

Attendance

Chair Cllr Beverley Momenabadi (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Mary Bateman

Cllr Jasbinder Dehar

Cllr Rita Potter

Conservative

Cllr Wendy Dalton
Cllr Stephanie Haynes

Cllr Mak Singh

In Attendance

Hannah Finch
Alison Hinds
Shelley Humphries
Caterina Robinson
Mark Tobin
Jazmine Walker

Corporate Parenting Officer
Deputy Director of Social Care
Democratic Services Officer
Service Manager for Children's Services
Mark Tobin, Head of Service for Adoption@Heart
Head of Service for Children and Young People in Care

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Corporate Parenting Board: Councillor Paula Brookfield and Councillor Asha Mattu.

Apologies were also received from Fiona Brennan.

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 27 January 2022

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2022 be confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting.

5 Schedule of outstanding matters

Jazmine Walker, Head of Service for Children and Young People in Care presented the report on current progress on matters previously considered by the Board.

An outline was provided of progress against all items and it was highlighted that all outstanding actions had now been completed.

Resolved:

That the Schedule of Outstanding Matters be received.

6 Adoption Service Interim Report

Mark Tobin, Head of Service for Adoption at Heart, presented the Adoption Service Interim Report and highlighted salient points. The report fulfilled the obligations in the Adoption National Minimum Standards (2011) and Adoption Service Statutory Guidance (2011) Adoption and Children Act 2002 to report to the “executive side” of the local authority.

It was noted that data and information within the published report was accurate as of 30 September 2021. It was clarified that scorecard data for children who wait longer was also for this six-month period.

It was queried if the number of children waiting to be adopted to date was known; it was reported that the figures presented were for the last six months however it was confirmed that this information would be available for the annual year-end report. It was noted that those who were waiting were not waiting due to a lack of availability

of adopters but a number of other complex factors, such as keeping members of large sibling groups together or children and young people with complex needs.

It was also clarified that the slow progression of special guardianship orders could possibly be attributed to delayed court hearings due to COVID restrictions.

It was queried whether the reported reduction in registrations of interest had been seen nationally as well as locally. It was noted that there had been a spike in enquiries and registrations of interest during 2020 – 2021 and there appeared to be a correlation between this and a rise in approval numbers as well. Although there had been a levelling off recently, it was reported that enquiries and registrations of interest were still in healthy numbers and levels were continually being monitored.

In response to a query around accessibility, it was confirmed that information material used in the 'You Can Adopt' campaign had also been translated into other languages in a conscious effort to reach a diverse range of communities.

It had been noted that children who waited longer were sometimes older children, members of large sibling groups or those with complex needs. It was suggested that younger children tended not to wait as long and there was a challenge nationally in placing large sibling groups in one family so they could remain together. It was confirmed that a package of training delivered by Adoption@Heart was available for adopters which could be tailored to include how to support children and young people with special educational needs and / or disabilities or other complex needs.

It was queried if a rise in unaccompanied children needing support was anticipated due to the crisis in Ukraine. It was confirmed that this had not emerged either locally or nationally at present as there were mainly family groups arriving rather than unaccompanied children.

The report was commended and thanks were offered to the Adoption@Heart Service.

Resolved:

That the Adoption Service Interim Report be received.

7 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) and Young People

Caterina Robinson, Service Manager for Children's Services presented the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) and Young People report and highlighted key points. The report outlined the current position of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) and Young People in Wolverhampton and the support offered from April 2021 - March 2022. This included an overview of numbers of UASC within the City and how many of these were children and young people in care and care leavers.

The support offer was commended and it was noted that Ofsted had remarked positively on the level of support offered to UASC arriving under the National Transfer Scheme.

In response to a query on the average age range of children, it was noted that there had been no child under the age of 16 arriving in the last 12 months and the typical age was around 16-17.

Resolved:

That the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) and Young People report be received.

8 **Performance Monitoring Information**

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

It was highlighted that the service continued to see a decrease in numbers of children and young people in care illustrating that only those children and young people remained in care that needed to be. The downward trajectory brought Wolverhampton ever closer in line with statistical neighbours.

It was noted that placement stability was steady and that many placements had been with internal foster carers, which meant a whole-system wraparound level of support could be offered.

There had been a small dip in numbers of children and young people with an up-to-date initial assessment however figures were still healthy at 70%. Performance was strong in terms of the number of children and young people in care with up-to-date reviews and participation in reviews.

There had been improvements in numbers of children and young people with up-to-date personal education plans (PEPs). Work undertaken focusing on PEPs for children in years 12 and 13 had paid dividends with figures improving here also.

Initial health checks were not as high as hoped however mechanisms were now in place to improve this. Work was also being undertaken to ensure timeliness of initial assessments for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

In terms of adoption orders being granted, it was noted that the impact of COVID could be seen in the drop in adoption numbers during 2020 - 2021 as court proceedings had been delayed, followed by a rise in 2021 – 2022 as restrictions lifted and face to face hearings could resume.

It was reported that a programme of support had recently been developed for those care leavers who had not been in education, employment or training for some time. The impact of COVID on opportunities was acknowledged. Figures for care leavers in suitable accommodation were positive.

Resolved:

That the Performance Monitoring Information report be received.

9 **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 falling within paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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

Councillor Wendy Dalton provided a verbal account of her visit to Upper Pendeford Farm Short Break Centre. It was reported that the establishment had made a good impression and provided satisfactory assurance that safety procedures were in place. It was noted that the premises was clean and provided a pleasant and calming rural outlook.

Concerns were raised around what measures were in place should a resident ever go missing. It was noted that the centre was a short stay facility providing respite for young people at risk of coming into care or at risk of placement breakdown. This was to diffuse difficult situations and prevent them escalating to a level where a child may run away.

It was noted that procedures were in place towards prevention although residents were free to move around as they wished. Assurances were offered that, should an incident occur, steps would be taken to respond and interviews would be held with the young person upon return to ascertain why they had left and if there were any further safeguarding concerns. Any young person who was considered at risk or had repeat missing episodes would be monitored.

It was noted that Councillors who had expressed an interest would be contacted to arrange a date. Councillor Stephanie Haynes added she had requested to attend at the last meeting but not been contacted therefore was placed on the list.

Resolved:

That Councillors Stephanie Haynes, Rita Potter and Mary Bateman would be contacted to arrange a visit to Upper Pendeford Farm Short Break Centre.