

Corporate Parenting Board
Wednesday, 27 November 2019, Wyre Forest House,
Kidderminster - 2.00 pm

Minutes

Present:

Mr A C Roberts (Chairman), Cllr Christopher Day, Cllr Helen Dyke, Mrs L C Hodgson, Dr C Hotham, Mrs F M Oborski, Mrs J A Potter and Cllr Margaret Sherrey

Also attended:

Derek Allen, Bromsgrove and Redditch District Council
Kate Bailey, Wyre Forest District Housing
Alison Brill, Worcestershire Children First
Rhys Davies, Worcestershire Children First
Catherine Driscoll, Worcestershire County Council
Ellen Footman, Designated Safeguarding Nurse,
Stephen Gabriel, Wychavon District Council
Adam Johnston, Worcestershire Children First
Emma Jordan, Worcester City Council
Kerry Nicholl, Worcestershire Children First
Celena Rossano, Worcestershire Children First
Selina Rawicz, Worcestershire Children First

203 Apologies

Rob Adams, Julian Grubb, Pattie Hill, Mike Johnson and Tina Russell gave their apologies.

Christopher Day attended for Rob Adams.

204 Confirmation of the Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2019 were agreed to be a correct record and were signed by the Chairman.

205 Review of Previous Action Points

Following the discussion held at the last meeting about mental well-being in children and young people, Fran Oborski informed the Board that there would be a joint meeting of the Children's and Families Scrutiny Panel and Health Overview and Scrutiny Panel in the New Year to look at the issue. The meeting would be held as a select committee with Councillors being able to ask questions of relevant officers. There was a concern services were not available out of hours, and although there may be services available to help young people with serious issues there did not seem to be services available to support children at an earlier stage and prevent them from needing Level 4 services.

**206 Accommodation
for Care
Leavers**

Board Members and invited Housing Officers from the District Councils gave a situation report about how things stood with housing for care leavers within each District.

Fran Oborski explained that since 2000, Wyre Forest had not had its own stock of housing and Wyre Forest Community Housing was their main supplier. Wyre Forest had a high number of foster parents, but some of schools had a problem in that they had become known for having a good reputation for supporting looked after children and had ended up with more than their share. It was hoped that social workers would be aiming to place children in their catchment school first so the children could make friends locally rather than making placements in a school they had previously used. Attachment training had been provided by the virtual school team. Wyre Forest did have access to some emergency housing for care leavers and also help from Wyre Forest Nightstop and Mediation.

Kate Bailey explained that as a District Council Wyre Forest had a duty to house young people of 18-21 if they were in need of housing. Sometimes it had been necessary to use bed and breakfast accommodation in an emergency if there was no time to organise other accommodation or if, for various reasons, the case was complex and the normal range of accommodation was not suitable. The District Council worked with the County Council to commission accommodation. She felt that the Councillors in the area were interested in the issue and were accessible and supportive.

In Worcester city Emma Jordan explained that although bed and breakfast was a last resort it was used on occasion if the young person had complex needs and no other options. Two crash pads were available and the City Council was working on providing new accommodation. They were also in the process of organising a training flat, however, it was recognised that there was demand for many more flats where young people could be supported and prepared for independent living. Providers wanted to know that young people had support before they provided accommodation.

In Wychavon Stephen Gabriel confirmed that the Cabinet Member was supportive but they had seen an increase in rough sleepers with a number of them being previously looked after children. Officers as well as Councillors should be supporting these young people as they all had a Corporate Parenting role.

Catherine Driscoll explained that under the Homelessness Reduction Act responsibility for housing care leavers sat with the District Council as Local Housing Authorities, but the County Council recognised that it was a difficult job to fulfil those duties and was trying to work with the Districts. Work was on-going on a protocol but not enough progress had been achieved so far. 17 young people using bed and breakfast was not a huge number and facilities such as crash pads were helpful but it was recognised that more strategic action was needed. Ofsted had criticised the situation where senior managers of the Council could not confirm that they did not have young people in unsuitable accommodation.

Derek Allen commented that although Bromsgrove and Redditch did have their own stock of housing and they were able to reserve some places in their own stock of houses for emergencies they still had problems and they had similar challenges as seen in other authorities across the West Midlands. Redditch were trying to be innovative but suffered from a lack of resources. He felt there would be value in joint assessments for young people and that there would be value to seconding someone with a housing background to the County Council.

In the following discussion various comments were made:

- A Committee Member asked a range of questions. Although it had been reported that 17 young people made use of bed and breakfast accommodation in the past year how many nights did that equate to. What cost of accommodation could a care leaver afford? Could the District or County Councils lease houses for care leavers? In response it was stated that the number of nights varied for the 17 people but the answers to the questions would be supplied more fully after the meeting.
- It was felt that bed and breakfast could be avoided through creative commissioning and that was easier with unitary authorities.
- It was questioned whether the issue was not with the availability of housing but rather that young people did not have enough support or preparation to live independently. Young people need the anchor of corporate parents and support in their earlier years in order to prepare them for independence. It was queried whether along with budgeting support and wraparound care, care workers could be copied into finance letters to

ensure the correct actions were being taken.

- It was pointed out that most looked after children did receive sufficient support and had outreach and residential workers. There were success stories but more still needed to be done for those who had complex needs and challenging behaviours. It was not enough just to keep people out of bed and breakfast – the accommodation needed to be suitable. Lateral thinking was needed to help those people, for example two young people were being kept in local accommodation for longer than normal to prevent them from becoming rough sleepers.
- When asked if lessons could be learnt from the successful Syrian refugee placement programme it was pointed out that the level of resources was different as the Syrian Refugee programme had attracted a level of National Government Funding. Ways of attracting more money to help provide accommodation for care leavers had been considered, such as retention of business rates and funding from the Department of Education but the problem was not an easy one to solve.
- It was clarified that the term ‘unaddressed substance misuse’ referred to when people were using drugs but were not part of a formal programme but support would still have been offered – for example trying to get them to engage with GPs and outreach workers. Often taking drugs would be one factor in a chaotic lifestyle.
- One Board Member felt there were two issues being highlighted; firstly the availability of suitable housing and secondly being able to get the young person to the point where they can manage to live independently. It appeared that providing the accommodation should not be a difficult problem to solve but enabling the young person to become independent was recognised as a complex issue. It was felt that there must be best practice that could be learnt from. It was queried whether the problem could be quantified by stating how much money and how many staff were needed to solve the problem.
- It was suggested that an aspect of the Syrian refugee programme that could be copied was the creation of a dedicated team to work on the issue. People from the Corporate Parenting side, those working with looked after children and housing specialists from around the county could be brought together. A task and finish group was suggested with the correct people who had buy in

from Senior Officers and Politicians. The Group would then feed back to the Board.

- A programme that could be supported and could help with this problem was the Housing First Project; The Government had said that housing was a right not a privilege so the project started by providing housing and then offering wraparound care to allow people who had previously been rough sleepers time to adjust to housing and become independent.
- It was pointed out that sometimes young people's lifestyles were different to those around them so thought should be given to where the accommodation was placed so that neighbours would not immediately label the young person as different, difficult or anti-social. How care leavers were perceived by communities was a large part of the problem and the expectations of social landlords needed to be changed. It was noted that feelings against children in care or looked after children had become worse in the last couple of years. Everyone needed to be careful of their language and enforce the belief that the problem was not the young person themselves, but rather their situation and the issue was how to help the young person with their complex needs. The most positive way to help was to change expectations.
- It was mentioned that giving Council Tax relief to care leavers had been agreed as a good idea by the Board but implementation of the policy had not been consistent across the County with some Districts applying different criteria. Officers were working on trying to get a consistent application by all Councils.

ACTION: it was agreed that a task and group should be set up to look at how to ensure care leavers had suitable accommodation. The group should be made of representatives from the District Councils and the County Council who had the necessary support from their senior managers. The group would report back to the Corporate Parenting Board.

NOTE: Following the meeting it was agreed that Adam Johnston would organise the task group.

208 Work Plan

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board were invited.

A Member of the Board asked if a Virtual College, to support young people aged 16 and above, could be considered at a future meeting. It was agreed that it would be discussed at the Virtual School Governing Body.

The work plan for 2020 was noted.

209 Future Meeting Dates

The future meeting dates were noted.

The meeting ended at 3.25 pm

Chairman