

Corporate Parenting Board

Thursday, 9 July 2020, Virtually via Zoom - 2.00 pm

Minutes

Present:

Mr A C Roberts (Chairman), Mr R C Adams, Ms H Dyke, Mrs L C Hodgson, Dr C Hotham, Nyear Nazir, Mrs F M Oborski, Mrs J A Potter, Cllr Margaret Sherrey and Mr T A L Wells

Also attended:

Beverley Downing, Morag Edmondson, Dan Gray, Helen Hey, Linda Joyce, Dr David Lewis, Collette Maynard, Jeremy Newell, Selina Rawicz (Group), Tina Russell and Elaine Salter

226 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mike Johnson, Catherine Driscoll, Kate Bailey, Heather Manning and Jane Stanley.

Elaine Salter attended for Kate Bailey. Jez Newell attended for Heather Manning and Morag Edmondson attended for Jane Stanley.

The Chairman welcomed Nyear Nazir from Reddich Borough Council who had replaced Julian Grubb on the Board.

227 Confirmation of the Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

228 Covid-19 Data Reporting and Analysis

Tina Russell provided an overview of the key performance indicators (KPI's) relating to children in care and care leavers for the period of COVID lockdown. The data was split into two phases, Phase 1 covering 4 April to 31 May and Phase 2 from 1 to 21 June 2020.

In Phase 1 the key focus had been visits to children who were identified as priority from the risk assessment process. She advised that visits to looked after children and care leavers had reduced during this period as many of these young people were in safe, stable placements with professional carers. Statutory visits had dropped to 40% by the end of May, but this still meant that 345 visits had taken place. Looked after reviews had been continued during this period as well as the usual keeping in touch contacts.

In Phase 2 there had been a shift to more direct work with children, as circumstances allowed. In early June

demand for services had been similar to Phase 1, however in the last week of June and then continuing into July, there had been a major increase in demand for services through the Family Front Door (FFD). Some of these contacts had been made by professional partners who had turned to the FFD, not knowing what else was available. With the nature of the increased workflow, the impact on the numbers of the care population was not yet being seen, but by the next meeting Tina would be able to provide a detailed analysis of the movement.

Throughout COVID Tina advised they had continued to report figures for the KPI's to the Department for Education (DfE) and in late June they had received comparative data from the Department providing a regional and national picture. This data had shown that Worcestershire's KPI's compared very favourably for the 3 indicators, with the figures being well above the average for each one.

The Chairman queried whether the increased demand through the FFD was linked to the increase in domestic abuse during the COVID lockdown. Tina reported that they hadn't seen a significant increase in domestic abuse cases, but they had witnessed a rise in other concerns such as emotional and health and well-being issues. With additional pressures including anxiety and loss of income, there was a strain on family relationships which contributed to the increase in demand on child protection services. She explained that many of those families would be helped through this short-term crisis, but it was also expected that there would be a resultant increase in children coming into care later in the year.

A Board member raised concerns about the impact on staff from a huge spike in demand. Tina advised that the service was not process driven but instead designed to be focused firmly on the interests of the child. She explained that they were working to ensure that the children most in need of services were the ones being helped. They had identified children who needed to be stepped down from protection planning as they no longer met the threshold. This had been halted during lockdown but had now been restarted with communication being made with families and partner organisations. The result of this action would free up resources to concentrate on the children identified as in most need with the intended outcome being manageable case load for staff.

A Board member highlighted that some of the young people appeared to have connected more readily using

**229 Independent
Reviewing
Officer Annual
Report**

the technologies introduced during lockdown. Tina explained that the use of zoom had proved to be a very effective means of connecting with families during this time and would continue to be made use of going forward. She stressed, however, that there was still very much the need for face to face interventions and support, particularly at key stages in the process such as early help. Tina referred to the work of the Edge of Care Project which had been working with 54 children during the lockdown period, safely preventing all but one, from having to be taken into care.

The Board thanked Tina and her Team for their tremendous efforts during lockdown and for the very positive set of comparative KPI's.

Linda Joyce gave a presentation on the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO's) Annual Report for 2019-20. The IRO has a statutory responsibility to ensure that the local authority gives due consideration to any views expressed by a looked after child and to monitor the local authority's performance of its functions in relation to each child's case.

Linda led the meeting through the main elements of the report drawing attention to key points including:

- The IRO had continued to provide a high-quality service during lockdown with an improving trend in the timeliness of looked after review meetings being held, that being 99% for March 2020.
- The importance of children not only attending but actively participating in their review meetings to ensure their views were captured. Various technologies had been made use of recently during lockdown to assist this process. Some meetings had also taken place in gardens, with appropriate safeguards, where it was felt appropriate.
- The average attendance at review meetings was 6% lower than the previous year. Linda reported that most children attended, and some liked to lead with meeting, whilst other children just refused to attend. She advised that it was always explained to them that the meeting would still take place and that the minutes would be shared with them later. Work was ongoing to seek to identify ways in which greater participation could be encouraged.
- Quarterly targeted audits were carried out to review the work of the IRO, with 199 mid-way

audits being completed during the year. These were an important check to ensure that Care plans were being enacted and actions being completed. Feedback from families was very positive and this was shared with all relevant professionals. A targeted feedback exercise was also carried out with young people, to which 30 returns were received.

- The importance of the dispute resolution process if an IRO has a quality assurance issue was highlighted. Linda advised that there had been an overall decrease in DRP's being issued during the year and more use of the informal DRP, which sought to resolve matters at an early stage. A key focus for the coming year was to ensure DRP responses were completed consistently within the required timescales.
- Good feedback from Ofsted had been received, with positive comments including the chairing of the review meetings and the way in which records of meetings were child friendly helping them to understand decisions that affected their lives. The Team were continually reflecting on how to make further improvements.
- 7 next steps were listed for the IRO service which would be the focus going forward.

A Board Member praised a very positive report but also highlighted a concern that the feedback from children had shown that 20% of them did not feel that what had been agreed at their last review meeting was actually done. Linda confirmed that this was a concern which they were following up and seeking to ensure that follow up systems were tightened. Another Board member highlighted that it would be helpful to gain a wider sample of feedback to establish a clearer view. Linda confirmed that they were working on ways to improve the return of feedback forms. The Chairman asked that feedback on the progress of this matter be provided to the Board in due course.

Tina Russell offered some further insight, in that some recommendations inevitably took longer to implement than others with a legitimate reason for this. The timescales for action needed to be understood. In terms of attendance she also highlighted that when children were happy and stable, they didn't necessarily want to attend a review meeting, but it was still important that their views were captured.

The Chairman thanked the IRO for a thorough report.

230 Protocol to Reduce the Criminalisation of Vulnerable Children and Young People

The Board received a Protocol 'to reduce the criminalisation of vulnerable children and young people and in particular those in care or who have experienced care' from Selina Rawicz, the Group Manager of Through Services. Selina advised that this was a West Mercia joint multi agency protocol with a partnership commitment from a wide range of local agencies in the West Mercia area including local authority Children's services, the Police and Care Services.

Selina responded to a few questions from Board members regarding the support for a child in care when charged with an offence and the network of support available for care leavers up to the age of 25. She confirmed that the care leaver would continue to be supported by the Team, as appropriate, even if they lived elsewhere in the country. Tina added that the ways of working set out in the protocol was how agencies were currently operating, but it was a useful reminder of the importance of working together and raised the profile of the issue.

231 Quarterly Data Report

The quarterly data report was received by the Board.

In response to a query regarding Personal Education Plans (PEP's), Tina advised that they were changing the way in which data was reported with the new liquid logic system and reducing the number of stages involved. With the support of the Virtual Head, the process would be streamlined, and they would now obtain data at source from the Virtual Head's team and directly add in the relevant up to date termly data. Colette Maynard, the Virtual Head assured the Board on the arrangements in place to ensure that every looked after child received the appropriate Plan meetings and welfare support that they needed. The PEP reviews had been held virtually this term, but usually the sessions took place via two telephone calls and one face to face session each year.

In response to an observation from a Board member on the total numbers of LAC's compared to neighbouring authorities, Tina advised that it was a difficult number to compare because our neighbouring local authorities had had a lower starting point. She did, however, highlight that for 2018-19, out of 14 West Midlands local authorities, Worcestershire had the lowest number of children taken into care and for 2019-20 the second lowest number. She explained that this demonstrated that the work to prevent children entering care and also moving those out of care when appropriate, was proving

		successful.
		A comment was made about the difficulty of deciphering the information with shades of grey. It would be ensured that a colour version, in electronic form would be provided in future.
		The report was noted.
232	Work Plan	The current Work Plan was noted.
233	Future Meeting Dates	<p>The forthcoming meeting dates were noted.</p> <p>A Board Member queried whether some young people might be encouraged to attend Board meetings in the future. The Early Help Partnerships Manager advised that Charlie Dickens had been consulting with young people and they were not keen to attend Board meetings. He would be looking at innovative ways in which the young people might be able to be involved in the meeting in a different way.</p>

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm

Chairman