

Attendance

Chair Cllr Chris Burden (Lab)
Vice Chair Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Ciaran Brackenridge
Cllr Jenny Cockayne

Cllr Lovinyer Daley
Cllr Jeszemma Howl

Cllr Iqra Tahir

Conservative

Cllr Paul Appleby

In Attendance

Hannah Bradley
Shelley Humphries
Lisa Preston
Caterina Robinson
Jazmine Walker

Corporate Parenting Officer
Democratic Services Officer
Head of Service Adoption at Heart
Service Manager
Head of Children and Young People in Care

Corporate Parenting Board also welcomed one Foster Parent.

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence

The Chair opened the meeting by acknowledging the cancellation of the last due to the sad passing of Councillor Ian Brookfield.

The Chair wished to note congratulations to Emma Bennett on her appointment as Chief Executive of Walsall Council and expressed thanks on behalf of the Board for her support to the Board and hard work as Executive Director of Families. Congratulations were also extended to Alison Hinds on her appointment to Director of Children's Services.

Apologies for absence were received from Corporate Parenting Board member, Councillor Sally Green.

Apologies were also received from Emma Bennett, Alison Hinds and Rebecca Grainger.

2 Declarations of interest

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

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2023

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

In respect of minute 7, it was confirmed that information around waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) for children and young people in care would be included within the Annual Health Report and a request was made that this issue have priority.

Resolved:

That the CAMHS report be taken before the Annual Health Report as a priority.

5 Schedule of outstanding matters

Hannah Bradley, Corporate Parenting Officer presented the report on current progress on matters previously considered by the Board.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Outstanding Matters be received.

6 **Equalities Motion – Care Experienced Young People**

Hannah Bradley, Corporate Parenting Officer presented the Equalities Motion – Care Experienced Young People and highlighted salient points. The report sought the support of Corporate Parenting Board to present the proposed motion to Full Council to recognise Care Experience as a protected characteristic until such time as it may be introduced by legislation.

In response to a query around how prevalent the issue of discrimination toward care experienced young people in Wolverhampton, it was noted that there was no evidence of specific issues involving hate crime or harassment in the City, however care experienced young people often did not have such positive outcomes as their peers.

The point was raised that a protected characteristic typically lasts a lifetime and it was considered that care leavers were often only supported up to the age of 25 years through the local REACH Offer. Assurances were offered that although this was the case and finance was a barrier to extending the offer indefinitely, Wolverhampton care leavers over the age of 25 would not be turned away should they reach out for support from the Authority. It was also highlighted there is a specific policy for how the authority works with young adults as they approach 25 and beyond.

It was acknowledged that it was a testament to the hard work undertaken in Wolverhampton that there were no specific issues, although the report highlighted the general prejudice that had crept into everyday language and it was considered how to change this culture going forward.

It was highlighted that Councillors may note an extra paragraph within the report that had been prepared for Full Council which called for the Minister for Children and Families to follow the example of the Council and seek to promote the status of Care Leavers as a protected minority characteristic. Councillors fully supported the proposals.

Resolved:

That Corporate Parenting Board agree to support the proposed motion that the City of Wolverhampton Council make Care Experience a protected characteristic until such time as it may be introduced by legalisation.

7 **Adoption Service Annual Report**

It was moved for the Vice Chair, Councillor Barbara McGarrity QN, to take the Chair as Councillor Chris Burden needed to leave. Lisa Preston, Head of Service for Adoption@Heart presented the Adoption Service Annual Report and highlighted key points.

The report sought to fulfil the obligations in Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority.

In respect of rejected applications it was queried what the most common reason was and how to rectify this. It was noted that there were many factors that affected this as various suitability checks were completed with prospective families prior to

progressing applications to adoption panel. Some examples given were that cases were not progressed due to the birth children of the adopting family not being ready for another sibling or a change in a family's financial circumstances. It was worth noting that in some of these cases, the adoption could be placed on hold and resumed if circumstances allowed. Any expressions of interest were always followed up with reminder communications.

It was acknowledged that the realities of disrupted adoptions as described in the report were quite stark however it was noted that there were many successful adoptions.

It was queried what the age breakdown of children was and if there was a particular ask or preference. It was noted that it ranged up to the age of ten although a large number were under three years old. Statistically, some children were harder to place than others, such as sibling groups with the difficulty increasing the larger the group, and boys were harder to place than girls.

It was noted that support was offered to both fathers and mothers of adopting families as well as any birth children to ensure the family were ready to adopt collectively. In response to queries around adopter households, it was noted that there were more same sex couples than in previous years and extra support was offered to single applicants.

In response to a query raised on the length of the process, it was noted that there was a statutory expectation for the assessment to take six months from start to finish. The first two months typically consisted of the suitability checks which included police checks, bank checks, character references from both employers and friends, social media screening and safety of the home environment. Resilience was also an important factor and families would not be progressed to adoption panel until checks had been completed and all parties were satisfied that adoption was right for everyone.

The report and the work of the service was commended and an open invitation was extended should any Councillor wish to visit the service.

Resolved:

1. That the Adoption Service Annual Report for Adoption@Heart be received.
2. That the progress made by the Regional Adoption Agency be noted.

8 Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023

Caterina Robinson, Fostering Service Manager presented the Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023 and highlighted salient points. The report provided an overview of the service delivery, service structure and performance for 2022-2023 whilst setting out key objectives for 2023-2024.

Members expressed interest in the short break respite arrangements and commended the scheme.

In response to a query around private fostering, it was confirmed that this referred to a child who was not in care but living with someone who was not their birth parents (such as a relative or family friend) for longer than 28 days.

The Foster Parent present stated they were pleased with the service, felt well-supported and that their feedback was always taken into account.

Resolved:

That the Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023 be received.

9 **Performance Monitoring Information**

Jazmine Walker, Head of Children and Young People in Care presented the Performance Monitoring Information report and highlighted salient points. The report provided analytics on performance in a number of areas relating to children and young people in care.

In respect of timescales for updated care plans, Corporate Parenting Board members were assured care plans were still in place and steps had been taken to improve timescales.

In response to a query around short-term placement stability, it was noted that a short period in a home could be due to a variety of complex factors, such as a child finding it difficult to settle in the new home or a breakdown of a relationship, or when a child was moved to a temporary home whilst awaiting a more long-term home.

It was queried what circumstances usually led to missing episodes and it was noted that this could range from the child or young person just going to visit a friend/family member or a non-agreed sleepover to them being a victim of some form of exploitation. Assurances were offered that extensive preventative work was being undertaken to disrupt child exploitation and safeguard children and young people in care.

Resolved:

That the Performance Monitoring Information report be received.

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 falling within paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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

It was reported that Councillor Jennifer Cockayne and Councillor Paul Appleby had visited Upper Pendeford Farm, which had been very informative and positive. It was noted that further visiting dates would be shared with Board members shortly.

It was noted that the Ofsted inspection of the establishment had been undertaken however the outcome was embargoed at the time of the meeting and would be shared in due course.

[NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED]

In response to a query around visiting other establishments, it was confirmed this was the only one home currently open and news of the two new planned homes opening would be shared with all Board members.

Resolved:

That Ofsted inspection outcomes for Upper Pendeford Farm be shared with Corporate Parenting Board once they were published.