work undertaken by the young people and their commitment to improving services was commended. It was noted that the Authority would continue to engage

with young people and the CiCC. It was requested that CiCC meetings dates be provided so Councillors were aware and could attend or contribute if needed.

Resolved:

1. That the Children in Care Council (CiCC) Annual Report 2019 – 2020 be received.
2. That CiCC meeting dates be provided to Councillors.

7 **Children's Services Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2021-2024**

Stephen Larking, Lead Commissioner for Children's Services presented the Children's Services Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2021-2024 and highlighted salient points.

It was acknowledged that the submission of a Sufficiency Strategy was a statutory requirement as set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989 which requires local authorities to take strategic action in respect of those children they look after and for whom it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation within their local authority area.

It was noted that this Children and Young People's Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2021-2025 was the first strategy that also set out how the Authority commissioned services.

This Strategy served as a single plan covering requirements for the Children in Care Sufficiency Duty and the Children in Care Strategy and outlined the seven themes: Collaborative Leadership; Strong and Effective Participation and Co-production; Creating a Vision for Local Service Provision; Implementing Robust Joint Commissioning Systems and Processes, Delivering Improved Value and Outcomes; Engaging the Market and Securing the Best Delivery Method, Understanding Performances of all services (internal and contracted).

It was reported that a strategic commissioning offer was being introduced with a service review approach. Reviews would focus on how all Council services worked together and not just one contract in isolation. Our first review is of supported accommodation, including input and feedback from young people, budgets and funding. Internal services as well as external services will be examined to determine what processes and resources the Authority already has before seeking what needs to be commissioned from elsewhere. Sufficiency Strategy Workshops had been held to gain insight from young people as well as including them in tender and contract evaluation processes. Co-production with young people was also embedded heavily throughout other areas of the Strategy.

It was noted that it was a requirement children and young people in care should be attending schools rated good or outstanding by OFSTED, but it was queried why 84% currently attended schools rated as such and not 100%. It was stated that there could be several factors, such as the school rating changing since the children placed there began attending; if the children were settled and happy at the school, it was preferable not to move them. Some children may be placed out of City which may affect the schools they could attend.

In response to a query around what was next for the Strategy, it was noted that a consultation would take place each year in September to ensure the Commissioning

Plan element was kept current and relevant. The first plan was due September 2021 and it was agreed that this plan, along with an update on how co-production had added value to the Strategy would be provided around this time.

Resolved:

1. That the publication of the refreshed Children and Young People's Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy 2021-2024 be approved.
2. That Corporate Parenting Board note the refreshed approach to Commissioning, with a more strategic offer across the directorate.
3. That Corporate Parenting Board receive the first Commissioning Plan update around September 2021 to include an update on how co-production had added value to the Strategy.

8 **Virtual School Head Report 2020**

Darren Martindale, Service Manager – Vulnerable Learners, presented the Virtual School Head Annual Report 2020 and highlighted salient points. The report sought to update and inform Corporate Parenting Board of the educational progress and achievements of Wolverhampton's children and young people in care and care leavers and the steps that the Authority had taken to support those achievements.

Following on from the point raised in the last item regarding children in care attending good or outstanding schools, it was added that some schools had been selected with a more concentrated focus on how inclusive they were.

Throughout the lockdown periods, a close eye was being kept on children both attending school and involved in home schooling to ensure their wellbeing and encourage engagement.

Unlike many other authorities, Pupil Premium Funding was still being paid to schools during summer term 2020 as it was felt that this support was necessary now more than ever.

Virtual meetings were taking place to support keeping Personal Education Plans (PEPs) up to date and young people's participation in these meetings had reportedly improved since the move to virtual platforms. School-aged PEP are fully electronic and electronic versions of the early years/16+ version PEPs will be launched very soon.

The Aspire2Uni programme had yielded some pleasing results with around 30 of Wolverhampton's young people signed up to the scheme. 75% had achieved the expected standard of their age for English and 72% had achieved this in maths.

It was highlighted that GSCE results had shown a notably higher attainment level than in previous years. As a result of the pandemic, grades had been based on teacher assessment of work rather than examination results. A theory had been expressed that children and young people in care fared less well in a formal examination system therefore this outcome was worth exploring.

The Chair commended the work done and expressed thanks to all who had contributed to achieving these positive outcomes. The points raised regarding the examination results were also echoed. It was noted that it was interesting how well-

received virtual meetings had been and that it was worth building on that success to encourage improved participation.

Resolved:

That the Virtual School Head Annual Report 2020 be received

9 Experience of an Apprenticeship

Resolved:

That Item 9 be deferred to the next appropriate meeting.

10 Increasing Not Engaged in Education Employment and Training (NEET) Care Leavers in the 19 - 21-year-old Cohort

Jazmine Walker, Head of Children and Young People in Care, presented the Increasing Support to Not Engaged in Education Employment and Training (NEET) Care Leavers in the 19 – 21-year-old Cohort report and highlighted salient points. The report provided an update on current performance, the impact of Covid-19, and the Authority’s approach to increasing engagement and support to care leavers who were currently not in education, employment and training (NEET) in order to improve their employability and life chances.

The report outlined the numbers of EET, NEET and NALM (not available for the labour market) and the reduction already seen in NEET from 2018 – 2019 to 2019 - 2020.

It was noted that COVID-19 had impacted heavily on employment in general with a large fall in employment for young people aged between 16 – 24, which had resulted in an increase of NEET. Despite the limitations posed by the national lockdown restrictions however, the EET Coordinator has worked closely with Children and Young People in Care Service, colleagues across the Council and partner agencies to identify several ways to monitor and support care leavers and promote EET opportunities.

An outline of the work undertaken and its alignment with the City-wide Relighting Our City Strategy was noted.

Within section 3.0 of the report, members of Corporate Parenting Board were invited to support the following proposals to further enhance the EET opportunities available to care leavers:

- Local businesses in Wolverhampton to engage in further work or work experience placements for care leavers with on the job training (to make up for lack of formal qualifications). Corporate Parenting Partnership Board members will be requested to see if they can offer further additional traineeship placement experiences on 31 March 2021.
- Closer work with the Care Leaver’s Covenant for increased tailored opportunities to meet our young people’s need which will be explored and progressed through the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board on 31 March 2021.

Resolved:

That Corporate Parenting Board approve the support offered to those young people who have left care and are not engaged in education employment or training as proposed in section 3.0 of the report.

11 **Health Assessments**

Jazmine Walker, Head of Children and Young People in Care presented the Health Assessments Report and highlighted salient points. The report provided the Corporate Parenting Board with an update on the challenges and actions identified to improve the completion and timeliness of initial and review health assessment for all children and young people in care.

It was reported that the performance data for initial and review health assessments, which were previously an area of strength, had shown a continued month on month reduction since July 2020. The response to this decline consisted of a manual trawl and data quality activity undertaken with health and Local Authority colleagues in order to understand the reasons for this level of performance. The data quality activity provided assurance about the number of children with an in-date review health assessment as well as assurance about how the Local Authority will further monitor and improve performance in this area.

It was stated that this work would continue and a full update on outcomes would be provided to Corporate Parenting Board in six months' time. This would include how changes made had impacted the performance data.

A concern was raised in respect of the accuracy of the system and the manual data trawl and if this may be creating duplicate work. Assurances were offered that changes had already been made to the way data was recorded to enable it to be separated and analysed efficiently and accurately. It was noted that the effects of the changes would take time to filter through and take effect. It was also agreed that an update should only be provided in six months' time if there were significant changes to report.

Assurances were offered from the Wolverhampton CCG that the majority of children will have had their initial review, it just might mean that some will have had it outside of the 30-day time period. The very small percentage that had not had their review were those who had actively chosen to opt out.

Resolved:

1. That a further update on health assessment performance is presented to Corporate Parenting Board in six months' time for review if there were sufficient changes to report.
2. That Corporate Parenting Board note the challenges and actions identified to improve the completion and timeliness of initial and review health assessment for all children and young people in care.

12 **Performance Monitoring Information**

Alison Hinds, Deputy Director of Social Care presented the Performance Monitoring Report and highlighted salient points. It was noted that the Education, NEET and Health Review areas had already been covered in earlier agenda items.

It was highlighted that numbers of children in care were on a downward trajectory whilst ensuring the right children remained in care if appropriate.

It was thought that the work undertaken on the Family Values project had contributed towards stability in placements and 'family and friends' placements had been the most common.

There had been a small number of adoptions; partly because of restrictions and concerns around COVID and partly because court closures during lockdown had delayed decisions being made on care orders. This backlog had begun to clear so more orders were being granted.

Resolved:

That the Performance Monitoring Information report be received.

13 **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.

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

Alice Vickers, Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager reported that visits had been paused due to COVID; virtual visits had been suggested however the establishments within the area had taken on new residents and it was not considered an appropriate time whilst they settled in.

Michelle Cummings, the newly appointed Corporate Parenting Officer, was introduced and welcomed. It was noted that she would be picking up the arrangement of the visits as soon as they could safely resume face to face and reporting back to the Board.

Resolved:

That face to face establishment visits would resume when safe and appropriate to do so.