

# Corporate Parenting Board

## 28 April 2022

### Corporate Parenting Annual Report

#### For Recommendation to Council

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

**Local Councillor(s):** Cllr

**Executive Director:** T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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**Report Status:** Public

#### **Recommendation:**

The report highlights the Corporate Parenting Board's key achievements and the challenges identified from April 2021 to March 2022. It also highlights future actions that will be required to address these challenges.

#### **Reason for Recommendation:**

I recommend that the board members support the area's identified for focus in this report. As Corporate Parents, all councillors should seek to stay informed about children in the council's care and our care leavers.

#### **1. Executive Summary**

This Annual Report provides an overview of what we are doing well, our key achievements in the last year, what our key challenges are and our plans to address those challenges in 2022/2023 and beyond.

#### **2. Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications to consider.

#### **3. Well-being and Health Implications**

There are no wellbeing and health implications to consider.

#### **4. Climate implications**

Transport to and from the board meeting venues will increase the use of transport. However, the Council continue to explore how this can be reduced by way of Hybrid meetings moving forward.

#### **5. Other Implications**

All Corporate Parenting Boards have and will continue to follow Government guidance in response to the Covid 19 pandemic.

#### **6. Risk Assessment**

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

#### **7. Equalities Impact Assessment**

Not applicable

#### **8. Appendices**

Not applicable

#### **9. Background Papers**

Not applicable

#### **10. Introduction**

10.1 This Annual Report provides an overview of what we are doing well, our key achievements in the last year, what are our key challenges and our plans to address those challenges in 2022/2023 and beyond.

10.2 The Corporate Parenting Board is chaired by Cllr Wheller and Vice Chair Cllr Biggs. The rest of the Board is made up of a number of multi-agency stakeholders including young people who are care experienced. The Board has maintained a consistent membership which has enriched developing relationships. Young people's voices are prioritised by the chair and as are ways in which the Board and its members can be accountable.

10.3 The primary objective of the Board is to ensure they are the best possible parents to children in care or the care-experienced of Dorset Council. The Board strives to ensure Dorset to be the best place to be a child; where communities thrive, and families are supported to be the best they can be'. This is in keeping with the 6 priorities of the Children, Young People and Families plan 2020/2023 and the aims of Dorset council overall.

- 10.4 We have a duty to make sure the Statutory Corporate Parenting Principles are upheld and to ensure vulnerable children and young people have an equal opportunity to enjoy and achieve the ambition of the council.
- 10.5 Our collective responsibilities and duty to children in care and care leavers are outlined in the seven key Corporate Parenting Principles in the Children and Social Work Act (2017):
1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of children and young people.
  2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
  3. To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
  4. To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
  5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
  6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
  7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living
- 10.6 Dorset Council are committed and ambitious for our children in care and care experienced young people as any parent would be for their children. As such, the Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2020/2023, which was co-created with our young people, highlights the 6 priorities/ambitions for the Board.
1. Increase opportunities to hear the voice of our children and young people and to take their views, wishes and feelings into account.
  2. Promote better physical and mental health and well-being through improved access to health information and services.
  3. Have high aspirations for children in care and care leavers in their education, training and employment.
  4. Ensure safe and stable accommodation within the family home or close relatives and friends. If not possible, children are moved to a permanent placement without delay.
  5. For our children to have a good and enriching experience of care provision and to prepare for adulthood and an independent and successful life.
  6. Effective governance and planning arrangements are in place to mean the Corporate Parent can be the best they can be.

## **11. Context: Corporate Parenting Overview 2021/2022**

- 11.1 The Board is required to meet a minimum of 7 times per year. During this period, the Board met 9 times between 5-7pm, as requested by our young people to support their attendance.
- 11.2 Of the 9 meetings held, 6 were public and live streamed via YouTube. One of these meetings was held in person due to updated Covid-19 guidance. The remaining 3 were informal meetings which allowed for deep dives into key topics of interest. Informal meetings are intended to allow for open and honest conversations which

are rich with challenge, without fear of disclosing the personal data of our children in care or care experienced young people.

- 11.3 During 2021/2022, the Board received all annual statutory reports with regard to children in care and care experienced young people. Statutory reports include annual reports from the Independent Reviewing Officer, Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Fostering, Adoption, Private Fostering, Fostering Panel Chair, Quality Assurance and Annual Corporate Parenting Report, Complaints and Representations, Virtual School and Health and Wellbeing.
- 11.4 During in-public meetings, a comprehensive data set has also been provided with commentary from lead officers to ensure that all members are well sighted on key data relating to our children in care and our care experienced young people. Updates on progression of the Corporate Parenting Strategy have also been provided in 3 of the 6 in public meetings, to ensure the members are sighted on progress and areas that require further focus.
- 11.5 At request of members, the following briefing reports have been completed and shared in board meetings:
- The progress of the Modernising Fostering Programme
  - Meaningful Care into Adulthood
  - Harbour progress report
  - Ofsted Report - The Cherries and Hayeswood
  - The Permanence and Care Leaver Strategy 2021-2023
  - The Care Leaver offer 2022-2023
  - Children in Care at Risk of Offending and Custody
  - Emotional Health and Well-Being in schools and briefing on the Emotional Health and Well-Being Steering Group
- 11.6 During informal meetings, key topics were explored in a multitude of mediums including workshops, case studies, videos and presentations. Topics covered included:
- Deep Dive on Care Leavers' Employment, education, and skills – Not in Education Employment and Training
  - Review annual children in care survey findings
  - National Care Leavers Week activity and promotion workshop
  - Dorset Council's in-house fostering workshop
- 11.7 Dorset Council continue to welcome Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children into our care both through the national transfer scheme and those presenting in person in Dorset. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, we have welcomed 22 children since April 2021. Our staff continue to get alongside our children and ensure access to safe accommodation and health and education provision.
- 11.8 Due to the United Kingdom leaving the European Union, there was a clear impact for 11 of our children in care and or care leavers who originated from outside of the United Kingdom (UK) rights to remain in the UK. The deadline for the settled

scheme application (30th June 2021) was carefully monitored and tracked within Dorset Council and all children and care leavers have now settled and or pre-settled status allowing them to remain in the United Kingdom. For those on pre settled status we will look to submit applications to request change in their status to settled in keeping with the current government guidance.

## 12. Covid-19 Pandemic and Corporate Parenting

12.1 During the national pandemic, Dorset Council's Corporate Parenting Board continued to operate and function, making best use of technology to ensure the Board continued to meet virtually via Microsoft Teams and that members were well sighted on progress relating to our strategy, priorities and ambitions. Other technology has been used to promote our board members engagement and interaction as they would have done prior to the pandemic. Examples of technology used include:

- Miro - an online collaborative digital white board platform that enabled members to work effectively together in group discussion to produce ideas and capture ideas through digital sticky notes and in real time.
- Slido - an easy-to-use Question and Answer polling platform. This has supported our young people's views being captured prior to, and shared, in our meetings. This app has also supported live feedback of all involved in meetings to get the most out of meetings and bridging the gap between speakers and those attending the board meeting.

12.2 As the rules of the Pandemic eased, as of the 10<sup>th</sup> March the Board has started to meet face to face and Dorset Council is actively exploring how hybrid board meetings may occur in the future.

## 13. Representation of our children in care and care experienced young people.

13.1 Our young people have reported in a number of forums that they have struggled with the number of online meetings during the pandemic. As such, attendance by our young people at board meetings has at times been sporadic. This remains a key area of focus for Dorset Council who value the participation and engagement of our young people.

13.2 Advocacy and Independent Visiting Services for our children has changed with National Youth Advocacy services (NYAS) taking over from Action for Children on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021. A key change in service delivery is that NYAS look to empower our young people to advocate for themselves. Feedback has been positive from our young people to date:

Having an advocate is nice, I had a voice- like an adult and people listened to me.

Advocacy was quite useful. I won't need it next time as I am now OK talking for myself. I have found my voice.

It is good having an advocate because they are there to help me when I am making difficult decisions or not sure what to do.

- 13.3 As Chair of the Board, Cllr Wheller has also made an open offer to meet with young people prior to any Corporate Parenting Board meeting to promote attendance, engagement and to build relationships with our young people.
- 13.4 In August 2021, we saw the development and successful implementation of Dorset Council's Youth Voice Service, taking over from Participation People. The Youth Voice Team performs an essential role in ensuring that we are listening to our children and young people, including children in care and care leavers, understanding their needs and working with them to find solutions together. The Youth Voice Team support a number of projects including the Dorset Youth Council, the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Forum and are in the process of developing a Young Commissioners programme. They also support initiatives, such as Takeover Challenge, to ensure leaders and managers are engaging with the children and young people that their service is responsible for.
- 13.5 The Youth Voice Team also provide specific support to children in care and care leavers to be involved in decision making both formally and informally. Formally, care experienced children and young people are invited to contribute through governance structures, such as the Corporate Parenting Board and the Care Leavers Delivery Group. Informally, the team hold events and workshops where leaders and managers are invited to meet with them, as well as surveys and other online approaches. Additionally, the team are supporting the redesign and promotion of the survey in calibration with our children in care and care experienced young people. The service has also presented to the board how the challenge cards have been redesigned into a challenge report moving to a report card approach so that conversations take place between members and young people, which means that solutions will be co-produced.
- 13.6 The Young People in Care Annual Satisfaction Survey was open to children and young people aged 11 – 25. The subsequent report was co-produced and then presented at the Corporate Parenting Board highlighting the key messages from our young people. These messages included how our children and young people have been offered help and support during the pandemic, particularly in areas of Health, Education, Social Care, and digital support. There was also a clear steer regarding future surveys; our young people felt that there needs to be a concerted effort to promote the next survey to many more children in care. We have listened to this and, as stated above, we are co-producing a new survey for our children in care and will through consultation explore how best to promote this for the 2022 survey. A clear recommendation from the survey was the need for a range of opportunities provided for children in care and care leavers to enable children and young people a choice as to how, and to what extent, they get involved. This has been heard and the Youth Voice service has co-produced and created a timeline considering future Corporate Parenting Boards and children in care and care leaver forums to ensure our children and young people have an opportunity to engage with our members in places and spaces that they are more accustomed too. This

will also mirror our Corporate Parenting themed agendas for 2022/2023 and maximise the voice of our children on our meetings.

## **14. Ofsted Inspection**

14.1 An inspection of Dorset Local Authority Children's Services took place from 27 September 2021 to 8 October 2021. This was the first full inspection of all Dorset children's services since the inception of the new Dorset Council Unitary Authority in April 2019. The last full inspection of all services was undertaken in 2016 and through Dorset's predecessor council, Dorset County Council.

14.2 The Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services is a graded inspection. Inspectors make their graded judgements on a 4-point scale:

- Outstanding
- Good
- Requires improvement to be good
- Inadequate

14.3 Ofsted have judged Dorset Children's Services as follows:

- Overall effectiveness: good
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: good
- The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: good
- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: outstanding

14.4 Ofsted have determined services for children and families in Dorset are of good quality and are continuing to improve, finding that senior leadership has a proven determination to give every child in Dorset a brighter future.

14.5 The inspectors have acknowledged the strong political and corporate commitment to improvement, the pride that staff take in their work and that good work is expected, delivered and celebrated. Inspectors have noted the scaffolding for further improvement is firmly in place.

## **15. Key Achievements**

15.1 The Harbour was launched in October 2021 and is developing an integrated service for our more complex and troubled young people to ensure that their needs, no matter how diverse, are addressed within a single team of trusted and skilled workers. This may be to prevent care, support placement stability or reunification if in care, and a smooth transition to independence when leaving care. The board have been regularly updated on the Harbour's development and the impact this service is having.

15.2 Dorset Council's creation of the Youth Voice Service is a positive step to developing our relationships with our children in care and our care experienced young people. The service continues to look at how and where we engage with our young people

and are looking to ensure a wide range of views are gathered and then supported to influence service development.

- 15.3 The board have been sighted on key Investing in Local Housing provision for our care leavers in the purchase of 10 Kirtilton Avenue, which forms part of Dorset Council's residential sufficiency program to increase the availability of suitable accommodation for care leavers within Dorset. The proposal remains to develop the property to provide suitable care leaver accommodation, and to create a care leaver Hub. Providing a space for professionals and our care leavers to meet.
- 15.4 The Corporate Parenting Board on the 1st March 2021 approved and signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant. At the heart of the Care Leaver Covenant is close collaboration with local authorities who are statutorily responsible for the wellbeing of our care leavers.
- 15.5 Firstly, Dorset Council worked to expand the internal offer across all Council departments to offer services and/or experiences to care leavers. This includes identifying a care leaver champion in each directorate. This work is being overseen by the Care Leaver Service Delivery Group chaired by Cllr Kerby. Secondly, the Covenant are working with us to engage and encourage local businesses, charities and organisations to consider what they may be able to contribute to the development and opportunities for care leavers.
- 15.6 The New Belongings Programme (NBP) run through Corum Voice was successfully launched and has run from 2020. Dorset Council were one of 8 Local Authorities to participate in this programme. The NBP developed a model for improving support for care leavers based on engagement and involvement of young people as experts in their own experience. A life beyond care survey was completed in 2020 and then in 2022 with a significant 60% return rate from our care leavers in the 2022 survey. The surveys have supported highlighting 'Bright Spots' for our care leavers which the board have been sighted on. The 2022 Bright Spots report is to be shared with the Board in the coming months as the programme comes to an end.
- 15.7 On 21st June 2021, we launched a care leaver delivery group which sits below the Corporate Parenting Board and is responsible for driving the Care Leaver Action plan – this plan is a combination of the New Belongings and Care Leaver Covenant Action plan. The delivery group has a key role in reporting on progress as well as identifying and addressing barriers to effective change, making recommendations on how issues can be resolved to improve the lived experiences of our children looked after and care leavers.
- 15.8 There are a variety of task and finish groups that focus on the work identified within the annual business plan and their work reports into the delivery group.
- 15.9 The areas of focus for the Corporate Parenting board for 2022/2023:
  - Our care leavers in emergency or temporary accommodation. There is a clear action plan which has been created to address OFSTED's 2021 recommendation, which will ensure not only that these types of accommodation are accessed as a last resort but there is improved management oversight of wrap around support and exit planning from this accommodation.



- Improve the diversity and number of children in care and care experienced young people contributing to the Corporate Parenting Board meetings.  
The Youth voice Team continues to make inroads to developing this in conjunction with the Service Manager for Corporate Parenting. As a Council we are committed to not only develop engagement but also seek active co-production in shaping and developing our service delivery with our young people.
- Dorset Councils plan for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.  
Dorset Council is proud to be part of the national transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Dorset Council area are committed to developing services and local communities to promote a warm welcome and integration of these children in Dorset.

The board will continue to be updated as to progress in the above focus areas in future board meetings.

## **16. Governance of the Corporate Parenting Board**

- 16.1 On 10th March 2022, the Board agreed to a change in the governance to two formal meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board held in public that will receive statutory reports; the remaining meetings will be informal and not in public, using different locations and methods of engaging our young people and stakeholders to ensure that the board is accessible and able to encourage the very best input from everyone taking part in the meetings. Themes of future boards were agreed and will include engagement, sufficiency, safeguarding, education, employment and training, health and wellbeing and care leavers.
- 16.2 Corporate Parenting Board members were also invited to nominate themselves as a champion of a theme that is of particular interest to them. Champions will be able to work with the lead officer and young people to contribute to the content of the workshop and act as an ambassador for young people promoting high aspirations and securing best outcomes through service development within the area of interest.
- 16.3 In summary, the Corporate Parenting Board continues to benefit from strong membership with positive relationships between Councillors and Officers that have regularly met through the year. This has ensured that all members are well sighted not only on key performance data but also provided reports on activities and developments within the council. This has supported our overarching Corporate Parenting Boards ambition to be the best corporate parents, with high ambitions for our children and care leavers.

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### **Footnote:**

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.