



Corporate Parenting Board



 <p>Chair – Cllr Ruth Buttery</p>	<p>Corporate Parenting Board</p>	 <p>Vice Chair – Cllr Sue Ridney</p>
	<p>Municipal Year Report 2023/2024</p>	

Purpose of the Children’s Corporate Parenting Board:

All elected members, employees, and partner agencies have a collective responsibility as Corporate Parents to provide the best possible care and safeguard for the children who are looked after by Dudley council, as well as our care experienced young adults. The Children’s Corporate Parenting Board meets on a regular basis to consider matters which affect children and young people in care. This includes satisfying themselves that arrangements for the investigation of concerns about safety and welfare of children and young people in the care of the local authority are good.

Recommendations

The Corporate Parenting Board is recommended to:

- Utilise this report to consider the impact of the Board in this reporting year, and to support the planning for the forthcoming year.

Board Members

Cllr Ruth Buttery – Lead Member (Chair)

Cllr Sue Ridney – Coseley East (Vice Chair)

Cllr Cathy Bayton – St James Ward

Cllr Hilary Bills – Halesowen North

Cllr Luke Johnson – Kingswinford South

Cllr Peter Lee - Amblecote

Cllr Kerry Lewis - Wordsley

Cllr David Stanley – Lower Gornal

Cllr Shaun Keasey - Sedgley

Cllr Elaine Taylor – Netherton, Woodside and St Andrews

Cllr Mark Westwood – Upper Gornal and Woodsetton

Summary:

The Corporate Parenting Board considered a number of areas, in respect of the experiences of the children in our care and care experienced young adults during the 2023/24 Municipal year.

This reports seeks to set out the impact of the work of the Board, and propose a plan for the forthcoming year 2024-25.

The Board is in receipt of the recommendations and actions through this past municipal year, which is not repeated in this summary report.

Areas of Focus and impact:

Achieving Permanence:

The Corporate Parenting Board has continued to monitor performance indicators through regular reports, with a particular focus on the impact on the progress of children in our care and a focus on achieving permanence.

Whilst the Corporate Parenting Board has received specific annual reports in respect of key permanence outcomes – for example Annual Adoption Report or the Annual Fostering report, the Board

helpfully brought focus to their understanding of permanency for our children in care in the broader context. The Board meeting of 18th April will see the first 'Permanency' report presented, and we anticipate that this will be a regular focus moving forward.

The impact of the Special Guardianship and Adoption No Detriment policy, which was approved in December 2020, has continued to be positive. In the two years prior to this approval, 12 children achieved permanency through these arrangements. In the 3 reporting years since that time (April 2021 – March 2024), 82 children have been able to be permanently cared for through such an arrangement.

Health of our children in care and care experienced young adults:

Timeliness of initial health assessments of children coming into care, has continued to be a regular standard discussion item at each working group, to ensure that rigour is evidenced and that our children's health is prioritised.

Some Initial Health Care Assessments had been delayed due to late notification, however that percentage of delay had now reduced to 18%. Work is continuing to reduce delays through regular monitoring and this is improving as a result.

Impact

- Performance on annual health assessments continues to improve and to be above target (February 2024, 93% with up to date health assessments).
- In terms of care experienced young adults, there is a renewed focus to ensure that health passports are available to every care experienced young adult at age 18 or when they have lost the original copy. In addition to this, an App has been developed to ensure that young people are aware of all the health services within Dudley and how to access them.
- The Integrated Care Board (IBC) had signed up to the Care Leavers Covenant and plans were in place to support care experienced young adults working within the NHS in the Black

Country, this include looking at apprenticeships and how that would work.

- Care experienced young adults up to the age of 25 are now eligible for free prescriptions. This was launched in April 2023. Further work is being conducted to promote free prescriptions.

Pocket Money Savings for Children and Young People in Care:

In 2022/23, the Board supported a review of the children's pocket money and savings be undertaken. Consequent to this, it was identified that whilst children's pocket money was deemed to be pitched at the right level, the arrangements and levels for children's savings would benefit from review.

Subsequently, proposals to increase as well as manage children's savings was presented to the Board on 7th December 2023. The Board noted the proposal, and recognised that resolution would be taken through budget setting across the authority. This was successfully completed, and the new savings are effective from April 2024.

Impact

- The increase in children's savings will bring our children in care at par with children in other local authorities.
- The arrangement to manage children's savings centrally will enable consistency and rigour, particularly for children where they have moved to a different home. It has been well received by our carers.

Children's Leisure membership:

In January 2023, Public Health had funded leisure passes for children in care. As a result of the robust monitoring of the children's health and the importance of exercise in their lives, the Board has successfully facilitated the provision of leisure passes to children in care and their carers. The matter was tabled on 5th October 2023.

The most popular activities during 2023 included free swimming and lifestyle gym, which has been taken up by children, young people and their carers.

In addition, there have been training opportunities made available for National Pool Lifeguard Qualification, with the potential then for employment in our local leisure centres. Again, this is positive impact for young people in our care, and reflects the dedicated attention of the council, members and community.

Education of our children in care and care experienced young adults:

The Corporate Parenting Board has a responsibility to promote the educational achievements of children in care as well as care experienced young adults. To this end, members considered;

- The Virtual School Annual Report 2022/23
- Dudley Virtual School Post 16 Programme including Smashlife

The Post 16 education programme, including the Virtual School integrating with the Department for Education (DfE) Pilot Project with the existing offer to inform future developments has included;

- Launch of a programme for learning, training and employment pathways for all 16- and 17-year-old children in care; the impact of this programme has ensured that individual young people are supported through a range of enhanced development offers.
- The Smashlife programme which was launched in 2023 engaged 35+ young people initially to enable learning across the whole system with several key strands emerging with young people requiring the right skills to become independent. This has been rolled out across Dudley.

The Virtual School had worked with both Dudley and Halesowen Colleges in January 2023 to launch a programme for learning, training and employment pathways for all Post 16 children in care. The programme ensured that each individual was supported by, subject to need, a range of enhanced development offers.

The 'I want to be' event led by our Virtual School and supporting young people with their career choices held in 2023 was well received. Corporate Parenting board received a report, and in discussion was supportive of the expansion of this approach. The event scheduled this year is for 9th July, and has dedicated spaces

for all secondary schools as well as our two key colleges, Dudley and Halesowen. The Board has wanted to ensure good contribution from member colleagues who may have skills or business leads that are well placed to support the event, as well of course as encouraging directorates across the council in their participation.

Emotional Wellbeing and therapeutic support to the children in care, care experienced young adults and carers:

Mental health and wellbeing was a key concern for young people, as reported to the Corporate Parenting Board, and has been under review and scrutiny throughout 2021/22, 2022/23. To respond to this concern, Members requested information and assurances that children in care who are at higher risk of experiencing poor emotional well-being than children living at home with their parents, receive responsive care.

In July 2023 Dudley implemented the Family Safeguarding model, which was a whole family, strength-based approach to child protection; this had created multi-disciplinary teams who were co-located, learning from other local authorities. Dudley's approach is to implement key elements of the integrated service delivery across all safeguarding and support teams.

It was also identified that it would be a good opportunity to adopt those principles across other teams, including Emotional Wellbeing arrangements for our children in care. The Board was supportive of the work to update our joint offer with health for our children in care and care experienced young adults.

As a result of this work, the emotional health and wellbeing service is now established jointly across health and social care, and embedded as part our Through Care arrangements. The impact of this development means that we are better able to support our young adults; have a more integrated arrangement directly with the social work teams; the reach into our fostering service delivers a more focussed approach to placement stability; we are not working only to geographical boundaries previously in place, but the team can consider how best to support children at distance.

Fostering and Permanency:

Fostering Annual Report 2023/24, presented to the Board on 7th December 2023, highlighted that Dudley Fostering Service has faced a number of challenges over the past few years. During the last two years it has quite rightly re-focused on compliance with the fostering regulations, as not to do so would mean we were not fulfilling our duty of care to our foster carers and to the children they foster. This has led to positive changes in staffing resulting in the right support provided to foster carers with the following strengths;

- A strong cohort of long-standing foster carers at its core, who have now formed a foster carer association to work in partnership with the local authority.
- A fully staffed and enthusiastic fostering service who are constantly reviewing and developing practice in order to better supervise and support foster carers so that they can meet the needs of our children.
- Supportive senior managers who understand the importance and complexity of developing a strong and sustainable in-house fostering service.

We have subsequently been successful in our application for the Fosterlink programme, exploring ways to further enhance our recruitment.

Experiences of Care Experienced Young Adults:

In October 2023, it was a privilege to be with our care experienced young adults at the launch event for their new drop in facility. This has continued to be a well used resource, embedded into the community. The tenacity and oversight of the Corporate Parenting Board has been valuable in achieving this outcome.

The impact of the dedicated young person advisor role for homelessness prevention has been positive, and the board has received a report specifically detailing this impact. The reshape of the Care Experienced service identifies a lead role across homelessness going forward, and the increasingly close working relationship with housing team.

Across the region, we have been active in the development of the Care Leaver Board, and which seeks to bring a consistent and high quality offer to young people in our region.

The Corporate Parenting Board has supported the wider work across Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council to recognise Care Experience as a protected characteristic. In December 2023, this matter was presented – alongside our young people – at Council and approved. This is a real and tangible benefit for our young people, and recognises the impact of focussed and dedicated attention.

Planning for 2023/24

Items for the Annual Children's Corporate Parenting Board Committee Programme:

1. Dudley Virtual School Annual report
2. Fostering and Permanency Service Annual Report
3. Annual report from Adoption@Heart, our Regional Adoption Agency
4. Annual report from Independent Reviewing Officers
5. Report on the outcomes of the Ofsted Inspections and the Regulation Independent Visitor inspections in respect of the Children Home (England) regulations 2015
6. Annual Health Report for children and young people in care
7. Annual update from our Children in Care service
8. Annual update from our Care Experienced service

Proposed inclusion for consideration:

- Review of the Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Delivery of Total Respect Training for the new members of Corporate Parenting Board
- Opportunity to consider next steps for inclusion of young people with the Corporate Parenting Board

Finance

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Law

There are no direct legal implications arising from the report.

Risk Management

There are no risks directly arising from the report.

Equality Impact

The Municipal report recognises issues of equality for children who are in our care, care experienced young adults and their rights to be supported to have better experiences and outcomes

Human Resources/Organisational Development

There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

Commercial/Procurement

There is no impact to trade or procurement arising from this report.

Council Priorities

The contents of the report relate to the key council priorities outlined within the Children's Services directorate plan.



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Appendices