

Attendance

Chair Cllr Paul Sweet (Lab)

Labour

Cllr Obaida Ahmed
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar
Cllr Celia Hibbert

Cllr Welcome Koussoukama
Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Clare Simm

Cllr Martin Waite

Conservative

Cllr Udey Singh

Employees

Emma Bennett
Fiona Brennan
Vanessa Graham
Alison Hinds
Shelley Humphries
Alice Vickers

Director of Children's Services
Designated Nurse, Looked After Children
Family Support Worker
Head of Looked After Children
Democratic Services Officer
Corporate Parenting Officer

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence (if any)

No apologies for absence were received.

2 Declarations of interests (if any)

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

3 Minutes of the meeting held

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2018 be confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

4 Matters arising

Emma Bennett clarified the visits to the residential establishments for Councillor Peter O'Neill and Councillor Martin Waite. The service was to facilitate the Councillor visits and to this end, Alice Vickers had suggested a date for Councillor Paul Sweet to visit the respite residential home at Upper Pendeford Farm and would bring a schedule of visits to the next meeting.

With regard to quality assurance, Emma Bennett reassured the Councillors present that a quality assurance report was produced and if any concerns were raised around a particular establishment, a visit from a member of the Quality Assurance team and a social worker would follow. A risk assessment would be carried out to weigh up the risks of removing the child versus leaving the child in the placement, always with the child's best interests in mind. The private residential homes across the City were said to be of variable quality, however monitoring mechanisms were in place. It was noted that not all looked after children (LAC) residing within Wolverhampton based homes were from Wolverhampton and the Authority were only responsible for the Wolverhampton LAC, however there were records kept of every LAC placed in city by other Local Authorities, especially if they were considered at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) or involved with a Youth Offending Team (YOT).

Resolved:

That Alice Vickers pulls together a list of Wolverhampton looked after children placed in local residential homes and liaises with Councillors to develop a schedule of Councillor visits to establishments be brought to the next meeting.

5 Schedule of outstanding matters

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

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

6 Wolverhampton Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2020: 2017-2018 Implementation Plan Summary Report

Nick Price, Commissioning Officer presented the Sufficiency Strategy and outlined key points.

The foster carer 1-4 Tier system was clarified for the Board and it was stated that the higher the tier, the wider the range of skills a foster carer had received training on. The wider the range of skills, the more complex needs a foster carer was equipped to provide support with.

It was queried whether there were any projected LAC figures available and it was confirmed that there were projections for up to 10 years. Spreadsheets were maintained of cohorts of children moving through the system and this data was regularly analysed, updated and reviewed every quarter. This information was aligned with budgets.

The growing age of the young people still in the system was touched on and possible reasons for this were explored. It was stated that there had been a legacy from bringing an influx of children into the system some years ago who were all now turning 18. The numbers were expected to drop over the next six years as this legacy moved out of the system. Another possible reason was that some teenagers might be brought into the system after being on the edge of care for too long.

As the placement timescales appeared to be longer than average, it was asked whether a median figure could be recorded internally, rather than a mean. It was noted that figures were continuing to reduce and approach the national average anyway, but it may be useful to show a different average. It was requested that these figures be brought to future meetings every six months or annually with figures represented in dashboard format.

With regard to caring for LAC with additional needs, such as children with dyslexia or ADHD, it was clarified that foster carers received relevant training. There was dedicated training available for foster carers supporting children with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). Councillor Dehar expressed an interest in the Family Values project and requested information on this.

Resolved:

1. That a different average of figures be explored to give a better representation of placement timescales.
2. That any further information on the progress of the Family Values Project be passed to Councillor Dehar upon request.

7 Annual Fostering Report 2017- 2018

Lisa Whelan, Senior Social Work Manager presented the Annual Fostering Report and highlighted key points.

The Chair praised the report and noted that there was good public presence maintained online and physically to promote foster caring. The video promoting foster caring entitled 'There was a Boy' was of particular interest and it was noted that it was available on YouTube to view.

The Chair took the opportunity to welcome the foster carers that had attended the meeting with Vanessa Graham, Family Support Worker: Laura Bayliss, Rena Patel and Emma Jane, who were all currently fostering children and Councillor Martin Waite thanked them for the work they were doing for children in Wolverhampton.

In response to a query on how successful the Authority were in identifying cases of Private Fostering and providing appropriate support, it was stated that the Authority were wholly reliant on information being received on families engaged in such arrangements and this didn't always occur.

The reasons behind families neglecting to inform the authority of these arrangements were thought to be that there could be a perceived stigma attached to a child being taken into care or a family's reluctance to involve a social worker, but the main factor was thought to be a general lack of awareness that private fostering needed to be reported in order to access available support.

It was noted that an annual report had been presented to the Safeguarding Board and an action plan around communications was in place to help raise this awareness, which involved a Private Fostering Week promotional event and working with schools and general practitioners, to try and reach out to anyone caring for a child.

It was asked of the foster carers what inspired them to become a foster carer and what barriers they faced:

- Two of the foster carers already worked with children, including children with additional needs, and had been attracted to foster caring.
- One carer had been hesitant at first as her concern was that a single person couldn't become a carer but once it was discovered this wasn't the case, she pursued that career path.
- The experience was that the timescale of six months was an ideal length for the process to take as it gave time to prepare and 'filtered' out over time those who were unprepared for what foster caring really entailed.
- Many challenges were identified, including challenging behaviour, however training and parent to parent support were available. Following a training course, one carer gained a better understanding of what was driving challenging behaviour and experienced a significant behavioural improvement as a result.
- The Supervising Social Workers were reported to be very supportive in difficult situations and it was highlighted it was important to make it known they were available for help and to encourage carers to seek help when needed.

The Mockingbird Model was clarified as a foster caring initiative that had begun in the US but was now licensed for use in the UK. Clusters of foster homes known as constellations were formed offering members built-in respite and a community support network.

In response to a query from Councillor Hibbert on whether cultural considerations were taken into account when a family fostered a child from a different culture to their own, it was confirmed that training was provided in aspects such as culture, diet and hair care. Cultural awareness was built into the developmental training days and the link and match process took this into consideration also. Much of this training was aimed at care-givers, however children reaching the age of 12-13 were able to access the information directly. Councillors suggested that this age could be extended as even older children still needed some help with personal care.

Resolved:

1. That the suggestion of the personal care element being extended to older children be considered.
2. That the report be received and noted.

8 Local Offer for Care leavers

Alison Hinds, Head of Looked After Children presented the report and highlighted key areas. It was noted that all statutory duties had been included, however there were additional services offered over and above the requirements and were identified within the document by a 'thumbs up' icon.

It was suggested that a section relating to diversity and quality be added. It was worth noting that a charter, which included equality and diversity, had been signed as standard but adding a section in this document would be considered.

The piece of work was praised and particular attention was drawn to the guaranteed interviews for apprenticeship positions. In response to a query about whether guaranteed interviews for other job positions could be added it was stated that, during the upcoming Business Week event, workshops would be held and there were plans to approach local businesses and suggest this. The Chair noted that he would be interested in the take-up of this and it was highlighted that having paid work gave independence and a sense of empowerment.

Resolved:

1. That an equality and diversity element be explored for the Care Leavers' Offer.
2. That guaranteed interviews for care leavers in job positions other than apprenticeships for be explored.
3. That the report be received and noted.

9 Performance Monitoring Information Report

Emma Bennett, Director for Children's Services presented the report and highlighted key areas. It was clarified that although the document was dated July 2018, the figures represented were as at May 2018.

There had been an increase noted in children placed 20 plus miles away from home, however it was not an area of concern.

The figure for participation in reviews had increased to 99%.

Key Stage 4 results were being pulled together with a briefing note due to provide a 'snapshot' of November – January figures the September meeting, followed by the full figures being presented in January 2019.

60% of care leavers were reported to be in employment and training, which was high compared to neighbours and comparators.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

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

It was noted that much of this had been covered earlier, however a visit invitation had been sent to the Chair for the 1 August 2018.

Resolved:

That the Chair visit a residential establishment.