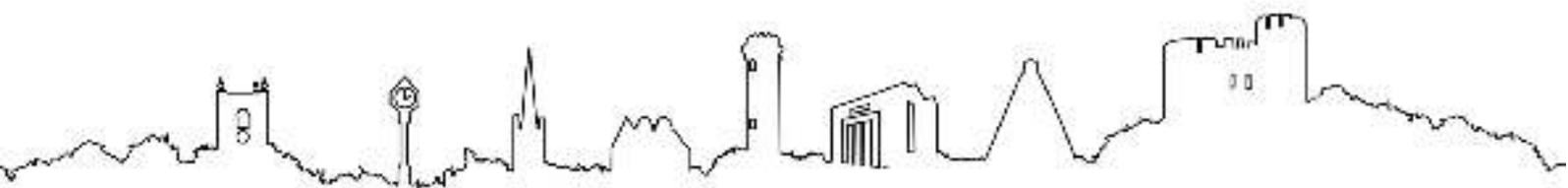


Dudley Children's Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2021-2022



Working as One Council in
the historic capital of the Black Country



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A message from Chair Cllr Ruth Buttery



“Being a Corporate parent is a huge privilege”

All councillors and employees of Dudley council are corporate parents and our aspiration for Dudley children and young people is the same as that for our own families and friends. Because of this, we have recently launched Child Friendly Dudley, so that all children and young people our care have even more support to help them achieve their potential and their dreams, in whatever area of life this may be.

As a cabinet, our commitment to children and young people in care within this borough remains focussed and strong

It has been really positive to see our care experienced young people accepted into apprenticeships within Children’s Social Care, and not just doing a job, but thriving, and blossoming as well as being a real inspiration to their work colleagues.

I’m pleased to commend the work the Corporate Parenting Board have done over the last 12 months in this annual report

Meet the Board Members



Deputy Chair Cllr Sue Ridley



Cllr Rebekah Collins



Cllr Paul Bradley



Cllr Kathryn Bayton



Cllr Anne Millward



Cllr Elaine Taylor



Cllr Angus Lee



Cllr Bec Gentle



Cllr Daniel Bevan



Cllr Bryn Challenor



Cllr Natalie Neale

We will

Seek to understand and learn about what has happened to children, not seek to identify what is wrong with them

Seek to identify and build on children's strengths

Respond, not react

Support children to develop Resilience

Be reflective and open to to learning

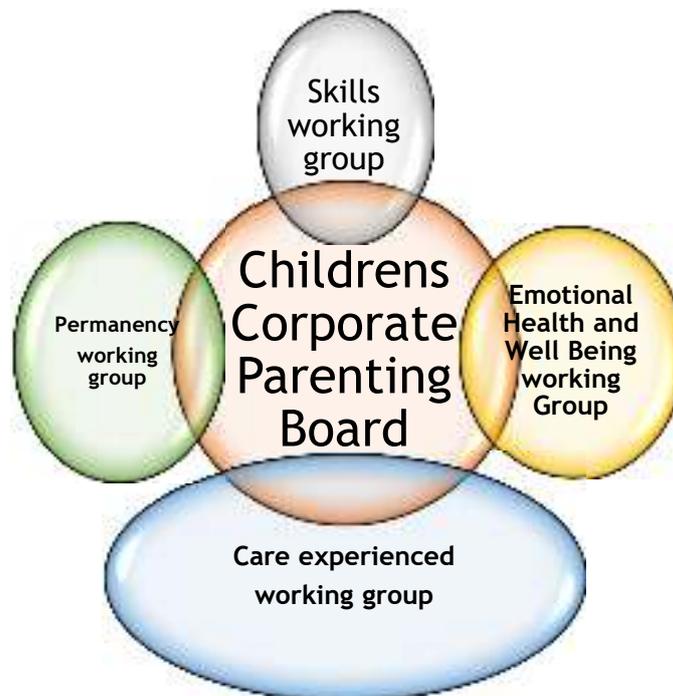
Prioritise relationships in every interaction

Dudley's Children's Corporate Parenting Board Structure

The Board is a committee of Dudley Council the role involves the scrutiny of matters relating to children in care and care experienced young people in the Directorate of Children's Services.

The Children's Corporate Parenting Board meets five times yearly and in attendance with Members are the Director of Children's Services, Service Director of Children's Social Care, Head of Service for Children in Care, Care Experienced Young People and Resources, Corporate Parenting Board Coordinator, and a Democratic Services Officer. We all work together to achieve what is best for our children and encourage partners to fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities.

In order to avoid any drift or delay in achieving what is best for our children in care and care experienced young people, the Board has four working groups which meets between Board meetings to complete, and progress identified tasks.



Importantly the Board consults with the Children in Care Council and care experienced young people on a regular basis to listen to their wishes, ambitions, and priorities.



This report draws together the range of activities and impact of the Children’s Corporate Parenting Board over the last year. It has been another year of unprecedented challenges. The challenges we have all faced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic have naturally been an area of focus as we have adapted to the various restrictions placed on us and therefore the manner in which we have delivered services. In doing so we have listened to children and young people and are aware that there are some parts of the ‘virtual world’ they enjoy, and we are keen to learn lessons and use new ways of working once all of the restrictions are lifted. Our engagement of

young people with board members has been one of the areas that has benefitted from the increased use of technology. Board members have welcomed the opportunity to have both informal conversations and themed discussions to support planned agenda items.

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to inquire and understand; set ambition; and to champion and challenge our collective care of looked after children and care experienced young people

This is an assurance role that sits alongside multi agency operational work and organisational scrutiny. It is informed by our leaders, our practitioners, children and young people and carers.

The council takes its responsibility for Children looked after and care leavers very seriously and closely monitors the services provided to these young people to ensure that all children in care and care experienced young are safe, healthy, and happy and aspire to be the best they can.



Demographic of children and young people in our care

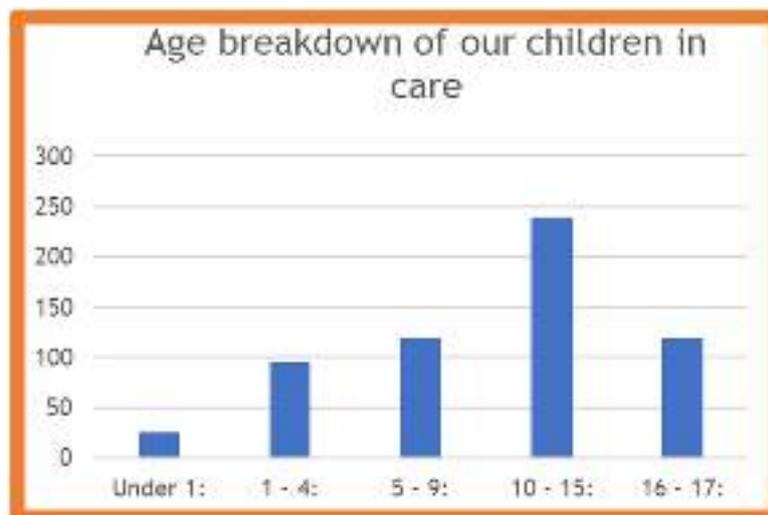
At the time of writing 72,875 children and young people live in Dudley Metropolitan Borough. The number of children that were looked after by Dudley Local authority in March 2021 was 621. This number has continued to reduce to 585 as at March 2022. This is a reduction rate of 5.8% with a rate of 84.5 children per 10,000. In the past year the drive to achieve permanency for our children and young people has resulted in an increase in children successfully being rehabilitated to their families in the last year and an increase in children who achieve permanency through adoption.

Comparison table of the rates of children and young people care per 10,000 with our statistical neighbours and England

Year Ending	2020	2021	2022
Dudley	90.00	89.00	84.5
Statistical neighbours	81.70	83.50	Not yet available
England	67.00	67.00	Not yet available

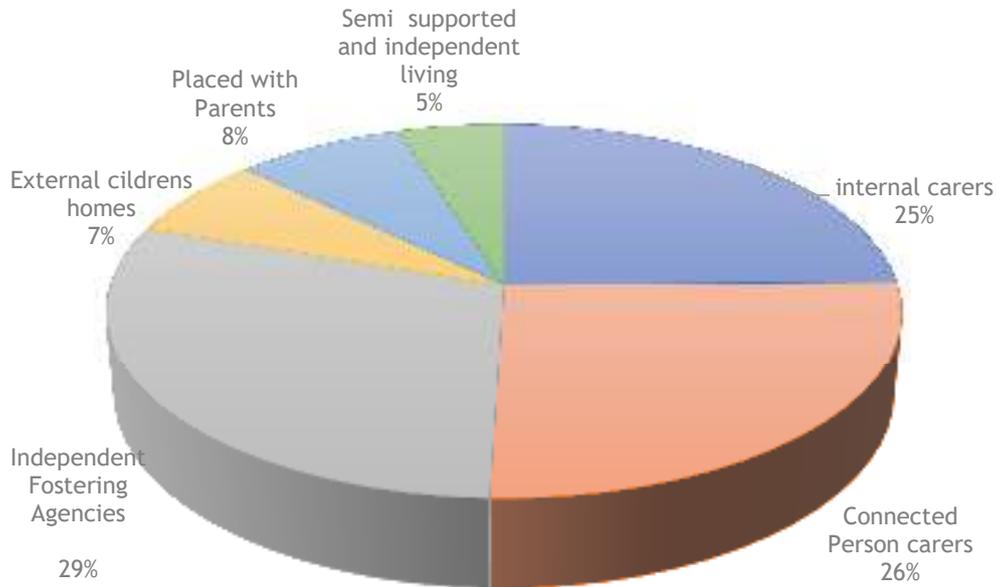
At the time of writing Dudley's Children's Social Care service were supporting 16 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

The table below illustrates the age breakdown of our children in care



Where our children and young people live

In March 2022, 77.6% of our children were placed in foster placements which is an increase from 76.7% on 31/03/21



Progress of the Childrens Corporate Parenting Board 2021- 2022

Working Groups of the Board became operational

The working groups of the board are multi-agency forums and are chaired by a member of the Children's Corporate Parenting Board. They consist of partner agencies in Dudley, who are responsible for delivering good and effective corporate parenting for children and young people in care of the local authority, as well as those young people leaving care. The primary aim of the working groups is to implement the corporate parenting priorities and ensure

that appropriate services are in place to safeguard and promote their welfare. Also, to enable this group of children and young people to make positive choices and achieve the best possible outcomes during their time in care and into adulthood.

Highlights of the working groups 2021 -2022



Care experienced working group

You said

'You needed help with heating and insurance costs when moving into new properties as well as support to combat isolation and loneliness'

We are

- Working in conjunction with the local authority housing department; it has been possible to have a more economical heating system installed in council properties for care experienced young people.
- Actively seeking property insurance that offers discount to care experienced young people and have been assured by that they will provide insurance for the first month of a tenancy for our young people.
- department to identify a property to be used as a drop in facility for care experienced young people.



Emotional health and wellbeing working group

You said

'We need help to be physically healthy and have good mental wellbeing.'

We are

- Seeking reassurance that our leisure department will improve our leisure offer to our children and young people as it is widely recognised that exercising is good for mental health and wellbeing.

- Ensuring that our therapeutic service delivers on its promise to our children and young people in care and our care experienced young people by the Emotional Wellbeing Service - Dudley Lighthouse Links.
- Holding partners to account. A care experienced young person reported that she was unable to heat her accommodation because her windows were so badly fitted, and it was really draughty. This matter has been resolved successfully through collaborative work with the Housing Department. Improving accessibility of Health Passports for care experienced young people by producing an app that enables instant access.



Skills working group

You said

'We want to be able to maintain our homes to a safe and comfortable standard'

We are

- Providing information to support care experienced young people to maintain & sustain their accommodation
- Working in partnership to provide tool boxes as a welcome gift to a new home for care experienced young people
- Working in partnership with the housing department to ensure that all the welcome gift vouchers can be spent online to enable care experienced young people can access them
- Working in partnership with public health colleagues and care experienced young people to produce recipe boxes for cheap and nutritious meals

Permanency working group



You said

'We want to be safe, happy and have a forever home'

We are

- Making Dudley a Child friendly local authority.

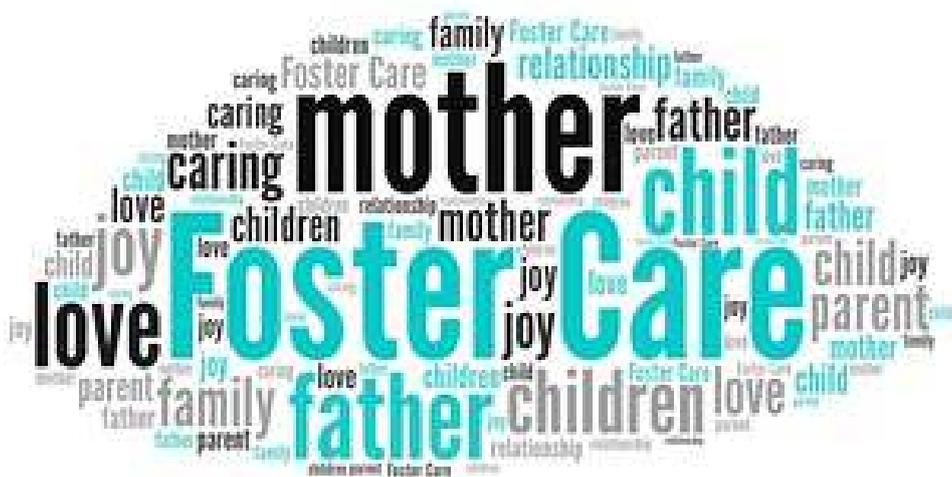
- Creating a Fostering Friendly authority by adding QR Codes on the fostering recruitment posters to enable those interested to access the information quickly and avoid any delay in applying to foster care
- Improving recruitment of foster carers by having our young people share their experiences in foster care and what qualities makes a good foster carer.

What makes a good foster carer?

A care experienced young person's voice

"There isn't a guide book on how to be a perfect foster carer there also isn't a guide on how to be a perfect foster child. Personally, I think the whole situation is nerve racking for both carer and child for example when a foster carer is welcoming a new person into their home plus everything that comes with that child for example their trauma /behaviour problems /mental health and their personal needs the list goes on. And as for the child... He/she is now moving into someone else's home for them this includes new rules new family new schedule. You could say in some cases they are being moved in with, someone who is a stranger, which is 100% frightening for the child.

So, from my experience, being a good foster carer consists of time, effort and generally understanding that child's needs /background. Often challenging children are mistaken for being misbehaved or naughty (I was one of those children) Sometimes all a child needs is someone to listen/understand what's going in their head/mind maybe even a hug and to be told its okay, comfort. Communication is a must"





Care experienced apprentices employed by Children's Social Care

In September 2021 five care experienced young people were employed by Children's Social Care Service in various roles. Using their expertise, they have been involved in all areas within Children's Social Care, to improve communication with children, young people, and their carers

The apprentices have

- Developed an animated film about the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer for children in our care
- Produced recruitment material for the Fostering Service
- Represented Dudley at a regional participation workshop on behalf of Dudley MBC
- Involved in fostering recruitment events in Merry Hill shopping centre Dudley College, local libraries, and community groups
- Actively participating in the working groups of the Corporate Parenting Board





Consolidation of Corporate Parenting Responsibilities

Throughout 2021 – 2022 the Board were committed to raising awareness of all Members' role and responsibilities as a corporate parent.

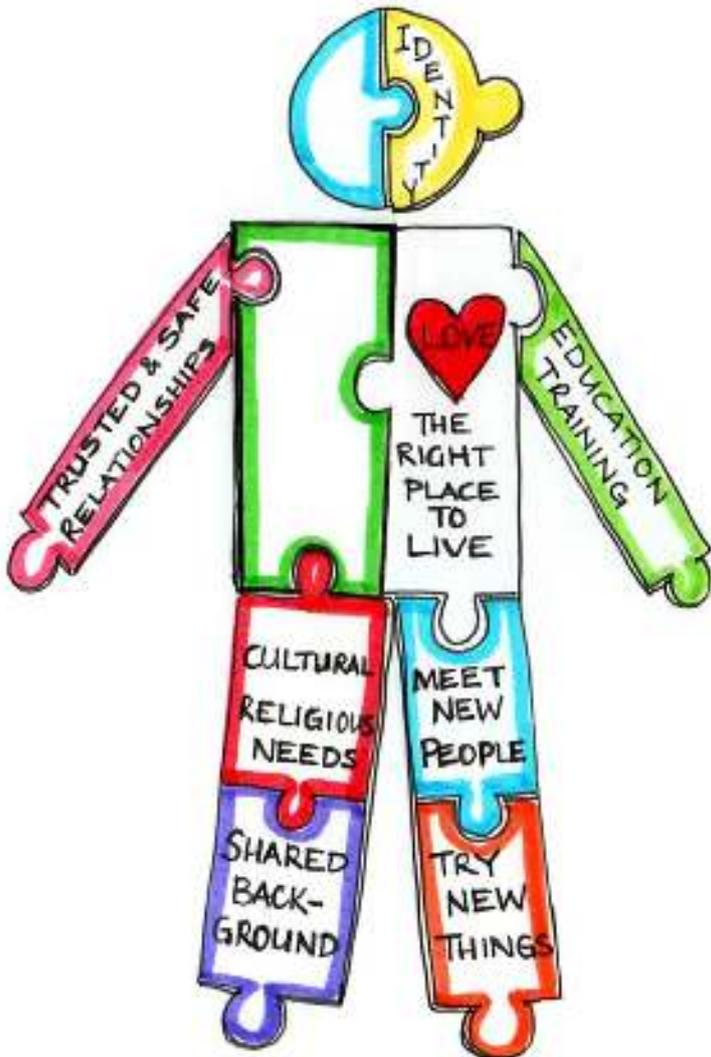
The first corporate parenting workshop for Members regarding their corporate parenting role and responsibilities was reinstated since pre COVID. This workshop was facilitated by the Director of Children's Services and the Service Director of Children's Social Care.

To raise awareness of the roles and responsibilities of corporate parents, an article was published in the Connect Councillor magazine.

Sixteen Members of the Council have joined the Children's Corporate Parenting Board Working Groups

Members Corporate Parenting Board signed off the Handbook which contained their responsibilities.

The children's Corporate Strategy 2021 – 2023 was signed off by Corporate Parenting Board members.





Education progress of children and young people in our care

Highlights of the Academic Year 2020 – 2021 for our children and young people

At a very challenging time in education, the proactive and positive work and influence of the Virtual School continued over the academic year of 2020.-21 including:

Key Stage Four Outcomes



There is an upward trend of outcomes for our children at Key Stage Four over the past three years.

Post 16 Outcomes

- In Year 13, **76%** (6) achieved one or more accredited qualification this academic year.
- At 'A' Level there was **100%** pass rate of young people achieving their grades.
- In Year 12 Students **72%** are moving up a level after their first year of study.
- There is a rise in number of students who have achieved one or more qualifications, with improvements in Year 12 and 13 learners achieving 4 in GCSE in Maths & English and others achieving Level 1 & 2 Functional Skills.

- There is an increase in the number of young people accessing University Destinations through A Level or Level 3 Routes
- The cohort of 2020/21 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Students have all moved up a course level or are accessing vocational courses.
- A Post 16 young person who was disengaged from education a little over twelve months ago, has been recognised by a work-based training provider as the Learner of The Year.

Early Year/Primary

The number of children in Year 1 and 2 receiving Letterbox parcels has doubled this academic year. The Maths/Numeracy targeted offer went on line during the pandemic maintaining focussed support on four primary children.

Arts & Sports Summer Programme



The first Dudley summer learning activity programme was hosted this year in partnership with the Participation Officer/Team, Museums Learning & Access Team and Public Health. This included over 75 attendees over the five days

Sports Link

This academic year has seen the introduction of a virtual sports offer including



training in Yoga sessions for children, carers and Social Workers, Cricket Skills from Worcestershire Cricket Club, and fitness from a Personal Trainer.

Children In Care Council Partnership Personal Education Plan Development

The introduction of 'Personal education plan Champions' from the Children in Care Council has enhanced the development of children and young people's voice in Personal education plans.

Personal Education Plan Development (Pep)

The Virtual School have piloted the introduction of the Cultural Entitlement section within the personal education plan on behalf of the West Midlands Region and to inform national development.

The number of Post 16 PEP's is growing with a particular increase in Year 12.

Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET)



There is a downward trend in young people not being in employment education or training for Year 12 and 13. The number of young people in Apprenticeships and Traineeships have increased, as have the number of Year 13 students staying in Education and Training. This has also included an increase in young mothers returning to college in Years 12 and 13. Young people who have not previously been able to access Year 11 and Year 12 are returning to college on increased Level courses due to the success of the Pathways Programme.

Young people who have not previously been able to access Year 11 and Year 12 are returning to college on increased Level courses due to the success of the Pathways Programme.

As a result of the mandated National Transfer Scheme, there has been an increase in unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arrivals, but all are accessing appropriate college courses for the new academic year.

Inclusion

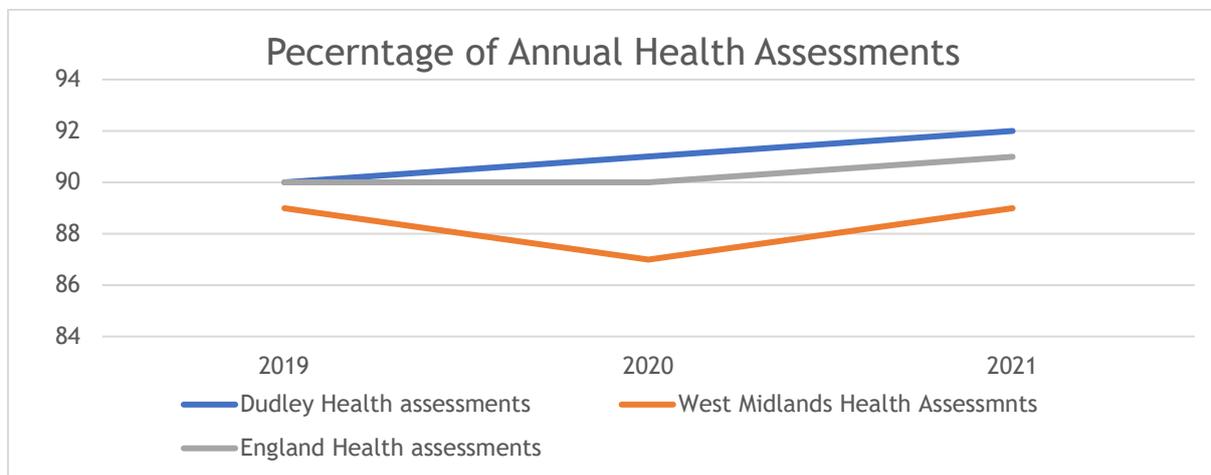
There continues to be no children or young people who are in care permanently excluded from their educational setting this academic year





Health of children in care and young people in our care

During 2021 -2022 92% of the children and young people had their Annual Health Assessment. The graph below illustrates % of Annual Health Assessments completed in Dudley over the last 3 years benchmarked against West Midlands and England average.



Throughout 2021 – 2022 work was undertaken with the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Dudley Virtual School Teams to map out pathway for children in care with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) to maintain a consistent approach to ensure the needs of the children were met and that all agencies were aware of their responsibilities.

Care experienced young people Health Passports has been designed and commissioned in collaboration with young people from the Care Leavers Forum



Reports presented to the Childrens Corporate Parenting Board 2021-2022



Report on children missing from care.

Children looked after are more likely to go missing than any other children we are involved with as a council. In Dudley there were 644 missing episodes and 290 of these involved children in care almost 35 % of all missing children were looked after. When a Dudley child in care that is placed out of area goes missing West Midlands Police are not aware as police recording systems are not linked. This means the Child and Adolescent Response Team is not aware either. To compensate for this Dudley Missing Procedures state that it is the responsibility of the allocated social worker to complete a missing/found notification form to enable the young person's missing episode to be discussed at the daily triage meeting. It is the responsibility of the placement provider and social worker to ensure that a Return Home Interview is completed. We found in average 78 % of children were offered a return home interview and 63% of children and young people participated in conversations about the reasons why they go missing and completed this interview. Children at risk of exploitation benefit from effective multi-agency intervention and information sharing. Members heard how the missing procedures were revised and implemented in January 2021. The revised procedures made the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub the front door for all missing episodes and strengthened multi agency working between Dudley Children's Services and West Midlands Police through the daily triage meeting.

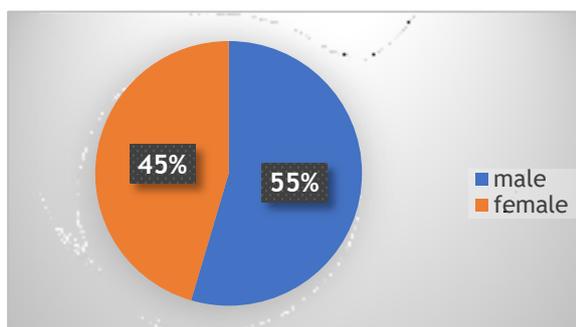
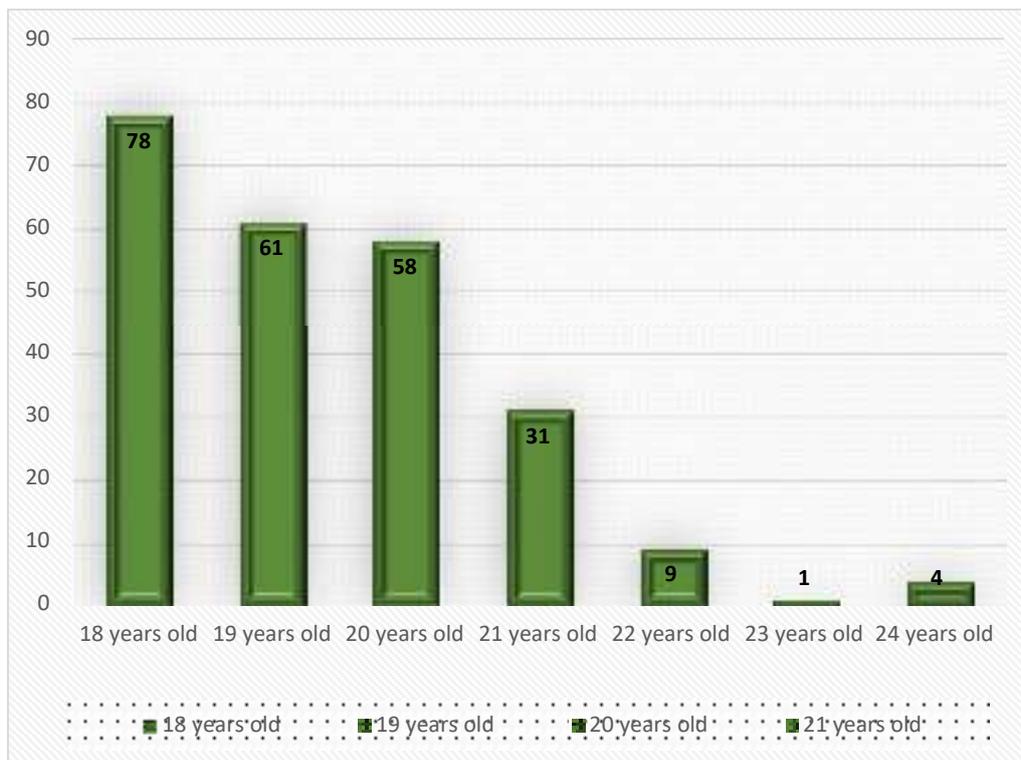


Care Experienced Young People

There were 241 care experienced young people aged 18-25 years old; at the time of writing 99% of this age group are managed by the Care Leavers Service.

The majority of our care experienced young people are between 18-21 years of age.

Age breakdown



Gender composition of our care experienced young people

Employment, Education and Training

17.8 % of our care experienced young people are in employment

5.4 % of our care experienced young people are in training

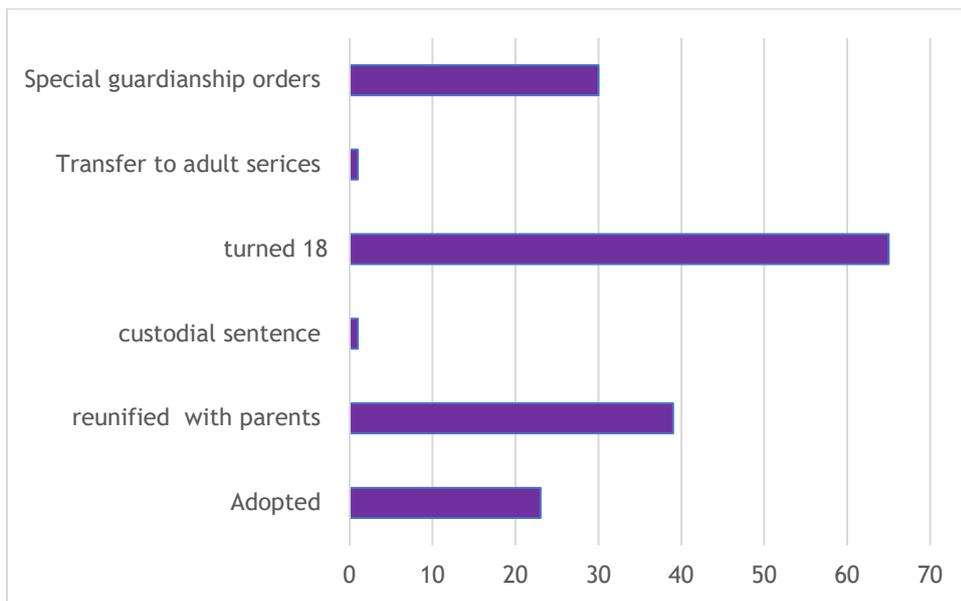
28.2 % of our care experienced young people are in education

42.3% our care experienced young people are not in education employment and training

29.9% of this group are pregnant or parenting, have a disability or illness or in prison which are classed as exemptions

To support care experienced young people who are not in employment, education and training the Care Leavers Service has employed a young person's advisor to provide bespoke support to this group.

The reasons why are care experienced young people leave care



What are care experienced young people have achieved

- High Sheriffs award
- Foundation Degree
- Higher Education
- Employment
- Parenting





Review of the Dudley Light House Links Service

This report updated members on the progress of the Dudley Lighthouse Links service (DLL).

After a period of significant challenges across the Dudley Lighthouse Links Service, in June 2021 Dudley Children Services commissioned an Independent Strategic review.

Information in the report, provided reassurance to members that significant progress had been made regarding the offer for Dudley children as well as impact. Furthermore, progress is rigorously tracked through regular meetings with health partners.

It was noted that an update report on Dudley Lighthouse Links had been positively received by the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Working Group, and it was agreed that the Working Group would continue to receive updates and monitor progress.



Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report

This report informed the Board of the role and function of the Independent Reviewing Officers and the legal status of our children in care.

It was noted that there have been less children coming into the care of the Local Authority during the last year, but trends in terms of the ages of these children are similar, with the main reduction being with younger children

Legal Status of our children and young people in care

As at 31/03/2021		
Legal status	No.	%
Interim Care Order	91	15%
Full Care Order	470	75%
Placement order granted	33	0.05%
J1 - On Remand or Committed for Trial or sentence and accommodated by Local Authority	3	0%
Voluntary Accommodation Under a Single Period of accommodation Under section 20	28	0.04%
Grand Total	625	
New children into care during 2020/21		
Legal status	No.	%
Interim Care Order	57	48%
Full Care Order	16	14%
Placement order granted	4	0.03%
On Remand or Committed for Trial or sentence and accommodated by Local Authority	3	0.03%
Under police protection and in Local Authority accommodation	3	0.03%

In relation to legal status, the chart above shows the breakdown of the legal status for our Children in Care as of 31st March 2021; with the vast majority of children being subject to Care Orders.

Those children with an interim Care Order did not yet have a permanence plan as the permanence decision is awaited with the conclusion of care proceedings.

Those children with a Placement Order granted will have a plan of adoption.

Those children on remand make up a small proportion of the overall child in care population.

While a higher proportion of children enter care by voluntary agreement, under Section.20 of the Children Act, these figures show they do not remain in care under this legal status,

which shows the Local Authority are appropriately working with families to return the child home, or to enter proceedings to determine a permanence outcome.

This data tells us that 93% of all children and young people in care in 2020/21 were reviewed in line with statutory timescale.

Compared to 98.6% at the end of March 2020 showing a decrease in performance which is likely attributable to the accuracy of past data recording combined with issues experienced arising from migration from the previous Social Care Records system.

The Board viewed a video created by the children in care of the Independent Reviewing Service Annual Report and were encouraged when they heard that 96% of children had participated in their own review.

The Board noted that it was reported that timeliness of reviews of had dipped. As a result, a recommendation was made for the head of service to update the board on the interventions to ensure that the timeliness of reviews improves. This report is scheduled for the new financial year.



Complaints and Complements in Childrens Services



23 complaints received

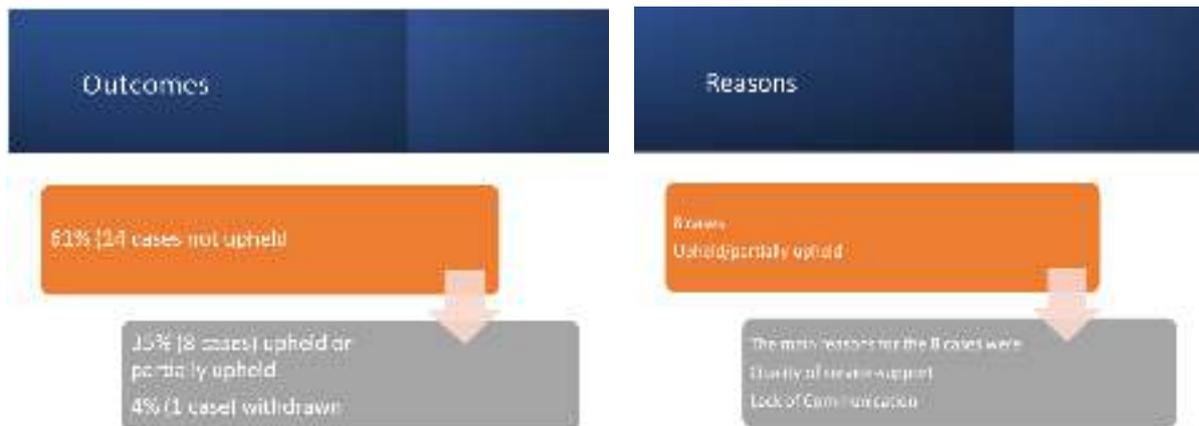
23% representation
(99 complaints)

The Board considered the report which referred to statutory and corporate complaints and noted the data in relation to children in care, care experienced young people and their carers.

Members noted an improvement in response times A total of 70% of all complaints were responded to within 20 working days. This is an improvement on the 54% response rates previously reported for the Children in Care & Resources Service. Overall, this compares to an overall Children's Services response time currently at 77%.



Data Presented



Compliments



During the period 1st October 2020 to the 31st of March 2021 the Children in Care Service received a total of 23 compliments.

This represents 20% of all compliments received in respect of Children's Services



Adoption at Heart Service Report

This report jointly covered the full year 2020/21. It is important to note that data and information within this report is accurate as of 31 March 2021. The report described the work of the Adoption@Heart is a Regional Adoption Agency, providing adoption services on behalf of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall, and Wolverhampton Councils. The service is hosted by Wolverhampton City Council and became operational 1 April

2019.

Board members were particularly interested in the Dudley data presented.



Dudley Data

Children placed in foster to adopt placements 2020/2021

LA/ Trust	In House	Interagency	Total
Sandwell	3	3	6
Wolverhampton	4	5	9
Walsall	5	1	6
Dudley	3	2	5
Total	15	11	26

Post Adoption Contact:

Council	Number of Adoptee	Number of Contacts for Adoptee
Dudley	379	989

The table shows the number of children and the work generated as some children will have multiple post adoption recipients.

Council	Number of Adoptee	Number of Contacts for Adoptee
Dudley	379	989

The Board were pleased with the progress that children had found forever homes, however they requested a report on the timescales involved during the process to adopt a child and updated figures on the number of children in Dudley being adopted to be presented at the Working Group for further scrutiny in the new financial year.



The voice of our children in care and care experienced young people

Our children in care and care-experienced young people told us priorities they identified as the most important for 2021-2023. The three priorities are based on the 'what's important to you' survey, questionnaire, focus groups and individual interviews undertaken with our children and young people in care.

Priority 1: Your Health and Emotional Well Being

You said:

'The most important issue for young people is the experience or trauma they have gone through.'

We promise:

To improve your health and well-being by ensuring high quality health services and information is provided to children, young people, and carers, that makes them feel valued and supported.

Priority 2: Your home and where you live

You said:

'I want to feel happy and safe in my home'

We promise:

That children and young people will live somewhere where they feel a sense of safety and belonging and are loved. We will help you prepare for independent living

Priority 3: Your Voice

You said:

'The most important thing is to be listened to and respected'

We promise:

That children and young people will be at the heart of service design, delivery, and evaluation

Children in care council and care experience young people's contribution for 2022-2022

The children in care council and care leavers forum have told us that small changes make such a difference.

For 2022 – 2023 you have asked the board to help with the following

We want to build relationships with the professionals in our life and for them to show they respect you

Can social workers



Let me know when you are going on annual leave

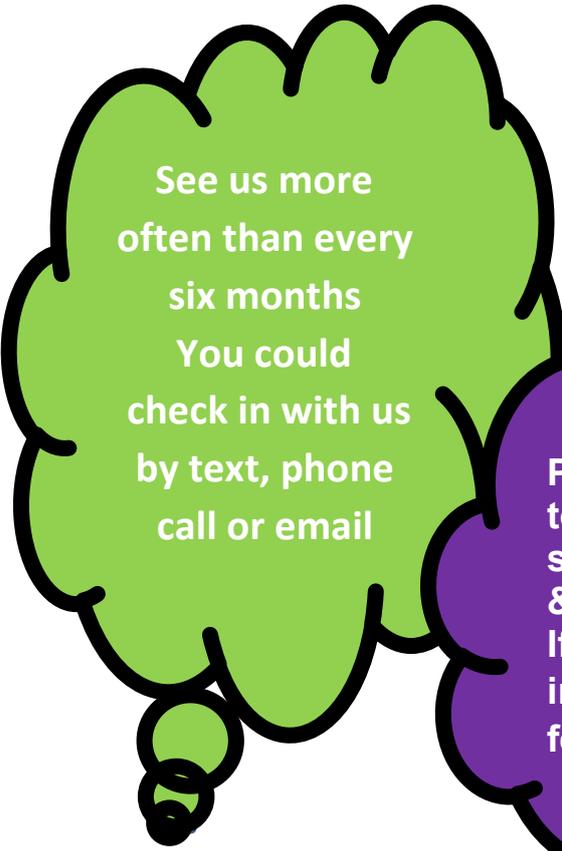


Arrive on time or let me know if you are going to be late

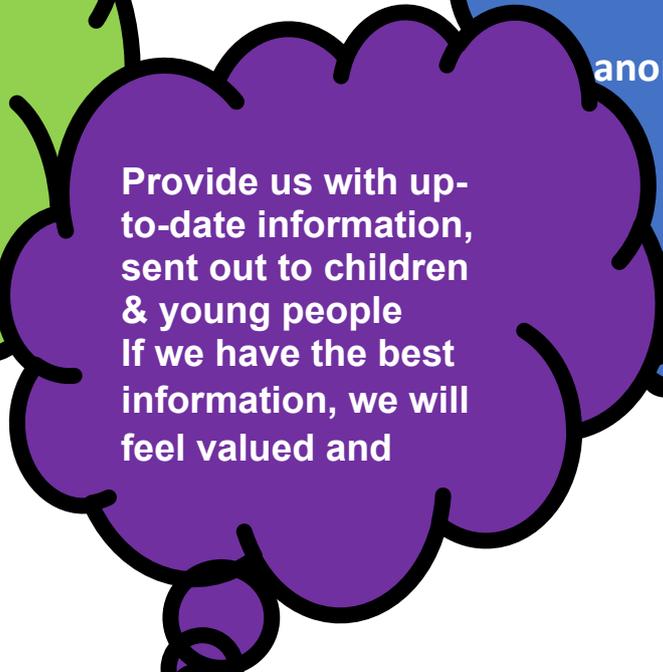


Spend more time with me and get to know me more

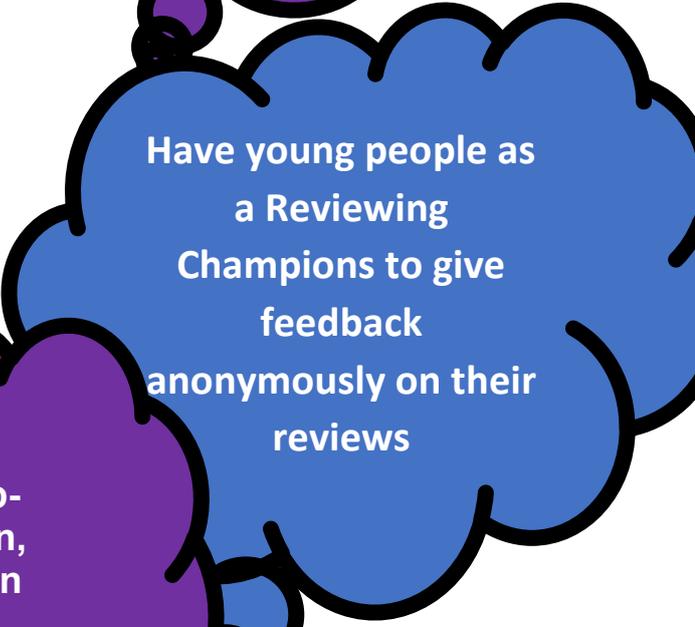
Can Independent Reviewing Officers



See us more often than every six months
You could check in with us by text, phone call or email



Provide us with up-to-date information, sent out to children & young people
If we have the best information, we will feel valued and



Have young people as a Reviewing Champions to give feedback anonymously on their reviews



Looking Forward

The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is to inquire and understand; set ambition; and to champion and challenge our collective care of looked after children and care experienced young people

This is an assurance role that sits alongside multi agency operational work and organisational scrutiny. It is informed by our leaders, our practitioners, children and young people and carers.

Throughout the next year we will continue to deliver on our pledge to children in care and care experienced young people, maintaining oversight of our corporate parenting services and our working groups will also focus on key themes when they meet:

- Preparing for independence
- Emotional health and wellbeing
- Education, employment, and training
- Placements, sufficiency, and permanence
- Leisure, and life skills

As your corporate parents we will listen to what you tell us, and we will respond by being open and honest with you, doing what we can and telling you if we are unable to carry your request.

Our praise needs to go to all our children in care and our care experienced young people who have shown amazing resilience and compassion during what has been an extremely difficult couple of years for all children and young people

