

**Minutes of the Children's Corporate Parenting Board
Thursday, 16th July, 2020 at 4.00 pm
On Microsoft Teams**

Present:

Councillor R Buttery (Chair)
Councillor S Ridney (Vice-Chair)
Councillors P Bradley, P Miller, G Partridge, E Taylor and D Vickers

Officers

A Delaney – Head of Children and Families, H Ellis – Interim Director of Children's Services, J Keeble – Matrix Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion, M McFadden – Corporate Parenting Board Co-ordinator, M Davies, J Shaw – Both Service Managers, A Stone – Interim Head of Safeguarding, Practice and Quality Assurance, J Walker – Service Manager Safeguarding and Review, A Wright – Matrix Head of Virtual School (All Directorate of Children's Services), S Gay – Area Manager (Directorate of Regeneration and Enterprise), K Buckle – Democratic Services Officer and M Johal – Senior Democratic Services Officer (Both Directorate of Finance and Legal).

Also in Attendance

S George (National Health Service Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group)

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors N Barlow and B Gentle

2. **Declarations of Interest**

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct in respect of any matter to be considered at the meeting.

3. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd September 2019, be approved as a correct record and signed.



4. **Safeguarding and Review Centre for Professional Practice**

Members considered a presentation on the focused work undertaken in the Safeguarding and Review Unit and in the Centre for Professional Practice.

The Interim Head of Safeguarding, Practice and Quality Assurance referred to Children Looked After Review Meetings that had taken place virtually since 25th March, 2020 and the technology involved in conducting those reviews, with Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO'S) using WhatsApp to connect with young people and involve them in their reviews.

It was reported that 98% of reviews had been completed within timescales, and the positive use of technology had been welcomed. Young people had commented positively on their reviews, advising that they had been involved and had found it easier to engage in conversations with their IRO's.

The children and young people's participation and engagement survey and the joint event with the Children in Care Council on 19th February 2020, were both referred to and the importance of engaging with parents moving forward in order to develop and improve services where necessary was expressed.

Positive feedback had been received in relation to the quality and nature of relationships with IRO's, as they were seen as authority figures who were involved with children and young people for many years and knew their stories.

All children were spoken to before their meetings, with children understanding that it was their meeting and they were able to influence what the meeting looked like. Children and families were involved with creating their plans and helped shaped the service.

Every child over the age of 11 was asked whether they wished to chair, co-chair or set their meeting, with the increased use of advocacy taking place.

The successes of the Reviewing Unit were outlined together with the work completed with IRO's on their development days. Monitoring and tracking reviews would take place and children would be engaged in creating new consultation documents.

Work was being completed with IRO'S on how to ensure that children understood and recognised themselves in reports and minutes.

Annual feedback from surveys would continue within Children's Services, in order to examine the number of ways to engage, participate and influence the services provided for children and young people.

It was reported that there were four advanced Social Work Practitioners and Team and Service Managers within the Centre for Professional Practice who were responsible for practice, learning and quality assurance within Children's Services.



The Audit Programme that had continued during COVID-19 was referred to, with all managers receiving one to one audit coaching.

It was reported that workshops were taking place with managers and practitioners in relation to how to conduct good assessments, plans and review of plans.

It was stated that the direct work tools and training to support young people in care was essential, and virtual training and webinar links to maintain professional standards and practices continued.

Mention was made of the positive feedback and compliments received, including the quality of the work of Social Workers and IRO's.

The Chair commented positively on the speed of the work that had been undertaken during COVID-19, including the introduction of WhatsApp in order to continue to communicate with children and young people, referring to the positive impact the Safeguarding team had on the children of the borough, in order to ensure that they were not only safe but thriving. The Chair also requested that a message of thanks be expressed to the team.

In responding to a question from a Member, the Interim Head of Safeguarding, Practice and Quality Assurance advised that both foster parents, and the parents of children and young people would be engaged with, in order to obtain their views during the care proceedings process.

Resolved

That the information contained in the presentation on the Safeguarding Review Unit and the Centre for Professional Practice be noted.

5. **Front Door Update**

The Head of Children and Families provided Members with a verbal update of the work undertaken with children during COVID-19.

In relation to the cohort of children it was reported that there were 411 children who were subject to Child Protection Orders, 623 looked after children and 1166 deemed as a child in need.

It was noted that contacts were received into the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub with the Hub involving a variety of partner agencies including Social Workers, an Early Help Desk, West Midlands Police, Housing providers and Health partners.

Immediately prior to lockdown remote working had been successfully tested with partner agencies, therefore providing assurances that the front door for

children's services would be fully effective.

It had been evidenced that contacts had significantly reduced following lockdown in March 2020, however had significantly increased in June 2020. The majority of contacts were referrals from schools, and these had reduced with the highest number of referrals in June received from West Midlands Police and health partners. It was believed that contacts would rise again once children returned to school.

It was stated that there had been no significant increase in level 4 contacts that related to domestic abuse. These were termed level 4 as they were the contacts that would require statutory assessment and intervention.

It was reported that in April, 20 contacts had been received compared to 63 for the same period last year, in May 25 contacts received, compared to 45 for the same period last year and in June 20 contacts received as compared to 45 for the same period last year.

Social Workers had continued to conduct visits throughout the pandemic. In situations of safeguarding where intervention was required, children had been removed from their households.

It was noted that 1162 assessments had been completed and in instances where these could not be conducted face to face, technology was utilised.

Children's Services had worked closely with schools in order to ensure that those children who could be in school, but were not in attendance, remained safe. It was reported that there had been an improvement in the number of children subject to a child protection plan attending school.

The Chair thanked the Head of Children and Families and her team for the work undertaken in order to ensure that the children of the Borough were safe in these unprecedented times.

The Vice-Chair raised concerns in relation to the possibility that cases of domestic violence may increase when children return to school in September.

The Interim Director of Children's Services provided assurances that refocusing work was currently taking place in early help services, to target those children who were vulnerable in order to work with schools in September, with the two family centres re-opening the following week, in order to support those particular families over the summer months, to ensure that they were prepared to return to school in September.

The Vice-Chair referred to those children transitioning from primary into secondary schools in September and the need to be prepared for any problems that may arise.



In relation to staff working remotely the Head of Children and Families reported that regular team meetings were held, and as far as possible they had tried to replicate physical contact, all had WhatsApp groups, and in relation to visiting children and families in difficult situations all had coped extremely well.

The Chair requested the Head of Children and Families to express Members' gratitude for the continued work undertaken.

Resolved

That the verbal presentation on the Front Door update and continuing work in Children's Services be noted.

6. **Dudley's Summer Provision - Overview**

Members considered a verbal presentation of the Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion on the summer provision programme.

The Head of Education Outcomes and Inclusion advised that he could provide the statistical information in relation to school attendance figures during COVID-19, should Members require this.

In relation to school attendance trends, there had been a significant increase in attendance resulting in 22% of children attending primary schools and 6.5% attending secondary schools. Looked after and vulnerable children and children of critical workers had all been in attendance. Reception and Year 6 children had returned to school, with the majority of secondary school children continuing to access remote learning.

The secondary provision for the summer had targeted that cohort of children who would find it difficult to re-engage in education in September.

There were six schools running provision across the borough, five were running provision they already had in place for example tennis coaching and summer camps. Jessons Primary School had also now agreed to provide summer provision, as they believed some of their pupils would need to re-engage in education.

In relation to the Dudley Performing Arts Programme the detail of how the Government funding could be used had not been provided, and that guidance was awaited from the Department for Education (Dfe).

Year 11 children had all received support in relation to their destinations, for example those transitioning from schools with no sixth forms who had applied for college or training courses. 96% of children had registered for a course and the remaining 4% had mainly travelled over the border into Sandwell or Birmingham.



An online learning platform had been provided free of charge by the Chief Executive Officer of the Shirelands Trust, and this was offered to all secondary schools. It had commenced the previous week and would continue through the summer.

The Dudley Performing Arts were able to provide a two week programme, from the 3rd August, 2020 that would take place at the Residents Arts Venue. From the 10th August, 2020 a wide range of venues would be utilised including the Black Country Living Museum, and there was also the possibility of using the facilities at Dudley's Zoo and Castle. These would engage with children in order to provide visits, with the first week of activities focusing on sensory activities such as drumming.

A rock band experience would be available for older children and the aspiration was to provide a video in order to celebrate the children's achievements.

The children referred to the Local Authority by their schools, with schools being provided with details of what children have been assigned to the various activities. The schools would then contact the children in order to provide a follow up exercise.

The delivery of activities would be staffed through Dudley Performing Arts together with some school staff that had offered to facilitate the activities and visits.

Transport arrangements were to be finalised shortly and it was hoped that children could be grouped in their local school settings as far as transport was concerned.

The establishment of the Dudley Information Service in order to provide support to families was referred to.

The Chair commented on the aspiration to provide a summer school and the limited time to arrange the activities. She referred to the outstanding work in order to provide the activities and outings.

It was noted that Leisure Centres would shortly be opening, however further Government guidelines were awaited in relation to swimming.

The Chair also advised that details of the summer activities would be forwarded to all elected Members in order that they could signpost families to activities in their areas.

Resolved

That the information reported on in relation to Dudley's Summer provision, be noted.

7. Children in Care Virtual School Update

The Virtual School Headteacher provided an update on the Children in Care Virtual School.

The Virtual School Headteacher advised that Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings had been revised and the numbers attending had increased due to virtual attendance, and this had resulted in fostering better relationships with colleagues in schools.

It was noted that the post 16 PEP had been developed together with a Tutor Programme, and 300 devices had been distributed to children, 211 from the Dfe and the remainder provided by schools.

The Pupil Premium Plus Grant had been suspended. This was usually paid to schools in relation to children in care. The suspension had allowed the Virtual School to continue to support children and had resulted in the Virtual School being in a strong position moving forward.

A Tutor Programme had been developed that provided group online tutoring that was age related and was conducted with different tutor groups.

A Pathways Programme had been introduced, as there were concerns in relation to the disengagement of Year 11 pupils. The programme addressed functional skills online and had appealed to a number of extremely vulnerable young people. Some of those young people would be undertaking a qualification in Maths and English during the summer.

It was reported that a new national Tutoring Programme would be introduced during the next academic year, however no further details were available at the present time.

There were emotional wellbeing and mental health concerns in relation to children and families, and anxieties had been noticed in colleagues. In view of this further support was being commissioned that would be available once children and young people returned to school.

In relation to the arts there was a collaborative offer across the board that was now online with the website entitled 'Connect and Create'. The website had received 7,000 hits and contained many varying offers.

During the summer there would be a Glastonbury styled festival and each day there would be a different tent with different arts involved for all ages, providing a whole range of different experiences. This is linked into the Birmingham Repertory Theatre who are providing a theatre programme entitled 'the Spy School' that mainly targeted the upper primary and lower secondary aged children.

Work had been conducted with the Arts Council in order to provide those children up to Year 10 with a 'Lets Create' arts pack.

The Annual Conference of the Virtual School was referred to and it was noted that this had taken place the previous week, with academic outcomes and emotional wellbeing being discussed. Lisa Cherry a former looked after child who had worked through education to become an experienced presenter was involved with the conference, and the Virtual School Headteacher thanked the Vice-Chair for being involved with the preparations for the conference.

Foster Carers had been supported with advice and guidance on supporting young people whilst being home educated and shared with all Foster Carers. A 'Love to Learn' bulletin had also been issued to Foster Carers, who were also financially resourced to assist them with home learning.

A Carers Workshop that was attended by 170 carers had been made available online. Lisa Cherry had also facilitated this event.

In relation to the Pupil Premium Plus Grant, 30% of the grant had been utilised for Information Technology, 30% for tuition, and targeting emotional wellbeing, and the remainder to support children in care remaining in school.

The Chair commented positively on the creative and innovative work ensuring that children were supported.

The Interim Director of Children's Services referred to the snapshot provided at the meeting of the work that had been conducted within Children's Services whilst managing COVID-19, and the continuation of developing services during this difficult period. She also thanked Officers for their presentations and contributions to the meeting.

The Chair referred to the next meeting of the Board, suggesting that an overview of the summer activities, how children had settled into school in September and any emerging issues, should be presented to the next meeting.

The Chair on behalf of the Board wished to extend a thank you to all sections and teams within Children's Services and welcomed the plans for the summer.

The Chair also requested Members to provide comments and feedback on the virtual meeting of the Board and any suggestions for future meetings.

Resolved

That the information reported on the Children In Care Virtual School be noted.

The meeting ended at 5.08 pm

CHAIR