



# Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes - 21 January 2015

## Attendance

**Chair** Cllr Val Gibson (Lab)

### Labour

Cllr Paula Brookfield  
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss  
Cllr Rita Potter

Cllr Martin Waite

### Conservative

Cllr Christine Mills

Cllr Patricia Patten

### Employees

Emma Bennett  
Carl Craney  
Louise Haughton  
Alison Hinds  
Helena Kucharczyk  
Darren Martindale

Service Director - Children, Young People and Families  
Democratic Support Officer  
Social Worker  
Head of Looked After Children  
Business Intelligence Manager  
COPE Team Manager/Virtual School Head, Community Directorate  
Strategic Director - People

Linda Sanders

*Item No.*    *Title*

**1        Apologies for absence (if any)**

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre and Lorraine Millard (Designated Senior Nurse Safeguarding Children, Wolverhampton City Clinical Commissioning Group).

**2        Declarations of interests (if any)**

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

**3        Minutes of the previous meeting (19 November 2015)**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**4        Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2014.

**5        Virtual School Headteacher Report 2013/14**

Darren Martindale, COPE Team Manager / Virtual School Head, presented the Virtual School Headteacher report 2013/14. The report informed the Board of the work of the Virtual School for Looked after Children (LAC) over the 2013/14 academic year and highlighted successes, learning points and areas for further development.

With regard to school admissions, Cllr Rita Potter questioned who made the selection for LAC. The COPE Team Manager / Virtual School Head advised that with In City placements LAC were treated in exactly the same way as mainstream children i.e. consideration would be given when the child was in Year 5 as to the options available and the individual child would be involved in the nomination of preferences. Similarly, in the case of In Year Transfers, support would be given including attendance at the School Admission Appeals Panel if necessary.

Cllr Mrs Christine Mills referred to those LAC who had not attained an 85% attendance at school and questioned whether this related primarily to those children in residential care and at the higher age range. The COPE Team Manager / Virtual School Head confirmed this to be the case. He also explained steps which had been taken to address unofficial exclusions where children attending Pupil Referral Units were sent home but were not marked on the Attendance Register as absent. In addressing this issue however the number of official exclusions had increased with the consequential effect on non-attendance statistics. In response to a question from Cllr Paula Brookfield he advised that non-attendance was an issue with a small group and it was being focussed on with a variety of options being made available

with a view to achieving re-engagement. It was intended to use Educational Psychologist support in future funded through the Pupil Premium.

Cllr Martin Waite enquired as to whether Education Support Officers attended Out of City Placements. The COPE Team Manager / Virtual School Head responded that with only 2.5 full time equivalent posts, the postholders concentrated on In City placements with Out of City placements being supported by the Senior Teacher Advisor and himself. He advised that the Educational Psychologists also supported LAC in Out of City placements.

Cllr Mrs Patricia Patten enquired as to whether in a case where a school was over-subscribed i.e. where applications for places exceeded the admission limit if any form of preferential treatment was available for LAC. The COPE Team Manager / Virtual School Head reported that this was the case both in terms of exceeding Infant Class limits and under Fair Access protocols.

Cllr Jasbinder Dehar welcomed the proposals for the new Personal Education Plans (PEP's) including for those children with Special Educational Needs and the 16 – 18 year groups. She questioned the support provided to children where English was an additional language. The COPE Team Manager / Virtual School Head reported that his Team worked closely with the EAL (English Additional Language) Team and on the differing teaching strategies available for use with those children.

Cllr Jasbinder Dehar sought clarification as to the work undertaken by the "Beanstalk" Volunteer Reading Help (VRH) programme. The COPE Team Manager / Virtual School Head reported that this involved a group of volunteers attending primary schools and providing 1:1 support in learning to read. This initiative had been in use in the City for some considerable time and was also used by a number of other local authorities.

With reference to Personal Education Plans (PEP's), Cllr Julie Hodgkiss reminded the Board that the Children in Care Council had expressed a wish for meetings on these to be held outside school hours if possible to avoid stigmatisation of LAC. The COPE Team Manager / Virtual School Head reported that he was addressing this matter with Designated Teachers and it had been raised at PEP training sessions with a request that the meetings be held at more appropriate times. Cllr Martin Waite suggested that there was a need to improve the attendance of Social Workers at PEP meetings and enquired whether the attendance would improve as a result of the recruitment of additional Social Workers. The COPE Team Manager / Virtual School Head advised that this would be the case and that he considered it to be critical that Social Workers attended and contributed to such meetings. The Service Director Children and Young People commented that the recruitment of additional Social workers would improve the quality of interventions and would, therefore, also reduce individual caseloads enabling greater attention to each child.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That the COPE Team Manager / Virtual School Head and his team be congratulated on the report and the work undertaken during the 2013/14 academic year;

3. That the Children in Care Council be invited to submit comments on the report and to send representatives to a future meeting to present any comments with a view to shaping future strategic decision making and scrutiny;
4. That future reports include detailed information pertaining to participation of LAC in further and higher education.

## **6 Adoption Agency interim report**

Louise Haughton, Senior Consultant Social Worker Adoption presented a report which updated the Board on the work of the Adoption Service from April 2014 to January 2015.

Cllr Rita Potter welcomed the success of the Adoption Service in securing the adoption of older children and sibling groups. She enquired as to whether there was a cut off age when adoption ceased to be an achievable option. The Senior Consultant Social Worker Adoption advised that this was not the case. Alison Hinds, Head of Looked After Children reported that in accordance with policy, the Council would always consider whether adoption was the most appropriate option for a particular child. Helena Kucharczyk, Business Intelligence Manager, reported that the Council was above the national average on the adoption of children of five years of age and above.

Cllr Paula Brookfield referred to the number of cases for adoption reducing by 30 – 40% and enquired whether the same numbers of Orders for Adoption were still being made. The Service Director, Children and Families reported that the number of Care Proceedings had reduced and this was also replicated nationally. Cllr Paula Brookfield questioned whether the Adoption Service was gaining adoptive parents at the loss of Foster Carers'. The Senior Consultant Social Worker Adoption advised that this was the case in certain circumstances when a Foster Parent(s) adopted the fostered child. There were cases where this happened and the Adoptive Parent continued also to foster.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That the Senior Consultant Social Worker Adoption and her Team be thanked for the work undertaken during the period covered by the report;
3. That statistics in relation to disruptions and breakdowns in prospective adoption cases both within Wolverhampton and nationally (if available) be included within future reports.

## **7 Performance Monitoring - Looked After Children (LAC)**

The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson, drew to the attention of the Board the revised format of the report. The Senior Information Officer commented that further improvements were also being considered. The Service Director, Children and Families, referred to the summary contained within the report and invited comments on the revised format.

The Business Intelligence Manager presented the Performance Monitoring Information as at November 2014. She reported that the number of Looked after

Children had stabilised and there were indications that the number was beginning to reduce. Currently there were 781 children in care. There a slightly higher proportion of female LAC compared to the Children and Young People population in Wolverhampton generally. There was also a considerably lower proportion of LAC were from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) backgrounds compared to the Wolverhampton Children and Young People population.

The Business Intelligence Manager referred to the good position on placement stability, the education data which contained some discrepancies when compared to the information reported earlier in the meeting, the rate of participation of LAC in reviews and the performance relating to adoptions.

Cllr Julie Hodgkiss referred to the statement in that part of the report pertaining to LAC Health – “The CCG and RWHT have indicated that they are committed to resolving the issue and work is on-going”. The Service Director, Children and Families assured the Board that these organisations were committed to addressing this issue and the CCG had allocated additional resources to deal with Out of City placements. Cllr Julie Hodgkiss requested that further information on developments be reported to a future meeting of the Board.

Cllr Paula Brookfield requested that information in relation to waiting times for LAC having access to the Children and Mental Health Service (CAMHS) be submitted to a future meeting.

Cllr Martin Waite commented that 20% of the LAC population had been placed with Foster Carers’ and enquired as to whether the Council was yet seeing the benefits from the campaign to recruit additional Foster Carers’. The Head of Looked After Children reported that the benefits of the recruitment campaign would take time to work through the system and, in any event, a child would not be moved from a stable placement to a newly recruited Foster Carer. The Service Director, Children and Families undertook to ensure that additional data was included in future reports.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted with the revised format welcomed;
2. That the developing position with LAC Health Checks be reported to a future meeting;
3. That information in relation to the waiting times for LAC having access to the Children and Mental Health Service (CAMHS) be submitted to a future meeting;
4. That information in relation to the recruitment campaign for Foster Carers’ be submitted to a future meeting.

## 8 **Exclusion of the public and press**

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**

9 **Councillors visits to establishments**

Cllr Martin Waite reported on a visit he had undertaken to Merridale Street West, Wolverhampton Residential Home on 5 December 2014.

The Chair, Cllr Val Gibson thanked Cllr Martin Waite for undertaking the visit and requested that all members of the Board endeavour to arrange to visit one of the establishments if they had not already done so.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received and noted;
2. That the Head of Looked After Children identify those establishments which had not been the subject of a visit during the current Municipal Year and inform members of the Board accordingly.