

Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes - 30 September 2015

Attendance

Chair Cllr Val Gibson (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Julie Hodgkiss

Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Stephen Simkins

Cllr Martin Waite

Conservative

Cllr Christine Mills

Liberal Democrat

Cllr Richard Whitehouse

Children in Care Council representatives

Alicia Blewitt	La-Myar James
Dasiante Dean	Tyrone Miller Coleman
Arron Gavin	Sean Povey
Casey Gavin	Shereen Rafferty
Kyron Hughes	Shaideen Williamson

Employees

Emma Bennett	Service Director - Children and Young People
Carl Craney	Democratic Support Officer
Louise Haughton	Social Worker
Alison Hinds	Head of Looked After Children
Andrew Spragg	Participation Officer
Alice Vickers	Corporate Parenting Officer

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence (if any)

No apologies for absence had been received.

2 Declarations of interest (if any)

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

3 Minutes of the previous meeting (1 July 2015)

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 July 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

With reference to Minute No. 4 (matters arising), the Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, enquired as to the present position with the review of inter alia, the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Emma Bennett, Service Director, Children and Young People, reported that the review was still work in progress. Alison Hinds, Head of Looked After Children, reported that a report on this matter would be submitted to the meeting of the Board scheduled for 6 January 2016.

With reference to Minute No. 4.2, the Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, reminded the Board that a report on outstanding matters would be submitted to all future meetings of the Board.

5 "This is my friend"

The Board and representatives of the Children in Care Council conducted an exercise, "This is my friend" and reported back on the outcomes.

6 Priorities identified by the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children in Care Council

Casey Gavin identified, on behalf of the Children in Care Council the following priorities for Looked After Children:

- Children in care having contact with siblings without supervision being provided;
- Preparing for independence;
- Out of City placements.

The Service Director, Children and Young People reported that a contact centre had been established and that the current contract was being reviewed. The Council was keen to facilitate contact between children in care and their siblings. Contact without supervision was dependent upon the ages of the children involved amongst other factors. With regard to preparing for independence, she advised that this was part of

the “New Belongings” project and undertook to circulate a copy of the latest iteration of the report to the Board. She explained that “New Belongings” was part of a Government initiative and that Wolverhampton had been selected as one of the pilot sites. An Action Plan to cover the next 12 months had been prepared and would be launched during Care Leavers week. With regard to Out of City placements she assured the Board and the representatives of the Children in Care Council that the Council was keen to reduce the number of Out of City placements and where no alternative existed to try to ensure that it was as close to Wolverhampton as possible. Circumstances did, however, sometimes dictate that there this type of placement was necessary and appropriate. She referred to a recent conference she had attended with three representatives of the Children in Care Council in connection with Looked After Children in Education. Cllr Stephen Simkins suggested that the “New Belongings” project be the topic of a future joint meeting between the Board and the Children in Care Council. Alice Vickers, Corporate Parenting Officer advised that the next joint meeting was scheduled for 30 March 2016.

Cllr Stephen Simkins enquired as to whether there was a role to play in schools to improve contact between children in care and siblings. The Corporate Parenting Officer, undertook to raise this issue at the next meeting with the Designated Teachers and to report back to a future meeting.

Resolved:

1. That the priorities identified by the Children in Care Council be noted;
2. That a copy of the latest iteration of the report on the “New Belongings” project be circulated to the Board;
3. That the “New Belongings” project be the topic of a future joint meeting between the Board and the Children in Care Council;
4. That the Corporate Parenting Officer raise the issue of the role of schools in improving contact between children in care and siblings at the next meeting with the Designated Teachers and report back on the outcome to a future meeting of the Board.

7 Feedback and arrangements for the next joint meeting

Resolved:

That the “New Belongings” project be the main topic for consideration at the next joint meeting scheduled for 30 March 2016.

8 Adoption Agency Interim Report

Louise Haughton, Senior Social Work Manager – Adoption, presented a report which detailed the work of the Wolverhampton City Council Adoption Service in the year April 2014 to April 2015. The report updated the Board in relation to adoption both nationally and locally and included legislative and practice changes and how these impacted on those affected by adoption in Wolverhampton.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss referred to the Government target for the time taken with the adoption process and suggested that this should only be viewed as an aspiration with the best placement being paramount. The Senior Social Work Manager – Adoption acknowledged the point being made but commented that a balance needed to be struck as when the correct placement had been identified it should be made to

happen quickly. Cllr Peter O'Neill suggested that the Council's good practice with adoption placements, in securing 85 during 2014/15, should be made known to other Councils.

Kyron Hughes enquired if one child in a family group was adopted whether contact with siblings was still encouraged. The Senior Social Work Manager – Adoption explained that contact would not normally cease for a variety of reasons. The law now provided for siblings to apply for a Contact Order enabling contact with the adopted sibling.

La-Myar James questioned why in certain circumstances only one child in a sibling group was adopted. The Senior Social Work Manager – Adoption explained that this issue was considered during the care planning period and would depend on the needs of the individual children. Formal contact might reduce following adoption. She advised the Board that Adoption had very low rates of breakdown and offered greater stability to the child which could be better than familial contact. Social Workers would attempt to facilitate contact when appropriate.

Alicia Blewitt enquired whether the Council would provide support to adopted children in preparing for independence. The Senior Social Work Manager – Adoption advised that this support would normally be provided by the adoptive family.

Dasiante Dean asked why the numbers of successful adoptions had increased and whether the placements were of a high quality. The Senior Social Work Manager – Adoption explained that there were a lot of legacy cases which had now been dealt with and that the rate of placement had increased partially due to the high profile given nationally to adoption. She assured the Board that the quality of placements was subject to assessment by two Social Workers, a Manager and the Adoption Panel. She commented that there had been no breakdown in adoption relationships in the past three years which was a testimony in itself to the quality of the placements.

Tyrone Miller Coleman enquired whether adopted children had an allocated Social Worker. The Senior Social Work Manager Adoption advised that adopted children were not allocated a Social Worker but that adoption support was available.

Shereen Rafferty questioned why the amount of money allocated to adopted children was calculated and why it differed to that for Looked After Children. The Senior Social Work Manager Adoption advised that the Council did not receive financial support from the Council as this would be provided by the adoptive parents.

Cllr Stephen Simkins referred to the Adoption Reform Grant and asked how long this funding would be available and what plans were in place for when it was no longer available. He also questioned the resource implications associated with Regional Adoption Committees. The Senior Social Work Manager Adoption reported that the Adoption Reform Grant had ended in 2014/15 and as this had been known in advance the Council was prepared for this reduction in resources. She commented on the amount of work that had been undertaken during 2014/15 utilising this funding. The Head of Looked After Children reminded the Board that twelve additional Social Workers had been recruited with one allocated to the Adoption Service.

Cllr Stephen Simkins questioned whether any thought had been given to amalgamating the Adoption and Looked After Children Services. The Head of Looked After Children reported that some work had already been undertaken in this area and that all Looked After Children with an Adoption Plan were now the responsibility of the Adoption Service. The Service Director, Children and Young People reported on the work of the Adoption Leadership Board which had raised the profile and priority of adoption within the region. She commented that a likely next step would be the regionalisation of adoption and that a bid had been submitted by West Midlands Councils to Government for funding. The Black Country was already an exemplar of good practice. Invitations were likely to be extended to Telford and Shropshire Councils to participate in regional work.

Cllr Peter O'Neill referred to paragraph 3.4.6 of the report insofar as it referred to the cost of providing a placement for one child being £27,000. The Service Director, Children and Young People explained that the figure had been set under the Adoption Reform agenda. The Senior Social Work Manager Adoption reported that this cost had calculated as the average cost. Cllr Peter O'Neill enquired as to whether there was a danger of the service being privatised. The Service Director, Children and Young People reported that this was not the case but that a wider pool of placements would be made available. The Senior Social Work Manager Adoption reminded the Board that Voluntary Adoption Agencies were voluntary organisations and operated on a not for profit basis.

Cllr Jasbinder Dehar referred to paragraph 3.4.4 of the report and the apparent reduction in the number of Asian or dual heritage background being placed for adoption. The Senior Social Work Manager Adoption responded that there was no explanation available for this and that it was a completely random occurrence. The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson commented that the situation was monitored and that no trends had been identified. Cllr Richard Whitehouse reminded the Board that when dealing with small numbers percentages could be very misleading. The Service Director, Children and Young People reminded the Board of the amount of benchmarking which was undertaken and that there were no concerns in relation to this issue.

Cllr Stephen Simkins enquired as to the checks and balances in place in relation to the use of voluntary adoption agencies. The Service Director, Children and Young People reminded the Board that she had offered re-assurances previously with regard to this issue and that all adoption agencies were registered with Ofsted and subject to the Council's vetting process. The Head of Looked After Children confirmed that the vetting process was very vigorous.

Resolved:

1. That the Wolverhampton City Council Adoption Service Annual Report April 2014 to April 2015 be received and noted;
2. That the thanks of the Board be extended to the Senior Social Work Manager Adoption for the report and her work over the reporting period;
3. That A Briefing Note be prepared and circulated in connection with the levelling of interagency placement fees.

The Service Director Children and Young People presented the Performance Report for September 2015 (data as at August 2015) and responded to a number of questions.

The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, reported that permanent staff had now been recruited to nearly all Social Worker posts which had reduced the dependency on agency staff.

Cllr Peter O'Neill enquired whether there was a Governor responsible for Looked After Children on the Governing Bodies of schools and if the increase in the number of Academies would be prejudicial to the position. The Head of Looked After Children reported that the Council enjoyed a good working relationship with the Designated Teachers.

Cllr Rita Potter enquired whether care leavers continued to receive support from the Council. The Head of Looked After Children confirmed that support and advice was provided in respect of housing and education.

Casey Gavin extended an invitation to the Service Director, Children and Young People and the Head of Looked After Children to attend the next meeting of the Children in Care Council. The invitation was accepted.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss invited the representatives of the Children in Care Council to provide feedback to the Board on their experience of attending this meeting. The Corporate Parenting Officer undertook to arrange for the minutes of the next Children in Care Council meeting to be presented to a future meeting of the Board.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That the representatives of the Children in Care Council be thanked for their contributions to this meeting and for their attendance.

10 **Exclusion of the press and public**

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**

Resolved:

1. That the offer of the Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, to visit Upper Pendeford Farm and to report back thereon to a future meeting be noted;
2. That the offer of Cllrs Peter O'Neill and Stephen Simkins to visit Merridale Street West and to report back thereon to a future meeting be noted.

12 **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson reported that the Looked After Children iAwards ceremony would be held on 5 February 2016 and that invitations to attend would be issued shortly.

The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, reminded the Board that the Foster Carer Long Service Awards evening would be held on 23 October 2015.