

Attendance

Chair Cllr John Reynolds (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Martin Waite

Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Rashpal Kaur

Cllr Rita Potter

Conservative

Cllr Udey Singh

Employees

Alison Hinds

Deputy Director of Children's Social Care

Employees

Fiona Brennan
Alison Hinds
Shelley Humphries
Mark Tobin
Alice Vickers

Designated Nurse, Children and Young People in Care
Deputy Director of Children's Social Care
Democratic Services Officer
Head of Service, Adoption at Heart
Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Corporate Parenting Board: Councillor Paul Appleby.

Apologies were also received from Emma Bennett and Jazmine Walker.

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 19 November 2020

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2020 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 noted from the Schedule of Outstanding Matters that the face masks had been sourced and distributed and that the Care Leaver Reach Team were working towards making progress on addressing public transport for care leavers.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Outstanding Matters be noted.

6 Adoption Service Interim Report

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

It was noted that the report jointly covered the full year 2019 - 2020 and the interim period of six months 1 April to 30 September 2020 and it was highlighted that the data and information within the report was accurate as of 30 September 2020. The interim report would normally have been presented separately to Corporate Parenting Board in the summer, however meetings had temporarily been stood down due to COVID.

The report provided detail of the performance and progress made by the new Adoption @ Heart service.

It was noted that since the first lockdown restrictions back in March 2020, effective ICT support from the Council had enabled the workforce to work successfully from home operating an almost fully virtual service (excepting the occasional face to face meeting when safe and necessary).

COVID had caused some delays to adoption proceedings moving through the courts, therefore this year's final adoption figures were predicted to be slightly lower than in previous years, although hearings had resumed from September 2020. It was noted that adoption numbers had reduced nationally since 2017.

It was noted that a great deal of interest had been generated and more people were keen to register interest although a campaign was planned for the autumn to reach out to an even wider audience. It was intended to inform the public and dispel any myths surrounding adoption that may have discouraged people in the past.

It was commended that the four authorities across the Black Country that made up Adoption@ Heart attempted to place children and young people as close as possible to where they were born or spent the early part of their lives as well as endeavouring to keep sibling groups together wherever possible. It was highlighted that these factors, amongst others, sometimes meant the process took longer but it was acknowledged that the priority was to get the placement absolutely right for each child. It was clarified that if keeping a sibling group together was not possible, every effort was made to keep those siblings in regular contact with each other.

It was noted that no formal analysis had taken place however, in some cases, people had expressed an interest but it then became apparent that uncertainty surrounding COVID or around their job security meant that they didn't want to proceed at that time. It was suggested that contact be maintained in case a change in circumstances meant they could proceed with joining the adoption pool. It was suggested that a campaign could be launched around the lifting of lockdown to attempt to reignite interest or that Radio Wolves could be used as a platform to reach out to inform that adoptions were still taking place.

Resolved:

1. That the Adoption Service Interim Report for Adoption@Heart be received.
2. That Corporate Parenting Board note progress made by the Regional Adoption Agency.

7 Performance Monitoring Information

Alison Hinds, Deputy Director of Social Care presented the Performance Monitoring Information Report and highlighted key points.

It was suggested that Councillors request any particular areas they would like to see highlighted or focused on when receiving the report at meetings.

A query was raised around the issue of domestic violence having increased during lockdown and if there had been any correlation between the number of domestic violence cases and numbers of children needing to be removed from these situations. It was reported that some cases of that nature had been received, which indicated that these cases were being received through the system.

A query was raised around whether there had been a spike in care referrals once schools reopened in September 2020 as schools were often the most common referral pathway. It was noted that such an increase had been anticipated, however it had not been as large as expected.

An increase in both long- and short-term placement stability was highlighted and this was attributed to the therapeutic support programmes in place for foster carers to ensure children felt more stable and settled. It was acknowledged that Wolverhampton's foster carers had continued to show great commitment to ensure stability for children throughout an uncertain situation and their efforts were commended.

A reduction in review participation had been noted and this was thought to be due to the new recording methods. An investigation into the figures was underway and it was agreed that the outcome would be fed back to Corporate Parenting Board.

Dental checks were showing as reduced from last year and, again, the Authority was working with health colleagues to review recording checks and meeting targets.

In terms of education, employment and training, it was acknowledged that this was an area of particular strength and, despite the slight downturn experienced, Wolverhampton was performing well against comparators. It was reported that work was underway to mitigate the long-term impact of national lockdown and school closures on young people's education. It was noted that the Virtual Head Annual Report was due at the next meeting and would include an overview of how children and young people in care were being supported in these areas. In addition, it was noted that ways mentoring and supporting young people into employment opportunities were being embedded into the Relight Out City strategy.

A query was raised around whether many children and young people in care were currently engaged with online learning and if they had access to resources to do this. It was reported that, as they were classed a vulnerable, children and young people in care were being encouraged to stay in school where possible. Children and young people in care who remained at home were being provided with devices and online access to study at home; information was also being provided to foster carers to ensure they could support the person in their care with online learning.

Resolved:

1. That Councillors identify areas of focus for the next Performance Monitoring Information report.
2. That the outcome from investigating the review participation statistics would be fed back to Corporate Parenting Board.

8 **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.

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

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

Alice Vickers, Co-production and Youth Engagement Manager reported she had been in contact with two establishments, however it was reported that one was closed to residents at this time and the other had just taken in new residents therefore it was decided to wait until they had settled in before undertaking any virtual visits.

It was hoped that a virtual visit would be able to take place soon and an update would be provided once this had been arranged.