

**Minutes of the Children's Corporate Parenting Board
Thursday, 21st July 2022 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Priory Road,
Dudley**

Present:

Councillor S Ridney (Vice-Chair in the Chair)
Councillors H Bills, P Bradley, A Hughes, L Johnson, P Lee, A Millward, N Neale, D Stanley
and E Taylor.

Dudley MBC Officers

D Foley – Youth Participation Officer, K Graham – Interim Service Director Children's Social
Care, M McFadden – Corporate Parenting Board Co-ordinator and J Mupombi - Head of
Children in Care, Care Leavers and Resources (All Directorate of Children's Services), A
Cartwright – Head of Service Maternity, Children and Young People (Directorate of Public
Health and Wellbeing), J Forbes – Strategy Manager (Housing Services) and H Mills –
Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Finance and Legal).

Also in attendance

Lynn Noble – Adoption@Heart
Rosemary Jones – Dudley Virtual School – Deputy Headteacher
Two members of the Children in Care Council

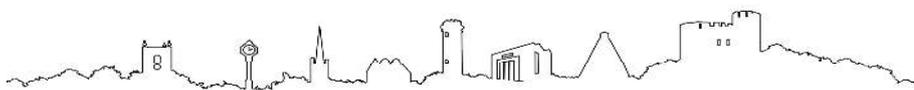
1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor R
Buttery and C Driscoll – Director of Children Services.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor S Ridney declared a non-pecuniary interest as the Chair of the Management
Committee of the Virtual School.

Councillor P Lee declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a Dudley foster carer.



3. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th March, 2022, be agreed as a correct record and signed.

4. **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

5. **Children in Care Council – Welcome to Children’s Corporate Parenting Board Members**

Two members of the Children in Care Council were in attendance at the meeting. Members and Officers took part in a fact-based quiz and a Total Respect exercise presented by the young people.

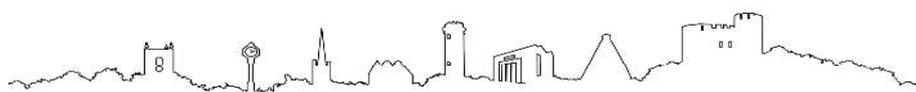
The young people outlined the positives and negatives of living with foster carers and provided the Board with an insight as to what life was like to be in care from their perspective and what happened once they reached the age of 18.

Members commended the young people for their excellent presentation skills and encouraged the young people to contact them for support if and when required.

Arising from the presentation, Members made comments, asked questions and the young people responded accordingly.

It was suggested that the Total Respect exercise completed by Members would also be useful for Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) to complete, to help them think about the actions and decisions that they implemented and the impact these had on the child. The Head of Children in Care, Care Leavers and Resources invited the young people to deliver the training to all relevant staff.

In referring to the support that was provided to a young person once they had reached the age of 18 and were no longer living with a foster carer, it was stated that discussions on the support for care leavers had been considered at a Working Group meeting previously and measures had been taken for support to be provided by the Housing Directorate and through providing life skill training. The Virtual School Deputy Head also confirmed that Year 12 students, as part of their Personal Education Plans (PEP), were asked if they required support moving forward and if agreed meetings would continue to be held. All care leavers were encouraged to agree to the additional support offered.



Members reiterated their thanks for the enlightening presentation and requested that arrangements be made for the Board to attend a future meeting of the Children in Care Council.

Resolved

- (1) That the information presented at the meeting be noted.
- (2) The Head of Children in Care, Care Leavers and Resources, be requested to arrange for the young people to deliver the Total Respect training/exercise to all Independent Reviewing Officers and relevant staff.
- (3) The Corporate Parenting Board Co-ordinator, in conjunction with the Children in Care Council, be requested to arrange a date for the Board to attend a future meeting of the Children in Care Council.

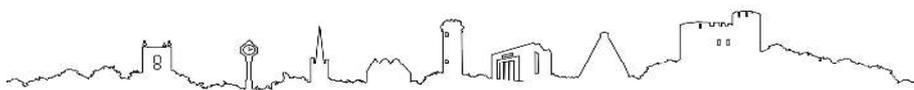
6. **Action Tracker**

The Corporate Parenting Board Co-ordinator gave a verbal update on the Action Tracker and in doing so advised that work was ongoing with regard to the offer of free leisure passes for care leavers. It was commented that Option Plus Cards were available, however neighbouring authorities did provide free leisure passes for care leavers, which extended to allow for one friend also to be admitted. The Leisure Services Manager had been invited to attend a future working group meeting to discuss the matter further.

Members expressed their annoyance and disappointment that after several years of discussion leisure passes were still not provided to Dudley Care Leavers. It was considered that the health and wellbeing of care leavers remained the responsibility of the Local Authority and therefore they should be provided with the same opportunities that were available to care leavers in other authorities. Although the continued efforts made by officers in dealing with this matter were acknowledged, Members were of the view that their concerns and disappointment should be submitted in writing to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise requesting that the matter be considered at haste, particularly as the new leisure centre in Dudley was now open and fully operational.

Resolved

- (1) That the verbal update be noted.
- (2) That the concerns and disappointment of the Board, in relation to the delay in providing Care Leavers with a Leisure Pass, which permitted the care leaver and one other person to be granted admission into Dudley's leisure facilities free of charge, be submitted in writing to the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise, for the matter to be dealt with promptly.



7. Adoption Service Annual Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March, 2022

Members considered a report of the Head of Service and received a detailed presentation on the Adoption Service Annual Report for the period 1st April, 2021 to 31st March, 2022.

It was confirmed that during the reporting period, 23 Dudley children had been granted adoption orders. Whilst it was recognised that this had been lower than in the previous years, this was as a result of the ongoing impact of Covid-19 and the delays in Court, which was reflected across all local authorities.

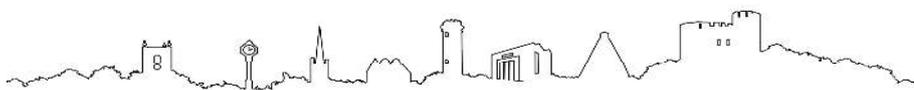
It was further commented that as at 31st March, 2022, 14 children were subject to placements orders, 11 of which were subject to active family finding and 3 were awaiting a formal match. 22 children had been placed with adoptive families during the reporting period, 12 of which had been placed with approved in-house adopters, which was a recognised improvement from the previous year and a reduction in the use of interagency adopters.

An overview of the Adoption Scorecard Performance data was provided, and it was stated that with regards to the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, Adoption@Heart's performance was below the national threshold, although consistent with the England average. However, in relation to the average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and a match identified, the regional performance was significantly above the threshold and above the national average.

Performance indicators in relation to adopters and the services provided by Adoption Support were also outlined. It was confirmed that the Adoption Panel had continued to meet in a virtual setting, with 53 panel meetings held during the reporting period, and that there had been one referral to the Independent Review Mechanism, with the decision being upheld.

Arising from the presentation, Members made comments, asked questions and responses were provided where necessary as follows:-

- In response questions raised by Councillor L Johnson in relation to the percentage of successful adopters who were single and from the LGBTQ+ community, it was stated that Adoption@heart was fully inclusive with their recruitment of adopters and all applications would be considered on their own merit and on a case-by-case basis, regardless of race, gender, religion, marital status or sexual orientation. The predominate factor when considering an adopter would be based on what that person(s) could offer a child.



- Councillor A Millward referred to adoption panel meetings continuing to be held virtually and questioned whether this was appropriate given the nature and importance of establishing a physical connection. In response it was commented that adopters had indicated that they preferred to attend virtual meetings as they considered it to be less daunting and felt more comfortable by attending virtually from their own homes.
- In responding to comments made in relation to adoption scorecard performance figures, it was recognised that delays within the adoption system needed to be addressed, however the needs, wellbeing and welfare of a child were the first and foremost predominate factor. It was also confirmed that upon identifying a match, the preparation work would always be undertaken at the child's pace and would not be performance figure led.
- Councillor P Bradley reiterated the concerns raised with regards to meetings continuing to be held virtual. It was confirmed that Post Adoption Contact meetings had returned to physical meetings as soon as it had been safe to do so following the Pandemic. The views of the Board in relation to adoption panels being held virtually would be reported back to the Management Board.

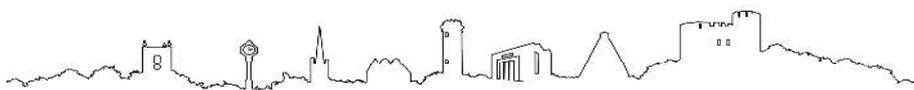
Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report and presented at the meeting on the Adoption Service Annual Report for the period 1st April, 2021 to 31st March, 2022, be received and noted.
- (2) That the Interim Service Director Children's Social Care be requested to report the views and concerns raised by Board Members in relation to Adoption Panel's continuing to be held virtually, to a future meeting of the Adoption@Heart Management Board.

8. **Dudley Virtual School Update Report**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the developments of Dudley Virtual School.

The Virtual School Deputy Headteacher was in attendance at the meeting and gave a detailed presentation on the key highlights of the 2020/21 academic year, and in doing so, referred to the work that had been undertaken by the Virtual School during the reporting period; provided data on the children in care cohort for each school year, as to where their education was provided, the number of pupils with SEND needs and the number of school moves for that cohort; as well as highlighting the academic outcomes for key stages one, two, four and post 16. It was reported that attendance had been well recorded, which had also been recognised by Ofsted and that there had been no permanent exclusions during the reporting period, although work would continue with schools to try to reduce the number of fixed term exclusions.



In referring to the number of pupils Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET), it was reported that figures were on a downward trend and work continued with Year 12 students to ensure college placements were in place in readiness for September. It was stated that there was currently a drive to promote attachment awareness and trauma within schools and that an average of 96.66% of all Personal Education Plans (PEP) were completed.

Arising from the presentation, Members made comments, asked questions and responses were provided where necessary:-

- In responding to a question raised by Councillor H Bills in relation to the low number of permanent exclusions during the reporting period, it was confirmed that work had been undertaken to explore the reasons and trauma that may have resulted in the bad behaviour, and the ways in which schools could be adequately supported to deal with the behaviour.
- It was stated that the Virtual School did not arrange work experiences for pupils, this would be the responsibility of the relevant provision. It was acknowledged that looked after children did not wish to be treated differently and therefore were provided with the same opportunity as other students. It was further commented that whilst PEP's did cease once a young person reached the age of 18, support would continue to be provided if requested and moving forward it was proposed for career advice to be included in future PEP's.
- It was confirmed that apprenticeships for care leavers were offered within the Children Services Directorate, although this provision needed to be replicated across all Directorates. Discussions had previously been undertaken at working group meetings for the possibility of establishing a centre that could provide advice, mentoring and suit hire and the Interim Service Director Children's Social Care confirmed that proposals continued to be under consideration.

Resolved

That the information contained in the report and presented at the meeting in relation to the developments of the Dudley Virtual School, be received and noted.

9. **Children's Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2021/2022**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the Children's Corporate Parenting Board Annual report 2021/2022.

Resolved

That the Children's Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2021/2022, be received and noted.



10. **Verbal Updates from the Working Groups**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

11. **Appointing Chairs for the Working Groups**

The Corporate Parenting Board Co-ordinator referred to the establishment of four informal working groups of the Board, namely:-

- Care Experienced Young People Working Group
- Emotional Health and Wellbeing Working Group
- Skills Working Group
- Permanence Working Group

All Members were encouraged to attend at least one of the working groups and nominations for Members to Chair the Working Groups were requested.

Resolved

- (1) That the appointment of the four informal working groups, as outlined above, be agreed and noted and that Chairs be appointed as follows:-
 - Care Experienced Young People Working Group - Councillor H Bills
 - Emotional Health and Wellbeing Working Group - Councillor E Taylor
 - Skills Working Group - Councillor P Bradley
 - Permanence Working Group - Councillor D Stanley
 - (2) That the Corporate Parenting Board Co-ordinator be requested to circulate the list of Working Groups to Members of the Board, for Members to advise directly as to which Group they wished to attend.
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12. **Children's Corporate Parenting Board Forward Planning Dates**

Members considered the proposed meetings dates and forward plan for the 2022/23 municipal year.

In referring to the many agenda items proposed for each meeting, the Corporate Parenting Board Co-ordinator commented that briefing notes would be provided for some items, particularly updates, as identified on the schedule, to enable more focussed and structured meetings to be conducted.

Arising from a comment made by Councillor S Ridney in relation to the proposed agenda item for Dudley Lighthouse Links Service, it was confirmed that this item would now be submitted as a briefing note, as a full report would be scrutinised by the Dudley Health and Wellbeing Board.

In referring to the 'Meet your Corporate Parent Event' that had been arranged for August 2022, Members requested that, due to pre-arranged holidays, the date be rearranged to allow all Members the opportunity to attend.

Resolved

- (1) That the Children's Corporate Parenting Board forward planning dates schedule, be received and noted.
- (2) That the Corporate Parenting Board Co-Ordinator, in conjunction with the Children in Care Council, look at an alternative date for the 'Meet your Corporate Parent Event' during October half-term.

13. **Members Comments**

Councillor P Bradley referred to the publication of the new Corporate Parenting Handbook, which had been emailed to all Councillors and suggested that this also be made available to all Council Officers.

The importance of raising awareness that all Elected Members and Council staff were corporate parents was accentuated, and it was suggested that the Board produce a podcast to raise awareness of everyone's role and responsibilities as a corporate parent.

Resolved

That the Corporate Parenting Board Co-Ordinator be requested to explore the options for the Children's Corporate Parenting Board to produce a podcast to raise awareness of everyone's role and responsibilities as a corporate parent.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm

CHAIR