

# Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes - 28 September 2015

### Attendance

#### Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Jasbinder Dehar  
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre  
Cllr Welcome Koussoukama  
Cllr Peter O'Neill (Chair)  
Cllr Arun Photay (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr Martin Waite  
Cllr Daniel Warren  
Cllr Richard Whitehouse  
Kashmire Hawker  
Emmerson Morrison

Wolverhampton Youth Council  
Wolverhampton Youth Council

#### Employees

Emma Bennett  
Alison Hinds  
Earl Piggott-Smith

Service Director - Children and Young People  
Head of Looked After Children  
Scrutiny Officer

Cllr Val Gibson

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*    *Title*

- 1        **Apologies**  
Apologies were received from the following member(s) of the panel:  
  
Cllr Christopher Haynes  
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss  
Cllr Paula Brookfield  
Rosalie Watkins  
Leanne Dack  
Cyril Randles  
Portia Tsvangirai
  
- 2        **Declarations of interest**  
No declarations of interest were made relative to items under consideration at the meeting.

3 **Minutes of the previous meeting (9.9.15)**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 **Matters arising**

Minute 5 – Corporate Parenting, Children in Care Council and the role of Councillors

Scrutiny Officer advised that invitations had been sent to all panel members about the planned Total Respect training.

5 **Proposed new fostering fees and allowances**

Alison Hinds, Head of Service Looked After Children, introduced the report detailing proposed changes to fostering fees and allowances. Head of Service explained that the service was finding it hard to recruit sufficient in-house foster carers and also could not match the level of fees paid to agency registered carers. A range of work is being done to promote the service. The current recruitment plan will be underpinned by the new proposed financial package.

Head of Service explained that the difficulties in recruiting foster carers led to a review of the current financial package. Foster carers and representatives of the Children in Care Council were consulted about the changes. In addition, a survey of the different practices among other local authorities was done as part of background research work.

In response to comments and feedback from foster carers and Children in Care Council a number of changes have been made to the original plans. For example, the payment of a retention fee to foster carers with a vacancy will be provided for a set period if the Council does not have a child that we could place with them. In the original plan, no payment would have been made to a foster carer in these circumstances.

The panel were concerned about the reference in 4.6 of the report about the monthly inventory check on the clothing stock of the foster child(ren) and that it would not be appropriate or sensitive to the needs of the young person concerned to have this done.

Emma Bennett, Service Director Children and Young People explained the reasons for doing the clothing checks and the responsibility on the Council to protect the interests of the young person and check that money given to foster carers was being spent appropriately. Service Director explained that there was support in responses from foster carers to check that clothing checks would be done. The clothing checks are not done every month. The panel agreed that there was a need to find the balance between the Council meeting its corporate parent responsibilities and checking that the clothing stock for the young person was sufficient for their needs.

Service Director accepted that the paragraph gives a misleading view of what happens in reality and agreed to make changes to the paragraph before the report is submitted to Cabinet in response to the concerns expressed.

The panel expressed a concern about the reduction in allowances paid to children aged 16 and over in the new scheme. Head of Service explained that the changes were discussed with representatives of the children in care council and also comparator work done across the other local authorities. The view of the children in care council was that the current amount was too high and they did not feel comfortable when they returned home or moved into independence with a large amount of savings. The panel were assured that young people would be given advice on how to manage their savings.

The panel commented on whether the fees in the new scheme could be increased to compete with the amount paid by private sector foster carers when considering the cost differential. The panel queried if there was view about what the ideal balance between the number of agency and local authority foster carers working in Wolverhampton and how the planned proposals would help the Council move towards this target. Service Director responded that there is an issue generally about the shortage of foster carers and the plan is set at a realistic recruitment target. The challenge for the service is recruiting enough specialist foster carers to meet the needs of children in Wolverhampton. Service Director explained that work is being done across the region to increase the pool of foster carers. The panel commented on the 331 LAC being cared for external foster carers by approved independent fostering agencies and how they would be affected by the change. The panel supported the idea of wanting to recruit local foster carers.

The panel queried the transition arrangements under the proposed new working arrangements would not mean children being moved when they reach a certain age. Head of Service explained that in this situation the Council would normally leave the child with the family.

The panel queried the implications of the scenario which assumes all foster carers receive payments at level, but who decide not to gain the skills and experience needed to become an advanced or specialist foster carer – and the extent the payment scheme would be a disincentive. Cllr Gibson commented that the Council wants all foster cares to be skilled practitioners.

The panel commented on the potential for Wolverhampton to become a leading authority if the proposed scheme is successful that in the future it could deliver the service on behalf of other local authorities by acting as a fostering agency. The panel commented on what was considered to the ideas mix of the ratio between in-house and agency foster carers and whether the planned changes were aimed at achieving a specific target.

Service Director outlined the work done with other local authorities to build good working relations. Cabinet Member explained that there was no specific figure, but the plan was aimed at moving towards addressing the problem of the shortage of internal fosters. The current pool of foster carers is not large enough to meet demand. The situation will be reviewed over time. Cabinet Member explained that a challenge is the recruitment of specialist foster carers and work is being done to try and engage the current pool to consider moving to being specialist foster carers. The panel discussed the merits of increasing the maximum payments to attract more

people to consider becoming a foster carer and this compares to the amounts paid to independent foster carers.

Wolverhampton Youth Council fully supported the proposals in the report. The panel welcomed the report and supported the proposals.

The panel queried if foster children would be encouraged and supported to take advantage of opportunities at the Youth Zone. Head of Service confirmed that under existing and new arrangements foster children are funded to take part in out of school activities and other interests or hobbies.

The panel discussed the requirements for foster carers to have a specific level of English and details of basic training that would be offered. The panel queried the need to have numeracy and language skills to be a foster carer. Service Director explained that there is a requirement on the council to meet its corporate parent responsibilities. The Council needs to have detailed records of the care and support in order to meet national minimum standards.

The panel supported the proposals and welcomed the report.

Resolved:

A summary of the panel comments on the proposed changes to the fostering fees and allowances to be included as appendix to the report presented to Cabinet for their consideration.

The meeting closed at 18:42