

Corporate Parenting Board

25 May 2023

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report 2022 - 2023

Choose an item.

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

Local Councillor(s):

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

Report Author: Louise Drury

Tel: 01305 228382

Email: louise.drury@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

Members of Corporate Parenting Board are requested to note the content of this report which captures the work of the board over the last financial year and the progress made against our priorities in the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2020-2023.

Reason for Recommendation:

As Corporate Parents, all members of the board seek to stay informed about Children in Care of the Council and Care Leavers, to offer challenge and support. The Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report provides members with an opportunity to reflect on the work of the previous year, to consider what has worked well and where there is still more to do, to plan next steps to be ever better.

1. Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

Introduction by Cllr Kate Wheller, Chair of Corporate Parenting Board

1.1. As Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board, I am pleased to introduce the Annual Report for 2022- 2023.

1.2. This has been a very busy year and we have seen a number of positive developments:

- Opening of College House
 - Launch of Mockingbird Constellation 1 and 2
 - Uplift in foster carer and supported lodgings carers fees coming into effect 1st April 2023
 - Investment in increasing management and staffing capacity Leaving Care Service
 - Launch of Staying Close
 - Opening of our Care Leaver accommodation.
- 1.3. The Corporate Parenting Board includes Members of the Council who come together with officers and relevant partner agencies to offer challenge and support to services for children in our care and for our care leavers. There is arguable no greater responsibility for Members than as corporate parents: to ensure that the care and support given to children and young people in the care of the authority and to those leaving our care, is as we would expect to be given to our own children.
- 1.4. In 2022/2023 we saw the Covid -19 pandemic move to an endemic virus. However, the impact both as service providers and recipients continues to be felt. Corporate Parenting Board has continued to seek reassurance in this period that colleagues in the service have been able to maintain the high standard of care that we know everyone is passionate about providing. I commend the adaptability and tenacity of our children and young people, their families, our carers and our staff and colleagues in continuing to build resilience when faced with the challenges this brings.
- 1.5. Finally, I would like to say thank you to Cllr Richard Biggs for stepping in and taking the role of the chair during my absence in January and March 2023 Corporate Parenting Board.

2. Corporate Parenting Strategy.

- 2.1. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021-2023, 'Making Dorset the best place to grow up,' was updated last year with the re-freshed Dorset Promise. The Dorset Promise was co-designed with young people and published in October 2022. The Dorset Promise will be carried forward as we develop the next Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024 – 2027 later this year.
- 2.2. The development of The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2024-2027 will be undertaken collaboratively with young people and board members. It will also take into account the government strategy 'Stable Lives Built with Love'.

2.3. Throughout 2022-2023, Corporate Parenting Board has considered progress against the strategy's priorities. The following provides a brief update on some of the key areas of discussion by the board in the reporting period and highlights positive areas of development.

2.4. Between March 2022 – March 2023 our care population has reduced from 450 To 437, and we are now actively working with 290 Care Leavers compared to 282 last year. We have a total of 516 Care Leavers.

3. Youth Voice and Youth Participation

Increase opportunities to hear the voice of our children and young people and to take their views, wishes and feelings into account.

3.1. The involvement of children and families in learning from their experiences through consultation and commissioning, complaints and serious incidents is fully embedded in the development of services.

3.2. We are continuing to strengthen the feedback system within our audit process to evolve and learn from our practice. Our care experienced young people have taken part in the 'Your Life Beyond Care' Coram Voice survey and we have continued to work with Coram voice this year, undertaking the Bright Spots survey for Children in Care in March 2023. We are anticipating a report with findings in July 2023 which will be shared with the Board.

3.3. These comprehensive surveys have given us insights across several areas:

- Use of evidenced based 'Bright Spots' – Partnership between Coram Voice and the University of Oxford supported by The Hadley Trust
- Perceptions of social workers, IRO's, advocates and other professionals
- Perceptions of plans, including care, education and pathway
- Perceptions of processes such as reviews and complaints
- Feelings of wellbeing and support

3.4. Dorset Youth's Voice have a program of Fostering Family Fun Days which members are actively encouraged to attend to be alongside our children and their families while joining in with different activities. These have been a great way for us to hear the voice of children in our care, children who foster and foster carers.

3.5. The new governance arrangements of Corporate Parenting Board to have 4 informal Boards and 2 formal Boards has led to increased participation from young people. Feedback from young people attending informal boards which centre around a workshop has been very positive.

3.6. This year we have held workshops which have focused on the following:

- Unaccompanied young people
- Feeling safe at home and in the community
- Community Parenting
- Transitions – ‘A helping hand’
- Menu of learning for children coming into care

‘I felt as though people were really interested in what I had to say’ - AP

‘I love coming to Corporate Parenting Board – you get to talk to people who can make things happen and make a difference for a lot of young people’ - CW

4. The Health of Children in Care

Promote better physical and mental health and wellbeing through improved access to health information and services.

- 4.1. Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report in addition to regular input to its meetings from designated professionals who work to provide services to children in care.
- 4.2. There are good working relationships between children’s social care managers, the Children in Care Health Service and NHS Dorset, with all partners committed to improving health outcomes for children in care. However, we have seen a continued underperformance reported to Corporate Parenting Board which is due to several factors and challenges which include children placed out of area.
- 4.3. Despite escalation through NHS Dorset, we have not yet been able to improve the performance in this area. We have requested a formal review of the service by NHS Dorset, and this will be a continued area of focus and scrutiny by the board.
- 4.4. Corporate Parenting Board has been concerned about being able to ensure good dental health for our children. While there have been some improvements in performance, the board has continued to seek assurance that we are working with our foster carers, carers and health colleagues to ensure that timely dental appointments are made for our children. Capacity of NHS dentists is an issue although children in care remain a priority for dentistry in the South West.
- 4.5. Members of Corporate Parenting Board have heard that the average SDQ score for our Children in Care aged 4-16 is higher than our comparator local authorities and has continued to be above our local target. The Board remains interested in the internal review of the emotional and mental health needs of our Children in Care and the aim being to bring a range of services and practitioners together to improve outcomes for our Children in Care by reducing duplication and hand-offs.

- 4.6. As part of this development and process a new guidance and procedures process has been co-produced by Dorset Healthcare, CAMHS and Dorset Council that will help frontline practitioners to develop their understanding of emotional wellbeing and mental health using the iThrive Framework. All services will adopt the prompts to improve their understanding of the child and their needs and what may be the best fit intervention.
- 4.7. Due to the rise in the numbers of requests for support, advice, and guidance from foster carers to the Children in Care Psychologists for adoption and permanence we are developing a model of practice that improves the skills of the supervising social workers to provide the direct support to the foster carers. Through consultation and group supervision, support and joint training foster carers will have an improved understanding of the emotional needs of the children in their care and how to respond to these.
- 4.8. Core CAMHS prioritises access for Children in Care, offering a 24-hour response for urgent referrals and an 8-week response for all other referrals. Digital platforms for the service were developed quickly during the initial phases of the pandemic and the website has been updated with signposting and podcasts. The service now uses a hybrid approach to support. We have established an operational monthly meeting to track children in care open to CAMHS and the Emotional Wellbeing services, both within and beyond Dorset.
- 4.9. The challenges experienced in being able to access Tier 4 provision for our children remains an area of concern.

5. Ambition for Children

Have high aspirations for children in care and care leavers in their education, training and employment.

- 5.1. The purpose of the Virtual School is to raise the educational achievement of Children in Care, promote their emotional wellbeing and improve their life chances as a more vulnerable group. Corporate Parenting Board receives an annual report from the Head of The Virtual School each year.
- 5.2. The Virtual School is ambitious for its children and ensures that our partner schools have high expectations and aspirations for the educational outcomes of our children to ensure that the life chances of each child are improved. The Virtual School has strong oversight and challenge from the Virtual School Governing Body and Corporate Parenting Board.
- 5.3. Some of the key strengths this year have been:
- A reduction in the number of children on reduced timetables
 - A reduction of the number of children missing education

- An effective quality assurance system for Personal Education Plans (PEPs) that has led to 93% of PEPs being good or better.
- 76% of post-16 young people in Education, Employment or Training
- 100% of our Year 13 young people who applied for university have been offered places
- 100 children celebrated at the Dorset Virtual School Exceptional People in Care (EPIC) Awards, and weekly celebrations of over 100 children and young people who have excelled in education or overcome significant barriers.
- Raising the profile of the role of the Virtual School for children previously looked after, working closely with Aspire Adoption Agency
- Delivery of the first Dorset Young Person Conference to raise ambition and aspiration.
- Production of the Handbook for Unaccompanied Young People in multiple languages

5.4. In February 2023 Corporate Parenting Board welcomed a short film from the Virtual School which showed the experiences a group of young people who had spent a residential weekend at Jamie's Farm in Wales. All the young people had a huge amount of fun and described improved emotional wellbeing and social confidence.

5.5. While the experiences of the young people were very positive, it was highlighted by the Board that Dorset County should be able to offer similar experiences closer to home, and our Outdoor Education colleagues are taking this forward in developing an offer.

5.6. The areas of focus for the Virtual School going forward include:

- Enhancing our children's voices through child led PEPs, Virtual School Council and Virtual School Newsletter Developing a mentoring system to support aspiration and ambition.
- Developing wider learning opportunities and positive experiences through extra-curricular activities
- Improving school transitions, particularly for those children with SEND
- Eradicating the use of suspensions, reduced timetables and the number of children missing education

5.7. We continue to support our young people to be in education, employment and training, with 63% 17-18yr olds and 51% 19-21 yr olds being in Education, Employment or Training at the end of March 2023.

5.8. This is an improvement from 60% 17-18yr olds and 46% 19-21 yr olds being in Education, Employment or Training at the end of March 2022.

6. Safeguarding and Permanence

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.

- 6.1. Members attended the opening of College House on 12th October 2023 and have commended The Harbour approach which continues to provide an effective approach for supporting young people to remain in the care of their families. As at the end of September 2022 a total of 153 young people have been supported by The Harbour since December 2020. Of these 100 young people who were on the edge of care were supported by outreach. Only 6 young people entered care meaning that 94% children were supported to remain at home.
- 6.2. While there has been a slight improvement in the % children placed 20 miles away from home from 43.8% in March 2022 to 42.18% in March 2023, we know that there is more work to do to increase the number of local foster carers so that our children are able maintain their links with friends, education and the local community more easily.
- 6.3. The challenges for fostering recruitment have been noted nationally within both local authority and IFA services. With the number of enquiries to be foster carers and supported lodgings for Dorset Council declining, the support Corporate Parenting Board has given to the strategic initiative, which has now been agreed by Cabinet, of a 15% uplift in the overall payment for Dorset foster carers and supported lodgings carer has been very welcome.
- 6.4. The launch of our first Mockingbird Constellation in November 2022 is supporting the resilience and retention of our existing carers. We are already seeing an impact for the foster carers and the children they are caring for and are delighted that constellation 2 and 3 launched in March and April 2023.
- 6.5. Achieving a permanent placement ensures children have a secure stable and loving family to support through childhood and beyond, to create a sense of security, continuity, commitment identity and belonging. We have continued to focus our attention in supporting our children to achieve permanence. Permanence can be achieved in a number of ways:
 - Return Home to Parents – More children have achieved permanence following re-unification to birth family. At the end of March 2023 this has increased to 35.63% from 17.28% in May 2022.
 - Adoption – More children have achieved permanence following being placed for adoption. At the end of March 2023 this has increased to 13% compared to 7% in May 2022. The number of children adopted in the last 12 months has increased to 26 in March 2023 from 19 in May 2022.

- SGO – We have seen fewer children achieving permanence through the making of a Special Guardianship Order. 8% of young people who ceased being in care in the six months prior to March 2023 were placed subject to Special Guardianship Order compared to 17% in the previous year.

6.6. This year the Board received a presentation from Cllr Biggs who alongside social workers and personal advisors met a number of our unaccompanied children and young people. This resulted in wider discussion and has continued to be an area of interest as to how we can provide young people a better care and education experience in Dorset.

6.7. Through the ‘Your Life Beyond Care’ Coram Voice survey, members of the Board have heard about the importance for our young people to have good quality, safe and suitable accommodation. Throughout 2023 the number of young people in unsuitable accommodation has reduced to 8 young people in March 2023 from 19 in May 2022.

7. Transitions

For our children to have a good and enriching experience of care provision and to prepare for adulthood and an independent and successful life.

7.1. All young people are allocated a personal adviser at the age of 16 to provide a smooth transition and support young people with the skills they need as they move into adulthood. We have continued our focus to ensure that all young people have a current Pathway Plan which is ambitious and supports our young people to move towards increased independence. At the end of March 2023 91.03% care leavers had a current Pathway Plan compared to 82.62% in May 2022.

7.2. The Transition Panel which meets monthly, tracks the planning for young people to ensure that plans are known, understood and in place and that there is no cliff edge at the age of 18yrs.

7.3. More young people are remaining in Staying Put arrangements with 23 young people remaining with their foster carer after turning 18 yrs old. The launch of Staying Close in September 2022 is supporting our young people to maintain supportive relationships with trusted adults from their children’s home.

7.4. We have welcomed our first residents at Kirtleton Avenue, in Weymouth which provides a training flat and homes for 12 young people. Alongside the Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers, an agreed guarantor offer and commitment to build relationships with the Private Landlord Association, this will support our young people to be safe and settled in accommodation.

7.5. A new framework contract for supported accommodation has been established over the last year and we will be insisting and supporting providers to register with Ofsted as required in the new regulations.

7.6. We have a protocol in place with two of our Job Centres Plus which provides:

- co-ordinated support to engage young people into Education, Employment, Apprenticeships, Voluntary Work or Training
- an early entry system and a smooth transition for those young people leaving care and needing to claim benefits.
- prompt and accurate payment of benefits where these are required.
- young people are empowered and enabled to gain sustainable paid employment through individual route ways.

7.7. Dorset Council is showing its commitment to Care Leavers through its HR procedures: all Children in Care and Care Leavers who apply for Dorset Council apprenticeships are guaranteed an interview and we are working with our HR colleagues to extend this commitment to all positions advertised by the council.

7.8. Through Corporate Parenting Board and the Care Leavers Delivery Group we continue to make use of relationships that have been developed within the business community. Hall and Woodhouse, Wessex Water and Sky have proved to be excellent partners in providing access to IT, training, employment, and accommodation for our young people.

7.9. A key interest for the Board has been to explore what more can be done to support young people as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Young people have asked for more help with life skills and work is underway to develop 'A helping hand' so that young people are able to access the wealth or skills, expertise and resources that colleagues of the council can offer, whether this is to put up a shelf or offer gentle words of guidance on a university application.

8. Membership and Governance

Effective governance and planning arrangements are in place to mean the Corporate Parent can be the best they can be.

8.1. Corporate Parenting Board membership includes elected members, officers of the Council and all employees, with support from stakeholders and our partners.

8.2. The membership of the Board during this reporting period was as follows:

- Cllr Kate Wheller (Chair)
- Cllr Richard Bigg (Vice Chair)
- Cllr Andrew Parry
- Cllr Ryan Holloway
- Cllr Carole Jones
- Cllr Stella Jones
- Cllr Andrew Kerby
- Cllr Cathy Lugg

- 8.3. Corporate Parenting Board met 7 times this year and going forward it is planned that the Board will meet 6 times on alternating months.
- 8.4. There have been 2 formal meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board held in public in April and November 2022 that:
- Received annual statutory reports with regard to Children in Care and Care Leavers including annual reports from IRO, Fostering, Adoption, Youth Justice, Fostering Panel Chair, Corporate Parenting, Leaving Care, Virtual School, Advocacy and Independent Visitors, Health and Wellbeing. There were also updates with regards performance and other areas of interest in relation to Children in Care and Care Leavers.
 - Agreed an annual report summarising the Board's activities.
- 8.5. All other Corporate Parenting Board meetings were held informally, engaging stakeholders and children and young people to ensure that the Board is accessible and able to encourage the very best input from everyone taking part in the meetings.
- 8.6. With these arrangements established, Corporate Parenting Board Members have been better able to understand the issues, challenges and concerns and celebrate successes as they are experienced by young people, and also enables greater challenge of the Board Members in respect of the Council's Corporate Parenting role.
- 8.7. Embracing the idea of community parenting, membership has been extended to partners and colleagues in the community to widen engagement and opportunities for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- 8.8. Corporate Parenting Board Members have nominated themselves as a champion for a theme that is of particular interest to them and have been 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.
- 8.9. The Board has supported the development of a new data set which was signed off in January 2023. Following the contributions of Board members, this has a new look and feel, is more easily accessible. In addition to the anticipated performance indicators, the data set also provides commentary on some of the more softer information such as extra-curricular activities which is equally impactful on children's outcomes. The data set has been presented to each Board meeting.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1. Dorset Council have adopted a policy of committing to reduce the number of Children in Care, taking a rights-based approach, and developing services which support children to be able to grow up in a family setting.
- 9.2. However, the National Transfer Scheme has had immediate effects on Dorset Council with a sharp rise in the number of unaccompanied children in our care and supported by us as care leavers.
- 9.3. The Board have been sighted on the findings of both the March 2022 Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) study¹ and the independent review of children's social care² which have resonated with local experience, particularly in respect of the difficulties we face in the social care marketplace.
- 9.4. The challenges for fostering recruitment have been noted nationally within both local authority and IFA services. With the number of enquiries to be foster carers and supported lodgings for Dorset Council declining, the support Corporate Parenting Board has given to a 15% uplift in the overall payment for Dorset foster carers and supported lodgings carer has been very welcome.
- 9.5. The Board recognises that it is all the more important for Dorset to be the fostering agency of choice for foster carers and supported lodgings carers and are committed to being ambassadors for the recruitment of Dorset carers.
- 9.6. The Board has supported investment in the residential estate for Dorset Children in Care and Care Leavers and members have actively participated at opening events and maintained oversight by visiting throughout the year.
- 9.7. In all that we do today we aim to equip children and young people 'for life', and wherever possible reduce the likelihood of needing to support Care Leavers in vulnerable adult populations. Investment in the Care Leavers Service, which has increased management and personal adviser capacity and developed senior personal adviser roles has ensured we are in a strong position to deliver ever better services.

10. Well-being and Health Implications

- 10.1 It is reported that Children in Care are four times more likely to have a mental health difficulty than children in the general population.³ Children in Care have double the rates of urgent dental treatment and are half as likely to attend dental
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services as the general population.⁴ This is significant as poor oral health is also associated with other chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. We also recognise the importance of extra-curricular activities such as sports, creative arts and music lessons which contribute to a child's wellbeing and sense of belonging.

- 10.2 One of the roles of corporate parents is to ensure that with partners we are working to reduce health inequalities and support the needs of Children in Care and Care Leavers.

11 Environmental Implications

- 11.1 As Corporate Parents we strive to ensure that our children experience love and care with permanent carers, close to the people and places that are important to them, recognising the link to improved mental health and educational attainment⁵.
- 11.2 Having sufficient placements in Dorset also reduces the amount of travel undertaken by families, social workers, and other children's services staff. There are currently 150 children living in care in independent provision outside Dorset. A third of children live under 20 miles away, with 2 thirds over 20 miles. While the majority of children live in neighbouring authorities, there are some children living as far afield as Blackpool, Sheffield, Leeds and Manchester.
- 11.3 Reduced travel should result in a reduction in the associated emissions from travel which is in line with the council's priority of protecting the natural environment, climate and ecology.

12 Other Implications

- 12.1 These are considered in the Corporate Parenting Board Annual Report.

13 Risk Assessment

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

14 Equalities Impact Assessment

N/A

15 Appendices

None

16 Background Papers

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-market-study-final-report>

¹ <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/March>

¹ NSPCC (2017) 'Children in Care :Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health'

¹ https://www.gla.ac.uk/news/archiveofnews/2017/august/headline_546507_en.html

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/conditions/index.html>

¹ Children's Commissioner (2017) 'Stability Index for Children in Care: Technical Report'