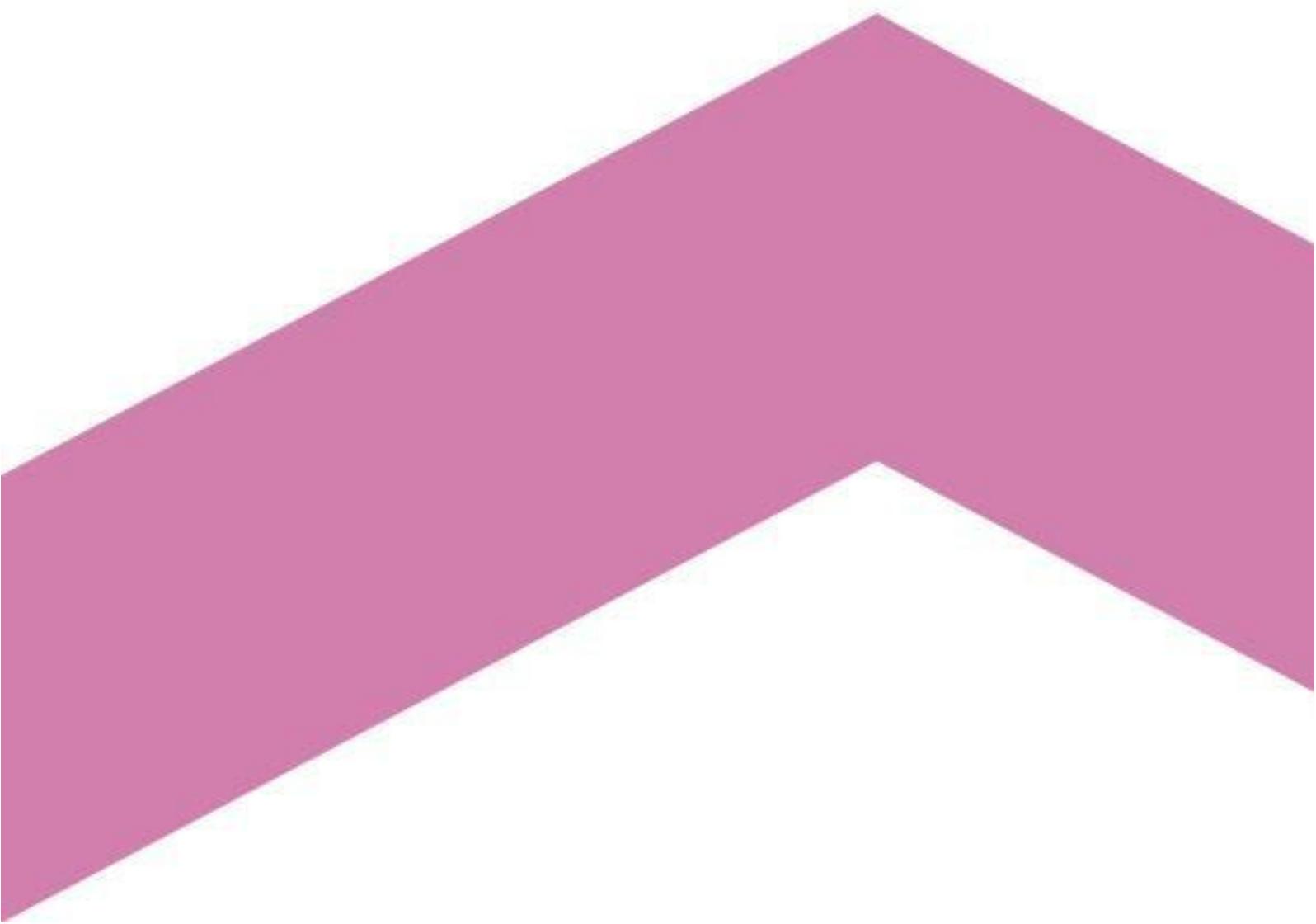


Staffordshire Corporate Parenting Panel

Annual Report 2022-23



Chairman's Foreword

For children who are in "Our Care", the council has a legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give to their children. We should all do our utmost to make sure that all children in our care get a good start in life, and this remains the primary driver behind the Corporate Parenting Panel's work.

This is the fifth year that the Corporate Parenting Panel has produced an annual report, and this is the seventh year that I have had the pleasure to have chaired the panel.

Our primary focus remains the children in our care, and in order to ensure that the child's voice is at the forefront of every decision made we implemented a new meeting process in March 2022. This solidified the work programme of the Corporate Parenting meetings and ensured a continuity of panel members throughout the meeting process of a specified topic theme.

This new meeting approach has been in place for 12 months and has proved to be very successful. The fact that corporate parents panel members, children in our care, care leavers, carers and professionals are all involved in the meetings that take place means that there is an inclusive approach to the development of action plans.

Panel members have continued to provide an invaluable service to our children, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them, and our support officers, for their hard work over the past 12 months. I anticipate that new District and Borough Council co-opted members will join the corporate parenting panel following the election in May 2023. I look forward to welcoming them to the panel in June.



County Councillor Mark Sutton
Chairman of Corporate Parenting Panel
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

1. The Corporate Parenting Role

- 1.1.** Children and young people in our care should be cared about and not just cared for; they have a unique place in society. They have a special relationship with the State because they have been taken into our care either by a court order or by voluntary agreement with their birth parents. Central Government, local authorities, partner agencies, individual professionals and carers all share responsibility for ensuring the best for these children and young people – as they would for their own children.
- 1.2.** We, as the corporate parent of children in care, have a special responsibility for their well-being and to put them first.
- 1.3.** These children and young people’s circumstances will have already placed them at a disadvantage. Therefore, we should be their champions in the fight to get what they need and to make sure they are safe. That also means being a powerful advocate to ensure they receive the best of everything and helping them make a success of their lives.
- 1.4.** Corporate parenting is most effective when everyone involved in the lives of those in our care by the County Council work together to improve their experiences and outcomes. By becoming interested in the issue of corporate parenting and promoting the welfare of children in our care and care leavers as part of all of our various roles, we will be helping to discharge the overall responsibility of ensuring the best outcomes for all children and young people in the county.

2. Purpose of Corporate Parenting Panel

- 2.1.** The Corporate Parenting Panel is how the Council discharges its responsibility as a corporate parent and brings together councillors, senior officers in children’s services and partner agencies to consider key issues which affect children in our care and care leavers.
- 2.2.** The panel actively engages with and challenges key partners to provide good support and is ambitious for the children in its care.
- 2.3.** The panel works closely with our Children in Care Council and Care Leaver forums to ensure all children in our care have the best possible care, are safe, healthy, happy and achieve. To achieve this, we have an annual thematic work programme in which all partners are called to account.

3. Governance and membership

3.1. The panel provides a key role in supporting members to play their role in ensuring accountability for children in our care. Whilst all members of the County Council are corporate parents, members of the Corporate Parenting Panel champion and challenge on behalf of Children in our Care and Care Leavers. The panel is proactive in challenging service delivery and advocates for children in our care and for strong governance principles.

3.2. The panel looks to see that the voice of the child is imbedded in all bodies and informs decision-making.

3.3. The Work Programme is a working document and as such the panel have requested supplementary reports to further explore any areas of concern or challenge. The current Work Programme can be found in **Appendix 1**.

3.4. The panel comprises 15 elected members of the County Council, including the Chair who is the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. Members are appointed annually at the Council meeting in May.

3.5. The 2022-23 members were:

Gill Burnett	Peter Kruskonjic	Samantha Thompson
Janet Eagland	Philip Hudson	Victoria Wilson
Ann Edgeller	Carolyn Trowbridge	Syed Hussain
Keith Flunder	Jill Hood	John Francis (vice-chair)
Thomas Jay	Phil Hewitt	Mark Sutton (chair)

3.6. Members of Staffordshire's District/ Borough Councils are co-opted onto the panel as champions for children in our care particularly in areas of housing and leisure facilities. The 2022-23 co-opted members were:

Bryan Jones	Rosey Claymore	Gillian Heesom
Janice Silvester-Hall	Chris Baron	Barbara Hughes
Wendy Sutton		

3.7. Representing Foster Carers continue to attend the meetings to provide invaluable "lived-experience" insight.

3.8. The panel is supported by the Assistant Director - Children's Social Care, the Assistant Director - Wellbeing and Partnerships, the Head of Children in Care and Care Leavers and the Head of Performance, QA & Engagement.

3.9. A member of the Voice Project attends every meeting to ensure the voice of the child feeds into the panel's agendas. The Voice project are a dedicated team responsible for listening to the views of families, parents, carers, children and young people who are part of our Families First Service.

3.10. The panel calls on professional advice and assistance/holds to account:

- The Headteacher of the Virtual School.
- Designated Doctor and Nurse for Children in our Care.
- County Managers for Fostering, Leaving Care and Adoption.
- Independent Reviewing Officers.
- Senior practitioner colleagues.

3.11. The panel regularly receives first-hand experience accounts from:

- Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- Care Leaver Ambassadors.
- Foster Carers.

3.12. The panel's Terms of reference updated in 2022 is attached as **Appendix 2.**

3.13. All panel members are required to complete Level 1 Child Protection Training as a minimum.

4. New Corporate Parenting Strategy Development

4.1. Stage 1 – Strategy development process

4.1.1. At the May 22 Corporate Parenting meeting the process to develop a new Corporate Parenting Strategy was discussed. Whilst the key objectives remained relevant the current strategy was out of date and no longer reflected the way in which the Corporate Parenting Panel operated.

4.1.2. Officers spent some time considering the items and key objectives that would be included in the development of a more succinct and purposeful document. It would also consider links to complementary work that was taking place elsewhere within the organisation.

4.2. Stage 2 – Workshop development

- 4.2.1. At the July 22 Corporate Parenting meeting a workshop was held with panel members regarding the development of the new corporate parenting strategy.
- 4.2.2. Members were informed of the progress that had been made to date and the commitments that had been given to children, young people, practitioners and carers. Officers proposed the format for the new strategy, key items that could be included, and some potential areas of focus.
- 4.2.3. Panel members broke into groups and were asked to consider a number of questions and provide feedback that would be used to develop the strategy. In summary it was agreed that the strategy would contain 4/5 key themes which could include:
 - Raising Profile / Awareness
 - Education
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - Housing
 - Care Leavers / Independence

4.3. Stage 3 – Draft strategy

- 4.3.1. At the business meeting held in March 23, members were presented with a draft version of the proposed Corporate Parenting Strategy. The draft strategy had been developed in line with feedback received at the strategy development session that took place in July 2022. Panel members broke into four separate working groups and were asked to share ideas and feedback that would be used to finetune the Strategy.
- 4.3.2. Following this a final “Task & Finish” session took place on Tuesday 25 April 23, to finalise the strategy, incorporating all of the feedback that had been provided during the development stages.

4.4. Stage 5 – Final Strategy

- 4.4.1. The final document was shared with partner organisations and presented to Panel members at the July Corporate Parenting Panel meeting. A copy of the final Strategy is included at **Appendix 3** to this report.

5. Meetings

5.1. The panel met 12 times throughout 2022/23, as outlined below.

5.1.1. Four working group meetings – Members, in their allocated groups, attend meetings with a variety of council officers, carers and practitioners to focus on a specific theme that affects our young people. The purpose of these meetings is to consider ways in which the issues can be changed or improved to better support them.

5.1.2. Four hot topic meetings – Members, in their allocated groups, attend meetings with a variety of council officers, carers, practitioners and representatives of children in our care and care leavers. The feedback from the working group meetings is further considered at the hot topic meetings and a number of action plans and recommendations are developed to support improvement of the specific topics that are being considered.

5.1.3. Four business meetings – All Corporate Parenting members attend the business meeting. The results of the working group and hot topic meetings are presented to the wider membership for consideration. The business meeting also focusses on quality and performance of our children’s service and regularly receives presentations from service providers from within the authority, such as the Headteacher of the Virtual School, Designated Doctor and Nurse for Children in our Care, County Managers for Fostering, Leaving Care and Adoption.

6. New Meeting Arrangements

6.1. In March 2022 a new meeting process was introduced to solidify the work programme of the Corporate Parenting meetings. This ensured a continuity of panel members would have a consistent involvement in a specified topic theme throughout the process, from the initial “Working Group” meeting to the “Hot Topic” meeting, and finally to the “Business” meeting, where the final action plans and recommendations are discussed by all panel members.

6.2. The new approach has been in place for 12 months and had proved to be very successful. The fact that corporate parents, children in our care, care leavers, carers and professionals were all involved in the meetings that took place, meant that there was a truly holistic approach to the development of action plans, and it

ensured that the child's voice remained prominent in the recommendations that were being made.

7. Meeting Topics for 2022-23

7.1. Understanding their past – May 2022

7.1.1. The Corporate Parenting Panel worked with a group made up of children in care council, care leaver and practitioner representatives to consider the subject of 'Understanding our Past'. This was one of the top issues young people felt they needed more help and support with. The outcome of this topic was to develop a process that provided children with a method that:

1. enabled them to save information that explained why they came into care.
2. helped them to understand what had happened during their time in care.
3. proposed a means by which children in care would be able to access the information more easily in the future.
4. considered ways in which the information would be stored.

7.1.2. The recommendations from this topic centred on improvements to the way in which information was stored and the ease with which it could be accessed.

7.2. Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers – July 2022

7.2.1. Working group meetings took place at the Amity Hub in Newcastle under Lyme, and at a Corporate Parenting working group in Stafford to consider the situations and issues affecting Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

7.2.2. It was agreed that a toolkit of useful information would be created and added to the Document Library that could be accessed to improve the support provided to all UASC.

7.2.3. The feedback received, and subsequent recommendations focussed on how a UASC could get support in accessing housing and understanding how to manage their own tenancy and feel, and be, safe in the places where they now live.

7.2.4. There was also a focus on the level of support provided to UASC to support them to integrate into the community, whether this be by helping with the language barrier, improving the continuity of family support to help build relationships,

accessing places of worship, accessing education and employment opportunities.

7.3. Delegated Authority – October 2022

7.3.1. Delegated authority relates to a person who can make a decision on behalf of a cared for young person. This was a top issue for the young people, as it wasn't always clear to the young people or their carers who can make a final decision on certain activities.

7.3.2. The action plan and recommendations centred around ensuring appropriate information was available to allow the relevant person to make the correct decision. A fact sheet was to be created that clearly defined the decisions that were delegated for a carer to make, and the decisions that would need to be escalated.

7.4. Topic review and future topic planning - December 2022

7.4.1. As part of the new meeting arrangement process highlighted in section 4 of this report, a topic review and future topic planning session had been introduced to allow the panel the opportunity to see how the implemented action plans were progressing.

7.4.2. At the same time it also gave the young people, practitioners and corporate parenting panel representatives the opportunity to suggest topics that they would like to see considered over the next 12-month period.

7.5. Physical Health – March 2023

7.5.1. A Hot Topic session made up of, corporate parents, children in care council, care leaver, practitioner and Commissioned Health Services for Cared for children representatives, had taken place to consider the topic of physical health.

7.5.2. The agreed actions focussed on the production of a digital Health Information sheet that would be used to explain what to do when dealing with certain illnesses or ill health situations, and also the production of a Health Assessment (HA) leaflet that would be used to explain what an HA was and what would happen during an HA.

7.5.3. Additional work would be undertaken to raise staff awareness to ensure all practitioners were doing the same thing when completing the various health forms, this would also provide quality assurance. An audit would be arranged to take place to ensure health details and forms were being compiled fully and correctly.

8. Service Annual Reports

8.1. The panel regularly received reports and presentations from colleagues and partners who provide services to the children in our care, to support it to fulfil its duties. In 2022/23 updates were provided by the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO), Virtual School, Foster Service, and Complaints team.

8.2. Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO)

8.2.1. The challenges faced by the IRO team centred on the increased numbers of children entering care and a decrease in the number of adoptions. Quality Assurance (QA) alerts were very low and there was a need to evidence informal as well as formal QA alerts & resolutions.

8.2.2. Positively the service had worked hard to deliver on the core priorities and had maintained links with the local authority and partner agencies. There had been a slight drop in the timeliness of reviews from 97% to 95%, but this was still well within the required target.

8.2.3. The Service Priorities for 2022-2023 were to focus on the stability in the service and increase the capacity of IRO's to bring deeper and greater scrutiny and challenge to the local authority. This would further improve outcomes for children. There would be a focus on permanency for children to ensure exit planning was considered and evidenced.

8.3. Virtual School

8.3.1. The Virtual School Head Teacher outlined the roles of the team as being responsible for the education of children in our care and for children previously in our care, and to support children who had a social work care plan.

8.3.2. The five future priorities for the Virtual School and future working groups for 2022/23 were:

- **Priority 1** - Covid-19 recovery planning to ensure that all our looked after and previously looked after children return to full-time education.
- **Priority 2** - To ensure that all our Looked After Children receive an appropriate education and are supported to make good progress in their education.
- **Priority 3** - To ensure that the child's journey into and leaving care, including the impact of attachment and trauma, is understood and supported to ensure children with a social care involvement thrive in education.
- **Priority 4** - To expand the opportunities for our children to engage in accredited wider learning opportunities shaped by their talents and interests.
- **Priority 5** - We listen and respond to the voice of our children to inform practice and plans.

8.4. Foster Service

- 8.4.1. The Head of Service for Fostering joined the Panel to update on the Fostering Service between 2021/22.
- 8.4.2. Within the last twelve months there had been significant changes within the Fostering Service following the whole service transformation within the children and communities' services.
- 8.4.3. On the 31.03.22 the service had 426 Approved Fostering Households. 253 were general Fostering Households, 138 were Family and Friends Households, 11 were Temporary Fostering Households, and 24 were Disability Short Break Households.
- 8.4.4. The agency had experienced capacity challenges over the past year. The agency had provided fostering families for 745 children and young people within the year with an increased number of teenagers. Despite the challenges, the prioritisation of placement support meant that the number of children living with Staffordshire carers had significantly increased over the year.
- 8.4.5. Applications to Foster had fallen significantly following the Covid-19 pandemic both nationally and within the West Midlands. Staffordshire had followed a similar trend in the number of applications received.

8.5. Complaints

- 8.5.1. The panel received a presentation from the Complaints Manager to accompany the Children's Complaints and Representations Service and the Corporate Feedback Procedure for the Children in Care and our Care Leavers service, for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.
- 8.5.2. The report showed that there had been no significant increase in complaints for the service since the service transformation. Responses to complaints within timescale had increased from 65% to 70% compared to the previous reporting year, and only 7% of complaints were found to be fully upheld. Minimal complaints had been received from young people directly, following the trend of previous reports.
- 8.5.3. The team had received 55 compliments. During what has been a year involving change and adaptation, the fact that more compliments had been received than complaints was positive.
- 8.5.4. The Challenges faced by the team relate to the difficulty experienced when responding to complaints within published timescales given the ongoing pressures the service faced. A response rate of 70% in timescale was commended and it was also noted that, although it was difficult for a service to acknowledge fault, it was commendable when officers accepted fault and put learning in place to improve practice.

8.6. Next Steps of the Corporate Parenting Panel

- 8.6.1. The Corporate Parenting Panel continues to play a key role in promoting, monitoring and challenging service improvement and achievements.
- 8.6.2. It is anticipated that new District and Borough Council co-opted members will join the corporate parenting panel following the election in May 2023.
- 8.6.3. An induction session has been arranged to take place in June 2023 to ensure that all relevant information and training is made available to the new cohort of members.

**County Councillor Mark Sutton
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Panel**

Implications

1. **Equalities implications:** it will be an ongoing responsibility for the panel to promote, support and respect the identity of children in our care and care leavers.
2. **Legal implications:** There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.
3. **Resource and Value for money implications:** There are no direct financial implications arising from this annual report. Financial performance, namely resources, budget and spend in relation to discharging the panel's responsibilities is regularly reported through the Council's budgetary procedures.
4. **Risk implications:** The key issue facing the panel in its oversight and challenge function is the capacity and financial pressures posed by the increase of the children in our care population on all service areas supporting children in our care, and ensuring that as effective corporate parents, this does not hinder the care, support, aspirations or continued improvement in outcomes for our children in care.
5. **Climate change:** There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report.
6. **Health Impact Assessment screening:** There are no health impact assessment implications arising from this report.

Contact Officer

Simon Humble, Governance and Democracy Officer

Telephone: 01785 278044

E-mail: simon.humble@staffordshire.gov.uk

Appendix 1



Corporate Parents Meeting Forward Plan May 23 – March 24

Corporate Parenting is the means by which the County Council fulfils its responsibilities as a corporate parent and brings together councillors, senior officers in children’s social care and partner agencies.

If you would like to know more about our work programme, please get in touch with Simon Humble, Governance and Democracy Officer, 01785 276961 or

simon.humble@staffordshire.gov.uk

Cycle No	Cycle Topic	Working Group Voice Project – Northfield	Hot Topic Voice Project – Northfield	Business Meeting Oak Room – County Buildings
2023				
3	Stigma and Identity	10 May 23 – 10am Group 1	5 Jun 23 – 4:45pm Group 1	12 Jul 23 – 1pm All members
4	Preparing for Adulthood	12 Jul 23 – 10am Group 2	18 Sept 23 - 4:45pm Group 2	19 Oct 23 – 10am All members
5	Reviewing Current Action Plans and Future Themes	NA	6 Nov 23 - 4:45pm 2 reps from each group	28 Nov 23 – 10am All members
2024				
1	TBC	XX Jan 24 – 10am Group 3	XX Feb 24 – 4:45pm Group 3	13 Mar 24 – 1pm All members
2	TBC	XX Mar 23 – 10am Group 1	XX Apr 23 – 4:45pm Group 1	14 May 23 – 10am All members

Other activities	Provider	Date and Location
Summer Funday	Voice Project	XX August 23

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
County Members	Gill Burnett Janet Eagland Ann Edgeller Keith Flunder	Peter Kruskonjic Philip Hudson Alex Farrell Jill Hood Thomas Jay	Phil Hewitt Samantha Thompson Victoria Wilson Syed Hussain John Francis
Co-opted Members	Janice Silvester-Hall Wendy Sutton Alan Hudson	Anne Hobbs Rosey Claymore Gillian Heesom Alan Hudson	Barbara Hughes Julie Easton Alan Hudson

Wednesday 12 th July 2023 – 1:00pm
Children’s Voice Project and Children in Care Council update
Topic Update and Action Plan
Induction / refresher training
Performance Data
Corporate Parenting Strategy
Work Programme – Simon Humble

Tuesday 17 th October 2023 – 10:00am
Children’s Voice Project and Children in Care Council update
Topic Update and Action Plan
Health and Wellbeing of Children in our care (12-month update)
Performance Data
Work Programme – Simon Humble

Tuesday 28 th November 2023 – 10:00am
Children’s Voice Project and Children in Care Council update
Review of recent topics and plan of future topic themes
Fostering Service Annual Report – Brian Johnson
Adoption Service Annual Report – Nicola Hope
Performance Data
Work Programme

Wednesday 13 th March 2024 - 1:00pm
Children’s Voice Project and Children in Care Council update House Project (care leavers)
Topic Update and Action Plan
Independent Review Officer – Angela Banks
Complaints Annual Report – Kate Bullivant
Performance Data
Work Programme

Tuesday 14 th May 2024 – 10:00am
Children’s Voice Project and Children in Care Council update
Topic Update and Action Plan
Virtual School Update – Sarah Rivers
Corporate Parenting Panel – Annual Report
Performance Data
Work Programme – Simon Humble

Appendix 2



Corporate Parenting Panel - Terms of Reference

Context

Corporate parenting is the collective responsibility of the Council to prioritise the needs of children in care and seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children. The Corporate Parenting Panel is designed to provide the necessary leadership that drives an ambitious and multi-agency approach to improving outcomes for children in care and care leavers by raising aspirations, building stronger relationships and taking time to listen to the voice of the child.

The panel is a non-political advisory body to the Children's Executive and is chaired by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children and Families. The panel does not take executive decisions but provides leadership and a governance structure for corporate parenting in order to drive forward outcomes for children in our care and care leavers.

Objectives of the panel

- To provide strategic leadership and hold partners to account for performance against strategies to improve all outcomes for children in our care and young people.
- To act as advocates for children in our care and young people and to ensure that the commitments to children in our care and young people set out in the panel's Strategy are delivered.
- To act as champions for corporate parenting influencing other councillors, officers and partners.
- To ensure that children in our care are protected and supported to develop as healthy citizens, able to participate in their community.
- To monitor the effectiveness of the Virtual School in improving the educational attainment of children in our care and young people, to narrow the gap of achievement between them and their peers and to maximise opportunities for training and career placements.

These objectives will be delivered by the panel in the following ways:

- Make sure the whole Council and partner agencies commit to the principles of excellent corporate parenting and to hold partners to account for their role in the delivery of services to children in our care and care leavers.
- Ensure children and young people in care, leaving care and their carers are getting the support they need.

- Lead on the development, review and promotion of the Corporate Parenting Strategy across the Council and involve partners in order to improve services and respond to changing need.
- Be well informed on Government legislation, guidance and policy concerning children and young people in care and receive assurance that the local authority is fulfilling its statutory duties for children in care, leaving care and their carers.
- Ensure a dialogue with the Children in Care Council to enable participation of children in our care and care leavers in the corporate parenting agenda and in influencing service re-design.
- Receive regular reports, as appropriate, on the level and quality of services and scrutinising performance management information to ensure that any shortfalls are properly addressed.
- Attend any training needed to support the role (minimum of two per year).
- In accordance with regulation 44 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 accompanying the independent visitor on their visits to children's homes each month to facilitate communication between children in our care, front line staff and councillors.
- Meet children placed in foster homes and hear from their carers and to monitor the ongoing commitment to providing support, training and clarity of expectations to foster carers to achieve excellent and high-quality care.
- Celebrate the achievements of children in our care and care leavers.
- Link as appropriate with the Safe and Strong Select Committee and develop a relationship with the Safeguarding Children's Board.
- Encourage all partners whether health, education or social care services or the voluntary sector to work in an integrated way in the best interests of children in our care and care leavers.

Membership

The panel shall comprise **15 County Councillors** and may include any member of the County Council representing a county-wide spread and be appointed at the annual meeting of the Council. Representatives from partner organisations may be co-opted onto the panel as appropriate. The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children and Families is chairman of the panel.

Co-opted membership is invited from:

- the eight District/Borough Councils;
- a foster carer.

The panel will be supported by:

- the Assistant Director - Children's Social Care;
- the Assistant Director - Wellbeing and Partnerships;
- the Head of Service - Children in our Care and Care Leavers;
- The Head of Performance, QA & Engagement;
- a Voice Project staff member;
- a representative from commissioning and partnerships;
- an Independent Reviewing Officer;
- a representative from the NHS Integrated Care Board.

Arrangements for Meetings:

The panel shall meet eight times per year as set out below, agree a work programme annually and review it at each meeting. The meetings of the panel are held in private session.

- Four Business meetings – to focus on quality and performance and held in county buildings (all members to attend).
- Four Discussion meetings - these meetings to be held from 4.30pm-6.30pm to discuss priority items identified by young people (panel members will attend on a rota basis).
- Members will attend working focus groups on a rota basis which will focus on outcomes for children and young people and barriers and will feedback to the wider panel.
- Members will be expected to attend a minimum of one engagement activity per quarter to directly hear the views of children, young people or carers (shadowing staff; 1-2-1 meetings with foster carers/families; attending a Voice Project event; or a Foster Carer Support Group).

Meetings of the panel shall be conducted in accordance with the Procedural Standing Orders in Section 11, of the Councils Constitution although meetings may comprise a range of different formats and locations.

The Corporate Parenting Panel will report to the appropriate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board as necessary.