

Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes - 22 September 2016

Attendance

Chair Cllr Val Gibson (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Hazel Malcolm
Cllr Lynne Moran

Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Zee Russell

Cllr Martin Waite

Employees

Linda Sanders
Emma Bennett
Alison Hinds
Dawn Deans
Alice Vickers
Esther Douglas
Mike Hooper

Strategic Director
Service Director – Children and Young People
Head of Looked After Children
Senior Social Work Manager – Adoption
Corporate Parenting Officer
Social Worker / Foster Care Trainer
Democratic Services Officer

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence (if any)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Julie Hodgkiss and Councillor Christine Mills.

2 Declarations of interests (if any)

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2016

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2016 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

5 Change to the Order of Agenda Items

The Chair moved that agenda item 5, Schedule of Outstanding Matters, be considered following items 6, Fostering Agency Annual Report, 7, Adoption Agency Annual Report and 8, Performance Monitoring – Looked After Children.

Resolved

That agenda items 6, 7 and 8 be considered prior to agenda item 5.

6 Fostering Agency Annual Report

Alison Hinds, Head of Looked After Children, presented the Fostering Agency Annual Report with a view to receiving feedback from Board members.

In addition to the information contained within the report and in response to questions from Board Members and attending foster carers, officers stated the following:

- Recent recruitment and marketing campaigns had been successful, with increased referrals seen during Fostering Week.
- The review of fees and allowances recognised that there was a need for foster carers that are family members to receive the same levels of support and financial help as other foster carers.
- Meeting the needs of older children was an area that needed to be focussed upon in terms of recruitment. Family placements were deemed to be the most appropriate.
- Care leave mentors would be a future area of focus.
- Processes were in place to ensure that the Independent Reviewing Officers were able to escalate to the Council issues raised by carers.
- Work commitments such as particular shift patterns would not necessarily rule a person out as a potential foster carer. The Authority would check to see if

- extended support networks and provision for the unexpected, i.e. an unwell child, were in place.
- Significant life events such as bereavements or new relationships would be actively investigated.
 - All carers should receive unannounced supervision visits. It was acknowledged that better planning was required to ensure that happens. Should improvements to the current rate not be achieved, the Independent Reviewing Officer could seek a 360 degree review.
 - It was recognised that children needed time to form bonds with their Social Workers and efforts were being made to reduce the number of agency staff. However, it was also essential that staffing levels were maintained. Recruiting and retaining staff was an industry-wide issue and new incentives, including a rolling recruitment programme, were being implemented. In addition, discussions had been had with best practice authorities and performance monitoring was in place. The Authority currently employed 15 agency Social Workers.
 - Measures taken to retain permanent Social Workers included thorough workforce plans and excellent development pathways, competitive pay and other employee benefits.
 - There was a need to ensure that carers kept young people beyond the age of 18. Fees had been set at a level where carers wouldn't be worse off financially.

The Head of Looked After Children apologised for the graph included under 13.11 report being incorrect.

Resolved:

That the Wolverhampton Fostering Annual Report for 2015/2016 be noted.

7 Adoption Agency Annual Report

Alison Hinds, Head of Looked After Children, presented the Adoption Agency Annual Report with a view to receiving feedback from Board members.

In addition to the information contained within the report and in response to questions from Board Members, officers stated the following:

- Contact with birth parents was retained through the Post-Adoption Contact (PAC) Service. Letterbox contact was made once per year through the PAC Co-ordinator. Currently there was one open case that had contact three times per year with parents and grandparents.
- Where a child was placed in a fostering capacity pre-adoption, their Social Worker would talk to them about what fostering and adoption meant.
- Guidelines were very clear that ensuring a cultural match should not be the driving force behind placements. Measures could be taken to support children from different cultural backgrounds to their carers. If an adopter specifically stated that they did not want children from a particular background the Authority would analyse and evaluate the reasoning behind that.

Resolved:

That the Adoption Agency Report for 2015/2016 be noted.

8 **Performance Monitoring - Looked After Children**

Emma Bennett, Service Director – Children and Young People, provided an overview of the key points and findings of the September 2016 Performance Report (data as at July 2016).

Attention was drawn to an administrative error in the report. On page 80 of the agenda, the percentage of LAC in Good or Outstanding Children's Homes was 81%.

In response to questions raised by the Board, the Service Director stated the following:

- The number of adoptions so far during 2016/17 (12) was not cause for alarm. The Munby case law indicated that adoption should be the last option considered and that had a big impact upon placement orders being granted.
- Although the industry had seen an uplift in care proceedings, Wolverhampton had seen a decrease.
- Young Persons Advisors could potentially meet with care leavers through to the age of 25. Social Workers would usually support up to the age of 18 but occasionally they would remain responsible for a case beyond that.

Resolved:

That the Performance Report be noted.

9 **Schedule of outstanding matters**

Emma Bennett, Service Director – Children and Young People presented a report on the progress made in relation to actions previously agreed by the Board.

Resolved

That the actions taken in relation to the following matters be noted and that they be removed from the Summary of Outstanding Matters:

- Report back on visit to Merridale Street West.
- Breakdown of LAC in terms of those known or not known to the Authority before being taken into care.
- Details of the number of children in privately operated Children's Homes in Wolverhampton together with the Ofsted rating of such establishments.
- Regional Adoption Agency.

10 **Exclusion of the public and press**

Resolved

That in accordance with Part 1 Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business as it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.

11 **Councillor Visits to Children's Homes**

Councillor Peter O'Neill presented an exempt report regarding his recent visit to Merridale Street West Children's Home.

Resolved

That the report be noted.