

Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board

County Hall, Worcester

Tuesday, 31 January 2023, 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Andy Roberts (Chairman), Cllr Matt Jenkins, Cllr Matthew Lamb, Cllr Steve Mackay, Cllr Nyear Nazir, Cllr Fran Oborski and Cllr Margaret Sherrey

Also attended:

Thomas Bourne, Charlie English-Peach, Alice Gillett, Kate Griffiths, Rebecca Haywood-Tibbetts, Adam Johnston, Dr David Lewis, James MacDonald, Laura Marshall, Celena Rossano, Tina Russell and Matthew Stiles

314 Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Lynn Denham, Cllr Rob Adams, Bev Downing and Debbie Stokes.

315 Confirmation of the Minutes

The minutes of the last meeting of 29 November 2022 were accepted to be a correct record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.

A Member of the Board felt that with any illegal placements (minute 309), it was important to state that any placement which was used to place a child, was checked by a social worker.

316 Virtual School Annual Report

Matthew Stiles, the Virtual School Head Teacher, summarised the Worcestershire Virtual School Annual Report 2021-22. Having a Virtual School Head Teacher was a statutory duty and they supported the increasing number of children who are looked (CLA) and previously looked after, for up to six years after they were looked after. It was important to promote the needs of this cohort in order to work towards closing the achievement gap with other young people.

Personal Education Plans were produced, looking at wellbeing as well as academic progress, with targets being produced so that outcomes could be

measured. Most children and young people (CYP) in the cohort attended schools with a good or outstanding rating, and there was a robust protocol in place to assess any 'settings of concern' to assess whether it would be best to move a child or not.

Good progress had been made in academic achievement, but attendance levels were not as good as with the general population of children; although figures for Autumn 2022 were better than for Autumn 2021.

A spike in the numbers of exclusions and suspensions was causing some concern and the Virtual School was working with schools to get exclusions rescinded if possible.

How schools were using the pupil premium plus grant was assessed and Worcestershire was taking part in the pilot for the 16+ pupil premium plus grant and were finding that it was making a difference. It was hoped that by showing that it was important that the funding would remain.

Matthew responded to various questions from Board members:

- The numbers of CLA who were electively home educated were kept to a minimum.
- With regard to CLA gaining places in schools, Learning Advocates worked with the Admissions Team to try to find the best placement for a child, although CLA already had a high priority on the oversubscription criteria. If a suitable school with places could not be identified within a reasonable distance of where the child was living, the Local Authority had the power to direct an oversubscribed maintained school to take a CLA.
- When it was queried if those children being refused admission to schools were more likely to be neurodiverse, it was explained that schools were being trained to become Trauma and Attachment Aware Schools and were rated dependent on whether they were Thrive trained.
- It was agreed that it was difficult for schools to rescind exclusions in some instances, but work was being done 'upstream' with prevention work with schools and individual children to reduce the likelihood of exclusions being necessary.

In the current year the Virtual School Team had been working hard on more efficient ways of working, working on pastoral care with Trauma Aware Schools and raising educational attainment of CLA in schools.

317 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Update

Alice Gillett, Through Care Group Manager, updated the Board on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). There were currently 82 UASC in Worcestershire, compared to 29 a year ago. Some arrived spontaneously, some from the National Transfer Scheme and some were placed in hotels and then presented as being under 18. The Transfer scheme became mandatory in February 2022 after some areas such as Kent became

overwhelmed. Of the under 18 population in Worcestershire 0.065% were UASC. If the figure rises to 0.1% of the population Worcestershire would not have to take more under the transfer scheme.

Any UASC under the age of 16 have the same Virtual School, reviewing officer and other support as any other child who was looked after. Social Workers were being trained to work with UASC and appreciate their individual cultural needs as well as being able to assess age. UASC would be supported with their emotional health and wellbeing. If there were any trafficking concerns the usual referral processes would be followed.

Hillview, an 8 bedroom building in Malvern, which was not being utilised, would imminently be opened for UASC aged between 16-17 years. Support was being organised to go into the building, a collaboration between health and social care and each individual would have their own social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer.

A discussion took place about how some young people who were obviously children could be assessed at the port as being an adult. It was clarified that the Local Authority had challenged some of the decisions being made at the ports, and Serco were training their hotel staff in safeguarding to ensure that they knew the right route to report any concerns.

Board members asked various questions:

- When asked if UASC were educated about the dangers of trafficking it was explained that Support Workers would start by asking the story of the young person's journey and through that any risks would be identified. Policies for CLA have been amended to ensure they included UASC.
- If UASC became at risk of County Lines and were targeted and recruited would the young person be treated as a suspect or a victim, because as Corporate Parents the Board wished to ensure that they could do their best for the children who were looked after. It was explained that the Partners would need to make a view on each case and it would depend on the level of crime.
- The Chairman asked if there should be a CPB Champion for UASC.

It was confirmed that USAC were incorporated into CLA teams rather than being dealt with separately. There was a specialist UASC Social Worker to ensure that the whole workforce was aware of the issues around UASC. It had been queried whether USAC would be willing to explain their experiences, but it was pointed out that that would give the view of an individual and it would perhaps be better to collect targeted feedback from the cohort.

318 Apprenticeships

James MacDonald, Practice Manager, Throughcare, reminded the Board that one of the Pledges to Looked After Children and Care Leavers was to encourage and support learning and development of life skills. He explained that in the commissioning process every prospective tender for contracts with the County Council must now state how employment and training opportunities

for Care Leavers would be provided. WCF officers were working with the Commissioning Team to ensure they understood the needs of Care Leavers and processes were being developed to enable the commitments made in the contracts to be monitored.

Moving forward, an employer's event was planned for the summer to launch the Care Leavers Covenant. By signing up to the covenant, businesses would be committing to support Care leavers by offering discounts or work experience. It was confirmed that any organisation or business could sign up to the Covenant, whether they were statutory bodies or large or small businesses. Once signed up support would be available through the Care Leavers Covenant website.

Other actions included the Care Leavers Team working with the Skills and Investment team, and also the Apprenticeship Team Manager to increase opportunities for Children in Care and Care Leavers. Bromsgrove and Redditch District Councils were working to develop a Care Leavers employment offer and it was anticipated other District Councils would also get involved.

319 Alfie's Poem

Celena Rossano, Participation Support Worker, explained that the Chair of Speak Out had suggested a book of poetry written by Care Leavers could be produced. The Rees Foundation agreed to support the idea and arranged for a workshop to take place and then a book of poetry written by care experienced people. Charlie read the poem written by Alfie 'Missing Words'.

The Chairman suggested that a letter to say well done should be sent to Alfie.

320 2022-23 Q3 Datasheet

The Board noted the datasheet and Members were told to look at the information for their areas and ask for further details if they had any questions or concerns.

321 Information Items

Fun Day

Celena Rossano announced that the next Looked After Children's Fun Day would take place on Sunday 16 July, 11.00am to 3.00pm at Perdiswell's Young People's Centre.

Members of the Board who had attended the Fun Day in 2022, enjoyed the event and found it was good to see the young people and meet their Foster Carers.

If anyone would be available to help please contact Celena.

Utelka

Utelka, a 21 year old Care Leaver, who had recently graduated, had her song played on Radio one in the week leading up to Christmas. The song was played to the Board at the end of the meeting.

The Chairman wished for a letter of congratulation to be sent to Utelka.

Councillor update

Councillors Nyear Nazir and Margaret Sherrey announced that they would be standing down at the District Elections so this would be their last meeting. They were thanked for their input and support of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Update on Health Assessments

An update was given about the numbers of up to date Health Assessments. There has been a problem with capacity to complete health assessments but three public health nurses and more admin support have recently been recruited so it was hoped that the percentage of up to date health assessments would be improved. Social Workers were being encouraged to request health assessments in a timely manner and the Integrated Care Board were working to ensure the assessments were taking place. Meetings between Health and WCF were happening regularly to assess if things were improving. A report would be brought to the next meeting.

322 Future Meeting Dates

Future meeting dates were:

- Thursday 11 May 2023
- Tuesday 11 July 2023
- Wednesday 4 October 2023
- Tuesday 21 November 2023

The meeting ended at 3.15pm

Chairman