

CITY OF  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
COUNCIL

# Corporate Parenting Board

## Minutes - 26 September 2019

### Attendance

**Chair** Cllr John Reynolds (Lab)

### Labour

Cllr Paul Sweet  
Cllr Martin Waite

Cllr Paula Brookfield  
Cllr Rashpal Kaur

Cllr Rita Potter  
Cllr Zee Russell

### Conservative

Cllr Udey Singh

### Employees

Emma Bennett  
Fiona Brennan  
Nicola Hale  
Alison Hinds  
Mandy Lee  
Nick Price  
Alice Vickers

Director of Children's Services  
Designated Nurse, Children and Young People in Care  
Principal Independent Reviewing Officer  
Head of Children and Young People in Care  
Safeguarding Manager for Children  
Commissioning Officer  
Corporate Parenting Officer

Item No. Title

1 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Paul Appleby.

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 18 July 2019**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2019 be confirmed as a 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**

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Outstanding Matters be noted.

6 **Wolverhampton Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2020: 2018-2019 Implementation Plan End of Year Report**

Nick Price, Commissioning Officer presented the Wolverhampton Sufficiency Strategy 2017 – 2020: 2018 – 2019 Implementation report and highlighted salient points.

The report provided information on the position at the end of the Sufficiency Strategy Implementation Plan period of 2018 – 2019 and performance in relation to the Sufficiency Strategy Implementation Plan 2018 – 2019 priorities. It included proposals for changing the way that the Sufficiency Challenge element of the work is organised.

The report also provided a summary of the different types of placement and the associated costs and focused on the ‘right placement at the right time’.

It was reported that there had been an increase in fostering placements and an overall decrease in the number of children placed with parents. There were fewer internal placements recorded, however work was being carried out to increase this number. Numbers of young people in independent living placements had increased which was thought to be as a result of the increasing age profile.

The report offered an overview of the four challenges faced by the service, what had been working well and the plans that were in place to overcome the challenges. It was reported that there were many notable successes, such as that the Family

Group Conferencing was working well and that there had been a net gain of 24 mainstream internal foster carers. In terms of key performance indicators, the majority of actions had been completed or were on track to be completed.

The work that had been carried out was commended as well as the services available to children and young people in care and care leavers. The Chair recounted a recent visit to Upper Pendeford Farm and reported that the establishment was very impressive.

Resolved:

That the Wolverhampton Sufficiency Strategy 2017 – 2020: 2018 – 2019 report be received.

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### **Independent Reviewing Officer [IRO] Annual Report 2018-2019**

Mandy Lee, Safeguarding Manager for Children and Nicola Hale, Principal Independent Reviewing Officer presented the Independent Reviewing Officer [IRO] Annual Report 2018 – 2019. The report provided an outline of the activity of the service, the impact for children and the recommendations for service improvement that had been developed to enhance young people's experiences.

It was reported that there was a stable and experienced team of IROs in place and caseloads had decreased in line with the reduction in numbers of children and young people in care, allowing officers to focus on individual children and cases.

It was noted that children had been continuing to be involved in their reviews. There had been a small reduction in the percentage of participants since last year from 95% to 94% however this figure had not reduced by much so there were no serious concerns.

It was noted that in order to encourage participation, more creative alternative methods of conducting reviews were being offered, particularly in cases where service users were choosing not to engage with the Authority. It was reported that new consultation forms have been developed, which are briefer and simpler and a tailored consultation was being developed for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. It was clarified that a record of observations was to be captured for infants who were too young to participate during review appointments.

Concerns were raised around whether further investigations followed if a child or parent persistently chose not to participate in the reviews. Assurances were given that alternative methods were offered at first and if those were exhausted, an audit was undertaken to establish reasons for the lack of engagement.

It was queried whether children and young people had an electronic method of communicating their thoughts on the review process. It was noted that open conversation was encouraged although it was stated that there had been a digital platform, Mind of My Own (MOMO), which also made this possible if preferred. It was reported that the MOMO scheme was to be replaced in December with a new system which was being developed in consultation with the Children in Care Council. This was to be known as the Consultation Hub and it was planned to launch this with a new website. It was felt by officers that it was important to establish good

relationships with children in care and project the clear message that they could express how they felt at any time.

It was suggested that a possible factor for lack of engagement may be that, particularly in cases where trauma had been experienced prior to entering care, children may not want to revisit unpleasant memories by their repeated retelling.

In respect of a written invitation being issued to children aged seven and over, it was suggested that a less formal method could be used.

Resolved:

That the Independent Reviewing Officer [IRO] Annual Report 2018 – 2019 be endorsed.

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## Care Leaver Offer Review

Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer delivered a presentation on the outcomes of the consultation undertaken as part of the Care Leaver Offer Review. It was reported that the Care Leaver Offer had been developed in consultation with the Care Leavers' Forum and was comprised of the services and facilities that the Local Authority and partners had made available to Wolverhampton Care Leavers. It was noted that a printed booklet had also been produced cataloguing these services to enable care leavers to be aware of and easily access everything they were entitled to as part of the offer. The offer had been launched last year and a review was in progress.

It was noted that the Care Leaver Offer Review consultation exercise was designed to obtain young people's opinions and experiences of the services provided as part of the Local Care Offer. The presentation outlined statistics gathered to date on how the Local Care Offer had been received. It was noted that a full report had been scheduled for the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board, however some highlights were reported.

It was reported that there had been 609 hits on the Care Leaver Offer website.

A mentoring scheme had been established, supported by the Mayor of the City of Wolverhampton Council and the Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority. It was noted that this was a universal provision which care leavers had been made aware of however few had taken the offer up.

Young people had reported that they would like more social events to meet up together. It was also requested that specialist support groups, covering subjects such as domestic violence or parenthood, could be established for them to share their experiences with each other. These suggestions were currently being explored. It was also noted that children and young people wished to be notified as early as possible that these events were taking place.

It was noted that the Access to University and preparation for university life was a good addition, however it was suggested that guidance for life after university be covered as well.

It was reported that there had not been much participation in the mock interviews, however it was thought that this was because young people sometimes did not communicate that they had an interview planned.

In response to a concern on how issues of low confidence and self-esteem could be tackled, it was noted the service had procured a team from the Ascend charity to work with specialist vulnerable groups to address this.

It was suggested that free prescriptions or eye tests for care leavers in work would be beneficial as money could be tight when living independently.

It was noted that Care Leavers' Week was being held in the City from 24 – 31 October 2019 and the Care Leaver Offer would be promoted during this to raise awareness.

It was reported that there were key workers in local Job Centres who had received Total Respect training and were equipped to support young care leavers looking for employment. This provision had been commended as an example of good practice by the Department for Education and Department for Work and Pensions.

It was highlighted that Kirsty Dorward, Care Leaver Lead for the University of Wolverhampton had developed a support package for students which had achieved gold standard as part of the Care Leaver Covenant.

It was reported that the Swift cards had been well received by the young people, although it was noted that some bus services ceased to operate after certain times in the evening, which made transport after this time difficult for young people. It was suggested that a service become available later in the evening to make it possible for young people to visit a wider range of areas throughout the City.

It was queried whether the Authority had any involvement if a care leaver chose to reconnect with their birth parents after reaching adulthood. Concerns were voiced over whether young people may again be vulnerable to behaviours that had resulted in their placement in care initially. It was reported that the Safeguarding service could be involved with young people up until the age of 25, however the Authority could offer its support to young people but not control the level of contact they had with their birth families. It was highlighted that, in many cases, children and young people in care retained regular contact with their birth families and relationships were often rehabilitated when appropriate.

Resolved:

That the presentation on the Care Leaver Offer Review be received.

## Performance Monitoring Information

Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services presented the Performance Monitoring Report and highlighted salient points. The dashboard at Appendix 1 provided data on Children and Young People in Care as at 31 July 2019 and it was noted that the number of children in care had continued to reduce over the years.

It was highlighted that a group of three siblings had been successfully placed with grandparents and the care order discharged; this achievement was commended by Board members.

In respect of numbers, it was anticipated that these would reduce further after the legacy group of 10 – 18-year olds had left the care system. It was agreed that sufficient care leaver resources would need to be in place in preparation for this event.

In response to a query regarding the Regional Adoption Agency and reporting performance, it was clarified that there would be a breakdown of figures for each participating authority so each could identify how it was performing.

Resolved:

That the Performance Monitoring Information Report be received.

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## **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.

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

It was requested that any Councillors interested in visiting the residential establishments should contact Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer Councillor Paul Sweet, Councillor Rita Potter, Councillor Udey Singh, Councillor Rashpal Kaur, Councillor Paul Appleby and Councillor Zareena Russell expressed an interest in undertaking a future visit to establishments. It was agreed that a visit would be arranged for at least two Councillors and that those who had expressed an interest liaise with Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer.

Resolved:

That Councillors interested in visiting a residential establishment liaise with Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer.