

Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board

County Hall, Worcester

Wednesday, 4 October 2023, 2.00 pm

Present:

Cllr Steve Mackay (Chairman), Cllr Rob Adams, Cllr Esther Gray, Cllr Lucy Harrison, Cllr Matt Jenkins, Matthew Lamb, Cllr Fran Oborski and Cllr Christine Wild

Also attended:

Marley Bourke, Tom Bourne, Sally Branchflower, Jo Clements, Beverley Downing, Eloise Gauntlett-Shea, Alice Gillett, Rebecca Haywood-Tibbetts, Adam Johnston, Simon Lewis, Celena Rossano, Matthew Stiles and Debbie Stokes.

332 Apologies (Agenda item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Lynn Denham, David Lewis, and Tina Russell.

333 Confirmation of the Minutes - 27 July 2023 (Agenda item 2)

The minutes of the last meeting held on 27 July 2023 were accepted as a correct record of the meeting and signed by the Chairman subject to an amendment to the list of attendees to note that Cllr Esther Gray was present.

334 IRO Annual Report (Agenda item 4)

The Board received a presentation on the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report from Sally Branchflower, Practice Manager IRO and Jo Clements, IRO.

Celena Rossano reported the feedback she had received from a meeting held with a group of looked after children. Comments included the following:

- IRO meetings were quite formal, felt like a tick box exercise and a means of keeping track of young people
- It would be helpful if there was not a constant change of IRO

- The language used in meetings was too formal particularly when the IRO was new to the job
- Too many reviews took place using the same information
- There was no choice as to when meetings were held
- Avoid having other unknown people attending meetings
- Top tips for future meetings:
 - Not too formal and no jargon
 - Avoid the feeling in meetings that young people were under scrutiny
 - Do not hold meetings in formal meeting rooms
 - The same IRO to attend meetings to build up trust and allow young people to open up.

Sally Branchflower welcomed the feedback and requested that she be invited to similar meetings in the future to learn directly from the young people. Adam Johnston added that some young people experienced changes of social worker but IROs tended to be a more consistent factor in their lives.

The Chairman also welcomed the feedback and acknowledged the desire for Sally Branchflower to receive feedback in person. However, he highlighted the importance of keeping any such meeting as informal as possible to encourage honest feedback from young people.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- In response to a query about staffing levels, Sally Branchflower indicated that she had a great team providing a great service. Staffing levels were adequate but she would always like more staff. It was important that the service was kept under review to avoid any drop in performance
- How did IROs communicate with very young children? Jo Clements explained that the service used more than one means of sourcing information from young children whether through play, drawing or observation eg non-verbal signs, but also listening to those adults around them. Adam Johnston added that IROs were very experienced at understanding the signals provided by young children in terms of their communication
- How did the service reach out to the 7% of children and young people who felt that their emotional health and well-being was not being supported? Sally Branchflower responded that the key issue was the timing of conversations and getting to know children better and understand their emotional struggles
- In response to a query about Covid, Jo Clements considered that the service had caught up with where it was before Covid by learning to adapt to new ways of working, particularly in relation to how and where meetings were held. Adam Johnston added that emotional well-being of children and isolation were issues for young people living semi-independently that Covid had exacerbated. However, Covid enabled the service to understand better ways to communicate with young people. Beverley Downing indicated that there was a robust system of communication between her team of specialist nurses, the IROs and

social workers to ensure that the emotional well-being of young people was being addressed

- It was queried whether IROs received any additional training to handle those young people who had become involved with the criminal justice system? Sally Branchflower indicated that the service was aware of the processes and challenges involved but welcomed any suggestions to improve working practices. Adam Johnston highlighted the importance of the Dispute Resolution process and its role in highlighting emerging issues of concern and avoiding drift and delay. It enabled the impact on a child to be assessed and any issues to be addressed at an early stage
- In response to a query, Sally Branchflower explained that the Post 18 Needs Assessment carried out 12 weeks before a young person turned 18 was for those young people who were in danger of becoming homeless.

The Board noted the IRO Annual Report.

335 Cross boundary contact with young people (Agenda item 3)

The Board received a presentation from Alice Gillett, Group Manager on cross boundary contact with young people.

In the ensuing debate, the following points were made:

- Adam Johnston explained that there were currently 130 looked after children/young people living at some distance from Worcestershire. Alice Gillett added that some young people ended up out of county for family network reasons
- Celena Rossano reported feedback from a discussion group held with looked after young people. A young person had commented that he/she was not happy living in Birmingham and it was a real challenge and time-consuming to travel to meetings. In relation to public health, comments were made about the different levels of support received in different areas
- Eloise emphasised the concerns of young people moving out of county that their relationship with CAMHs would break down as a result
- Rebecca Haywood-Tibbetts reported that at present, there was an issue with young people moving out of county being automatically placed at the bottom of the waiting list for CAMHs support in the area they moved into. The aim was to ensure that when young people transferred to another local authority area that they maintained their existing place on the CAMHs waiting list rather than drop to the bottom
- There was a general issue with the support provided by schools for children and young people with autism and ADHD. Would the existing level of support provided by this Council be transferred with that looked after child to the new local authority area? Matthew Stiles responded that the support should transfer with the EHCP however there were issues caused by different ways of working in different local authorities. All schools should be able to provide the necessary support and be held to account if they did not. Beverley Downing added that looked after

children should receive the same level of service out of county but unfortunately that was not always the case. Despite efforts to improve matters, the reality was that waiting lists for assessments out of county were long and very often added delays occurred due to requirements for reassessments by clinicians

- Marley reported the difficulties he had experienced when he moved from Redditch to Stafford particularly in terms of the delays in the receipt of educational support
- Were the majority of children deliberately placed out of county or were the moves as a result of foster moves? Adam Johnston indicated that the majority of out of county placements were as a result of the locality of the placement that became available. On occasion, the placement might arise from family connections in the area or in the best interests of child.

The Board noted the presentation on cross boundary contact with young people.

336 Quarterly Data, Q1 2023-24 (Agenda item 5)

Beverley Downing expressed her concern about the accuracy of the data nationally for the percentage of Looked After Children with an up-to-date health assessment. In this county, every effort was made to ensure timely, appropriate health assessments were provided by quality specialist nurses. Alice Gillett commented that the problem with the national data was that there were so many variables across different local authorities that made meaningful comparison difficult.

The Board:

- a) Noted the datasheet;**
- b) Requested that future quarterly data be amended to provide a breakdown of unaccompanied asylum seekers by nation; and**
- c) Agreed that a report be brought to a future Board meeting on the learning from the audit of mental and physical health and well-being.**

337 Future Meeting Dates (Agenda item 6)

Noted.

338 Any Other Business (Agenda item 7)

Celena Rossano read out a number of well-done/ celebrating achievements messages that she had received from children and young people.

The meeting ended at 3.50pm.

Chairman