



Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes - 11 September 2014

Attendance

Chair Cllr Val Gibson (Lab)

Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Jas Dehar
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss
Cllr Christine Mills
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Martin Waite

Employees

Emma Bennett
Carl Craney

Assistant Director - Children, Young People and Families
Democratic Support Officer

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence (if any)

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Mrs Patricia Patten and Samantha Arrowsmith (Named Nurse for Looked After Children - Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust)

2 Declarations of interest (if any)

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre declared personal interests in any matters pertaining to Woodthorne School (Chair of Governors), Central Learning Partnership (Heath Park, Moseley Park and Woden Primary Schools) [Director], Catch 22 [Director], City of Wolverhampton College (Governor) and Graiseley Primary (Governor).

3 Minutes of the previous meeting (3 July 2014)

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

With reference to Minute No. 4 (Matters arising), Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre enquired as to when the access arrangements to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) would be considered by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel. Cllr Julie Hodgkiss reported that this matter had been discussed that morning at the Agenda meeting and was scheduled to be considered at the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel on 14 January 2015.

With reference to Minute No. 6 (Performance Monitoring – Looked After Children), Cllr Paula Brookfield enquired as to the latest position with the production of a Briefing Note in relation to the age at which LAC / Care Leavers and Young Offenders on remand remained the responsibility of the local authority. Emma Bennett outlined the position and advised that this was also covered within the report to be considered later in the meeting.

With reference to Minute No. 6 (Performance Monitoring – Looked After Children), Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre referred to the multi- agency “edge of care” meeting and as to whether any children were slipping through the net. Emma Bennett assured the Board that in the current climate it was highly unlikely that any children were overlooked and that 22 cases had been reviewed during August and September 2014. The assurance was accepted by Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre.

With reference to Minute No. 6 (Performance Monitoring – Looked After Children), Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre questioned the current position with discussions between both the Council and the Wolverhampton City Clinical Commissioning Group (WCCCG) and the WCCCG and the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust with regard to health checks for Looked After Children. Lorraine Millard reported that this issue had been discussed at a meeting held the previous day and that a division of

responsibility had been agreed. RWNSHT would be responsible for undertaking health checks on those Looked After Children who lived within 20 miles of the City with the WCCCG taking responsibility for those who lived further away. A resolution to this particular issue was not easily identifiable but was being treated as a priority. As an interim measure the WCCCG would take responsibility for co-ordinating all health checks for Looked After Children until 31 March 2015 albeit that the matter was to be reviewed on a weekly basis. Alison Hinds advised that during the intervening period a long term arrangement would be identified. Lorraine Millard undertook to arrange for a Briefing Note on this matter to be circulated to Members of the Board. Cllr Paula Brookfield requested that the Board be notified as soon as the long term arrangement had been agreed. Emma Bennett reminded the Board that this issue was monitored regularly and formed part of the Performance Monitoring Information considered by the Board.

With reference to Minute No. 8 (Children in Care Council), Cllr Rita Potter enquired as to whether the Council was working in partnership with the Police and Schools in connection with safeguarding issues, especially with regard to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) . Emma Bennett reported that there were strategic and operational groups addressing CSE, that a report on this subject had been considered at the meeting of the Strategic Executive Board held the previous day where an Action Plan for Wolverhampton and the Region had been presented. The West Midlands Metropolitan Chief Executive's had commissioned Stephen Rimmer from the Home Office to undertake a piece of work across the West Midlands on this topic. She advised that in the light of the Rotherham case awareness of the issue had been highlighted to schools. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, reported that all agencies were alert to the issue and it had been raised recently at the Children's Safeguarding Board. All agencies had identified lead officers and that Wolverhampton had a good record on joint working to identify and address the issue and was held as a national exemplar. Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre welcomed the report on the actions being taken but reminded the Board that the Council had been in a much stronger position previously to influence schools when they had been under the control of the local authority. He suggested that with the increase in number of academies and private schools that communication was more problematic. Emma Bennett advised that this was not the experience of the local authority and that the Assistant Director, Learning and Achievement was preparing for the roll out of a Communications Plan. She reminded the Board that Safeguarding was a critical element in Ofsted inspections. Cllr Paula Brookfield sought an assurance that the issue of female genital mutilation was also being addressed. Emma Bennett advised that this was included in the piece of work which had been commissioned from Stephen Rimmer.

5 Work Programme 2014/15

Emma Bennett presented the draft Work Programme for the 2014/15 Municipal Year. Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre enquired as to whether any other reports not currently included within the Work Programme would be presented if necessary. Cllr Paula Brookfield enquired as to whether the Board could also ask for additional reports to

be presented. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson confirmed this to be the case in both instances.

Resolved:

That the draft Work Programme 2014/15 be approved.

6 **Performance Monitoring - Looked After Children (LAC)**

Emma Bennett presented Performance Monitoring Information based on an extract from high level information for July and August 2014.

With reference to the information in connection with “Up to date Reviews”, Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre enquired as to whether the data related to the current month or the year to date position. Emma Bennett confirmed it to be the latter.

With reference to the information in connection with “The proportion of LAC reviews where the child was present or contributed by other means since 1 April 2014”, Cllr Julie Hodgkiss reminded the Board that at the last meeting representatives of the Children in Care Council had expressed concern with regard to these meetings being held in school time inasmuch as they were to miss lessons without choice and/or being withdrawn from a lesson highlighted their status as a Looked After Child. Darren Martindale explained that these review meetings and similar meeting in connection with Personal Education Plans were held in school time and, that every effort was made to handle the issue sensitively to ensure that LAC were not marginalised. Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre suggested that individual children should be consulted as to their preferred timing for such meetings, which, presumably could be held in lesson or lunch times. Darren Martindale undertook to include the suggestion within training to be provided to Social Workers, Designated Teachers and Independent Review Officers. It was intended that best practice would be followed in respect of this matter.

With reference to the information in connection with “LAC in permanent placements”, Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre enquired as to why no comparable information was included. Emma Bennett explained that this was a local indicator and comparable data was not available.

With reference to the information in connection with “Health Checks and Dental Checks”, Cllr Paula Brookfield enquired as to whether it would be possible to include data in respect of those LAC who opted out of these checks. Emma Bennett undertook to investigate as to whether the Carefirst system could be interrogated to this level.

With reference to the information in connection with “Placed for adoption within 18 months of entering care / Placed for adoption within 18 months of Foster Care”, Cllr Martin Waite suggested that a mean rather than median average should be used.

With reference to the information in connection with “Education, employment and training of care leavers”, Cllr Julie Hodgkiss sought clarification on the three cases listed as “NULL”. Emma Bennett explained that no status information in respect of these cases was recorded. Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre reminded the Board that year on year comparisons could not be made in relation to this information as different

cohorts were involved. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, suggested that in the Annual Report there should be a comparison between LAC and non LAC in relation to education, employment and training.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

7 Looked After Children (LAC) Transitions Team - Annual Report

Sharon Green presented the LAC Transitions Team's Annual Report 2013/14 which detailed an overview of the team's activities for the year together with a commentary of performance and plans for the future.

Cllr Paula Brookfield referred to the number of "missing children". Emma Bennett explained the difference between "missing children" and those care leavers who were no longer in contact with the local authority. Sharon Green advised that some care leavers specifically requested no further contact with the local authority once they had left care but in other cases where contact had been lost, Personal Advisers would continue to attempt to re-establish contact approximately every six months. Emma Bennett also outlined the role of the Family Support Worker.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss asked whether the system operated by the Department for Work and Pensions to provide support to care leavers was working satisfactorily. Sharon Green acknowledged that the system was not working as well in Wolverhampton as in some other locations.

Cllr Martin Waite reported on anecdotal evidence of a Social worker encouraging a care leaver to spend the accrued savings to prevent prejudicial treatment in respect of receipt of benefits. Emma Bennett commented that a number of LAC had expressed concern in relation to the amount of money they received as savings did build up. This matter was being reviewed but was a complex issue to address to the satisfaction of all LAC.

Cllr Martin Waite also drew attention to the average amount of time per week available to Social Workers to spend with individuals. Sharon Green acknowledged that caseloads were challenging and reflected the amount of time which could be spent with individuals.

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre expressed his disappointment that paragraph 5.1 of the covering report seemed to suggest that an equalities analysis had not been undertaken. He also queried the term "Foyer" in the Annual Report. Emma Bennett assured the Board that an equalities analysis had been undertaken with regard to the new structure and explained that a "Foyer" was a housing scheme linked to educational and/or employment opportunities.

Cllr Rita Potter referred to Section 7.8 of the Annual Report and suggested that further consideration be given to the classification of Care Leavers on the housing register. Emma Bennett and Sharon Green reported on the excellent working relationships between the local authority and Wolverhampton Homes and also other Registered Social Landlords operating in the City but undertook to consider this

matter further. Alison Hinds reminded the Board of the progress with the provision of additional supported accommodation by Wolverhampton Homes.

Cllr Paula Brookfield requested further information in relation to "Night-stop". Sharon Green explained that this was a host arrangement facilitated through YMCA Black Country which had eliminated the use of Bed and Breakfast as an emergency provision.

The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, referred to paragraph 9.5 of the Annual Report insofar as it related to useful information to be provided to care leavers. She reminded the Board that at the last meeting representatives of the Children in Care Council had made it known that information on issues such as using a washing machine and changing a fuse would be helpful. Sharon Green explained that it was intended to include links to relevant YouTube clips on the children's website.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That further discussions be held with Wolverhampton Homes on the most appropriate classification for care leavers on the housing register;
3. That further useful information be included on the children's website in respect of issues such as the use of a washing machine and changing a fuse;
4. That the thanks of the Board be offered to the Transitions Team for the work undertaken during the period covered by the report.

8 **Adoptions Team - Annual Report**

Louise Haughton presented the Annual Report of the Council's Adoption Service for the year April 2013 to March 2014. The report included information in relation to adoption both nationally and locally together with information regarding legislative and practice changes and how these had impacted on those affected by adoption in Wolverhampton.

Cllr Paula Brookfield noted the progress that had been made but referred to the "Activity Days" and enquired how children's expectations were managed. She also enquired as to whether there was provision for concurrent fostering/adoption placements where foster parents were not quite at the stage where they were ready to adopt formally. Laura Haughton assured the Board that children's expectations of the outcome of the "Activity Days" were handled sensitively and that no child attended more than one event. Careful preparation was also undertaken in advance of attendance. In most instances it was the Foster Carer's who were more anxious than the children. The longer term implications for those children who were not successful at an event was of greater concern and an issue required careful handling. She confirmed that the Service had a number of concurrent carers and that the marketing of the service included provision for concurrency i.e. fostering prior to progression to adopting.

Cllr Rita Potter enquired if all groups were permitted to apply to become adoptive parents and Louise Haughton confirmed this to be the case. Cllr Martin Waite reminded the Board that this issue had been highlighted during the tenure of Michael Gove as Secretary of State for Education. Louise Haughton reported that trans –

national arrangements had always been encouraged in Wolverhampton but that this was not replicated throughout the Country.

The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, referred to Section 9 of the Annual Report and enquired as to when the further analysis would commence of the over representation of BME children compared to both the looked after children and the population of Wolverhampton as a whole. Louise Haughton explained that the figures fluctuated year on year and a decrease in the numbers was anticipated during the current year. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, requested that an analysis over the past five years be presented. Emma Bennett suggested that the analysis should also include reference to the wider LAC population.

Cllr Paula Brookfield enquired as to the steps taken as a preventative measure in order to overcome repeat incidences of children from the same parent being taken into care. Louise Haughton outlined the programmes which were available in order to assist parents in making life choices before having a second child and post adoption support which was available to birth mothers. Alison Hinds referred to a successful bid for Lottery funding enabling work to be undertaken with Black Country and Birmingham families. Emma Bennett reported on the associated elements within the newly commissioned Sexual Health Service which was within the remit of the Public Health Service.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That the difficulties encountered within the Adoption Service of moving to a paperless system be noted;
3. That an analysis be presented to a future meeting of the over representation of BME children compared to LAC and the population of Wolverhampton as a whole over the past five years together with information pertaining to the LAC population in that period;
4. That the thanks of the Board be offered to the staff in the Adoptions Service for the work undertaken during the period covered by the report.

9 Corporate Parenting Pledge - Refresh

Darren Martindale presented a report which was the starting point for a refresh of the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy which would assist the Council in fulfilling its statutory Corporate Parenting responsibilities. The refreshed document had been shortened and also had regard to the New Operating Model, the current budget position, the current LAC population, the revised staffing structures together with progress to date in delivering the current strategy including the positive outcomes. The document had been produced following the receipt of the views of the Children in Care Council albeit further consultation was required. Once the document had been approved work would commence on the refresh of the Corporate Parenting Pledge. Once appointed, the Corporate Parenting Officer would be charged with the preparation of an Action Plan to deliver the refreshed Strategy.

Cllr Martin Waite enquired as to whether there was an intention to reduce the number of communication channels faced by the LAC population with a single point of contact. Emma Bennett advised that the New Operating Model did move towards a central reference point prior to referral to the Social Work Team. Darren Martindale

referred to a presentation he had made to Ofsted last year which included reference to a LAC getting a little help from a lot of people rather than a lot of help from a few.

Cllr Paula Brookfield enquired if the New Operating Model enabled information to be shared across Teams. She also referred to the high number of LAC within the City; to the financial implications associated with this high population and with regard to the number of Out of City Placements the possible loss of contact with family, extended family and peer group. Emma Bennett confirmed that the new system did enable information sharing. She also explained that many Out of City Placements were, in fact, quite close to the City and on the steps taken to maintain relevant and appropriate contacts. With regard to rates of pay and terms and conditions, Alison Hinds reported that those offered by the Council were comparable to those offered by private fostering agencies.

Cllr Mrs Christine Mills welcomed the intention to consult further on the Strategy and the inclusion of Priority 4 "Keep siblings together and give us more contact with siblings". Darren Martindale assured the Board that the consultation would drive the contents of the Strategy.

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre referred to the proposed service re-structure including the savings target and enquired if the savings could be delivered without care being compromised. Emma Bennett confirmed that to be the case subject a reduction in the LAC population being achieved. Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre asked as to the process adopted to review the previous Strategy. Darren Martindale explained that this had included an interrogation of data, an analysis of outcomes, consultations with Managers and Staff within the LAC Service and with LAC. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson suggested that a quantitative analysis should be included in the 2014/15 Annual Report.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and approved for consultation purposes;
2. That the refreshed Strategy be presented to the meeting of the Board scheduled to be held on 21 January 2015 with the Action Plan being submitted to a future meeting;
3. That future Annual Reports include a quantitative analysis.

10 **Exclusion of the public and press**

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 **Councillors visits to establishments**

The Board considered further the arrangements for visits to establishments to be undertaken during the current Municipal Year.

Resolved:

1. That Cllr Mrs Christine Mills will visit Brooklands on 19 September 2014;
2. That Carl Craney, Democratic Support Officer, be requested to re-circulate the email dated 25 July 2014 and attachment in connection with visits to establishments.