

## **Attendance**

**Chair** Cllr John Reynolds (Lab)

## **Labour**

Cllr Paul Sweet Cllr Rashpal Kaur

## **Conservative**

Cllr Paul Appleby Cllr Udey Singh

## **Employees**

Emma Bennett	Director of Children's Services
Fiona Brennan	Designated Nurse, Children and Young People in Care
Alison Hinds	Head of Children and Young People in Care
Shelley Humphries	Democratic Services Officer
Alice Vickers	Corporate Parenting Officer
Shaquille Spence	Participation Officer

Members of the Children in Care Council also attended as guests.

*Item No.*    *Title*

**1        Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rita Potter, Councillor Paula Brookfield and Councillor Zee Russell.

**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 14 November 2019**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2019 be confirmed as 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**

The Chair presented the report on current progress on matters previously considered by the Board.

In respect of the free salon appointments, it was reported that work was underway to explore discount rates and free appointments with alternative salons.

In respect of the percentage of care leavers unavailable for the labour market, it was noted that a breakdown of information had been collated into briefing note and would be provided to the Corporate Parenting Board as soon as it had been verified.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Outstanding Matters be noted.

**6        Children in Care Council**

Members of the Children in Care Council attended the meeting to lead members of the Corporate Parenting Board in a workshop session. A video was screened showing members of the Children in Care Council describing how they thought corporate parenting could be promoted and pledging how they would support other children and young people in care in Wolverhampton.

Members of the Board were asked what qualities they thought they had and what they thought they should possess as corporate parents. A number of answers were recorded such as a caring demeanour; a genuine interest in the health and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people in care; parenting experience which also offered the perspective of what they would want for their own children; life experience and promoting the benefits of a good education and high aspirations.

Members of the Board were then asked what they believed the impact would be on children and young people in care if they didn't have these qualities. It was suggested that there may be a breakdown in communication, a lack of clarity and that a sense of what young people wanted would not be gained. It was noted that the Board wished to work together to support children and young people in care and those who had chosen to be part of its membership were genuinely interested in their welfare.

It was noted that the young people had pledged how they would support other children and young people in care in the City. It was requested that Board members take a short video of themselves also pledging what they would do to support and champion children and young people in care in the City and shared with the Board. It was also suggested that a montage of the pledges could be screened at the upcoming iAwards event.

Resolved:

1. That the Children in Care Council workshops be noted.
2. That members of Corporate Parenting Board provide short videos of their pledges to support and champion children and young people in care in the City.

## **7 Adoption Service Interim Report**

Mark Tobin, Adoption at Heart Service Head presented the Adoption Service Interim Report and highlighted salient points.

The report provided Corporate Parenting Board with the detail of performance and the progress the new regional adoption agency (RAA) service known as Adoption@Heart had made since it went live on 1 April 2019 up to 30 September 2019.

The report also summarised positive highlights, such as reductions in the number of children waiting to be matched for adoption and key priorities for the service moving forward. It was noted that a full report would be provided to Corporate Parenting Board once the service had been in place for a year.

It was suggested that Board members could attend Adoption Information events that were held around the region every fortnight and a list of dates would be circulated.

A case that had been publicised in Berkshire was recounted where an Indian couple had taken Berkshire Council to court for refusing to place a child of a different ethnicity with them. It was queried how the City of Wolverhampton Council might approach this. Board members were reassured that regulations prevented declining prospective adopters on the grounds of ethnic or cultural background alone. It was noted that there existed a diverse population of prospective adopters and foster carers in Wolverhampton and part of the process focused on how the child's culture could be promoted and supported if there was not a full cultural match. It was reported that some thought had to be given to other factors, such as whether there was a language barrier.

In respect of workforce, it was clarified that vacancy rates had been fairly low from the beginning but permanent positions had now stabilised with only one employee leaving post since the agency went live. It was reported that sourcing and retaining quality agency workers had been challenging, however this issue was not limited to this region and was a national issue. The management team were credited for the high staff retention.

Concerns were raised over the Eclipse reporting system which had been found to be encountering some challenges. Board members were assured that the system had been procured with the intention of providing value for money and problems that had been experienced with reporting had not been apparent at the time the system was being tested. It was noted that work was being undertaken with an internal business analyst to provide technical support to resolve any issues.

Resolved:

That the Adoption Service Interim Report be received.

## 8 **Virtual School Head Annual Report 2019**

Darren Martindale, Virtual School Head presented the Virtual School Head Annual Report 2019 and highlighted salient points. The report sought to inform Corporate Parenting Board of the educational progress and achievements of Wolverhampton's Children and Young People in Care, and previously in care, and the steps that the local authority has taken to support those achievements.

It was noted that the Beanstalk reading assistant scheme had been successful with the aim of accelerating children's reading progress, confidence and attitude to reading. The Turnabout programme had also produced positive results by improving confidence and problem-solving skills in reading and writing. It had also been noted that, out of the children who had shown improvement on this programme, a high percentage of had also seen improvements in maths.

In respect of children in years 7 – 11, it was highlighted that 75% had achieved the age-appropriate stage in English and 72% had achieved the age-appropriate stage in maths. It was noted that attainment gaps existed in some areas, however work was being undertaken to ensure these gaps closed.

It was reported that there were a number of successes for children and young people in care in Wolverhampton. It was noted that attendance rates were high and persistent absences were falling. It was highlighted that no children and young people had been permanently excluded from school or setting in the past year. This was commended as the rate of permanent exclusion for children and young people in care had been rising nationally.

It was queried whether any pupil premium plus funding had been invested in arts or sports and clarified that there had been an increase in this type of funding. It was agreed that focus was needed on achievement in the core subjects however it was felt that arts and sports would add extra depth.

It was also clarified that an area of the personal education plans (PEPs) had been dedicated to extra-curricular interests, therefore activities such as theatre trips, music lessons, art events and workshops could be funded if a student wished to participate.

It was noted that Virtual Heads were able to network via the West Midlands Consortium to arrange visits for children and young people in care to arts events and workshops around the region.

In response to a query around how the Authority had been approaching the behaviour leading to exclusions, it was noted that there was a wide plan in place. Support around emotional literacy and anger management was offered and extensive work was undertaken in partnership with schools to promote inclusion. The intention was to cultivate the understanding that challenging behaviour was usually driven by an unmet need and to work towards supporting young people in a different way.

It was clarified that pupil premium plus could be used for sporting activities provided there was a direct link to supporting a specific child's learning targets. It was suggested that children and young people displaying challenging behaviour could engage in sports to channel any physical aggression.

Resolved:

That the Virtual School Head Annual Report be received.

## 9 **Performance Monitoring Information**

Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services presented the Performance Monitoring Information report and highlighted salient points.

It was reported that the numbers of children in care in Wolverhampton had dropped to 106 per 10,000 and numbers continued to reduce. It was noted that there had been a shift in gender to more boys in care than girls.

It was noted that work was being carried out by the leadership team on the assessments and it was highlighted that the average caseload for the children and young people in care social worker had reduced.

It was noted that some discrepancies had been identified in initial health check data and Fiona Brennan, Designated Nurse for Children and Young People at Wolverhampton CCG had been working with Alison Hinds, Head of Children and Young People in Care to examine the reporting process.

It had been noted earlier that a briefing note had been prepared to provide a breakdown of the reasons why care leavers were not available for the labour market (NALM) which would be circulated to Board members as soon as it became available.

Resolved:

1. That the Performance Monitoring Information report be received.
2. That the data breakdown for care leavers who were not available for the labour market be shared with Board members once available.

10 **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.

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

There had been no visits undertaken since the last meeting. The visit set up for November had been postponed due to election duties over November and December. It was requested that Board members contact Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer with availability and the visit would be rescheduled.

Resolved:

That Board members contact Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer with availability for an establishment visit.