



Corporate Parenting Board

Dorset Council – Children’s Services

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Annual Report 2018/19 (Bi Annual Snapshot)

Date of Meeting: 9 December 2019

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education and Early Help

Director: Sarah Parker, Executive Director of People - Children

Executive Summary:

This is the first Annual Report of Dorset Council’s Corporate Parenting Board and reflects a ‘midway snapshot’ of Corporate Parenting in Dorset following the Local Government Reorganisation and the inception of the new Dorset Council in May.

Councillor Toni Coombs (Chairman) is the first new Dorset Council - Corporate Parenting Board Chair and together with six elected members and the Lead Member for Children’s Services (LMCS) they form the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) for Dorset. Corporate Parenting was formally introduced in legislation by the Children Act (1989). The Children and Social Work Act (2018) defined in law for the first time the statutory requirements that all councils have as Corporate Parents by outlining seven principles that must be considered. The principles are based on the needs of children in care and care leavers and the responsibility that Councils have to those children.

Corporate parenting is a ‘task’ and must be shared by the whole local authority and partner agencies’. This midway report shares some of the reporting and oversight considered at monthly CPB meetings.

Looking at the recommendations members are invited to consider how they can further support children and young people to have access to high-quality service provision from other directorates within the council and how they can influence those services to improve the quality of provision to Looked After Children. Examples are Housing, Transport, Leisure and Sports facilities and the provision of support to families in communities before any statutory involvement is required.

Parenting is a lifelong commitment and the children and young people who are forced to navigate the care system do not have the luxury of ‘lifelong’ corporate parents.... Therefore, the window for Corporate Parents to be the best that they can be is considerably short.

'All children need love and stability to thrive. A strong corporate parenting ethos means that everyone from the Chief Executive down to front line staff, as well as elected council members, are concerned about those children and care leavers as if they were their own. This is evidenced by an embedded culture where council officers do all that is reasonably possible to ensure the council is the best 'parent' it can be to the child or young person. [Statutory guidance](#) on the role of the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member for Children describes how those roles set the tone for the local authority to be an effective corporate parent.' – Applying Corporate Parenting Principles DfE (2018)

Equalities Impact Assessment:

N/A

Budget:

None Identified

Risk Assessment:

N/A

Climate implications:

N/A

Other Implications:

None

Recommendation:

Members to consider and act on the recommendations within the report to continue to drive high standards and aspirational parenting for Looked After Children in Dorset.

Reason for Recommendation:

Good parents are aspirational and ambitious for their children and corporate parenting shouldn't be any different. Ensuring Care Leavers and Looked After Children have access to everything they need to prepare them for adult life is a responsibility and a duty we all share - *'if this were my child'*.

Appendices:

N/A

Background Papers:

Applying Corporate Parenting Principles to Looked After Children and Care Leavers – statutory guidance (2018)

Local Government Corporate Parenting Resource Pack – Guidance (2017)

The Children and Social Work Act (2017)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-new-scheme-launched-to-support-young-people-leaving-care>

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1 Corporate Parenting duty

- 1.1 This is the first Annual Report of Dorset Council’s Corporate Parenting Board and reflects a ‘midway snapshot’ of progress following Local Government Reorganisation and the inception of the new Dorset Council in May 2019.
- 1.2 Councillor Toni Coombs (Chairman) is the first Dorset Council - Corporate Parenting Board Chair and together with five elected members and the Lead Member for Children’s Services they form the Corporate Parenting Board. Corporate Parenting was introduced in the Children Act (1989) and defined in law for the first time in The Children and Social Work Act (2017) which outlines how the local authority should carry out its duty as the corporate parent to looked after children and care leavers. Seven principles must be considered and are based on the needs of children in care and care leavers and the responsibility that councils have to those children.

‘Being a corporate parent means doing everything we can for every child in the council’s care – and every care leaver- to give them the opportunities that other children get. This covers everything from keeping an eye on their progress at school, to looking after their health and wellbeing, to preparing them for life as independent adults – and supporting them when they get there. We need to be ambitious for the children in our care, encouraging them to dream big and take chances even if they don’t feel like that’s been an option in the past.’ LGA Guidance – Corporate Parenting resource pack (2017)

2 Corporate Parenting Principles

- 2.1 The corporate parenting principles are intended to inform how a local authority carries out existing responsibilities, they are about the behaviours and attitudes. They should shape the mind-set and culture of every part of a local authority in how it carries out all its functions in relation to looked-after children and care leavers. The principles intend to ensure that all councils

have high ambitions for the children in their care. In doing so, the application of the principles must respond to the individual needs, vulnerabilities or disadvantages of looked after children and care leavers.

- 2.2 Using the seven principles as headings, this report will comment briefly on the reporting, progress and oversight of the Corporate Parenting Board since its inception in May.

3 Principle 1 - Physical Mental Health and Well Being

- 3.1 The board receive annual reports and interim updates when required from Health providers and services which include the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group (DCCG), CAMHS, the specialist emotional health practitioners and the Looked After Nursing Service to include reporting on health review assessments carried out annually and initial assessments (IHA's) which must be completed within 20 days of a child coming in to care.
- 3.2 The IHA statutory 20-day timescale completion rate continues to challenge both children's service officers and the healthcare provider, the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (DNLAC) escalated the concern to the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) last year and requested that IHA's remain a standing agenda item at Board meetings.
- 3.3 Sporadic improvements throughout the last six months have been recorded, but timeliness continues to be inconsistent and unacceptable and the Council and the health provider as the partner agency share the responsibility to ensure IHA's are completed within the acceptable parameters with a minimum agreed completion target of 85%. The DNLAC and the Acting Corporate Director for Care and Protection have committed to achieving the target set.
- 3.4 This year through the DNLAC service, children and young people reported that they want continued and improved access and timely support for emotional and mental health and for Care Leavers transitioning into adulthood.

3.3 Recommendation

- Corporate Parenting Board to review the Dorset Young Researchers report on Mental Health and Emotional Wellness 2019 and work with CLiCC to identify what more can be done across Dorset with services and partners to follow up and act on the recommendations within the report.
- CPB to make enquiries as to whether the Dorset Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which informs the Joint Health and Well Being Strategy (JHWS) includes specific consideration for children in care and care leavers.

4. Principle 2 - Encouraging expression of views, wishes and feelings

- 4.1 The Care Leavers and Children in Care Council (CLICC) regularly present and challenge the CPB at monthly meetings. Additionally, members and officers attend activity events held outside of school and the annual residential event where for the first time CLICC chaired the meeting. The CPB meeting times have been adjusted to encourage more young people to attend after school, however the young people's attendance continues to be low.
- 4.2 The chairman and the Lead Member for Children's services (LMCS) attended the Looked After Children awards ceremony held at Bryanston School to celebrate successes and achievements of young people throughout the year.
- 4.3 CLICC report that they would like to see a consistent turn out of CPB members and staff at events and at their 'What it's like to be a child in Care' training session which has been designed to help workers and councillors to gain an informed understanding of the lived experience of a child in care.
- 4.4 The Independent Reviewing Officers annual report informed members about the progress of Children and Young People in care and reminded the board that Permanence – long term placement is crucial to the stability of children and young people and identified several areas for service improvement and changes to practice through an annual work plan.
- 4.5 Children and Young People are invited to complete an annual survey about the service they experience and their life as a child in care or as a care leaver. The survey responses are shared widely with the directorate; senior officers and the Corporate Parenting Board and Council and helps to identify themes and recurring trends for areas of service improvement and learning.
- 4.6 **Recommendation**
 - Board members to meet with young people and review where and when CPB meetings should/could be held to enable a greater cohort of young people to attend.
 - Board members to consider how they can assist CLiCC with ensuring their training course becomes part of the induction training for all employees working in the Children's Service directorate.
 - The chair and Board members to meet with the Independent Reviewing Manager to discuss the Annual Work Program and establish how Corporate Parents can support the Annual Work Program.
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5. Principle 3 - Taking in to account those views, wishes and feelings of Children and Young People

- 5.1 Places a requirement on the CPB to 'act' on information gathered and shared by children and young people and their representatives, advocates and support workers. To challenge partners and services, to advocate for children in care and care leavers and to ensure they feedback and update young people with progress and responses.
- 5.2 Members and Officers are presented with challenge cards to complete as homework and return to subsequent Corporate Parenting Board meetings. The Officers take the responses and integrate them into the services to develop. This creates the opportunity for young people to influence the service they receive. The introduction of social worker business cards and permitting foster areas to make pre-authorised wider decisions are some of the examples where children's views and wishes have been acted on.
- 5.3 Last Year the Leaving Care team highlighted a national campaign run by the Children's Society to exempt Care Leavers from paying council tax. In September this year the CPB approved and recommended to full council that the proposal should be passed. The LMCS reported that the proposal received unanimous support from counsellors and was passed by the council in October this year.

6. Principle 4 - Enabling access and making the best use of services delivered by the Local Authority and relevant partners

- 6.1 Relevant partners are defined as the governing bodies of the following: - The Police, probation service, youth offending, Clinical Commissioning Groups, school governing bodies of academies and technology colleges and further education providers. Services and partner agencies are also required to submit annual reports to the CPB throughout the year.
- 6.2 The board also received service reports regarding Children Who are Disabled, Children and Care Leavers service performance overview, Quality and Assurance and Audit and Blue Print for Change the Children's Service restructure plans and the proposals for a LAC reduction strategy.
- 6.3 This year there has seen an increase in the number of children and young people placed in unregulated and unregistered settings. Ofsted state that it is recognised there is a national shortage of appropriate accommodation for some young people. The CPB monitor the placements in Dorset monthly and follow the young people's progress very closely.
- 6.4 The LMCS requested monthly notifications to Ofsted on these placements for the purpose of transparency and visited some of the settings with the Executive Director for Children, to listen to the views of the young people in person and to ensure the settings are appropriate and that the young people are receiving a good standard of care. One of the young people insisted that their home is

where they want to remain as they have been the most settled in a long time despite the registration issue. The LCMS and the Executive Director supported the young person's request and are in the process of registering the home to enable the young person to remain in their placement of choice.

6.5 Suitable properties are being sourced within the Local Authority estate, the LMCS and the Executive Director are pro-actively viewing and resourcing alternative properties with a view to increase the number of children's residential homes in Dorset.

6.6 The Corporate Parenting Board have not fully completed a strategy document to provide direction and shared objectives or Terms of Reference defining the purpose and structure of the board. A forward plan of meetings is used to provide structure to meetings but without a strategy and identified objectives the board will not achieve substantial change. A workshop is planned in December with an external consultant to look at how the CPB can meaningfully influence change for children and young people in care.

6.6 **Recommendation**

- Corporate Parents should consider how they can engage creatively with partners to consider what additional accommodation resources in Dorset can be made available for children in care and care leavers. What ideas and incentives can the CPB members consider to encourage landlords and property developers to make available suitable properties for care leavers and foster carers who may need assistance with affordable property in Dorset.
- CPB members to consider how planning applications can be expedited in the case of childrens residential homes and accommodation.
- CPB to complete the Terms of Reference for the new board and to complete the CPB strategy document in partnership with CLiCC to establish shared goals and monitor progress.

7. **Principle 5 - The promotion of high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people**

7.1 Following the recommendation from Ofsted in their full inspection report in 2016 the CPB are aware of their responsibility to challenge and scrutinise the services delivered to Looked After Children and Care Leavers. There are now ten CPB meetings per year to allow for increased monitoring through service annual reports and progress updates where requested by the board.

7.2 Service performance reports are reviewed regularly and the CPB receive the Children's services data analysis tool (ChAT) which encompasses a detailed statistical snapshot of children in care and care leavers information. Having the opportunity to compare data nationally assists the CPB in better understanding developing issues, key performance indicators and comparative information with other Local Authorities.

- 7.3 The Quality Assurance service advises the CPB with updates on service performance attained through audits. The Quality Assurance Officer will be reporting to the Corporate Parenting Board on a six-monthly basis following the introduction of the new Quality Assurance Improvement Program.
- 7.4 The inception of the new Dorset Council introduced one significant change to Corporate Parenting Board reporting, the whole council policy for transparency and openness requires that agendas and minutes are made publicly available. Additionally, attendance by members of the public and press to CPB meetings are invited. Whilst this is a new policy for Dorset, many Local Authorities have made their CPB meetings open to the public for some time. There are arguments for and against the sharing of reporting in relation to children and young people and sensitive or confidential items and reports must remain exempt from public viewing and publishing.
- 7.5 Good parents are aspirational and ambitious for their children and corporate parenting shouldn't be any different, ensuring Care Leavers and Looked After Children have access to everything they need to prepare them for adult life is a responsibility and a duty – as if they were your own child.

7.6 **Recommendation**

- Corporate parents to consider how they can meaningfully evidence 'aspirational parenting' and how they will ensure the best outcomes for the children they are responsible for.

8 Principle 6 - For children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

- 8.1 Stability for children and young people in care is a primary need and local authorities nationally are struggling to offer consistent and high-quality care, this is repeatedly stated in Ofsted inspection reports. Dorset is no exception and constantly challenged to provide 'consistent and stable' accommodation. In the recent Independent Reviewing managers annual report 'permeance' for children in care was declared as a priority and a request to corporate parents to help in any way possible.
- 8.2 There are a very small number of young people in care placed in unregistered/unregulated accommodation and the corporate parenting board insist on regular updates on those young people. The Executive Director and the LMCS have visited some of the young people in their placements to hear what the young people have to say and to make sure the settings are appropriate and safe, as good parents would do. The settings are regularly inspected by officers and the young people are invited to share their views through their advocates or in person.

9. Principle 7 – To prepare Looked After Children and Care Leavers for adulthood and independent living.

- 9.1 The Children and Social Work Act requires by statute that local authorities have in place and publish a local offer to care leavers outlining what services are

available to them as they transition from life in care to independence. The support offered includes advice on services; health and wellbeing, relationships, education training and employment, finance, accommodation. The annual report for Care Leavers and an update on the Dorset local offer is due in December, the offer is published on the council website.

9.2 There is substantially more that can be done to improve the Local Authority offer to care leavers beyond the statutory requirement. Corporate Parents are in a good position to influence services and what can be achieved locally by working together with partners and the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers to source and provide additional support through local businesses, charities and voluntary organisations.

9.3 In October 2018 the government launched the Care Leaver Covenant (CLC) which was introduced as a new scheme to support young people leaving care. The Covenant is a commitment from businesses, charities and the public sector and offers opportunities to access learning from some large corporations; Barclays Bank offer an online life skills hub for care leavers to access in compact learning sessions.

9.4 **Recommendation**

- In consultation with CLICC and Care Leavers and their Advisors and other interested groups, Corporate Parents should initiate a members and business leaders Care Leaver forum and network to look at what type of non-statutory provision can be made available in Dorset to support young people leaving care.