

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 20 JUNE 2024

Present: Cllrs Bridget Bolwell (Chair), Duncan Sowry-House (Vice-Chair), Matt Bell, Andrew Parry, Byron Quayle, Jane Somper and Andy Todd

Apologies: Cllrs

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Matthew Chislett (Service Manager - Corporate Parenting & Care Leavers), Lianne Chorley (Fostering Panel Member), Alice Deacon (Corp Dir - Commissioning & Partnerships), Paul Dempsey (Corporate Director - Care & Protection), Louise Drury (Head of Service Children in Care and Care Leavers), Catriona Fountain (Communications Business Partner, Children's), Mandy Jarvis (Youth Voice Officer), Sunita Khattra-Hall (Interim Head of Quality Assurance & Partnerships), Miriam Leigh (Head of Children Thriving in Education), John Miles (Democratic Services Officer), Megan Rochester (Democratic Services Officer), Jo Smark-Richards (Service Manager (Virtual School), Lisa Wilms (Service Manager - Fostering) and Laura Wood (Aspire Adoption).

Officers present remotely (for all or part of the meeting):

Rachel Lachlan (NHS), Theresa Leavy (Executive Director of People - Children), Lisa Reid (Quality Assurance & Safeguarding).

1. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Following from the Annual Council Meeting, members voted in Cllr Bridget Bolwell as Chair and Cllr Duncan Sowry-House as Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board.

2. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed those present.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the formal meeting held on Wednesday 30th November 2022 were confirmed and signed.

4. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

5. **Public Participation**

There was no public participation.

6. **Introduction and Scene Setting**

Theresa Leavy, Executive Director People and Children, set the scene of the meeting and welcomed the new members to the Corporate Parenting Board. She discussed the ongoing work from colleagues, expressing her gratitude for their partnership and continued work in supporting the young people of Dorset.

7. **Corporate Parenting Dataset**

Paul Dempsey, Corporate Director for Care and Protection, introduced members to the Corporate Parenting Board and gave an update on their performance. Referring to the infographics within the report, he highlighted the key indicators which had improved and worsened, noting that there was more positive than negative. Members also received an overview of the number of children in care which had reduced from 449 to 442 as well as discussing the number of foster placements and the percentage of children in care who had secured long term stability and continuity. The Corporate Director for Care and Protection also gave a summary of the strengths and difficulties questionnaires, noting that there were areas which needed to improve despite having greater results since the board last met.

Members were informed that officers had been working hard to ensure that health assessments were completed on time and school attendance figures were highlighted. Paul Dempsey, Corporate Director for Care and Protection, drew members attention to the report, noting that 63% of children were in education, training, or employment. He also referred to the high number of children who were currently in suitable accommodation and assured members that they were continually striving to provide suitable accommodation for care leavers as well as supporting them through pathway plans. To summarise, the Corporate Director for Care and Protection noted the work which had been completed but discussed what further work needed to be done to increase the number of children within education, training, or employment.

Questions/comments

- Questions regarding the different measures for engagement in education.
- Extra support needed for areas such as mental health and wellbeing and members queried if there were any correlations between those with an EHCP and children within care.
- Members noted the percentage of children placed for adoption.
- Clarification regarding how long Dorset children wait for permanent placements, comparisons to sibling's groups and how both these figures compare nationally.

- How has the number of children been placed outside of their locality reviewed and what are the challenges surrounding this.
- Members requested that the sufficiency strategy be presented to the board at a future meeting.

The Corporate Parenting Board Dataset was received and noted.

8. **Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report**

Louise Drury, Head of Service - CiC & Care Leavers, introduced members to the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report. She informed the board that officers had been working hard in what had been an extremely busy year and highlighted the Dataset which had been strengthened. Members were introduced to Chestnut House which was designed for those with a disability, and it was highlighted the positive impacts which this has had on families and their children. She mentioned the celebration of foster carers and noted a further 3 Mockingbird constellations. OFSTED had been welcomed early on in the year for 16-17 care leaver arrangement and homes such as Cherries and College House.

Louise Drury, Head of Service - CiC & Care Leavers, highlighted that work was continuing with Youth Voice and annual surveys had been conducted to better strategies. Attention was drawn to figure 1 of the report which was a useful visual aid which captured the work which had been undertaken. Progress had been made in a number of areas such as decreases in the total number of children in care and the percentage of care leavers living in unsuitable accommodation as well as improvements in placement stability. Work was ongoing to improve the completion of strengths and difficulties questionnaires.

Questions/comments

- Clarification regarding SDQ's and a request as to whether this could be circulated to members of the board in the future as it indicates a lot of areas for the child.
- A lot of positive work was celebrated.
- Members referred to 6.7 of the report and queried as to whether there had been patterns identified in particular schools or year groups.
- What work had been completed to resolve and avoid children being suspended.
- Referred to Initial Health Assessments in figure 1 of the report. Members sought clarification regarding the measurement of timeliness of children in care.
- Behaviours could be escalated through the appropriate support.

The Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report was received and noted.

9. **Fostering Service Annual Report**

Members were introduced to the Fostering Service Annual Report and highlighted that there had been an increase in the number of foster carers from 169 in the previous year to now being 187. The Mockingbird constellation was also highlighted, and members were informed that additional constellations were in the process of being launched. Foster carers had been celebrated and the importance of doing this was discussed. Members were introduced to the annual award celebration which recognised the number of years which had been dedicated to supporting our children of Dorset, ensuring that they had been provided with stability and a nurturing home. Areas for improvement were also discussed and members were assured that work is ongoing to ensure that children either live with or near family. They recognised that one child living outside of Dorset was one too many.

The Fostering Service Annual Report also referred to LADO referrals and noted the results of these. Work is also ongoing to review and monitor standards to ensure that the appropriate training had been carried out and standards continued to be met. This had led to an increase in the number of referrals. The LADO service continued to work closely and collaboratively with the team at Dorset and support is offered to foster carers through paid services.

Questions/comments

- Referred to 3.1 of the report and were pleased with the kinship service.
- Members were pleased with the performance by all the team and foster carers and were pleased that the fostering service was continuing to grow.
- Clarification regarding funding for Pathway projects.

The Fostering Service Annual Report was received and noted.

10. **Fostering Panel Chair Annual Report**

Lianne Chorley, Fostering Panel Member, introduced members to the Fostering Panel Chair Report and highlighted the number of panels which had been held. Members were informed that it was an independent panel across the UK and their primary function had been to make recommendations regarding suitability. It ensured quality standards were being maintained to ensure that children received the national minimal standards. Lianne Chorley, Fostering Panel Member, highlighted feedback which had been received as well as noting the trialling of therapeutic assessments. Members were informed that 4 panel members had resigned, therefore work needed to be completed to look into the panel list. Children have voiced their own views at panel to allow for their voice to be heard. Relationships are continuing to be built to strengthen the service.

Questions/comments

- There were no questions or comments.

The Fostering Panel Chair Annual Report was received and noted.

11. **Care Leavers Annual Report**

Members were introduced to the Care Leavers Annual Report. They were informed that OFSTED came in May 2023 which focused on performance and supervision. In addition to this, officers were pleased to announce that the council had approved an additional protected characteristic for young people. The launch of an unaccompanied asylum-seeking team was also discussed, and recruitment had been maintained for these positions which secured a level of expertise within the service. Two Department for Education programs had been funded around mentoring and reducing isolation and developing links and networks of support for care leavers. Members were informed that work had continued with supporting young children and were pleased that 21 were currently at university and they were hoping to increase the number of children in apprenticeships from 8 to 17. The completion of this would strengthen opportunities.

Questions/comments

- Members acknowledged the positive work which had continued throughout the service, noting the feedback which had been received from care leavers.
- Surprised at the number of care leavers in financial difficulties and felt this was an attribute to the work which had been completed.
- Pleased to see that care leavers were engaging with mentoring programmes.

The Care Leavers Annual Report was received and noted, and members agreed to continue to promote the Corporate Parenting responsibilities across Dorset.

12. **Aspire Adoption Annual Report**

Members were introduced to the Aspire Adoption Annual Report. They were informed that Aspire was formed in 2017 with a role linked to Dorset which offered support to senior officers. Officers highlighted that in the previous year more boys had been adopted than girls and was pleased to report that nearly all sibling groups had been placed together. In addition to this, officers also discussed the number of placements orders and noted that there had been no delays due to close monitoring. Reductions in adopted orders could be seen when compared to the previous year however delays had happened within the courts due to parents being encouraged to challenge placement orders. There had been a slight increase in children being placed. Timeliness had also improved with Dorset being better than the national average. Members were informed that early permanence had been positive for children as prospective adopters were given temporary orders and early training was completed. This ensured that they were all working together to use early permanence. Recruitment was highlighted, making note of a recruitment campaign.

Officers were proud of the work completed, particularly their success in placing large sibling groups with adopters. They praised the collaboration between Aspire

and Dorset in ensuring the children of Dorset were supported. Attention was also drawn to the adoption panel, in which they continued to meet virtually twice a month.

Questions/comments

- Members felt that this had been really positive for the children of Dorset and a significant amount of good joint work between Dorset and Aspire had ensured this.
- Pleased that as many sibling groups were being kept together.

The Corporate Parenting Board approved the Aspire Adoption Annual Report and Statement of purpose.

13. Youth Voice Strategy for Care Experienced Children and Young People

Members were introduced to the Youth Voice Strategy for Care Experienced Children and Young People. Officers felt it had been a privilege to hear the views of young people and the report was an update on the approach taken. Members were informed that it was important to hear their voices, therefore they looked into how this could have been done as they weren't hearing the diversity of voices. There are different children in different types of care. It was challenging for young children to use their voices and the language that officers used could have been a barrier. Officers highlighted the use of networking which resulted in a range of voices as well as diverse spaces, children should be able to choose who and where they use their voice. Members were informed that surveys had been conducted which identified progress. The results of these helped to set the themes for the Corporate Parenting Board. The network board as a youth voice team collate these responses and hoped that in future, they would bring to members the change needed. Currently there were 9 children signed up with the aim to increase the voices heard.

Members were informed that the first network board meeting was scheduled for the following week and were invited to attend.

Questions/comments

- Clarification regarding the diversity of the youth voice team and the age range within the group. Were there any gaps which need to be improved such as age or gender.
- Confirmation regarding the top priorities and immediate impacts.
- How do you ensure their voice is heard and will continue to be heard.

The Youth Voice Strategy for Care Experienced Children and Young People was received and noted.

14. Corporate Parenting Strategy

Louise Drury, Head of Service - CiC & Care Leavers, introduced members to the Corporate Parenting Strategy and reflected on the use of the children's voice to demonstrate the work that the service had done. It reflected the diversity of the children in care and drew attention to the priorities. Ensuring that children are safe and have a sense of stability and permanence in their lives. She discussed the importance of celebrating with them as well as the importance of their physical and mental health. Supporting them to be themselves and helping them to identify who they are. The next steps include looking towards adult life and how to support them to be safe and happy as adults.

Questions/comments

- Referred to 2.5 of the officer's report.
- Were EHCP being extradited for children in care and were they being prioritised.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy was approved.

15. Date of Next Meeting

The next formal meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board will be held on Thursday 28th November 2024. The next informal meeting will be held on Thursday 25th July 2024.

16. Urgent items

There were no urgent items.

17. Exempt Business

There was no exempt business.

Duration of meeting: 3.00 - 4.50 pm

Chairman

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