

**Minutes of the Children's Corporate Parenting Board
Thursday, 24th March 2022 at 4.30 pm
in the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor R Buttery (Chair)
Councillor S Ridney (Vice-Chair)
Councillors N Barlow, C Bayton, P Bradley, S Greenaway, A Lees, N Neale and D Stanley.

Officers

C Driscoll – Director of Children's Services, 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) and K Buckle – Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Finance and Legal).

11. **Apologies for Absence**

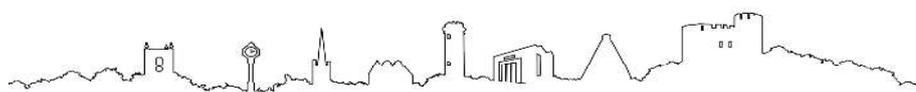
Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors D Bevan, B Challenor, R Collins, B Gentle, M Hanif, A Millward and E Taylor.

12. **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was reported that Councillors N Barlow, C Bayton, S Greenaway and D Stanley had been appointed as substitute Members for Councillors D Bevan, M Hanif, R Collins and M Millward respectively, for this meeting of the Board only.

13. **Declarations of Interest**

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



14. **Minutes**

The Chair provided a verbal update on the Virtual School following her attendance at a Local Government Training Session hosted to extend the work of the Virtual School to any child that had been previously cared for by the Local Authority, as it had become evident that previous Looked After Children were failing to achieve their full academic potential.

The Chair supported the decision of the Government as that work would be extended to 1.6 million children nationally and one in ten or three children in every classroom. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Behavioural teaching would become embedded in all schools. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that the relevant teams had recently been extended, in order to deal with the additional responsibilities.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd July 2021, be approved as a correct record, and signed.

15. **Public Forum**

There were no issues raised under this agenda item.

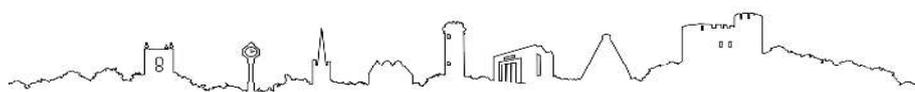
16. **Children's Corporate Parenting Board Municipal Year Report April 2021 to March 2022**

Members considered a presentation which provided detail in relation to the Board's Action Tracker for 2021 to 2022 including the reports considered by the Children's Corporate Parenting Working Group and the suggested recommendations during the municipal year. There had also been the establishment of the four Operational Working Groups which were facilitated by the Corporate Parenting Board Co-ordinator. The Operational Working Groups were as follows: -

The Care Experience Working Group
The Emotional Health and Wellbeing Working Group
The Skills Working Group
The Permanency Working Group

It was noted that six care experienced apprentices had become employed by Children's Social Care.

A Workshop for Members had also been reinstated to outline their corporate parenting responsibilities.



The Local Authority's Communications and Public Affairs Section had published an article informing Members of the Operational Working Groups established by the Board.

The Members Corporate Parenting Handbook had been approved by all Board Members.

The Service Manager for the Independent Reviewing Service had provided assurances that the Independent Visitor Service had been improved.

The Director of Children's Services had appointed the Chair of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Working Group to Chair the Strategic Leadership meeting of the Dudley Lighthouse Links to provide independent challenge and accountability.

The Head of Children in Care – Care Leavers and Resources referred to the reports presented to the Children's Corporate Parenting Board Working Group and the suggested recommendations made by that Group during 2021 to 2022 as detailed below: -

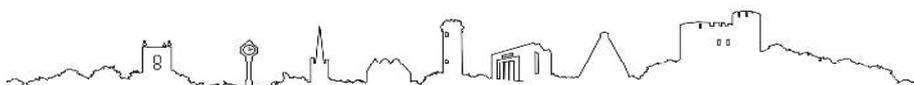
On 9th September 2021 the Lead for the Adolescent Response Team had presented a report on Children Missing from Care to the Working Group that included current arrangements for those children and details of the number of children who were reported as missing, together with details of missing episodes and Return Home Interviews.

In responding to a question from Councillor C Bayton it was confirmed that reciprocal arrangements for reimbursing Local Authorities for carrying out Return Home Visits would be considered.

In responding to a question from Councillor P Bradley, it was accepted that the timeliness of conducting Return Home Interviews remained an area for improvement and those Interviews would be conducted following the last missing episode.

The Director of Children's Services confirmed that it remained a priority to conduct Return Home Interviews for Dudley children and those interviews remained an area for improvement and some missing episodes may be marred with exploitation and therefore compliance and quality interviews were required. It was confirmed that there were a number of children residing out of Borough.

It was stated that the reasons for missing episodes varied in that some had argued with their parents or wished to go to places that they were not allowed to, however, the majority of children had not believed that they were missing when going out with friends or visiting their separated parents. Sometimes children removed from their parents returned to their parents.



It was noted that when a child in care was placed with a carer, details of their networks and social media would be provided to the carer. Should a child be reported as missing, their carers were supported by providing the most appropriate course of action to follow rather than immediately telephoning the Police, however urgency would be dependent upon a child's age and the level of risk. Children's parents' houses would also be checked.

The Adoption at Heart Service Report was also presented to the September meeting of the Working Group and provided a focus on the work of the Service which included details of those children placed in foster to adopt placements during 2020/21. Data in relation to those children in Dudley placed in foster to adopt placements were referred to, including those who were placed interagency. Data in relation to post adoption contacts was also referred to, together with the number of contacts with their siblings. Work was also continuing to provide birth parent support with a view to more effectively supporting birth parents and improving outcomes for them and their children.

The Matrix Project Manager Social Care undertook to provide Members with details of how successful birth parent support had been in terms of data.

Following consideration of the report, Members of the Working Group requested a report on the timescales involved during the process to adopt a child together with updated figures on the number of children in Dudley being adopted.

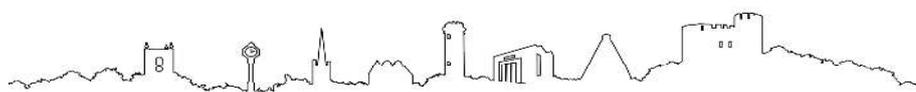
In relation to the Children's Services Complaints, Comments and Compliments Annual report from 1st October 2020 to 31st March 2021, Members were pleased with the improved response times to complaints, and it had been noted that 61% of complaints had not been upheld with eight cases being upheld or partially upheld and one complaint withdrawn. The reasons for upholding complaints were mainly due to the quality of service and support which included the lack of communication. That lack of communication had resulted in a huge drive through the Strategic Management Team to demonstrate improvement.

The Children in Care Team had received 23 compliments during the same reporting period.

The update report of the Dudley Lighthouse Links Service, Emotional Wellbeing Service to Children in Care 23rd February 2021 to 18th August 2021 was considered by the Working Group and it was noted that in June 2021, Children's Services had commissioned an Independent Strategic Review of the Service and an action plan had been progressed.

A Clinical Lead had been appointed who was trauma trained and Therapeutic Parent Plans were being prepared for carers to meet the needs of children and young people.

Members requested further update reports on the Service in order to monitor progress; case studies on how young people and carers had benefited from the Service and a report in relation to kinship care.



The Chair requested that the kinship care report also include details of funding strategies for kinship carers.

In responding to a question from Councillor C Bayton, the Director of Children's Services undertook to provide the Board with the 'No Detriment Policy' including details of resources available to kinship carers.

A report on the Corporate Parenting Handbook was presented to the November meeting of the Working Group and an overview of the content of the Handbook had been provided to Members. The Handbook ensured that Elected Members understood their corporate parenting responsibilities. It was confirmed that the Handbook would be regularly updated on issues affecting children and young people and how the Local Authority were performing in relation to performance indicators.

Corporate Parenting Board Members were requested to sign the Handbook and adopt the mantra 'Children first and at the heart of all we do' be included on the front page of the handbook.

The Corporate Parenting Co-ordinator undertook to insert Members signatures and request the Council's Communications and Public Affairs Section to publish the Handbook for Members.

Throughout the municipal year the Working Group had received details in relation to the Children in Care Council Activities.

Members had also met with care experienced apprentices who had all provided details of their achievements.

An updated report on the Care Leavers Service had been presented to the January meeting of the Working Group which provided data in terms of the areas where they resided, those Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET), care leavers successes and the reason why children in care exited care.

It was confirmed that the drop-in centre for young people was to be set up by the Service Manager Children's Services Children in Care and Resources.

The Annual Health Report for Children in Care 2020 to 2021 was also presented to the January meeting of the Working Group, and it was noted that the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Working Group had considered the App that Sandwell Council utilised for Health Passports, and it had been agreed that those passports would be electronic in the future.

It was noted that the children in care and young people had chosen the priorities for the 2022/23 municipal year which included the following: -

- Your Health and Emotional Wellbeing.
- Your Home and where you live.
- To be listened to and respected.

The Working Group considered the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) Annual Report 2020/21.

It was confirmed that the following items would be included in the Annual Childrens Corporate Parenting Board Programme for 2022/23: -

- Verbal Update Reports from the Corporate Parenting Board Working Groups.
- Children's Services Complaints, Comments and Compliments Annual Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- Dudley's Virtual School Annual Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- Report on care experienced young people Not in Education Employment or Training.
- Fostering and Permanency Service Annual Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- Report from regional adoption agency Adoption at Heart.
- Review Report of Dudley Lighthouse Link Service.
- Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group Annual Children in Care Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- Report on the outcomes of the Ofsted inspections, the Regulation Independent Visitor inspections and Regulation 45 quality of care reviews in respect of the Children Home (England) Regulations 2015.
- Care experienced young people update report.
- Connected Carers (Kinship) Report.
- Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report April 2021 – March 2022.

In relation to Leisure Centre Passes it was noted that S Gay, Leisure Services Manager would be invited to attend a future meeting of the Board to update Members in relation to passes for children in care and care leavers.

The Chair referred to funding available to prioritise children's mental health and the possibility of the funding being utilised for Leisure Passes as leisure centre activities not only prevent obesity but also mental health and wellbeing.

Councillor S Ridney referred to the request of the Children in Care Council to prevent constant changes in their Social Workers for children in care and a request to review pocket money.

The Head of Children in Care – Care Leavers and Resources confirmed that a review was being undertaken in relation to pocket money.

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for their support during the municipal year and Councillor S Ridney thanked the Corporate Parenting Co-ordinator for establishing the four Operational Working Groups. Thanks were echoed by all Members.



The Head of Children in Care – Care Leavers and Resources reported that all Elected Members would be asked if they wished to become Foster Carers as part of the Foster Carers Recruitment Strategy.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the presentation on the Children's Corporate Parenting Board Municipal Year 2021/22, be noted.
- (2) That the Lead for the Adolescent Response Team be requested to provide Members with statistics and comparisons with neighbouring local authorities on the number, length of time children were missing and reasons for those episodes and to investigate the possibility of carrying out Return Home Interviews for all children placed in Dudley with a view to being reimbursed by those children's home authorities, (should they have been placed out of their area and in Dudley).
- (3) That the Corporate Parenting Co-ordinator be requested to insert Members' signature on the Corporate Parenting Handbook and request the Council's Communications and Public Affairs Section to publish the Handbook for Members.
- (4) That the Director of Children's Services be requested to submit 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 a future meeting of the Board.
- (5) That the Head of Children in Care – Care Leavers and Resources be requested to provide Members with details and data of how successful Birth Parent Support had been.
- (5) That the Children's Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2022 to 2023 be approved.
- (6) That the Service Director of Children's Social Care be requested to liaise with the Director of Children's Services and the Service Director - Early Help/Schools and SEND to ascertain the current position in relation to all Directorates extending the offer of Apprenticeships to care leavers.
- (7) That the Head of Safeguarding, Practice and Quality Assurance be requested to inform Members whether the written information regarding the IRO and the Reviewing Service that was provided to all children and young people was all inclusive and catered for different languages and to provide an update report on the Independent Reviewing Officers Reviews to a future meeting.
- (8) That the Director of Children's Services be requested to provide Members with the 'No Detriment Policy', to include details of the resources available to kinship carers.
- (9) That the following items be included in the Annual Children's Corporate Parenting Board Programme for 2022/23



- Verbal Update Reports from the Corporate Parenting Board Working Groups.
- Children's Services Complaints, Comments and Compliments Annual Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- Dudley's Virtual School Annual Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- Report on care experienced young people Not in Education Employment or Training.
- Fostering and Permanency Service Annual Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- Report from regional adoption agency Adoption@Heart
- Review Report of Dudley Lighthouse Links Service
- Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group Annual Children in Care Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.
- Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022
- Report on the outcomes of the Ofsted inspections, the Regulation. Independent Visitor inspections and Regulation 45 quality of care reviews in respect of the Children Home (England) Regulations 2015.
- Care experienced young people update report.
- Connected Carers (Kinship) Report to include funding strategies for kinship carers.
- Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report April 2021 – March 2022.

The meeting ended at 5.45 pm

CHAIR