



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 23 November 2021

REPORT TITLE:	CORPORATE PARENTING UPDATE
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

The report provides the Children, Young People and Education Committee with an update on the work of the Corporate Parenting Board since 2019.

No previous reports have been provided to the Committee; therefore the update will cover developments during the previous two years.

It is proposed that an annual update is provided to the Children's Committee to scrutinise the work of the Corporate Parenting Board ensuring that it is effective and fulfilling its responsibilities. This is an element of good practice and helps to demonstrate the importance of being good corporate parents to children looked after and care leavers across the organisation.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is requested to:

1. consider and comment on the information contained within the report; and,
2. agree to receive a further report back to the Committee on the work of the Corporate Parenting Board within one year.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 To ensure that there is good and effective governance around supporting and promoting the needs of children looked after and care leavers.
- 1.2 To provide assurance to the Children, Young People and Education Committee that the Corporate Parenting Board is operating effectively and fulfilling its responsibilities.
- 1.3 To demonstrate the importance of corporate parenting across the organisation and in applying the corporate parenting principles.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 It is important that there are clear reporting lines between the Children, Young People and Families Committee and, the Corporate Parenting Panel (as the formal Sub-Committee) and the Corporate Parenting Board to secure effective governance and oversight. Without this strategic connectivity, there is a risk of duplication of activity and wider organisational misunderstanding of the achievements and/or challenges for children looked after and care leavers.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Children and Families Act 2014 and supporting statutory guidance; *“Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers”* introduces the seven principles that local authorities and partners must have regard to when considering support for children looked after and care leavers. The principles are:
 - to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of children and young people
 - to encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
 - to consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
 - to help children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
 - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for children and young people
 - 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.
- 3.2 As outlined in the Wirral Constitution, the Corporate Parenting Board sits as an advisory Board to the Corporate Parenting Panel which is a formal Sub-Committee of the Children, Young People and Education Committee. Unlike the Sub-Committee, the Corporate Parenting Board meets in private to respect the sensitive nature of information discussed about children looked after (CLA) and care leavers. This is particularly the case as there are young people representatives of the care

councils who attend meetings to share stories and real-life experiences about being in care.

- 3.3 The Corporate Parenting Panel has relevant constitutional authority and is called upon where required to make decisions as appropriate. For example, the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy will be approved by the Corporate Parenting Panel once it is developed.

3.4 Roles and Responsibilities of the Board

- 3.5 Wirral's Corporate Parenting Board is responsible for owning and championing the corporate parenting principles and holding officers and partners to account for how the principles are applied and delivered. The Board is also responsible for understanding the experiences of children looked after and care leavers and building relationships with young people to ensure they can influence priorities and activity of both the council and its partners.
- 3.6 The Board consists of children looked after and care leavers through representation on the care councils, foster carers, elected members, senior leaders from the local authority, along with health and police colleagues. There is also a group of officers who attend meetings of the Board in an advisory capacity.

3.7 ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.8 Over the past two years the Corporate Parenting Board has developed to become a vibrant and child-centred group which champions the needs and wishes of children looked after across the local authority and beyond. The Care Councils play an active role in sharing ideas, plans and activities which connect the Board with the lives and experiences of young people. Elected members embrace and champion the corporate parenting principles as members of the Board but also in their wider Councillor roles in the organisation and in their communities. Foster carers share their experiences and provide constructive challenge to officers and partners. Representatives from health and the police also contribute proactively, share challenges and recognise progress and successes.
- 3.9 The Board plays a proactive role in shaping its work programme and requesting information on key issues and areas of development. The provision of regular performance reports has enabled members of the Board to drill down and request further explanation to secure assurance and/or confirm understanding. There is discussion and scrutiny which results in tangible actions or follow up. Since 2019, the Board has played a pivotal role in overseeing improvement and developments to improve outcomes for children looked after and care leavers. A summary of these achievements is highlighted below.

3.10 Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019 – 2021

- 3.11 In 2019, the Board became responsible for providing oversight and monitoring of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-2021. The Strategy set out a series of priorities focused on improving the lives for children and young people who are looked after. The Board has played an important role in ensuring the achievement and success in many areas and supporting significant progress towards the priorities identified:

- 3.12 **Priority 1: Accommodation and Housing - Ensure that children and young people have a stable placement in good standard accommodation.**
- 3.13 In 2019, a Partnership Accommodation programme was established, reporting into the Corporate Parenting Board to drive improvements in accommodation for CLA and care leavers. This programme involved several major projects including:
- Expansion of Willowtree Short Breaks Service to provide in-house long-term placements for children looked after with disabilities. Due to be completed in January 2022, this project has seen a major refurbishment and infrastructure work to secure a 6-bedded provision, building on the well-established support already provided.
 - Development of semi-independent living accommodation in partnership with a local social landlord, providing care leavers with new, quality, modern living facilities and wrap around support. This has proved successful with many young people moving into independent living.
 - Creation of a new ethical market for children's homes through development of a Liverpool City Region programme to build 10 children's homes across the area that significantly improve the life chances of children living in care in Wirral. This project will see 4 residential homes built in Wirral over two phases.
 - Development of a therapeutic short breaks accommodation facility for up to three young people, who have Autism and/or Learning Disability, who are at risk of hospital in-patient admission and may need support in terms for the assessment and treatment for mental health issues.
- 3.15 The Corporate Parenting Board has acted as a key governance driver in the delivery and progress made to date. Regular reporting and oversight by the Board has ensured that progress has been timely, and actions and delivery fit for purpose and aligned to the needs of residents and children and young people in the borough.
- 3.16 **Priority 2: Health and wellbeing: Ensure that our children and young people have access to health services which will promote them thriving and meeting their potential.**
- 3.17 Since 2019, the Board has reviewed, monitored and endorsed work to commission a new mental health service, specifically for children looked after and care leavers. This has resulted in a new service, OOMOO, commissioned to work directly with children and young people and their carers to improve emotional health and wellbeing. Since the contract has been in place, feedback has been overwhelmingly positive with identifiable outcomes for children and young people achieved.
- 3.18 The Board has also overseen the implementation of gym and swim passes for care leavers in recognition of the interdependencies between good physical health and positive emotional health and wellbeing. This has had a positive impact on those involved in an initial trial programme, and subsequently been rolled out for all care leavers.
- 3.19 In addition, the Board has continued to monitor the timeliness of initial and review health assessments for CLA. Most recently, a report was brought to the Board from the CLA Designated Nurse which highlighted that there had been a consistent improvement in review health assessments completed by health services. This has

been delivered and sustained through effective collaborative systems and processes. The Board has recognised that these improvements have ensured greater oversight from partners and the local authority on the health needs of CLA.

- 3.20 Priority 3: Education and Jobs: Ensure that all our children and young people have access to a good education which will support them in meeting their potential.**
- 3.21 Since 2019, the Board has considered information and updates from the Virtual School on the progress of children and young people in education. The Annual Report of the Virtual School is received and supported by the Board and provides an opportunity for the Board to review and scrutinise educational attainment and progress. The Board has recognised that there have been significant improvements in the quality and timeliness of Personal Education Plans (PEPs). Now, between 90-95% of PEPs are completed within timescales each term. A new quality assurance process has helped to drive improvements in the quality of plans, ensuring that plans and targets are achievable and aligned to the wishes and feelings of children and young people.
- 3.22 The Board has also focussed on employment opportunities for care leavers and has received regular reports on the challenges and opportunities presented. The Board has supported the development of the Council's Apprenticeship Strategy which sets out a commitment to offer several apprenticeship opportunities to care leavers within the local authority. The Board has recognised the need to continue to monitor opportunities and progress via the regular performance reporting.
- 3.23 Priority 4: Transitions - Ensure clearer triaging by adult's services regarding eligibility for children to access adult's services.**
- 3.24 Since 2019, the Board has considered information regarding improvement work in transition arrangements. This has involved the development of a transition protocol and pathway. The Board has recognised the need for future evidence in regards of improvements and progress around transition arrangements.
- 3.25 Our Space – Care Leavers Hub**
- 3.26 In addition to its role in strategic oversight and delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, the Board has also played a role in supporting the development of the Care Leavers Hub 'Our Space'. The Board has monitored this development over the past two years, supporting and assisting in driving its implementation. The successful delivery of the Our Space project and the launch of the new hub in Wirral for care leavers, has provided more than just a physical space for young people:
- The Our Space hub provides access to support officers, Personal Advisors and drop-in services so that care leavers can access face to face support as and when required and in COVID-secure setting.
 - Training and learning opportunities are now being co-ordinated and provided at the Our Space hub, aligned to the wishes and needs identified by young people, the skills classes are supporting both the development of new vocational skills and independent living skills.
 - The Our Space hub operated as a vaccination centre, with 75 young care leavers opting to use their own familiar support setting to get vaccinated

- The hub provides a safe space for young people, acting as a place for social gatherings and interaction, helping to improve socialisation (particularly post-COVID) and prevent young people becoming the victims of exploitation.

3.27 The Our Space Hub has also helped to support the development of relationships between members of the Corporate Parenting Board and the Care Councils. Since its opening, this has involved a socially distanced 'meet and greet' event with children looked after and care leavers.

3.28 Fostering and Adoption

3.29 The Corporate Parenting Board has requested information and reports on fostering and adoption. It has considered a range of reports regarding the performance of Wirral in relation to meeting statutory timescales for adoption and in securing successful adoption placements for children and young people. Most recently the Board considered and reviewed the Adoption in Merseyside Annual Report which provided an opportunity to consider the progress and performance of the Regional Adoption Agency.

3.30 The Board has continued to monitor the recruitment and support for foster carers. The Board has supported foster care campaigns and helped to identify and suggest potential areas for recruitment. Training and development plans for foster carers have been considered, reviewed and endorsed. Positive attendance from co-opted foster carers has enabled real-life experiences to be shared and constructive challenge to be provided. This has resulted in tangible actions being identified.

3.31 Voice of young people – work with the Care Councils

3.32 Building relationships with Children Looked After and Care Leavers has been integral to the work of the Corporate Parenting Board. The Board has been pivotal in championing the successes and achievements of CLA. Members have attended celebration events including Awards ceremonies, Christmas celebrations as well as care and young person engagement events, for example, the 'Moon' event. Members have also attended conferences to discuss and listen to the key issues for young people. Most recently, Board members attended a 'meet and greet' event at the Our Space Hub to listen to the achievements and views of the councils and engage in a game of bingo.

3.33 CHALLENGES

3.34 It was recognised in the 2019 Ofsted inspection that young people felt that the Board was "boring", and efforts have been made to try to improve the connectivity with the Board and ensure young people's voice is heard. Prior to COVID-19, engagement of children looked after and care leavers with the Board was positive and there was a good representation of young people at Board meetings. Plans were put in place to ensure that members attended meetings of care councils and brought back their views and experiences.

3.35 The COVID-19 pandemic hampered any plans for direct engagement work with the councils and the Board and it has been difficult to resurrect the positive plans and developments in place, given the nature of the current operation of the Board. With

the opening of places and opportunities to interact face to face once again, there are now plans to further engage with the councils and to explore new ways to ensure their views are heard.

3.36 MOVING FORWARD

- 3.37 To continue to build on the relationships between the Board and care councils, further work will be carried out to ensure that their voice influences the agenda and discussions of the Corporate Parenting Board. New ways to share information from the Board will be developed including the introduction of child-friendly minutes which will be shared on the care council's website. The development of a new Children Looked After and Care Leaver's Strategy will be influenced and shaped by CLA through various engagement opportunities including council meetings and surveys etc. Feedback from the care councils on key priorities for young people has already been provided to the Board.
- 3.38 The development of a Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy will be led and developed by the Board. This will be used to inform the Board's work programme, allowing it to provide appropriate scrutiny to ensure that sufficient progress is made. A series of performance measures, focussed on outcomes, will be developed to underpin the Strategy and enable the Board to robustly monitor evidence on progress.
- 3.39 Members of the Board are launching a campaign to raise awareness of the corporate parenting principles across the organisation and to partners. This is intended to ensure that all professionals and partners, no matter where they work, understand their role and work as effective corporate parents.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no significant legal implications arising from the report.
- 5.2 The local authority has a statutory responsibility to have regard to the corporate parenting principles as outlined in guidance and legislation.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The management and administration of the Board is currently provided by the Modernisation and Support Service. Management and administration need to be reviewed to ensure there is appropriate support in place.
- 6.2 Resources from Democratic Services and Children's Services are being identified to provide the necessary support.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 Failing to ensure robust governance arrangements are in place to our children looked after and care leavers creates a risk that there is insufficient oversight and scrutiny which both gives assurance and drives improvements to improve outcomes.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 The role of the Board is to ensure that children looked after, and care leavers have a voice and influence about discussions which are made about them. Young people are invited to meetings as key members of the Board and members attend celebration events and other meeting to build relationships and listen to children looked after and care leavers. A key focus of any services developments is based on co-production with young people and key stakeholders.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no environment and climate implications.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The apprenticeship programmes and employment opportunities secured for care leavers will help to strengthen their skills and potential as young people embarking on becoming independent and living and working in Wirral in the future.

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APPENDICES

None

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Children and Families Act 2014
Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-2020

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date

