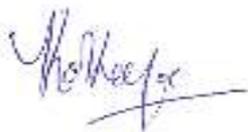


Meeting of the Children's Corporate Parenting Board

Thursday 24th March 2022 at 4.00pm
In Committee Room 3, the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

Agenda - Public Session **(Meeting open to the public and press)**

1. Apologies for absence
2. To report the appointment of any substitute members serving for this meeting of the Committee.
3. To receive any declarations of interest under the Members' Code of Conduct.
4. [To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd July 2021 as a correct record.](#)
5. Public Forum
6. [Action Tracker](#)
7. [Children's Corporate Parenting Board Municipal Year Report April 2021 to March 2022 \(Powerpoint Presentation\)](#)
8. To consider any questions from Members to the Chair where two clear days-notice has been given to the Monitoring Officer (Council Procedure Rule 11.8).



Chief Executive
Dated: 16th March 2022

Distribution:

Councillor R Buttery (Chair)

Councillor S Ridney (Vice-Chair)

Councillors D Bevan, P Bradley, B Challenor, R Collins, B Gentle, M Hanif, A Lees, A Millward, N Neale and E Taylor.

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**Minutes of the Children's Corporate Parenting Board
Thursday, 22nd July 2021 at 4.00 pm
In the Council Chamber**

Present:

Councillor R Buttery (Chair)
Councillor S Ridney (Vice-Chair)
Councillors D Bevan, R Collins, B Gentle, M Hanif, P Lee, A Millward and N Neale

Officers

M Barnett – Lead for Connexions/Worklessness, M Davies – Service Manager Children's Services, Children in Care and Resources, C Driscoll – Director of Children's Services, M McFadden – Corporate Parenting Board Co-ordinator, A Wright – Matrix Head of Virtual School (All Directorate of Children's Services) and K Buckle – Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Finance and Legal).

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting was received on behalf of Councillors P Bradley and E Taylor.

2 **Appointment of Substitute Member**

It was reported that Councillor P Lee had been appointed as a substitute Member for Councillor P Bradley, for this meeting of the Committee only.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of any matter to be considered at the meeting.

4. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30th March 2021, be approved as a correct record and signed.

5. **Public Forum**

There were no issues raised under this agenda item.

6. **Action Tracker**

The Corporate Parenting Board Co-ordinator referred to a Corporate Parenting event that would take place on the 24th August 2021, which Members would be invited to attend, however it was unsure whether that event would be online or face to face.

The interviews for the Care Leavers apprenticeships within the Council would take place on 24th August 2021 with the intention that those apprentices would be in post by September 2021.

In responding to questions and suggestions of Members, the Corporate Parenting Co-ordinator advised that when Council employees were on the re-deployment list, they had the first choice of any vacancies within the Council.

The Service Director of Children's Social Care referred to a report that had been submitted to the Strategic Executive Board in relation to care leavers being offered apprenticeships, which had been positively received and was currently being pursued.

The Chair referred to 'Child Friendly Dudley' that had been launched, which would provide a clear line of accountability and challenge in relation to Corporate Parenting responsibilities in relation to care leavers being offered apprenticeships.

Resolved

That the Action Tracker be updated and noted.

7. **Children's Corporate Parenting Board Work Planner**

The Corporate Parenting Co-ordinator referred to the items that would be considered at the next meeting of the Children's Corporate Parenting Board Working Group which would take place on 9th September 2021.

8. **Annual Fostering Report; the operation of the Fostering Service and the work of the Fostering Panel April 2020 – March 2021**

Members considered a report on the progress made within the Fostering Service for the period of 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. The report submitted identified the priorities for 2021/22 within the Fostering Service.

The Service Manager Children's Services, Children in Care and Resources presented the report submitted, advising that despite the lockdown restrictions imposed, Fostering Services had been maintained together with performance levels remaining high.

The Fostering Service was now fully staffed by a permanent workforce and although the Service was permitted to take several easements during lockdown, none were taken.

Enhanced Foster Carer training had been offered to all Foster Carers.

The level of physical visits were maintained as far as the Service were able to as some children still required visits during lockdown.

All staff had been provided with personal protective equipment and were vaccinated against Covid-19 as soon as the vaccines became available.

The placement stability statistics remained the same as the previous year, with 9 new Foster Carers being approved by the Fostering Panel.

Six Special Guardianship Orders had been approved up until June 2021 and the approval of Orders continued to increase.

The Action Plan for 2021-22 as outlined in the report submitted was referred to.

Three children who were placed with an Independent Fostering Agency were granted Special Guardianship Orders that had resulted in savings for the Service.

There was the intention to maintain and improve services offered to Foster Carers.

The recruitment of Foster Carers, especially for those children with disabilities and those children who had ethnic minority backgrounds, was required.

A Foster Carer Association had been established, in order to gain further feedback from Foster Carers in relation to the Service.

The Chair commented positively on the report submitted congratulating the Service on maintaining their levels of contact with children in foster care and the positivity of obtaining Special Guardianship Orders for those children in foster care.

It was noted that the conversion rate from enquiries to approving Foster Carers remained low, although this was in line with the national average

There followed a discussion in relation to children in care requiring their own bedroom should they be fostered, and it was noted that those regulations were set in statute and could not be changed, however there may be situations whereby kinship could be an issue and the Authority may support Foster Carers in relation to extending their properties.

All neighbouring authorities were aiming to recruit additional Foster Carers and that posed a challenge with creative recruitment practices being required.

In response to a question in relation to the Liquidlogic ICT system, the Service Manager advised that the system would continually improve as all Authorities start with the basic module and build onto that.

In relation to the number of children leaving care it was reported that this was due to either Special Guardianship Orders being approved, those in care reaching the age of 18 or children and young people returning home.

It was reported that during the pandemic those Foster Carers with healthcare problems were shielding and this had led to the reduction in Foster Carers during those challenging times. In addition, some Foster Carers had decided to retire, and the Authority may have received complaints or allegations against some Foster Carers which would also contribute to their reducing numbers.

The Government had provided Easement Grants in order that alternative Fostering Services could be used during lockdown.

In responding to a further question from a Member it was stated that the average profile of a Foster Carer was unknown, however some were aged 70 and above and there was the need to recruit younger Foster Carers.

In relation to the problems that had occurred during the pandemic regarding recording Annual Foster Carer Reviews, following the instruction to work at home, all of the paperwork to conduct those reviews had remained in the office, posing problems with completing reviews. However, there was a plan to address such issues.

It was noted that an Independent Reviewing Officer would be dedicated to recording Annual Foster Carer Review in the future.

The Chair and the Vice Chair congratulated the Fostering Service Team for their continuing work throughout challenging times and requested the Service Manager to pass on their thanks to the Team for their committed approach to the Service.

Resolved

- (1) That the Annual Fostering Report; operation of the Fostering Service and the work of the Fostering Panel April 2020 to March 2021, be noted.
- (2) That the Pledge for Children Looked After and the Charter for Care Leavers was being adhered to, be confirmed.
- (3) That the Children's Corporate Parenting responsibilities were being met, be noted.
- (4) That the Charter for Care Leavers was being adhered to, be confirmed.

8. **Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Care Leavers Report**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted providing NEET comparative data from 31st January 2020 to 31st January 2021 and providing an overview of support arrangements during Covid-19.

The Lead for Connexions/Worklessness presented the report submitted, stating that it had been imperative to support the mental health and wellbeing of the NEET cohort of young people during the pandemic, in order that young people could sustain their current employment or educational positions, with continued support being provided in order to achieve that aim.

It was reported that the majority of young people had been furloughed during the period of lockdown and young people had continued to be supported via virtual platforms.

The service had also strived to ensure the intended destinations for those year 11 students who were transitioning post 16 were sustained and maintained.

Work had continued with colleagues in order to ensure that young people would not be impacted upon when they needed to re-integrate back into education.

The summary of NEET data as at the end of May 2021 and the comparison to the same time last year was outlined.

The analysis of the NEET status split into ages 16 to 18 and 19 to 21 as referred to in the report submitted, was noted.

Performance and practice meetings between Managers and practitioners in Connexions, the Virtual School and Black Country Impact, in order to discuss progress and areas for concerns to share good practice and agree next steps were taking place.

The rising challenges in securing employment for young people due to the pandemic were referred to.

The Service continued to support young people to secure interviews and work continued with regenerations and skills partners, HS2 providers and those preparing for the Commonwealth Games 2022, in order to secure employment for the NEET cohort.

The Chair referred to the Kickstart Programme that was based at the Merry Hill Shopping Centre, which provided a Youth Hub and was facilitated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Impact Team.

It was noted that the Programme provided Mindfulness Programmes and assisted young people in applying for interviews, however the downside to the Programme was that those accessing it must be in receipt of Universal Credit. The Lead for Connexions/Workfulness undertook to enter into a constructive dialogue with the DWP in relation to that requirement not being needed in the future to enable more young people access the Programme.

It was reported that Year 11 modelling had taken place in order that the destinations of all young people could be tracked, and work was continuing in order to secure destinations for all Year 11 students by September.

Colleges provided the Service with all data in relation to offers made and all young people who had no destination would continue to be targeted.

The Chair thanked the Team for being creative and innovative during the pandemic.

Resolved

- (1) That the Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) Care Leavers report, be noted.
- (2) That the success, given the challenges in the reduction of NEET as at 31st May 2021 in comparison to 31st May 2020, be noted.
- (3) That the arrangements in place to sustain the numbers of Care Leavers in employment, education and training, be noted.

9. **Dudley Virtual School Annual Report 2019/20**

A report of the Director of Children's Services was submitted on the programme of activities, systems and processes that were being developed to improve outcomes and enhance the learning of Children in Care.

The Matrix Head of Virtual School presented the report submitted which covered the 2019/20 academic year, stating that the data in relation to the Year 11 cohort evidenced an improvement in education outcomes.

It was stated that 51% of the children in care cohort had special educational needs and the majority of that cohort were educated out of Borough.

It was noted that work continued with schools in order for them to be attainment focused and improving exam results.

The data in relation to Personal Education Plans (PEP'S) in order to track PEP's and ensuring that schools were conducting internal assessments was referred to.

There had been an emphasis on developing relationships with young people and those professionals that could provide intervention measures earlier should they become disengaged with education.

Transition points in relation to post 16 young people had become much clearer.

The Matrix Head of Virtual School referred to the finance section of the report stating that a significant amount of devices had been purchased in order that students could access learning from home and wrap around tuition programmes that had been introduced in order to provide intervention in the home.

The Virtual School continued to review and refine the emotional wellbeing programme in order to support a range of ages and needs.

In relation to the 'Love to Learn programme', websites had been updated and open Events had taken place, with a holistic approach taking place to provide a personalised offer in relation to education.

Regarding exclusions, a zero percent rate in relation to permanent exclusions had been maintained, with a focused aim in continuing to work with schools in order to ensure children and young people remained in an educational setting.

The Personal Education Plans Service had improved significantly changing their status from inadequate to outstanding as a result of the support provided to schools, by the Virtual School.

The introduction of Personal Education Plans for those post 16 had taken place with a proposed training event for schools in September 2021.

The Matrix Head of Virtual School referred to the Arts offer and the Arts Link Awesome Programme which had been a regional partnership with all Virtual Schools whereby a two-week programme for all ages had been organised.

The tuition and career offer to children and young people was also outlined and the Annual Virtual School Conference had taken place for the second year which had evidenced the outstanding work with children and educational providers.

In responding to a question from a Member, the Matrix Head of Virtual School advised that he chaired the Wet Midlands Virtual School Group who met weekly and invited various providers. It was noted that at their last meeting, a representative from the Department for Environment (DfE) had attended.

In terms of Academic outcomes there were concerns in relation to primary aged children and there was a Birmingham Black Country cluster undertaking a project in relation to numeracy and literacy.

The Matrix Head of Virtual School reported that the Children in Care Council had been invited to attend a London Parliamentary Group.

The Children in Care Council had also been consulted in relation to the Arts Link project and provided positive feedback, stating that it maintained connections to the community and influenced their ambitions and aspirations.

In relation to the face to face Arts Offer event that was scheduled to take place on 16th August 2021, the Matrix Head of Virtual School confirmed that Members would be invited to attend.

The Chair congratulated the Service on the provision of a huge range of services to children and young people who were looked after or care leavers.

Resolved

- (1) That the Annual report submitted on the Dudley Virtual School, together with actions being taken to improve the outcomes for Dudley children looked after pupils, be noted.
- (2) That the plan to support the report in the future with activities to provide an insight into the types of support that had been effective for Dudley children looked after, be supported.
- (3) That the Matrix Head of Virtual School be requested to invite Member to the Arts Offer Event, as referred to above.

10. **The Appointment of Children's Corporate Parenting Board Working Groups**

Councillor R Collins provided feedback from the Emotional Health and Wellbeing and Skills Working Groups.

In relation to the Skills Working Group, care leavers were invited in order that strategies could be discussed to assist independent living and it was also intended to invite a representative from Leisure Services to future Working Group meetings.

A survey would be prepared in order that care leavers could be consulted on the skills that they required, and there would be an action plan with the ambition that Officers and Members could assist with any skills required in the future.

There was a proposal to appoint a Fostering Champion in order to raise the profile of Fostering with the intention to make Dudley a Foster friendly authority.

There was also the requirement to raise the awareness of providing children in care with their forever homes raising the profile of permanency.

The ambition to strengthen links with the National Health Service in relation to the Health and Wellbeing Working Group was outlined.

The Chair commented positively on the work of the Working Groups and the outcomes as outlined above, whilst noting that Member attendance remained low.

Following a discussion in relation to inviting Officers from other Directorates such as Leisure and Housing Services to future meetings of the Board, it was determined that the appropriate Officers would be invited to future meetings of the Working Groups.

A Member suggested that all Children in Care be offered free passes to the new Leisure Centre facility in Dudley.

In responding to a question from the Chair, the Matrix Head of Virtual School confirmed that bereavement services for children in care were commissioned and facilitated by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), and there was also support and intervention work offered within schools.

It was noted that the DfE had provided funding to schools to provide counselling as part of the bereavement service for those children in care who had lost parents or relatives due to the pandemic.

The Chair confirmed that she would also Chair the Care Leavers Working Group.

Following a request from Care Leavers it was agreed that the Life Pac and Advocacy Services would be included within the Children's Corporate Parenting Board Action Tracker.

It was reported that two care leavers had won awards in relation to the 'Respect Programme' which would be presented by the Mayoress at a future Full Council meeting. Care leavers would also be invited to the Mayor's Parlour when it was safe to do so.

Resolved

- (1) That the verbal update on the appointment of Children's Corporate Parenting Board Working Groups, be noted.
- (2) That the Life Pac and Advocacy Services be included on the Children's Corporate Parenting Board Action Tracker.
- (3) That the Corporate Parenting Co-ordinator be requested to advise Members whether Children Looked After would be provided with Leisure passes to the new Leisure Centre in Dudley.

The meeting ended at 5.40 pm

CHAIR