

**Corporate Parenting Board****Thursday, 8 October 2020, Online only - 2.00 pm****Minutes****Present:**

Mr A C Roberts (Chairman), Mr R C Adams, Ms H Dyke, Dr C Hotham, Mr M Johnson, Ms N Nazir, Mrs F M Oborski, Mrs J A Potter and Mr T A L Wells

**Also attended:**

Justine Bishop, Sally Branchflower, Charlie Dickens, Beverley Downing, Dr Catherine Driscoll, Sarah-Jayne Foster, Adam Johnston, Dr David Lewis, Peter Little, Heather Manning, Collette Maynard, Tina Russell, Richard Taylor, Shannon and Thomas

**234 Apologies**

Apologies had been received from Lucy Hodgson and Selina Rawicz.

**235 Confirmation of the Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July were agreed as a correct record.

**236 Review of Previous Action Points**

It was agreed that, due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on service delivery, previous action points would be suspended.

**237 Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Council**

The Board received a presentation on the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Council from the Participation and Engagement Manager. She also showed a brief video that had been created by a young person to highlight the participation offer for children and young people in care in Worcestershire and the benefits that young people could gain from getting involved.

Every local authority was required by law to organise a Children in Care Council. This was a forum for children and young people who were looked after to share their views with the decision makers. There were three groups currently running:

- Big Voices gave children from birth to the age of about 11 the chance to meet other looked after children in a relaxed environment and provided an opportunity for Worcestershire Children First (WCF) to consult with the children on a range of issues to shape services. For example, responses from children had been used when developing questions to ask in the recruitment of

foster carers.

- Who Cares, We Care was the name for Worcestershire's Children in Care Council and was open to children from the age of 12.
- Speak Out was the group for care leavers from age 17 to 25. The age range for each group was not set but involvement would be led by the needs of the young people. These two groups met separately on a monthly basis.

COVID-19 had had a huge impact and engagement had been more sporadic and needed to be approached in a more flexible way. Although the formal groups had been paused, officers were still keeping in touch with individuals.

Examples of Who Cares, We Care's recent activity were given. The Board was told about the benefits to young people of involvement in the participation groups including improving their confidence and self-esteem, and developing life skills. A number of events had been planned for this year but had had to be postponed due to the COVID pandemic, including an early years celebration and a looked after children's fun day.

Children in care were also members of the Young People's Panel which had been a great success and had supported the recruitment of a number of prospective candidates (including the Participation and Engagement Manager herself). The young people had received training which led to a recognised qualification and were professional and passionate about choosing the right candidate. The team had since been inundated with requests for young people to be involved in other recruitment exercises.

It was recognised that a formal forum was not right for all young people and other opportunities were available. It was important that all children in care were aware of the range of opportunities open to them. Future plans included increasing the number of members and the diversity of the young people involved, developing participation webpages and building closer links with Corporate Parenting Board Councillors.

Members were reminded that 26 October to 1 November was Care Leavers week and this year's theme was 'Careers'. Although there would be no corporate parenting fair in October, there were plans for a virtual event in the future.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and the following main points were raised:

- It was confirmed that Speak Out currently had 11 members, and nine young people were trained to sit on interview panels. Who Cares, We Care currently had three members and there was a clear need to recruit more.
- In response to a question about the involvement of Worcestershire children who were currently living out of county, Members were informed that lockdown and the subsequent increase in the use of virtual meetings had made attendance much easier for children living outside of Worcestershire as everyone was joining on line.
- The Director of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding confirmed that participation groups were promoted to children when they were received into care. However, she noted that the point of entry may not be the best time for this and it may be more appropriate to ask Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) to introduce the groups as part of quality assurance and feedback at mid-way reviews.
- A programme of webinar events was being planned to reach out to all young people in care and highlight the opportunities to engage with the work of the Corporate Parenting Board outside of formal Board meetings. It would be helpful to have wider Board Member participation in this.
- It was confirmed that virtual open sessions were being held for young people to log on and find out more about participation activities. A social media campaign had also been run over the summer.
- In response to a Member question about the geographical spread of those involved, it was confirmed that currently the majority were based in Worcester but the aim of future recruitment would be to expand this.
- In relation to the impact of lockdown on the mental health of young people, the Board was reminded that social workers had continued to be in touch with all young people in care and there had been a particular focus on care leavers, especially those in semi-independent supported living. Some young people had struggled but, on the whole, the majority had coped. It was noted that young people were used to communicating virtually.
- The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families confirmed that an ongoing

## 238 Return to School

focus on hard to reach groups was at the heart of the work.

- The Chief Executive of WCF reported that a survey of children, young people and families focusing on mental and emotional well-being was being undertaken in conjunction with the Worcestershire Health and Care Trust. This would cover all children, not just those in care, and feedback would be shared with the Board.

The Board received a presentation from the Headteacher of the Virtual School on the return to school in September for children who are looked after.

The following main points were noted:

- Attendance for all pupils in care since the start of the academic year was 92.2% which was above the national and Worcestershire rates for all children.
- Attendance figures were very positive and something to be celebrated.
- 77.4% of pupils had 100% attendance. The focus would now be on those who had less than 90% attendance. Out of a full cohort of 473 pupils, only 9 children had not attended school at all.
- As of 28 September, 94% of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan had returned to school.
- An increasing number of children and young people had returned to school over the first five weeks of term.
- 15 young people had received a fixed term exclusion since the beginning of term which was no higher than usual for the start of the autumn term.
- The virtual school was undertaking a range of targeted and universal interventions to further improve school attendance levels. These included working with Education Welfare Officers, supporting and advising schools through the termly Personal Education Plan process and working collaboratively with social care and school colleagues.
- Members were reminded that Pupil Premium could be used to support emotional wellbeing as well as academic needs. It was confirmed that all looked after children were supported whether they were placed in county or elsewhere.

Members were given an opportunity to ask questions and

the following main points were raised:

- In response to a question about how children living out of county were supported, Members were informed that caseworkers would visit schools in the usual way. The aim was for there to be no distinction between in county and out of county schools, although it was acknowledged that different local authorities would have different policies and there may not be the same relationship with the exclusion and attendance officers.
- As a caveat to the figures in the presentation, Members were informed that 20% of schools had not yet made attendance returns to the DfE (covering looked after and non-looked after children). Figures for looked after children covered 97% of the cohort and were collected through Welfare Call.
- It was confirmed that attainment and progress was tracked for both in county and out of county children and some differences could be seen, although it was acknowledged that it was often the most complex cases that saw children placed out of county.

The Chairman thanked the Virtual Headteacher for attending the meeting.

**239**      **Child  
Safeguarding  
Practice  
Reviews**

In order to accommodate officer availability, the Chairman amended the order of the remaining agenda items.

The Director of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding reminded the Board that there were two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) currently in progress. Both were likely to be completed in 2021. The Board would receive a more detailed presentation when the reviews were completed including a discussion of the learning points.

**240**      **Children with  
Disabilities and  
SEND**

The Director of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding reminded Members that it had been part of Children's Services' vision for some time to improve services for children with disabilities and SEND. Although services had not yet moved to the ultimate vision, work had been ongoing as part of the wider service improvement agenda and the action plan following the SEND inspection.

Moving towards further service improvement would involve a complex programme of work taking 18 months

		<p>to two years to complete and divided into four phases. The ultimate vision would be to have a 0-25 service of quality taking children with Special Educational Need and Disabilities from early in their lives through to young adults. The work would include all stakeholders including children, parents, carers, children's social care, the CCG (as commissioners and providers of services), specialist education providers and adult social care.</p> <p>Officers were in the process of creating a document which would present the vision to stakeholders. A further report would be brought to the Corporate Parenting Board in the future. When discussing this report, it would be important for the Board to maintain its focus on children in care. Members were informed that there were currently 35 children with disabilities who were in the care of the local authority.</p>
<b>241</b>	<b>Quarterly Data Report</b>	<p>The Director of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding informed Members that, on the whole, the data in the quarterly data report had not been significantly impacted by COVID-19.</p> <p>Throughout lockdown, social workers had kept in touch with looked after children by virtual contact and this had worked well. As soon as workers were able to return to physical contact they had done so. However, this had not been the case for all as, for some children, young people and parents, the virtual method of contact had been a better experience. For some young people it was an emotional challenge to see their parents and seeing them virtually had made this easier. Families would now be offered a mix of virtual and face-to-face contacts and feedback would be taken from each family. This would be reviewed going forward.</p>
<b>242</b>	<b>Developments to the Care Leavers and Outreach Service</b>	<p>Members received a presentation from the Group Manager, Placements and Sufficiency, who informed the Board that she had now also taken on responsibility for the Care Leavers Service. This was a positive development with the aim of getting the best outcomes for Worcestershire's care leavers.</p> <p>The Care Leavers Service would link up with the Outreach Service which provided support to looked after children aged 16 plus, who were living in supported and semi-supported living. Merging the two services would improve outcomes for young people and would mean they would have one consistent worker at an early stage (a Personal Adviser) to support their transition to adulthood. The intention was to ensure that staff were as</p>

		<p>skilled as possible, including providing training to deliver ASDAN qualifications. There would be a whole service approach to support care leavers from age 16 up until 24 or 25. Although there would be a combined service, each branch would retain its specialty, with the roles of Outreach Workers and Personal Advisers remaining separate.</p> <p>Members were reassured that, in bringing the two teams together, the service for young people would not be disrupted. The combined service would have the oversight of one Group Manager but would retain the specialist knowledge of the individual teams.</p> <p>The Director of Children's Social Care and Safeguarding informed the Board that feedback from young people had expressed concern about duplication in the system with individuals having overlapping conversations with different support workers. This change would allow young people to develop a relationship with one worker and would enable the service to ensure best use of resources. Staff in both services were very positive about the changes.</p>
<b>243</b>	<b>Work Plan</b>	No amendments were made.
<b>244</b>	<b>Apprenticeships</b>	<p>The Board received an update on apprenticeships and traineeships with particular reference to children who were looked after by the local authority.</p> <p>The Assistant Director of HR, OD and Engagement asked Members to focus on three areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the organisations they represented could support the strategy;</li> <li>• How the work could more closely focus on care leavers; and</li> <li>• How more care leavers could be directly attracted on to apprenticeships and traineeships.</li> </ul> <p>The new apprenticeships strategy had been agreed in February 2020 and covered both apprenticeships and traineeships.</p> <p>With reference to traineeships, the team was working closely with the 16-19 NEET Prevention Team. Traineeships were part of an education and training programme which offered skills development and work experience to young people who wanted to find a job but may not have the necessary skills and experience. The aim was for young people to move from a traineeship on</p>

to an apprenticeship or into employment. It was important for the two schemes to work together. A traineeship was not intended for the most disengaged young people or for those who were already in employment.

The apprenticeship scheme was a structured programme which had already seen real successes, providing a qualifications platform at all levels of the organisation, right up to level 8 (an MBA or other leadership and executive qualification). An apprenticeship would involve learning on the job, with the apprenticeship levy covering training costs but not the individual's salary. For an organisation, an apprenticeship could be an important succession planning tool.

The scheme had a real focus on care leavers including:

- The development with the Commercial Team of a Social Value policy to encourage businesses in the Council's supply chain to take on care leavers as apprentices or trainees.
- The creation of an internal taskforce with the sole focus of supporting care leavers into work or skills programmes.
- Ensuring the Levy Transfer policy required businesses to create opportunities for disadvantaged groups including care leavers.

It was important to recognise some of the challenges the scheme faced. These included:

- Many care leavers' areas of interest were not offered by the County Council.
- The number of opportunities for care leavers to be supported through an apprenticeship or traineeship was low, although this was starting to change.
- Current working conditions (ie working from home) were not always conducive to supporting traineeships.

In terms of future action, the new apprenticeship strategy provided a clear focus on care leavers and provided the basis for managers to provide more individual support for young people leaving care. Every vacancy in WCC and WCF would be shared with the Care Leavers Team to establish whether any were of interest to care leavers. Any care leavers who wanted to apply would be supported through the recruitment process.



The Head of Learning and Development informed Members that, with reference to the prioritisation of care leavers, the County Council was following the Department for Education Model which allowed for an exception to the standard recruitment process. This recognised that it was not helpful to subject care leavers to the same rigorous recruitment and selection processes. The Recruitment Team had a dispensation from the DfE which meant that any care leavers interested in a position would be guaranteed an interview (provided they met the minimum requirements) and offered one to one support.

A Member suggested that it would be important to liaise with district councils as they were also significant employers and had significant supply chains, including in the leisure sector. The Assistant Director agreed to take forward the suggestion that the Chief Executive of the County Council could discuss this further with the Chief Executives of the District Councils. This could also be discussed via the Local Enterprise Partnership. The Chairman agreed that there was a much broader base if the organisations worked together.

A Member expressed support for the scheme and suggested, in relation to corporate parenting, it showed progress being made in treating children who were looked after with the same care that individuals would treat their own children. It was suggested that contracts with major suppliers should include a requirement to take on apprentices, in particular those who were leaving care. Members were informed that this was already part of the conversation with suppliers via the Commercial Team.

Further support for the apprenticeship strategy was expressed by Members of the Board and the proposal to extend available opportunities outside of the council into the wider business world was welcomed.

At the suggestion of the Director of Children's Services, it was agreed that details of the team's contacts in district councils would be circulated to District Councillors on the Board to allow them to further support the combined corporate parenting responsibility. The Director went on to suggest that it would be helpful to have tangible targets for each organisation in relation to offering apprenticeships and traineeships to care leavers with organisations holding each other to account and challenging each other to take forward the practical work.

**245 Future Meeting Dates**

It was confirmed that under new rules recently introduced following the Government's COVID-19 recovery plan, employers or training organisations could claim up to £1000 to help with an apprentices' costs such as travel or uniforms.

Noted.

The meeting ended at 4.10 pm

Chairman .....