

CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022



Introduction

We want all children and young people to achieve, be healthy, safe and resilient. We want Wirral to be the best place for children and young people to grow up in regardless of that child or young person's background.



The government introduced clear **corporate parenting principles** that require all departments within a local authority, including staff, elected members and partner agencies, to recognise their role as a corporate parent and encourage them to look at the support and services they provide. Wirral Council works to be the best corporate parent to our children and young people by following these key principles:

1. To act in the best interest and promote the physical, mental health and wellbeing of those children and young people.
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
3. To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
4. To help those children and young people to gain access to, and make the best use of, the 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. To ensure those children and young people are safe and have stability in their home lives, relationships, education and workplace.
7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

As Corporate Parents we have a special responsibility to make sure children and young people who may have had disrupted experiences of family life and experienced trauma get the support they need to live the happiest and healthiest lives possible.

It is our responsibility to keep them safe, make sure their experiences in care are positive and improve their on-going life chances. We recognise that no single service operating alone can achieve this and that we need to build close, coordinated working relationships with partners if we are to succeed in improving outcomes.

This report summarises the work that has been undertaken in Wirral over the last 12 months to ensure good outcomes for our children looked after and care experienced young people and to ensure corporate parenting is at the forefront of everyone's agenda.

Simone White, Director for Children, Families and Education

Positive participation for our Children Looked After and Care Leavers

Over the past 12 months, our Participation and Engagement Service has supported children looked after and care leavers with a range of opportunities the Participation and Engagement team aims to:

- Ensure children looked after and young people have a voice in decisions made that affect them
- Represent children and young people's views locally, regionally, and nationally
- Develop links and mechanisms for children looked after and young people to contribute towards the development of the Children and Young People's Department
- Ensure that services for them are relevant to their needs
- Develop projects locally, regionally and nationally
- Ensure children looked after are consulted around service delivery, and are involved in the recruitment, selection and training of social care staff
- Support the Care Councils to effectively monitor service delivery in areas of social care that affect them
- Create opportunities for young people in care, leaving care and with additional needs to participate in positive activities, and promote their achievements
- Work in partnership with other agencies and services that support children looked after and care leavers such as Oomoo, Barnardo's etc

Highlights over past 12 months...

Our Space – Care Leavers Hub which 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.



Training and learning opportunities are now being co-ordinated and provided, 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 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.



This year, Care Leavers week was back in person and a success with a good turnout and a wide range of services being offered including a talent show and bake off.

This year, children looked after have continued to be engaged in a range of consultations. These have included consultation about independent visitors, terminology and developing the Juno children's homes.



Children Looked After have been involved in the recruitment, selection and training of social care staff. This has included for example, the Joint Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Head of SEND.

Opportunities to contribute towards the development of Services to ensure that they are relevant to their needs has included in-depth work with the Head of Provider and Commissioned Services.



Delivering our priorities – achievements over past 12 months

Over the past 12 months, there has been positive progress made in meeting the priorities of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. This Strategy expired in 2021. These include:

Priority 1: Accommodation and Housing

The Partnership Accommodation programme which was established in 2019 to drive forward improvements in the quality and offer of homes for children looked after and care leavers. The main developments this year have included:

- **Juno**

Work has been ongoing with Juno who are the community interest company Wirral and other local authorities in collaboration with locally to provide bespoke children's homes across the region. The Council agreed to invest funding in this development and allowed land assets and opportunities to be explored. The first Juno home was identified and is scheduled to open in Oxton around December 2022, with further homes planned.

A director of care was appointed in June 2022, with interviews for the registered manager taking place during August 2022.

- **Willowtree Home for residential and short break for children with disabilities**

The Willow tree expansion work was completed in 2022, providing Willow tree with the capacity for additional capacity for children with disabilities to be able to remain in Wirral without necessitating move out of area. This will benefit children locally as it means that they can maintain links with family and friends and

schools more easily. There is also a cost saving benefit for the local authority to be able to provide the offer of care locally.

- **Children's short break/respice/crisis care home for children with Learning Disability/Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Following a successful expression of interest stage and a full Project Initiation Document (PID) being submitted to NHSE and approved the project aim is to use the capital funds to purchase and refurbish a property for the purpose of developing a service for children and young people with Learning Difficulties, Autism and presenting mental health difficulties, who are at risk of attendance at A&E.

Priority 2: Health and wellbeing

- **OOMOO**

OOMOO started in February 21 as a virtual offer due to the COVID restrictions but by March 21 was fully operational and involving face-to-face and direct contact. OOMOO is the emotional well-being and mental health service for children looked after and care experienced young people within Wirral.

- **Health assessments and wellbeing checks**

Timeliness of health assessments and review health assessments have remained positive.

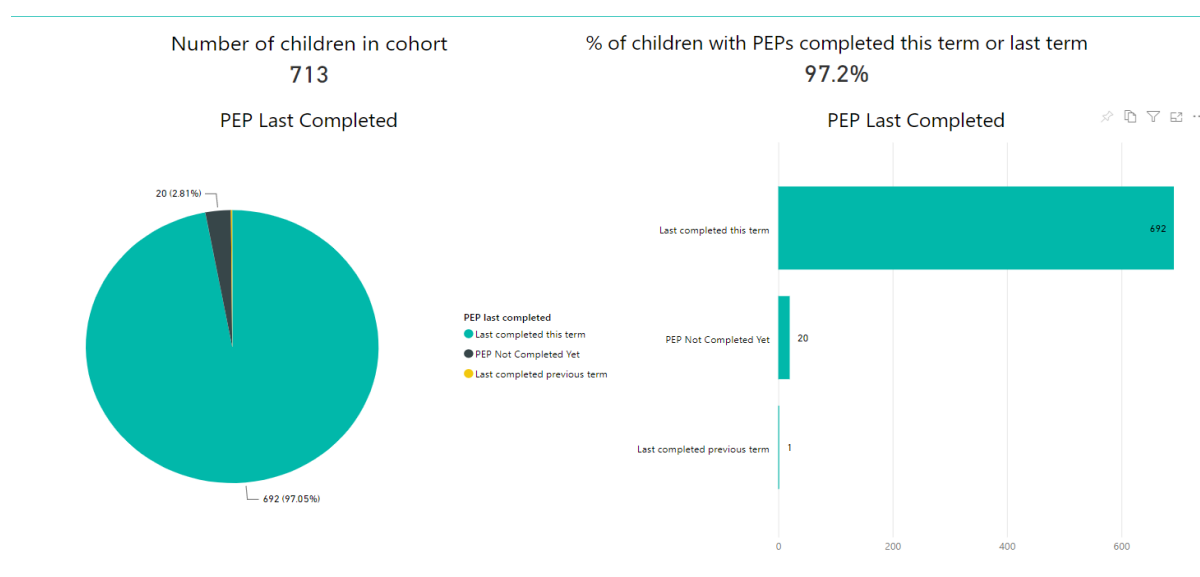
- **Gym and swim passes**

22 gym and swim passes were provided to care leavers for the initial 3 month pass in 2021 in recognition of the interdependencies between good physical health and positive emotional health and wellbeing. Since then a further 29 were issued in 2022. 27 of these have been renewed evidencing the positive impact this has made.

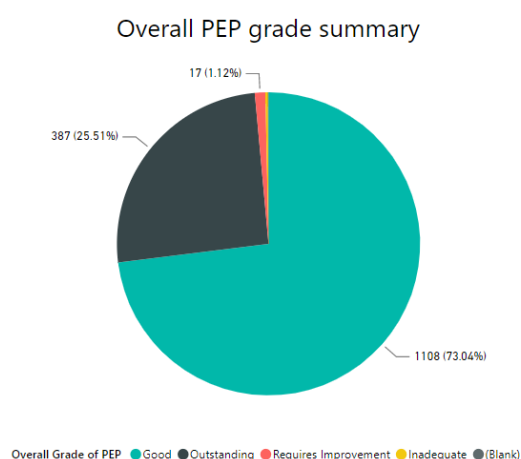
Priority 3: Education and Jobs

• Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

Completion of Personal Education Plans within the statutory timescale has continued to remain high over the past year. Now, between 90-95% of PEPs are completed within timescales each term. Current data shows that 97.2% of PEPs were completed this term or last 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.



Priority 4: Transitions

A transition protocol and pathway is embedded and improved training and development offer regarding transitions.



Fostering progress 21-22

The overall aim of the Fostering Service is to provide a range of high quality and safe foster placements that meet the needs of our children looked after in line with the requirements of Care Standards Act 2002 and the Fostering Regulations 2011 including the National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011.

The service is responsible for:

- Support, supervision, and training of foster carers including family and friend carers (connected carers)
- Ensuring provision of local safe and supportive foster placements in accordance with fostering national minimum standards
- Promoting placement stability and permanence planning for our children
- Recruitment and assessment of new foster carers

As of 31st March 2022, there were 306 mainstream and connected Fostering Households. In total, these households support 58% of children looked after in Wirral.

- **Supervision and support**

A summary of the achievements, progress and plans in relation to supervision and support includes:

- a new reporting tool has been introduced on foster carer training. This has enabled a better understanding of the uptake of the five mandatory training sessions.
- there is now evidence of improvements in foster carer training compliance resulting with current data showing 92% of carers have completed safer care, 63% recording and reporting, 59% safeguarding, 57% equality and diversity and 45% first aid.

- Two of the mandatory training sessions will be incorporated into the Skills to Foster Programme so that they are completed before registration
- A new provider for the First Aid training to offer a more flexible package for carers, making training available at weekends and evenings.
- Mentoring schemes continue to be well received across the Service
- A new 'Kinship' Service has been commissioned to provide emotional and practical support for connected carers
- The Family Toolbox has been launched with foster carers to provide advice and guidance for all families
- A review of fostering payments has commenced benchmarking against other local authorities and considering cost of living rises and inflation.

- **Fostering Panel**

A summary of the achievements, progress and plans in relation to the Fostering Panel includes:

- 51 Fostering Panels have been held
- Two new experienced Fostering Panel chairs have been appointed and the central list of panel members has been increased was increased
- Feedback from those attending Panel meetings has been positive
- Panel members report that the overall quality of assessments being presented to panel from the assessment team has significantly improved over the last 12 months

- 101 approvals have been made by the Panel. This is an increase from 2019 (data not captured nationally for 2020) which was 91.
- The Panel also approved 104 deregistration's, an increase from 92 in 2019 resulting in a small overall decrease in LA registered carers, which is reflected nationally.

• Recruitment

A summary of the achievements, progress and plans in relation to recruitment and retention includes:

- a review of the timeliness of foster carer assessment processes has been undertaken with mainstream assessments resulting in a new completion target of 12-weeks, which is in line with our Independent Fostering Agency competitors.
- an increased emphasis on marketing and promotion through campaigning which has included
 - Press release launch in January 2022
 - Overview for visibility on the social media ads with 568 clicks through to the website over a 2.5-week period:
 - Linda Wilde – ITV Christmas Advent heroes' campaign
 - Julie McLean Case study January 2022:
 - Tree planting event December 2021
 - Newsletter to carers
- As a result of the marketing and promotion, there has been 152 enquiries to date this year, 37 higher than the previous year. This has resulted in an increase of mainstream assessments to 19 compared to 11 in 20-21. A break down in the result of all enquiries is contained within the report.

Next Steps –Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-2025

Throughout the past 12 months, dedicated work has focussed on developing a new three-year Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

The Strategy was developed in consultation with young people who contributed their views. What we want to achieve:

- **Emotional and physical health and wellbeing** – making sure you are happy and healthy all the way through your childhood and into adulthood.
- **Independence and transition to adulthood** – Focussing on helping you learn ‘life skills’ from an early age and getting everything in place so you can be supported if you need it after you turn 18.
- Further work is required on ensuring that transition arrangements (whether they include staying put, transition to adult services for some or to independent living) are seamless and young people feel confident and empowered when they turn 18.
- **Positive Lived Experiences** – Making sure there are enough of the right people to look after you in suitable homes whether this is a short or long stay/time.

We want to review the current model of offer for fostering ensuring there is dedicated training and recruitment support, develop a support offer for Special Guardians which is robust and tailored to need. We want to continue to explore new models of accommodation particularly for Care Leavers where

challenges around homelessness are becoming more apparent.

- **Education and Employment** – Ensuring that you do well and have the right support in school and have the right opportunities to access employment.

Further work around inclusion, aligned to the SEND transformation programme will form the basis of planning and priorities moving forward.

Underpinning the Strategy will be the voice of the child which will be the bedrock of planning, reviewing, and considering the outcomes for young people. This will transcend all the priorities within the Strategy.

