

Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes - 26 May 2016

Attendance

Chair Cllr Val Gibson (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss
Cllr Hazel Malcolm

Cllr Lynne Moran
Cllr Peter O'Neill

Cllr Zee Russell
Cllr Martin Waite

Conservative

Cllr Christine Mills

Employees

Carl Craney
Alison Hinds
Alice Vickers

Democratic Support Officer
Head of Looked After Children
Corporate Parenting Officer

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence (if any)

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllrs Paula Brookfield, Rita Potter and Martin Waite together with Emma Bennett, Service Director, Children and Young People and Fiona Brennan, Designated Nurse, Looked After Children, Wolverhampton City Clinical Commissioning Group.

2 Declarations of interests (if any)

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

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2016

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 April be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

With reference to Minute No. 6, “New Belongings”, the Chair, Cllr Val Gibson queried whether the breakdown of the Care Leavers’ who were available for work and who were engaged in Education, Employment or Training had yet been circulated. Alison Hinds, Head of Looked After Children, advised that the breakdown of this information had yet to be circulated.

Cllr Mrs Christine Mills referred to Minute No. 7 (To meet with representatives of the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum to consider the “New Belongings” priorities and other matters of mutual interest) and commented that the exercise carried out with the young people had been a most useful event.

Resolved:

That the breakdown of the information referred to above be added to the Schedule of outstanding matters.

5 Schedule of outstanding matters

Carl Craney, Democratic Support Officer, presented a report which appraised the Board of the current position with matters considered previously by the Board.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

6 Corporate Parenting Board - Work Programme - 2016/17 Municipal Year

Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer, presented the Work Programme for the Board for the 2016/17 Municipal Year. She explained that all reports to be

considered at the Board were presented first to the Children in Care Council (CiCC) with an opportunity for the CiCC to comment on such reports.

Resolved:

1. That the Work Programme for the 2016/17 Municipal Year be approved;
2. That any further matters be identified for consideration as necessary or raised during consideration of the Performance Monitoring Data report.

7 Introduction to the work of the Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Officer gave a PowerPoint presentation on an introduction to the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Chair referred to the slide which included a reference to “poor education attainment and attendance pre-care” of Looked After Children and advised the Board that the educational attainment of Wolverhampton’s LAC population was good and above the national average with 20% of the LAC obtaining 5 GCSE A* - C grades as opposed to 14% nationally.

Cllr Peter O’Neill queried whether the issue of “Spare Bedroom Tax” for Foster Carers’ had been addressed. The Head of Looked After Children reported that this issue had been resolved locally. Cllr Hazel Malcolm questioned whether there were close links between the Looked After Children’s service and the Special Educational Needs and Disability service. The Corporate Parenting Officer confirmed that such links were in place via the Virtual School Head and the COPE Team. Cllr Hazel Malcolm enquired as to the arrangements for health assessments. The Head of Looked After Children explained that initial health assessments were undertaken by the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust and then were linked to Healthcare Plans of individual children.

Resolved:

That the presentation be received and noted.

8 Corporate Parenting Strategy - Update

The Corporate Parenting Officer presented a report on the developments over the past year of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan.

Cllr Mrs Christine Mills enquired as to the work undertaken to increase aspirations of Looked After Children to attend university. The Corporate Parenting Officer reported on the work with the Black Country Authorities, Wolverhampton University and a local charity, “Creative Chances” where at Year 6, those Looked After Children who had attained level 4 or above were encouraged to aspire to attend university. The programme provided a mentor who was attending university to support the aspiration. Additional homework was set and social activities arranged.

Cllr Peter O’Neill referred to the proposal to produce a guide for foster carers such as at what age to have a mobile phone and expressed concern that this could cause an issue with foster carers if the guidance was at odds with their views. The Head of Looked After Children advised that the guide would be produced in consultation with foster carers and would only be a guide where exceptions were acceptable. The

intention was to address safeguarding issues. Cllr Peter O'Neill acknowledged the response and explained that he was keen to ensure that Looked After Children were not stigmatised by having or not having a mobile phone at the same age as their peers. The Corporate Parenting Officer commented that it was hoped to provide reassurance to foster carers and to identify a suitably balanced position. In response to a further question from Cllr Peter O'Neill she reported that the guide would be developed in consultation with all relevant partner agencies including schools.

Cllr Peter O'Neill questioned whether the views of the Transport Authority or Bus Operators would be sought in relation to the age at which a child could catch a bus by themselves. The Corporate Parenting Officer advised that a number of courses were available which provided information on such issues including acceptable behaviour, courtesy, safe places to sit etc. She reported that the guide would be produced during 2016/17.

The Chair suggested that the guide be produced in chapters rather than as a single document thus enabling some information to be readily available sooner than other parts. Cllr Hazel Malcolm suggested that the guide be made available on the website as well as in hard copy format. The Corporate Parenting Officer advised that it would be included in the Foster Carers' Handbook.

Cllr Hazel Malcolm offered to work with the Corporate Parenting Officer on guidance on finance matters in light of her work with a Credit Union.

The Chair questioned the appropriateness of "drop in" sessions being held on Friday afternoons given that the Looked After Children should be at school or college or work at that time. The Corporate Parenting Officer undertook to consider this issue further but explained that this was a popular time for Looked After Children to collect money etc.

The Chair referred to a number of errors and omissions in Section 3.5 of the report and suggested that the following amendments be made (amendments in italics): "11 Councillors attended a special Total Respect training session. It is now part of the induction for new Councillors joining the *Council*" and "An E-Learning module on the roles and responsibilities of Corporate Parenting for all *Councillors and* colleagues has been designed with the young people and will be ready to launch early May. The young people on the CiCC have completed exercises and video content for this."

The Chair enquired if there were now two representatives from the CiCC serving on the Youth Council. The Corporate Parenting Officer confirmed this to be the case and reported on a planned joint event with the "Be Safe Team". She also informed the Board that two representatives from the Looked After Children population attended meetings of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel as representatives of the Youth Council.

Cllr Peter O'Neill commented that during their year of service on the Scrutiny Panel their confidence had grown and had been involved actively in consultations which had been undertaken. This news was welcomed by Cllr Zee Russell. The Corporate Parenting Officer commented on the involvement of the Looked After Children population in the Participation Strategy. Cllr Zee Russell enquired if any of this work

was accredited. The Corporate Parenting Officer advised that it was and cited the example of the iAwards.

Resolved:

1. That the developments of the Corporate Parenting Strategy since April 2015 and the progress of the Action Plan be noted;
2. That the thanks of the Board be extended to the Corporate Parenting Officer, the Participation Officers and all Officers involved in the development of the Strategy and Action Plan.

9 **Performance Monitoring Data**

The Head of Looked After Children presented the Performance report for April 2016 (data as at March 2016) and responded to questions.

With reference to the section on “Demographics” Cllr Julie Hodgkiss requested that a report be submitted to a future meeting on the breakdown of the Looked After Children population, why the children were taken into care and when they were first known to the Authority. Cllr Julie Hodgkiss also questioned whether the information pertaining to Social Worker caseload included Specialist Social Workers. The Head of Looked After Children explained that the information was influenced by changes in Social Workers but that the average caseload was 21 with no other social work cases undertaken.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss referred to the recent Queen’s speech at the state opening of Parliament insofar as it referred to proposed changes in legislation on adoption and enquired if the timetable for the proposed changes were yet known. The Head of Looked After Children advised that details were still awaited but assured the Board that the Regional Adoption Agency would be involved in lobbying in respect of any changes. The Chair reminded the Board that it had always taken the view that obtaining the most appropriate placement was paramount rather than the speed of placement and that this stance was accepted by the Department for Education. The Head of Looked After Children commented that Wolverhampton had a very positive approach to adoption and had a good record in placing family groups and hard to place children.

The Chair referred to the Regional Adoption Agency which was comprised of the four Black Country Authorities together with Telford and Wrekin Council and Shropshire County Council which enabled best practice to be shared. A report on this matter was to be presented to Cabinet in September 2016 and that she would be attending a meeting of fellow Cabinet Members for Children and Young People with Directors of Children’s Services on 22 June 2016. She suggested that a report or Briefing Note be presented to the next meeting on the work of the Regional Adoption Agency.

Cllr Lynne Moran commented that she was particularly interested in children who had left care and commented that changes in Social Workers should be avoided wherever possible. She enquired as to the current retention rates of Social Work staff. She also questioned the literacy and numeracy levels of the Looked After Children population given that they were often under achievers despite the support provided. The Head of Looked After Children confirmed the importance of recruitment and retention and advised that a major recruitment campaign had been

completed recently. With regard to literacy and numeracy she reported that the current levels of educational attainment of 20% obtaining 5+ GCSE A* - C including English and Maths was well above the national average.

Cllr Peter O'Neill expressed concern that some 118 children had not communicated their views in relation to their reviews. The Head of Looked After Children reported that work was underway in order to understand the reason for the drop in participation. The Chair reminded the Board that 118 was the number of reviews and not the number of children. Cllr Peter O'Neill enquired as to how the reviews were organised. The Head of Looked After Children explained the reviews were not held in school time (at the request of the CiCC) and were normally held in the foster home or residential home with the dates being set in advance. She advised that the Council did attempt to communicate in other ways and did not just rely on verbal communication. Furthermore, children were encouraged to chair their own reviews.

Cllr Peter O'Neill asked if alternative venues were ever considered. The Head of Looked After Children confirmed that on some occasions neutral venues were used especially if one or both birth parents were intending to be present.

Cllr Peter enquired as to the reasons why children would not wish to express their views. The Corporate Parenting Officer suggested that this could be because they did not feel listened to and outlined proposals to introduce an app to assist participation. Cllr Peter O'Neill commented that the CiCC now had a stronger profile and enquired whether it could be requested to promote the use of the app. The Head of Looked After Children confirmed that this could be pursued. She also undertook to provide members of the Board with a link to the LAC Newsletter.

Cllr Hazel Malcolm requested that a report of the breakdown of the Looked After Children population including details of the number of migrants etc. be submitted to a future meeting together with data on waiting times for appointments with the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The Head of Looked After Children explained that the latter data was included in the Annual Report to the Board from the Black Country Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

Cllr Zee Russell enquired whether the Council employed trainee Social Workers recruited from the Looked After Children population. The Head of Looked After Children reported that the development of Social Work programmes was being investigated.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That a report be submitted to a future meeting on the breakdown of the Looked After Children population, why they were taken into care and when they became known to the Authority;
3. That a report or Briefing Note be submitted to the next meeting on the work of the Regional Adoption Agency;
4. That the Children in Care Council be requested to promote the use of the app (if developed) with a view to encouraging Looked After Children to make their views known on their reviews;
5. That a link to the LAC Newsletter be provided to all Members of the Board;
6. That a report be submitted to a future meeting on the breakdown of the Looked After Children population including the number of migrants etc.

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.

Part 2 items not open to the public and press

11 **Councillors visits to establishments**

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

The Chair enquired if there was any obligation on the Council to visit privately operated Children's Homes in the City. The Head of Looked After Children confirmed that there was no such obligation.

Resolved:

That an annual report be submitted to the Board on the number of children living in privately operated Children's Homes in the City together with the Ofsted ratings of such establishments.