



**Chair -
Councillor
Ruth Buttery**

Annual report of the Children's Corporate Parenting Board (CCPB)

2020/21 Municipal Year



**Vice-Chair
Councillor
Sue Ridney**

Our role involves the scrutiny of matters relating to Children and Young People in Care and Care Experienced Young People in the Directorate of Children's Services

Impact of COVID on the or Children in Care, Care leavers and Resource Service

Throughout this Municipal Year Members have considered the impact on and responses to COVID-19 within the Children in care and Resources Service. Verbal updates have provided detailed information on critical services being maintained during the pandemic, including the monitored visits undertaken to determine which children needed to remain in school following the first lockdown.

In July 2020 the Children's Corporate Parenting Board received a report from the Head Teacher of Dudley Virtual School (DVS). The Virtual School Headteacher advised that Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings have been revised and more people attend due to virtual meetings. This has also fostered improved relationships with colleagues in schools.

The post 16 PEP had been developed together with a Tutor Programme, and 300 devices had been distributed to children, 211 from the Department of Education (DfE) and the remainder provided by schools. The Tutor Programme provides online group tutoring that is age related with different tutor groups.

The Pupil Premium Plus Grant had been suspended. This was usually paid to schools in relation to children in care. The suspension had allowed the Virtual School to continue to support children during Covid. 30% of the grant had been utilised for Information Technology, 30% for tuition, and targeting emotional wellbeing, and the remainder to support children in care remaining in school.

A Pathways Programme had been introduced, as there were concerns in relation to the disengagement of Year 11 pupils. The programme addressed functional skills online and had appealed to several of our most vulnerable young people. Some of those young people will be undertaking a qualification in Maths and English during the summer.

Children and families experienced heightened emotional and mental health needs. Further support was being commissioned that would be available once children and young people returned to school.

A collaborative offer across the board in Arts is now online with the website entitled 'Connect and Create'. The website has received 7,000 hits by November and contains many varying offers.

During the summer a Glastonbury styled festival took place and each day there would be a different tent with different arts involved for all ages, providing a whole range of different experiences. This is linked into the Birmingham Repertory Theatre who are providing a theatre programme entitled 'the Spy School' that mainly targeted the upper primary and lower secondary aged children.

Foster Carers had been supported with advice and guidance to support young people whilst being home educated and shared with all Foster Carers. A 'Love to Learn' bulletin had also been issued to Foster Carers, who were also financially resourced to assist them with home learning. A Carers Workshop that was attended by 170 carers had been made available online.

Further feedback from the DVS through the Municipal year provided an update on the continued engagement with foster carers and a strengthening relationship between the Fostering Service and DVS.

The Connecting Families Centres continued throughout the pandemic to offer family time to children so that they could spend time with their parents or people important to them.

Children are 'RAG' rated in accordance to their need, to ensure that, despite Covid flexibilities, those children most in need are seen by a member of their professional network, preferably, their social worker.

Outcomes

- The Chair commented positively on the creative and innovative work of the Children in Care, Care Leavers and Resource Service ensuring that children and young people and their carers were supported in the pandemic.

Children's Services Complaints, Comments and Compliments Annual Report 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020. 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

The Board considered this report which made reference to statutory and corporate complaints and noted that the data that in relation to children in care, care leavers and their carers

Members raised concerns in relation to response times to complaints and requested that these be addressed together with the reasons for the late responses.

Outcomes:

- The Service Director for Children's Social Care advised that it was a priority for the Service to respond to complaints within the statutory time frames especially as some complaints came from children.
- The Head of Service for Children in Care, Care leavers and Resources to introduce the collection of "You Said We Did" message board within the Service.

Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group (DCCG) Annual Children in Care Report 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

The Designated Nurse for Looked After Children and Young People presented the report referring to the service model in Dudley involving three providers who provide statutory health services for children and young people in care.

It was reported that a review of children in care's health service provision had been undertaken, and details of the professional roles within the service were referred to. It was stated that the purpose of the group was to monitor and improve the delivery of outcomes for children in care.

It was noted that the initial health assessments completed in time were 100% in 2019 with all initial health assessments booked in to see in clinic within the statutory time scales of 20 working days.

However, in December 2019 to January 2020 health care assessments being completed within statutory time limits had been impacted upon by Doctor availability and in March at the start of the pandemic the assessments had been completed online.

The number of reasons why initial health care assessments had not been completed within statutory time limits were referred to, which included appointments being cancelled by carers and young people health issues, with those aged 0 to 1 with very few health issues, those aged 1 to 5 recording issues with dental data, speech, language and behavioural issues. Those children aged 5 to 11 had the majority of Educational Health Care Plans, special educational needs, and mental health issues. The main issues for all aged groups were behavioural issues.

It had been recorded that children in residential homes had the most issues.

The 'Our Voice Our Shoes' conference that was commissioned with monies provided by National Health Service England, specifically for health professionals across the Black Country STP, which consisted of four workshops where the young people and professionals were asked to work together to discuss feedback on various areas was referred to.

The key priorities for 2020 to 2021 outlined in the report submitted were noted.

Outcomes:

- The Virtual School issued a 'Love to Learn Emotional Health and Wellbeing' pack which was provided to children in care and foster carers.
- In order to deal with social anxiety for children who had returned to school, additional staff had been made available to support those children.
- Weekly meetings were conducted with staff from the Safeguarding Teams with assurances being provided that those children who required support were accessing that support.

- Should a foster carer refuse an appointment for an initial health care assessment, that carer would be contacted, and the importance of the assessment would be stressed to the carer.

Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020

A report that provided assurances of the effective functioning of the Safeguarding and Review Service, that had operational line management of Independent Reviewing Officers for children subject to Child Protection Plans, and effective care planning for Children in Care was considered by Members.

Outcomes:

- Members requested that That the Acting Director of Children's Services from be requested to submit a report on the recruitment of Independent Visitors to a future meeting of the Board.
- Members received reassurance from the Independent Reviewing Service Manager that recruitment of Independent Visitors has been made a priority within the Service

Children in Care Council Annual report 2019 / 2020

The Board considered a report on the work carried out over the previous 12-month period and on the Key Performance Indicators

The seven Members of the Children in Care Youth Council introduced themselves and referred in turn to the power-point presentation, entitled 'Make A Difference' (MAD).

The presentation outlined details of the group activities from April 2019 to March 2020

Outcomes:

- The Board were impressed and appreciated the initiative and energy of the Children in Care Council, which grew during the Pandemic.
- Congratulations were echoed in relation to the Awards Ceremony, and Members commented positively on the arrangement skills of the Children in Care Council.
- Members were impressed with the work conducted in the garden at the Lighthouse Links site.
- There was the hope to meet the Children in Care Council in person in the future.
- The Bounceback Boxes were particularly well received with nearly 300 distributed to children in care to manage emotional wellbeing.
- The Head of Service/Virtual School and the Board closed the loop with feedback received from the Children in Care Council

Children's Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2019/2020

Members received the CPB Annual Report which was divided into 6 sections for ease of reading.

- Section One: Introduces the Corporate Parenting Board Members and describes the journey and commitment of the CPB to become a committee of the Council
- Section two, three and four describe the work of the CPB;

- Section two: April 2019 – July 2020 addresses the challenges and progress of the some of the services working with our children and young people in care; the Independent Reviewing Officer Service and Dudley Virtual School in particular.
 - Section three: August 2019 – November 2019 highlights the success of the Meet your Corporate Parent Event and the brilliant Children in care and Care Leavers Awards Evening organised and hosted by the children in Care Council (CiCC). In November 2019 the CiCC addressed the CPB with issues / problems that they wanted answered. The CPB received the health Report which included Health Needs Analysis of our children and young people in care.
 - Section Four: January 2020 – March 2020. Highlighted in the report is the much-welcomed council tax exemption for our care leavers and responses to the issues / problem raised by the CiCC
- Section five: Highlights the CiCC activities and achievements
 - Section 6: Sets out the priorities for CPB and its Work Planner for 2020-2021

Outcomes:

The primary change to the functioning of the CPB was agreed which is the formation of Working Groups in 2020 - 2021. The purpose of the Working groups are complete tasks or actions identified by the CPB.

The Working groups will be chaired by a Member of the Board and relevant Officers;

- Working Group for Care Experienced Young People - This group will focus on our care experienced young people aged 16 – 25 years old. It will address issues pertinent to care leavers and effect change to improve outcomes for this group. Areas of work will include: Further Education, Housing, Benefits Employability, Training, Skills and Apprenticeships.
- Working Group for Permanence - Permanence is a priority action for Dudley. This group will focus on the quality of the care our children and young people, the suitability of placements and the speed at which they receive permanency. It will oversee the Fostering Recruitment, transforming Residential Care, ensuring policy and procedure support early permanence, ensuring the right financial support to achieve early permanence and raising the profile of forever across the council.
- Working Group for Emotional Health and Wellbeing - Children in care and care experienced young people need every investment to overcome the adversity they experienced in early childhood. We need strong support to ensure our children have the right access to Health, Emotional Wellbeing, Education & Leisure, Entitlements and Support Services. It will monitor the outcomes and ambitions for our children in care as we would our own children
- Skills Working Group. - This Group will gather a register of interested tradesmen to teach our care leavers practical skills to allow them to achieve independence.

Care leavers will be upskilled to be able to maintain their homes to a safe and comfortable standard. It is a great opportunity to help a young person as you would your own child.

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

The Service Manager for Children's Social Care presented the report submitted that included updates on the continued developments within the three children's residential homes in Dudley, namely St James's Road, Tipton Road and Maitland Road.

Details of Dudley's children's residential homes including levels of occupation and what each home provided, Ofsted grading and recommendations as well as key successes for the homes over the last year.

It was stated that all homes were Covid-19 compliant with risk assessments carried out and there were contingency plans should staff shortages occur. Lots of activities are being offered to the children resident in the homes. All children have laptops and children have continued to have family time, with some being supported with virtual family time when there were symptoms in the homes.

Outcomes:

- Members acknowledged that the children in Dudley's three residential children's homes were receiving quality care.
- Members wish to reinstate visits to the homes. To maintain the homes as children's places of safety, their homes, and their privacy, it is suggested that members make a request and visits are only offered on invitation.

A Report on the proposals for four Apprenticeships for Care Leavers in the Children in Care and Placement Resources Service.

Members received a report on the proposed initiative within the Children in Care, Care Leavers and Resources Service to provide an opportunity for four care leavers to undertake a two-year apprenticeship.

The Corporate Parenting Co-ordinator advised that those entering the apprenticeships would spend six months in each service area, the children in care teams, care leavers team, fostering team and placement resources.

It was stated that for the Children in Care, Care Leavers and Resources Service, there was the potential for staff to learn and develop an understanding of being in care whilst working with care leavers.

It was noted that each apprentice would receive the minimum wage, with that being funded by the proposal, that each Directorate would contribute approximately £6,500 per annum.

Outcomes:

- Members fully endorsed and welcomed the initiative.

- Members suggested that the proposal be referred to the formal meeting of the Board in March 2021 with a recommendation to the Cabinet thereafter.

A Report Dudley Lighthouse Links

The Head of Children in Care and Placement Resources reported that the service had been established 18 months ago and was funded jointly by the Local Authority and the Dudley CCG. The provider service is the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

The Head of Children in Care and Placement Resources had conducted an internal review of the service and recommendations for a recovery plan. Interim arrangements are in place including building additional capacity for emergency intervention through family support.

A further review through Finance and Commissioned Services are in process to consider best practice models from across the country.

Outcomes:

- Children's Corporate Parenting Board provide independent challenge and scrutiny through the Emotional Health and Wellbeing working group and participation to the strategic Dudley Lighthouse Links project.
- That the Children's Corporate Parenting Board be recommended to support and endorse a further commissioning process to evaluate best practice across the country before a service delivery model is agreed.
- Head of Children in Care and Placement Resources was requested to provide a progress report with recommendations to the Children's Corporate Parenting Board by June 2021

Care Leavers Update Report

Members received a report that provided scope and detail in relation to Dudley's care leavers.

In relation to care leavers it was reported that Dudley had 129, 16 to 18 years and 231, 18 to 25 years, with a total of 360 care leavers.

It was stated that the Care Leavers Team consisted of 16 Young Person Advisor's, who had been hard hit by Covid-19, with one becoming extremely ill and hospitalised.

The Young Person Advisor provides advice, participates in the assessment and the preparation of the pathway plan, participates in reviews, liaises with the responsible authority in implementing the plan, co-ordinated provision of services to support the young person, remained informed about the relevant child or former relevant child's progress and well-being, and maintained a written record of contact with and of services provided by the relevant or former relevant child.

The Young Person Advisor's duties post 18 were outlined and it was stated that they would support as many young people as possible to enter higher education.

It was reported that most care leavers would not enter into higher education until later in life, however the Young Person Advisor would continue to work with them in order

that they could access the correct career path and they continue to have access to the Virtual school until they are 25.

The Young Person Advisor would help with obtaining accommodation and advise against unsafe choices.

In concluding, it was stated that a building had been secured in order that care leavers could access this facility three-days each week, and the possibility of having a Housing or Finance Officer in situ who could provide them with assistance, was being investigated.

Outcomes:

- The quality support for care leavers by Young Person Advisor is evidenced in the report.

Dudley Virtual School Report

The CPB received a report to advise and inform of the programme of extensive activities, systems and processes that are being developed to improve outcomes and enhance learning of children in care

“The head of virtual school has put good systems in place which ensure effective support to children. Staff have adapted well to the COVID-19 restrictions.” Ofsted November 2020

The Virtual School continue to support our Children in Care as they follow their educational pathway after the challenges of the lockdown that dominated the end of the last academic year.

The new year has seen the children return to their normal educational setting where provision has been revised to ensure that social distancing is achieved. This continues to be a challenge to a number of our young people, and indeed their settings.

The relationships that were established last year being of particular value at these testing times. Academic Outcomes “Although there was an improvement in attainment at the end of KS4 in 2019/20 academic year for children in care, there is a lack of a strategy to improve pupils’ outcomes.” Ofsted November 2020.

The challenge of not having assessment results from the previous academic year has not deflected the Virtual School from laying the foundations for further progress and improvements.

It was certainly an extraordinary ‘exam season’ where our young people experienced a great deal of anxiety around their results, particularly at Year 11. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic all Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) Key Stage One, and Key Stage Two Primary aged children, exams for Key Stage 4 and Post 16 were cancelled in March and the grades initially were based on Ofqual data submissions by schools.

The Department for Education (DfE) announced, on the 17th August 2020, to revert back to Teacher Assessment grades submitted to the DfE. Nexus data is not available at the time of this report, and it is unlikely to be so this academic year.

As a result, there is no data available for Early Years, Key Stage One, Year One or Key Stage Two. The unvalidated outcomes for Year 11 were 23% of young people securing Grade 4+ in English and Maths. This represents an improvement on the outcomes from the academic year 2018/19 where the young people with English/Maths combined at 5+ was 6.1% (7.9% in 2017/18). There were 12% of the cohort who achieved Grade 5+ in English and Maths.

The work around improving Numeracy piloted in the last academic year has been further developed this year to ensure that there is an evolving strategic focus that targets:

- Developing the educational workforce
- Targeted work with Children in Care
- Supporting Carers understanding of applying numeracy

The Virtual School has engaged the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) to work in partnership with Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council integrating targeted work on Primary Maths, focussing on school improvement, and developing the workforce. This will complement The Basics of Success tuition programme which was introduced by Dudley Virtual School (DVS) last academic year.

Furthermore, Education Endowment Fund will also be looking at developing a co-ordinated regional approach with a focus on improving Key Stage Two Numeracy outcomes for Children in Care.

Outcomes:

- The Board praised the extensive support that the DVS is providing to children in care and their carers
- The Board noted the improvements made in the service since the previous OFSTED visit

A Report on Unregulated Provision in Dudley

Members considered the report unregulated provision in Dudley. The report also provided some national context as well as information at a local level, highlighting measures taken to raise standards for young people in Dudley.

The Service Manager Children's Social Care, reported that on the 19th February 2021 the Department for Education banned all those under the age of 16 going into unregulated provision, and assurances were provided that Dudley would not place any child under the age of 16 in unregulated provision.

In relation to the National picture, it had been evidenced that the number of children entering the care system was increasing year on year, and according to the Fostering Network in May 2019, there were at least 6,800 fostering placements needed to meet local authority needs.

Unregulated supported accommodation provision often made up for the shortfall in placements, and a recent BBC report highlighted that 5,000 children in care in England were living in accommodation that was unregulated, and that figure was increasing.

It was noted that Dudley currently had 638 looked after children and the percentage of young people accommodated in semi-supported accommodation was 2.82%.

There were currently 12 independent providers operating in the Borough in addition to the YMCA, CHADD and Registered Social Landlords.

Further assurances were provided that checks were carried out with all local providers.

Outcomes:

- Children's Corporate Parenting Board were assured that Children's Services were making progress with the area of unregulated placements and supported accommodation to support our most vulnerable children and young people

Other Items Considered by the Children's Corporate Parenting Board in the 2020/21 Municipal Year

- Children in Care and Care Leavers Performance Report
- Regional Adoption Agency Report

Items to be Considered by the Children's Corporate Parenting Board

Items for inclusion in the Annual Childrens Corporate Parenting Board Programme for 2021/2022 are listed below:

Items suggested for inclusion in the work programme for 2021/22: -

- Children in Care Council Annual report 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.
- Verbal Updates Reports from the Corporate Parenting Board Working Groups
- Children's Services Complaints, Comments and Compliments Annual Report 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.
- Dudley's Virtual School Annual Report 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.
- Report on care leavers Not in Education Employment or Training
- Fostering and Permanency Service Annual Report 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021
- Report from regional adoption agency Adoption at Heart
- Review Report of Dudley Lighthouse Link Service
- Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group (DCCG) Annual Children in Care Report 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021.
- Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021
- 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 leavers Update Report