

# Corporate Parenting Board

**Date:** Wednesday, 30 November 2022  
**Time:** 3.00 pm  
**Venue:** Committee Room 1, County Hall, Dorchester, DT1 1XJ

**Members (Quorum )**

Kate Wheller (Chairman), Richard Biggs (Vice-Chairman), Ryan Holloway, Carole Jones, Stella Jones, Andrew Kerby and Cathy Lugg

**Chief Executive:** Matt Prosser, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

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## Agenda

Item	Pages
<b>1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS</b>	
Cllr Weller welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
<b>2. APOLOGIES</b>	
Apologies of absence were received from Cllr Cathy Lugg.	
<b>3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</b>	
There were no declarations of interest.	
<b>4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b>	
The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 28 <sup>th</sup> April 2022 were confirmed and signed.	

## **5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no Public Participation for this meeting.

## **6. PROPOSED MEETING SCHEDULE SIGN OFF**

A proposed meeting scheduled which was previously circulated would be sent again.

It was confirmed the next informal board meeting would be Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

The next formal board meeting would be Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

## **7. INTRODUCTION AND SCENE SETTING**

Members were informed of the busy year for Children's Services and believed it had been an opportunity to see what had been happening for Children in Care. Members were updated that there were currently 450 children in care and 580 care leavers. They were also informed that Children in Care numbers had decreased and had changed in terms of cohort of young people. The number of local Dorset Children in Care had also decreased however unaccompanied Asylum children had increased.

Members were informed that Cllr Parry launched the first Mockingbird constellation in November. This had led to good development for children in Foster Care as well as new children homes registered this month who would welcome their first two children. An update was also given regarding the staying close project which supports Care Leavers when they're ready to leave their residential accommodation.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care was also discussed. Members were informed that this could lead to national and local changes. The officer informed the committee that they were still waiting for government implementation plan. This could lead to council's delivering their own children's zones again.

## **8. CORPORATE PARENTING DATASET**

Members were informed of a decreasing number of children in care but an increase in asylum seeking children. Currently 41 unaccompanied children which will reach 67. Adoption 18% achieving permanence year to date.

Number of children with 3 placement moves or more is 7, significantly lower than national average. The timeliness of Initial Health Assessments remains an area of concern – they must be completed within 20 working days. Trying to improve performance with health colleagues. Some children placed out of area create complexity in

achieving 20 working day deadline.

Areas of clarification raised by Councillors:

- Unregulated placements- what are these?
- Are we seeing more children placed out of area?
- Number of unaccompanied children reside in Dorset
- Number of Foster Carers resigning
- Missing episodes

### **Unregulated placements – what are these?**

Supported accommodation placements for children aged 16+ only who need support to live independently rather than care. Unregistered and Unregulated are different. In Dorset we have no children in Unregistered provision. We do have young people 16+ who live in Unregulated provision. Registered provision is regulated through Ofsted.

Cllr Wheller shared her concerns over Unregulated placements:

- Would encounter the same group of 17/18 year olds in town centre in early hours while Cllr Wheller was a street pastor.
- A lot of asylum seekers where vaccines are not same standards to ours in UK e.g., diphtheria, polio, measles. We need to ensure our Children in Care asylum seekers are fully vaccinated. We need to take responsibility for this.

Dorset Council advised there is a robust framework for Quality Assurance of Unregulated placements. We have enhanced visiting for these children and produce a quarterly report to the Senior Leadership Team. Ofsted are planning to bring in new regulations for this cohort of providers. We have been working hard with these providers to adhere to these new regulations. The new regulations will clarify the distinction between care and support. The regulation regime will be proportionate. These providers will be able to provide more appropriate levels of support to our children.

### **Are we seeing more children placed out of area?**

Dorset Council advised the first port of call for children coming into care is always family. Some of our children could be placed out of area due to family living outside Dorset. Dorset Council advised we want our children in Dorset wherever possible, but a number of our unaccompanied children prefer to be in an urban area – often closer to friends and family. We are looking at taking a different approach for our unaccompanied children.

Cllr Stella Jones – welcomed increasing diversity within Dorset.

### **How many unaccompanied children reside in Dorset?**

Of our 47 young people all but 4 are placed outside of Dorset Council area. Sometimes it makes sense for these children to be placed out of county and remain in their current placement. They receive the same service as Dorset based children. All those unaccompanied children have the same access to resources.

Cllr Richard Biggs – not ideal these children are placed outside Dorset even though there are good reasons. It's more costly, cannot give them the same support. We should aspire to encourage as many unaccompanied children as possible to be placed in Dorset. 33 young people living in unregulated placements is a high number, those in unregulated placements do not have 24-hour cover. We have a target of 10 for a reason.

### **Number of Foster Carers resigning**

We are in a much better position in terms of what we're presenting - much leaner. A lot of the Foster Carers who have resigned were not currently fostering for Dorset Council. We are concerned about numbers of Foster Carers. We do not have enough. We are all working to recruit more. Local Foster Carers are the best resource for our Children in Care. Paul Dempsey, Louise Drury and Gerry Connell met with around 50 carers last week, developing mockingbird programme, active recruitment, proposals to make Dorset Council a more attractive place to be a Foster Carer including support package and financial support. Any support from Corporate Parenting Board appreciated. Gerry Connell advised the board Dorset Council currently to have 9 mainstream fostering households in assessment and 21 Connected Carers in assessment, a lot of ongoing work.

### **Missing episodes**

Missing episodes are often an indicator of other issues going on. Risk of Child Exploitation. We are working with our multi-Agency partners closely and using targeted youth workers to build relationships. We are also starting to map out the connections between different young people going missing and adults they are associating with. Weekly meetings to discuss this. Return Home interviews – independent person will visit young person. Work also undertaken alongside Registered Managers of other children's homes to ensure that steps taken to locate the young person as any parent would take. The Harbour offering support to other providers. Much better understanding of risk to these young people and whether the child is absent or missing.

Cllr Andrew Parry – We need to understand the reasons for repeated missing episodes. Really good multi agency work taking place. Also, a difference between a young person returning home late and those who are missing.

Cllr Stella Jones – sometimes a child is just copying a 'leader'. Are they

told not to follow other children?

Louise Drury reassured members that return home interviews are undertaken to understand the causes of missing episodes. A lot of the time the young person will say they were just out with their friends or seeing family. Where we have those concerning relationships, we will engage with our partners to disrupt that activity. More young people tend to go missing in the summer.

Cllr Kerby – previously Dorset Police and Council used to share data on why people go missing. It was confirmed that this information can be accessed on dashboards.

## **9. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL: EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN CARE**

Paul Dempsey asked the board not to share children's names.

Lisa Linscott and Jo Smark-Richards played video and PowerPoint presentation to the board.

Virtual Schools fosters high expectations for our schools and education settings. Focus this year on celebrating our young people and developing the child's voice within our work. The year before we were embedding our processes. Through recruitment we've strengthened key areas:

- Post 16
- SEND
- Early Years

Jo Smark-Richards and Lisa Linscott outlined the key strengths of Virtual Schools during the last year.

3 Priorities for 2022/23:

- Achieving educational stability
- Improving how children are represented in our work
- Developing opportunities for children to achieve their ambitions

Jamie's Farm Visit took place on 24-28 October 2022.

Lisa Linscott thanked the Virtual Schools' Governing Body.

Areas of concern raised by Councillors:

- What support is there for children who move schools?
- Permanent exclusions have gone down but increase in number of suspensions, particularly boys
- How do we ensure we're using this money wisely and not

encroaching into EHCP money?

- A lot of spends on one-to-one tuition, is this from the right funding stream?

### **What support is there for children who move schools?**

Early planning of the transfer, right school placement for the home they are in. If the child in care has an EHCP the team are helping colleagues in Dorset and other SEND teams to go faster than statutory timescale. A Personal Education Plan (PEP) is key to ensure support in school gives them what they need. This could be a range of things such as play therapy, one to one support, it's through the child's voice what are they asking for to help them transition.

### **Permanent exclusions have gone down but increase in number of suspensions, particularly boys**

Last year no permanent exclusions. Several temporary suspensions. We meet fortnightly, the child's voice is captured to see what they would like to see. If multiple suspensions, Jo Smark-Richards will visit school. Big process where school can apply for funding around strategic priority for children suspended on several occasions. We are seeing a trend of schools suspending more regularly. Jo Smark-Richards and specialist teachers meet with schools. Our conference in January involves one workshop around suspensions. Kim Pickford running one of these workshops. Hoping to showcase outstanding practice. It is more boys than girls being suspended nationally not just in Dorset.

### **How do we ensure we're using this money wisely and not encroaching into EHCP money?**

Pupil Premium funding is for additional needs and different, we're very careful when looking at funding requests.

### **A lot of spends on one-to-one tuition, is this from the right funding stream?**

Lisa Linscott reassured the board this was from the correct funding stream.

## **10. ADVOCACY AND INDEPENDANT VISITORS**

NYAS contract started August 2021, Claire and Louise started in post March 2022. Initial challenge with contract. Rectified January 2022. Since then, very much on track in terms of contract specifications. Now providing a consistent service where all young people referred to us received an advocacy service. We've worked hard to embed our processes. Once they have a service from us, they will continue with this service. Develop their lifelong skills around self-advocacy. Emerging from Covid period – advocacy now more face to face but it's child's preference.

Independent Visitor (IV) service. Took time to embed volunteers over

to NYAS. Service has grown quickly. Contract of 33. Looking to increase in line with national guidelines of 10% within Dorset. Overall, it's going well. Group activity in July – paddleboarding in Ferndown. Good opportunity for young people to spend time with others in similar situation to them.

NYAS are doing lots of work with Children's Services, going to team meetings to share what we can offer. Will be working shortly with Children in Care team where we can be more proactive. Start their journey in advocacy as early as possible. Work with commissioning team to ensure we are sharing data and improve our referral rate. My Things Matter campaign – it's making a big difference

Cllr Wheller said it would be good to know how the contact with Children in Care progresses

Areas of concern raised by Councillors:

- Do we have young people on a waiting list?
- Can we promote advocacy more on social media?
- Breakdown between young person and advocacy

#### **Do we have young people on a waiting list?**

Waiting list has gone right down – we have a few young people on a waiting list but also recruiting more volunteers. We are trying to spread the word and increase referrals.

#### **Can we promote advocacy more on social media?**

Commissioning team and NYAS to work together to get something on social media. Cllr Stella Jones advised she was previously an IV. Only adult that turns up without a clipboard. It's good for continuity as well.

#### **Breakdown between young person and advocacy**

There were problems with the service in the beginning, but things have now improved. We now work more closely with the Social Workers to see where we can remove the barriers. We're creating the next set of appointment forms. We use the phone number provided on referral form if not available we will go back to the social worker. Sometimes the young person decides to disengage from the service.

We are in a much better place than previously with longer relationships with our social workers. Caseloads for our social workers are really well managed. This is important work too.

## **11. INDEPENDANT REVIEWING OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT**

Jane MacLennan explained the role of the Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO). They undertake statutory role of a reviewing officer. Continue to support good outcomes. We have a collaborative approach – QAROs challenge practice and outcomes for

our Children in Care. We have high expectations, high challenge, and high support. A person-centred relational approach. It's achieved through a robust escalation and challenge process.

We've had a consistent workforce within our team. We've had good recruitment, so we have seen minimal changes which provides the consistency our Children in Care need and deserve. Clear in care planning and preventing drift. Ensure they are in the right place and have the right support around them.

Areas of clarification raised by Councillors:

- What percentage of gypsy and traveller children are Children in Care or in education? Concerned these children are slipping under the net.

We do capture White (Gypsy/Roma) ethnicity of our Children in Care and that there were no children in care under this category on 31.3.22 (last year).

## **12. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY CHANGE- BETTER CARE AND EDUCATION FOR UNACCOMPANIED MINORS IN DORSET**

The paper sets out plans to increase our capacity to care for and support our care leavers and unaccompanied minors and outline the policy change that is required to do so. To respond effectively to the needs of our young people we are proposing to do the following:

- Develop an operating model for unaccompanied minors that uses capacity in good or outstanding boarding schools to provide education and term time accommodation and uses school communities to host unaccompanied minors in school holidays as 'connected persons.
- Seek easement of specific regulations and guidance.
- Create a Head of Service to provide dedicated leadership to a specialised service for care leavers and unaccompanied minors alongside the Resettlement Team.
- Create the role of Senior Personal Adviser within the Leaving Care Service to champion key areas of service delivery for young people and offer a career pathway within the team.

Recommendation that the board supports policy change and service development. This is in response to local and national context.

Areas of clarification raised by Councillors:

- Are we confident we can stick to budget regarding Staying Close funding?



- Cost of private education compared to a placed care setting
- Would the children stay in school during all school holidays?
- Will our current Children in Care be given the opportunity to use an independent school as an intervention?
- Need to be assured children with troubled backgrounds are doing well, the safeguards are there, and the checks are good

#### **Are we confident we can stick to budget?**

The Staying Close grant is awarded for 3 years and it's more of a challenge to make sure we spend the money. It will be a challenge for some providers to have the determination to stay close. We will also give people a route back in if they disengage temporarily.

#### **Cost of private education compared to a placed care setting**

This new way will be more cost effective, and we will be looking to the Department for Education for more support with this. The current model is not cost effective. Hopefully within next few months – we need approval from Ofsted, the Home Office, and Department for Education. Dorset Council are ready to go as soon as we hear. We have already identified cost pressures for next year.

#### **Would the children stay in school during all school holidays?**

We are looking for young people to stay with a host family potentially from within the school community on weekends and in the holidays. Not remaining within the school environment, the whole time.

#### **Will our current Children in Care be given the opportunity to use an independent school as an intervention?**

There is a national scheme around Children in Care and private schools. It takes a long time for them to access them. Among our Children in Care, we have those with great talents – these could be developed within a stable family environment.

#### **Need to be assured children with troubled backgrounds are doing well, the safeguards are there, and the checks are good.**

We will pay real attention to ensure the right children are matched. Need to welcome young people at the earliest age. Having proactive conversations with the Home Office and improving those outcomes.

#### **Recommendation – the board supports this policy change**

**Decision: Proposed by Cllr Kirby, seconded by Cllr Stella Jones to approve.**

### **13. AOB- FOSTERING FAMILY DAYS**

Members were informed of the aims to remove as many barriers as possible to hear voice of the children. This was an opportunity for

service to chat with foster carers and everyone is welcome. The aim was to bring families together and to hear the voice of children which helps to build good relationships. Organically built a Children in Care Council who work with Virtual Schools as well. They're hearing young children's voices in the right way. Currently 70 children this year including birth children – A breakdown is needed of which are Children in Care. Have 6 dates for next year we can give to carers well in advance. Feedback from last year – looked for specifically facilities with adult changing provision e.g., Dorset Museum. Really pleased with how this is going. Last one this year is 20<sup>th</sup> December.

Cllr Wheller asked for these dates to be sent to Council members as well. It would be good if there was a member of Corporate Parenting board at each meet up.

#### **14. AOB- THE CHILDREN'S DISABILITY REVIEW**

Lisa Reid, Corporate Director for Quality Assurance and Safeguarding. Families had asked Matt Chislett to bring this to the board's attention. Identify the young people this applies to and will report to the board in January 2023.

#### **15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was confirmed that the next formal meeting would be held on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

#### **16. URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

#### **17. EXEMPT BUSINESS**

The webcasting ended so that the exempt business could be shared with the board.

#### **18. Annual LADO Report**

Members were updated that Martha Sharp was a new Designated Officer for Dorset Council. They were also informed of 259 new contacts for the last financial year. 86 progressed to Management. There was a high percentage of referrals from Staff in Education settings, foster carers and residential care workers. Areas underrepresented were police, religious groups, and sports.

Members were informed that improvements needed to be made in the awareness of role of Designated Officer. There were the highest referrals from physical harm, second category was sexual harm. There was a decrease in number of unfounded outcomes. The Officer also highlighted the LADO service in which it was suggested that there was a higher level of scrutiny of information.

Regarding timescales over dealing with allegations, where police

investigations was involved, the management of allegations process take longer. Members were informed that work was being maintained with key agencies to improve referral rate from groups.

#### **Members questions and comments**

- Was there enough engagement with Police. MASH used to be inundated.
- Lower uptake of faith schools using Dorset Council services
- Was there anything slipping through the net

Officers' responses to members questions and comments.

**Engagement with Police-** Children services are strengthening their links with the police. Martha Sharp has delivered training with the forces and cadets in Dorset. Regular meetings have also been set up with the police.

**Faith Schools using Dorset Council Services-** Depends on where the person worked. It could be they work in a school and are also involved in a church. Members were informed that links were getting better at contacting every person/group they are involved with if there's more than one.

**Anything slipping through the net-** Members were assured that when delivering training, if any concerns are raised with those who work with children to contact LADO. Everything is recorded on separate databases, and it can be picked up if there are repeated concerns. Regular 44 visitors also visit placements, and they will report anything to the LADO. Information is also shared with other Local Authorities. If outcomes of investigations need a referral to DBS it will be tracked and monitored to ensure this.