

Corporate Parenting Board

Thursday, 4 June 2020, 2.00 pm, held virtually via Zoom

Minutes

Present:

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

Also attended:

Kate Bailey, Charlie Dickens, Beverley Downing, Catherine Driscoll, Dan Gray, Adam Johnston, Dr David Lewis, Heather Manning, Collette Maynard and Selina Rawitz.

218 Apologies

Apologies for absence had been received from Mike Johnston.

The Chairman wished to pay tribute to Heather Griffin who had sadly died recently. Heather had been a foster carer for over 30 years and had only recently retired. She had fostered many children and was well known for meeting the specific needs of all the children in her care.

219 Confirmation of the Minutes

No amendments were made. The minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

220 Review of Previous Action Points

In the current circumstances this item was deferred to a future meeting.

221 Virtual School Update and the wider educational experiences of Children Looked After during Covid-19

Collette Maynard, the Virtual School Headteacher, gave a presentation about the experiences of Looked After Children during Covid-19.

Her team included 11 members of staff who now worked for Worcestershire Children First; they included Personal Education Plan (Personal Education Plan) Co-ordinators who worked with 412 Looked After Children within the County and Area Learning Officers who looked after 121 Looked After Children placed outside the County.

At present 19 young people were classed as Missing in Education but their circumstances were known to the Virtual School Team with some being in year 11 and unclear where they would go next. All children, whatever their circumstances, got the same support from PEP Co-

ordinators and meetings were held with the Child and their Carers, Social Workers and teachers. Meetings enabled SMART targets to be planned and reviewed.

Various projects were underway. The Fresh Air project and the Be You Project worked with individuals with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs and offered various activities. There was also a number of different Arts Events.

Data was collected from schools and during the spring term (prior to the 20 March lockdown) 70% were making progress and 61% were classed as motivated most of the time. The Virtual School were concerned with those who were not motivated and were working on improving that number.

Staff had been concerned to find out how Covid-19 was affecting Looked After Children and were keen to find out through PEP meetings what activities the young people were involved in. Pupils were taking part in lots of different and new activities during the lockdown and information had been gathered giving the Pupil and Carers voice. In general, Officers wanted quality learning for Looked After Children and the opportunity for them to make the best of the situation.

The Virtual School Head Teacher confirmed they collaborated with social Care teams and concerns were raised if needed. The welfare of all Looked After Children was considered and if necessary those with the highest need were prioritised for additional support.

In the ensuing discussion various points were clarified:

- At the Children and Families Scrutiny Panel meeting it had been requested that budgets be considered to see if young people could be given more support to attend colleges. This query had been received and an update would be given at the Virtual School Board Meeting
- Board members were surprised at the number of young people in placements outside the County. It was explained that placements were made as close to home as possible, but a suitable placement may not be available within the County, especially if a specialist place was required and sometimes it was felt that particular young people would be safer in placements away from home. Generally, Worcestershire had a good proportion of its young people in County or close to home.
- The Virtual Headteacher attended the Resource

222 Voice of the Child - Keeping in Touch with our Looked After Children and Care Leavers

- Panel when requests for accommodation were considered to ensure that the young person's education was disrupted as little as possible
- When it was queried why there were more boys with EHCP (Education, Health and Care Plans) and SEMH (Social, Emotional, and Mental Health) needs the Virtual Head replied that it was unclear but further work would be done in that area and Virtual Head Teachers in other areas would be consulted.

Daniel Gray updated the Board about the experiences of Looked after Children and Care Leavers during the Coronavirus pandemic. Social Workers, Personal Advisors and Reviewing Officers were using keeping in touch calls and visits to find out how Looked After Children and Care Leavers were coping and to ensure their voices were heard during their Looked after Reviews. Some young people also used the Mind of My Own Virtual tool to share their views.

Children and Young People continued to participate in their reviews which were taking place on time and Reviewing Officers and Social Workers were maintaining relationships with young people but it had been revealed that young people were feeling anxious about Covid -19, what would happen about school and exam results and the lack of contact with their friends. None of the young people using Mind of My Own said that they felt unsafe. Social Workers and PAs would continue to support and see children and would encourage them to have virtual contact with their friends.

A Board Member was concerned that Looked After Children may be at a disadvantage when schools allocated exam grades, especially if they had moved school. The Virtual Head explained that she had written to the Worcestershire Association of Secondary Heads to voice her concerns and The Association had assured her that schools would take into account all the information they had available and would contact previous schools where necessary, before grades were allocated.

223 Fostering Service Update

Laurie-Mo Gullachson gave a presentation to update the Board on Worcestershire Children First Fostering which was registered on 1 October 2019 and is the biggest fostering provider within the County, dealing with Mainstream Foster Carers and Kinship Carers, both within and outside the County.

Since the last inspection in July 2019 a great deal had been achieved. Most carers had migrated to the new company and they considered themselves the biggest family within the County with around 350 children being looked after by more than 250 Foster Carers.

High expectations were placed on Foster Carers but WCF recognised that and encouraged a network of support groups and organised a forum to help Carers, which in turn helped with recruitment. Recruitment was a constant activity to replace carers who decided to retire or felt that they wanted to stop being carers. Foster carers for children with specialist needs, for sibling groups and older children were always in demand.

WCF worked to have a low level of disruption from unplanned placement breakdowns and did what they could to help prevent placement breakdowns occurring. If a placement was really not in the best interest of the child, they would be moved but by tracking children's progress, ensuring carers were well prepared and collaborating closely with the Virtual School Head, improvements were being made to ensure disruption was minimised.

Any notifiable incidents were monitored and good management oversight was in place to ensure a good service for young people and carers. Officers worked with the child to ensure their voices were heard, either spontaneously or through planned updates and new technology such as Mind of My Own was being encouraged. Any complaints or allegations were taken seriously and safeguarding procedures were followed. The number of allegations were rising but this was seen as a good thing as children were feeling more empowered to speak out and was a trend which was happening across the region. Each case was examined to see if the situation could have been prevented and to see that the same situation should not be allowed to occur again in the future.

Feedback was gathered from foster carers through an annual survey and the relationship between social workers and carers was recognised as a challenging but supportive one. Before lockdown a session had been organised with Parents and On-Side Advocacy and would now be arranged virtually.

Audits happened in themes such as looking at mental health and well-being, or Adverse Children Events. Staffing was now more stable with 6 social work teams

and 4 members of staff had been trained to assess young people about to leave care for independent living.

Under Covid -19 the usual ways of working had been adapted and had become more flexible while ensuring that children were happy, healthy and safe. The Foster Care Conference had taken place virtually. New government legislation enabled carers to be fast tracked if necessary but that had not been necessary so far.

224	Work Plan	Noted
225	Future Meeting Dates	Noted

The meeting ended at 15.40pm

Chairman

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