

# Public Document Pack

**Tony Kershaw**  
Director of Law and Assurance

If calling please ask for:

Natalie Jones-Punch on 033 022 25098  
Email: natalie.jones-punch@westsussex.gov.uk

www.westsussex.gov.uk

County Hall  
Chichester  
West Sussex  
PO19 1RQ  
Switchboard  
Tel no (01243) 777100



---

08 May 2019

Dear Member,

**Children and Young People's Services Select Committee - Wednesday, 15 May 2019**

Please find enclosed the following document(s) for consideration at the meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Select Committee on Wednesday, 15 May 2019 which was unavailable when the agenda was published.

<b>Agenda No</b>	<b>Item</b>
------------------	-------------

<b>5.</b>	<b>Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care Services</b> (Pages 3 - 26)
-----------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------

This report was late in order to ensure that the Committee receives the most up to date information.

Yours sincerely

Tony Kershaw  
Director of Law and Assurance

**To all members of the Children and Young People's Services Select Committee**

This page is intentionally left blank

<b>Children and Young People's Services Select Committee</b>
--------------------------------------------------------------

<b>15 May 2019</b>
--------------------

<b>Ofsted Inspection of Children's Social Care Services</b>
-------------------------------------------------------------

<b>Report by the Director of Law and Assurance and the Director of Children's Services</b>
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Summary**

The County Council's Children's Social Care Services were the subject of an inspection by Ofsted in February 2019. Following a dialogue with the County Council in light of the Inspection's findings a final report on the service has been published. This is attached as an appendix to this report.

The report explains the implications for the County Council of the findings and designation within the report and what areas for action will be required of the County Council in response. The governance of the Council's arrangements to address the challenges for the future of the services is set out, including the role of the Select Committee. The role for members of the Children and Young People's Services Select Committee is presented for consideration by the Committee. The findings of the report will be the focus for consideration more thoroughly through the next few months rather than at this meeting.

**The focus for scrutiny**

- To understand the relationship between the various agencies and responsible bodies within the governance as set out.
- To identify where the committee should focus its contribution to the improvement plan in the context of the governance as set out.
- To consider and identify the future role of elected members, including that of the Select Committee, as corporate parents and in monitoring performance and the effectiveness of service outcome planning
- To define members' expectations and how future Committee meetings should be planned to ensure those expectations are met.

**Proposal**

**1. Background and Context**

- 1.1. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), a non-ministerial government department which reports to Parliament, regulates and inspects in order to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates, assesses and inspects children's social care services.
- 1.2. Ofsted carried out an inspection of the County Council's children's services during a structured visit between 25<sup>th</sup> February and 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019. The last Ofsted inspection of these services took place in 2016 when an overall finding of 'requires improvement to be good' was given. Following the recent inspection a draft report was prepared and a meeting with the inspectors

followed. Following a brief opportunity for the Council to comment on the proposed content the report it has now been published (**appendix 1**).

- 1.3. The report's findings provide a significant challenge to the Council in relation to its responsibilities for children's social care services and how plans for recovery and improvement should be addressed. This will require a full understanding of the various roles elected members have - both in accounting for the historical position, the assessment of the current position and in rising to the challenges presented to the Council as a whole.
- 1.4. Some steps have already been taken in anticipation of the report's findings and in light of expectations the Council had in light of a LGA peer review late in 2018. These are summarised in the report.

## **2. The County Council's position following the report's findings**

- 2.1 The most significant consequence of the inspection will be the issuing of a statutory direction by the Department for Education to the County Council and the role taken by the commissioner to be appointed by the Secretary of State to oversee the Council's response. The Council will need to work closely with the commissioner on the development and delivery of an improvement plan and it will be for the commissioner to monitor and direct the Council in relation to that plan. There will be arrangements internally for the governance of the improvement plan and these are set out below.
- 2.2 Ultimately it will be for the Commissioner to determine whether the Council's improvement plan and the actions taken to deliver it are effective. That will inform the Commissioner's recommendation to the Secretary of State in relation to whether the County Council should retain responsibility for the direct provision of children's social care services. A strict timetable for the evaluation of progress against the improvement plan will be determined and monitored by the Commissioner. An initial decision is likely to be planned for six months following the publication of the report.
- 2.3 The County Council has already taken the steps to address the concerns expressed about the Council's approach to corporate parenting and, at the County Council meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> April, approved a revised constitution for the Corporate Parenting Panel – including extensive revisions to its membership. A copy of the revised constitution is attached as **appendix 2**.
- 2.4 The report also contains a criticism of the effectiveness of the scrutiny function by stating 'oversight, scrutiny and challenge from corporate leaders, including the children's select committee and the corporate parenting panel, have not been sufficiently rigorous'. The first task for this committee should be to understand what lies behind this and to consider how it should respond, in the context of the overall findings of the inspection.

## **3. Governance and the role of Scrutiny**

- 3.1 In anticipation of the inspection and its findings steps have been taken to establish a more focused and closely defined set of governance arrangements. Following the establishment prior to the inspection of a voluntary improvement board for children's social care services that board,

engaging a wide range of partners and chaired by an independent expert in children's social care services, will be formalised and its current membership and terms of reference reviewed. These will need to be endorsed by the commissioner. It has met once under its current constitution and will take action in relation to its future structure and role following dialogue with the commissioner.

- 3.2 The Improvement Board will take the primary responsibility for managing and overseeing the implementation of the improvement plan and in providing a forum for partnership working on the plan in addition to the liaison with the DfE's appointed commissioner. This Committee will need to see the outcome of the Board's review of its terms of reference to better understand the role of the Improvement Board and what relationship the Committee should have.
- 3.3 The Cabinet Member retains the statutory responsibility as lead member for Children's Services and will provide the County Council's direct accountability to the commissioner and the DfE. The Cabinet Member is currently a member, alongside the Leader, of the Improvement Board. As the Board will not have executive powers on behalf of the County Council the Cabinet Member and the Director of Children and Family Services will share the responsibility for taking all significant decisions for the implementation of the plan. These will be advertised through the Forward Plan and processed for transparency in the usual way. The Cabinet Member will, as far as practicable, take such decisions in a public forum at Cabinet meetings – when both public engagement and member scrutiny can be ensured. Members should also be aware of the need for decisions to be taken with appropriate urgency when required and, in such cases, urgent decisions will be notified to members through the Members' Information Service. It is proposed that these arrangements will ensure both rigour and transparency in the County Council's discharge of its responsibilities for meeting the improvement plan.

#### **4. Issues for consideration by the Select Committee**

##### **How to identify the focus for scrutiny – agreeing the work plan**

- 4.1 Members will wish to explore and understand the criticism of the Council's approach to scrutiny and challenge and to identify what approaches and measures could address any shortcomings. These may include the arrangements for business planning, the scope and content of performance data brought before it, the identification of outcomes and the validation of evidence presented to it. This will however need to be considered in the context of the finalised role discharged by the Improvement Board.

##### **The purpose of scrutiny – what should it deliver?**

- 4.2 The Committee will need to restate its purpose and expectations by reference to the roles discharged by others in the governance arrangements described above - to ensure that there are no conflicting or overlapping roles and that the distinct purpose of scrutiny is fully defined. It may in particular wish to consider how it fulfils its role as corporate parent, particularly in understanding the experience and voice of the child.

##### **How does scrutiny support with the improvement plan?**

- 4.3 In the longer term the Committee will wish to have and maintain a more coherent and effective role in holding the executive and the service leads to

account in the context of the outcome of the improvement plan. In the meantime the focus will need to be on considering the aims and actions within the improvement plan so that the contribution of the Select Committee can be better understood within the context of the overall governance.

#### **Learning and developing the skills and tools needed**

- 4.4 Finally the Committee may wish to consider how members learn or develop a greater understanding about the needs of children and families and how these are best met and to secure the skills needed to better challenge and support the services the Council delivers. This will also require a new approach to evidence validation and to focus on what information the committee needs to give members' greater assurance in relation to outcomes.

### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 There has been no consultation with members or with external partners save in relation to the changes to the CPP described above and in connection with the remodelled Improvement Board also described above.

### **6. Risk Management Implications**

- 6.1 The future effectiveness of the Council's services for children in need and children looked after will be driven by the nature of the response to the inspection report and the Council's delivery of actions required for improvement. The Select Committee's members will play a critical role in mitigating the risks to future service delivery
- 6.2 The Council's reputation will be at risk unless a good response is made to the findings of the inspection and the improvement plan which is to be adopted. The Committee must identify, understand and ensure it is able to fulfil its role in that meeting that objective.

### **7. Other Options Considered**

- 7.1 The Committee will have a limited number of options in relation to the County Council's management of the response to the inspection report or the role it can play in the context of a DfE commissioner directed position for the County Council.

### **8. Equality Duty**

- 8.1 The public sector equality duty will be referenced in all of the work planning and the monitoring of delivery so that the Committee is able to give due regard to the needs of those with protected characteristics and to the obligation to ensure fairness and equal treatment.

### **9. Social Value**

- 9.1 The Committee will wish to examine to what extent the future plans for Children's Services support and complement the Council's commitments to social value.

## **10. Crime and Disorder Implications**

- 10.1 To the extent that areas of children's social care services and its work with partners in child protection have implications for reducing crime and disorder and improving the life chances of young people, this will be referenced in the work planning and in the material presented for review by the Committee.

## **11. Human Rights Implications**

- 11.1 The Committee will wish to understand the implications of the inspection's findings and the actions identified in the improvement plan which have a bearing on the Council's overriding duty to safeguard the Human Rights of children in need. The Committee may also in due course wish to consider the value of a focus on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

John Readman Director of Children and Family Services (interim)  
Tony Kershaw Director of Law and Assurance

**Contact:** Tony Kershaw

**Appendix 1:** Ofsted Inspection into Children's Social Care May 2019

**Appendix 2:** Constitution of Corporate Parenting Panel (revised April 2019), Part 3 Appendix 12.

This page is intentionally left blank



# West Sussex County Council

## Inspection of local authority children’s services

**Inspection dates: 25 February to 8 March 2019**

**Lead inspector: Linda Steele**  
**Her Majesty’s Inspector**

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

There are widespread and serious weaknesses in the provision of services to support, protect and care for children in West Sussex. Services have seriously declined since the last inspection, when all areas were judged to require improvement to be good. The quality of help and support that children receive is a lottery and depends on where they live. Children experience a negative impact from the considerable turnover of the social workers and managers and from the substantial variability in the quality of assessment and intervention.

Most social work practice is weak. Risks to children are seldom recognised, and social workers do not see children frequently enough. Children’s views are not often included in assessments and plans, and their records are rarely up to date. Children in care wait too long for their permanence to be confirmed. Drift and delay are evident at every stage of the child’s journey. This is particularly true for children living in neglectful circumstances. These critical weaknesses span across all social work teams. Consequently, some children remain without the protection and care that they need.

A service restructure in 2015 and subsequent changes in leadership at corporate and managerial levels have created considerable instability. Continual turnover in the workforce and high caseloads severely limit the local authority's ability to achieve a consistently acceptable standard of social work practice. Children do not always have a named social worker. This has a negative impact on how often they are seen and how well they are enabled to build relationships with professionals they know and trust. Insufficient rigour in challenging poor practice and weak management oversight have led to a deep-rooted culture of non-compliance with basic social work standards.

Many of the deficits highlighted through this inspection have been known to political and corporate leaders for some time. Political leaders have pledged further significant funds to support an increase in capacity and service developments. This has come too late to prevent substantial service decline. The corporate parenting panel has been largely ineffective in delivering much-needed improvements for children in care. Attempts to drive improvement under the direction of the quality and development board have not been sufficiently focused or effective. Partner agencies and the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) have not been included in this work. This has severely limited the extent to which the local authority has been able to effect the changes that are needed. In very recent months, the trajectory of improvement has accelerated, linked to recent action to establish an improvement board and appoint an independent chair. However, the quality of support that many children receive continues to fall significantly below an acceptable standard.

## **What needs to improve**

- The infrastructure and services to support good-quality social work practice, reducing the number of transfer points for children. Clarity regarding the expectations of the workforce, including practice guidance and procedures and the quality of staff induction and training.
- The quality of social work practice, to assess, support and protect children who experience neglect.
- The effectiveness of assessment and planning for children in private fostering arrangements and 16- and 17-year-old homeless young people.
- The quality of plans, particularly in relation to the focus on critical issues for families, timescales for actions and the consideration of what will happen if improvements are not achieved or concerns increase.
- The quality of social work recording, including the inclusion of intelligence and an analysis of the critical issues for children in return home interview records.
- Permanence planning for children, including the availability and use of foster-to-adopt placements, timeliness of assessments and planning for unborn babies.
- The quality and timeliness of life-story work.

- The quality and regularity of supervision, management oversight, direction and challenge, at all levels.
- The effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements.
- Staff recruitment and retention so that children experience fewer social workers.
- The rigour and impact of corporate parenting arrangements.
- The active engagement of all relevant partners to tackle weaknesses in services and improve outcomes for children.

## **The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection is inadequate**

1. There are long-standing, widespread and serious weaknesses in the provision of services to safeguard children in West Sussex. Risks are seldom recognised, and weak managerial oversight at all levels is a common feature in too many children's cases. Serious shortfalls in the response to neglect across the service, the steps that are taken to safeguard unborn babies and the quality of child protection planning mean that too many children are not effectively supported and protected.
2. Critical weaknesses in how social workers, managers and partner agencies identify and respond to neglect are evident across the service. Accumulating concerns about the neglect children have experienced are not always recognised or understood, resulting in a lack of assertive action and to some children experiencing profound and potentially long-term consequences. A neglect strategy, supported by a range of tools to identify and measure progress, was introduced by the LSCB in 2016. This has not led to an effective, coordinated response to neglect across the partnership.
3. The assessment and management of risk to unborn babies are poor. The practice of not allocating the cases of all unborn babies to social workers when they are first referred leads to significant drift and delay in pre-birth assessment and planning. Thus, babies are born without robust plans in place to safeguard their welfare, leading to unnecessary emergency action or unplanned parent and child placements. The practice of requiring all care leavers' unborn children to be referred for assessment, regardless of whether there are concerns about their capacity to parent, further illustrates the need for significant improvement in this area.
4. The integrated prevention and earliest help (IPEH) service delivers early help to families across the county. Some children experience delays accessing early help due to duplication in screening and triaging. Delays vary in length from initial contact to allocation and first visit. Early help assessments and plans undertaken by the local authority and partners are variable in quality. Some are

comprehensive, analytical and provide a good sense of the child, but too many do not focus on the needs or voice of the child and sometimes adult issues dominate. The local authority uses a range of approaches, including feedback from children and families, to evaluate the impact of the service. This is making a positive difference to some children's lives but is yet to have a demonstrable impact on reducing the number of referrals to children's social care.

5. Under the direction of the strategic multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) board, partners have worked purposefully to strengthen the response that children receive when they are first referred for help, support or protection. The co-location of police, health and other agencies supports effective joint working and information-sharing. The integration of early help screening staff ensures that consideration is given to meeting children's needs at the earliest point. Daily screening by the police, social care and a domestic abuse service provider ensures a joined-up response to police notifications, particularly in respect to concerns about domestic abuse.
6. When children are first referred to the MASH, the response is mostly timely and effective. Consent to share information is routinely sought from parents. Careful consideration is given to children's histories, and, along with timely and thorough agency checks, this supports mostly effective decision-making regarding next steps. Not all decisions are timely, with some delays seen in progressing contacts. These delays are seen when the decisions are of a less serious nature. Managers oversee all referrals and decision-making. In most cases, threshold decisions are appropriate. Nevertheless, the MASH continues to receive a high number of contacts which result in no further action or are closed with advice and guidance because partner agencies are not clear enough about thresholds.
7. Strategy meetings are not always convened in response to potential concerns regarding significant harm. Strategy meetings that do take place vary in quality. Those that are carried out by the MASH are comprehensive, include key agencies in decision-making and result in the right outcome. Strategy discussions carried out by area teams are less comprehensive, but mostly lead to appropriate decisions. Child protection enquiries vary in quality, although the majority lead to the right outcome and ensure that children are safeguarded.
8. Child and family assessments are not always completed within timescales that meet individual needs of children. They do not consistently include historical family information or needs arising from culture or religion and lack coherent analysis to inform decision-making. Insufficient social work capacity means that some children are not visited regularly enough, or they are visited by different duty workers. This impacts negatively on social workers' ability to gain a proper understanding of children's changing needs. Direct work with children is evident, but it is not always used to gather children's views or to get an understanding of what life is like for children.

9. Child protection plans are rarely written with a clear focus on reducing risks to children and promoting their welfare. Although children have plans, they are complex documents that include a large amount of information, and far too many actions. They also lack timescales. The impact of this is that it is difficult to understand the critical concerns and for families and agencies to know what to focus on. Most child protection conferences and reviews are well attended by parents and professionals, who are supported to share their views. Parents and children benefit from the regular presence of advocates in conferences.
  
10. When concerns about children do not reduce, legal planning meetings provide a forum for deciding whether further action is needed. These meetings consider whether the threshold is met for pre-proceedings under the Public Law Outline (PLO). However, pre-proceedings are not consistently considered for all children who would benefit from this approach, for example unborn babies, or in response to accumulating concerns, such as chronic neglect. Consequently, risks escalate, or concerns increase without compensatory action, leading to further harm for some children. The judiciary is highly critical of the quality of social work practice, due to continued examples of staff turnover and changes in social work allocation to families. Subsequently, this leads to a lack of timely assessment and action and results in drift and delay in progressing some children's plans.
  
11. Risks to children, including exploitation, are, for the majority, well identified and responded to. A multi-agency framework supports professionals to identify and respond to exploitation in all its forms. Risks to children are monitored via the missing and exploitation operational group. Concerted effort has been made across the partnership to improve outcomes for a cohort of high-risk adolescents with complex needs in the local authority. This work has delivered effective results in reducing risk, missing episodes and offending for some young people.
  
12. The local authority has strengthened its response to missing children, bringing this service in-house after discontinuing its contract with an externally commissioned provider. Most missing children are identified effectively and are offered return home interviews. Return home interviews are not always recorded or recorded well enough, leading to considerable gaps in the use of intelligence to support the ongoing assessment and management of risk for children.
  
13. Not all children living in private fostering arrangements are supported effectively. Critical safeguarding checks and assessments are not always undertaken in accordance with procedures and not all visits to children are timely.
  
14. The local authority recognises that it has further work to do to strengthen the response to 16- and 17-year-olds who present as homeless. Young people's needs are assessed, but assessments do not sufficiently consider their

accommodation needs, or their entitlement to become looked after. Young people are not fully informed of their rights and entitlements. Some young people who should have been offered accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 have not been afforded this.

15. An increasing number of children in West Sussex are electively home educated. The local authority has processes in place for identifying and tracking children and it maintains records. The local authority liaises proportionately with families to ensure that children are safe, and to check plans for their education. The local authority keeps a record of any children not attending school full-time and works effectively to integrate children back into mainstream placements. In some instances, it takes longer than is desirable to place children in appropriate provision, especially where their needs are complex.
16. The system for managing allegations or concerns about adults who work with children is generally effective. Nevertheless, there is more work to do to ensure that the process for tracking and overseeing allegations is accurate and measures the time taken for investigations to be completed. There is variability in social workers' understanding of the designated officer's role and a lack of progression of important actions arising from strategy meetings.
17. Awareness of, and the response to, children at risk of radicalisation are established and effective, but further work is needed to ensure that the workforce is trained in how to respond to these risks.

**The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers is inadequate**

18. Services for children in care have declined since the single inspection in 2016. Serious shortfalls in practice mean that children in care receive an inadequate service. Too few children in care have an up-to-date, good-quality care plan, and children wait too long for assessments of their health needs and for permanent homes. Issues in how social workers, managers and partner agencies respond to neglect lead to children coming into care too late, and when their needs have become complex and challenging. The effect of all these shortfalls is that there is drift and delay in progressing children's plans, which results in missed opportunities to improve children's lives and to achieve permanence in families when it is right for children.
19. Assessments and care plans vary considerably in their timeliness and quality. Senior managers' actions to tackle weaknesses in the quality of care plans have had limited impact. Some care plans meet required standards, but most do not clearly set out accountabilities, or effectively represent the child's voice. A quarter of children in care do not have an up-to-date care plan. A new care plan format has only recently been implemented, and training on what a good care plan looks like is yet to take place. Assessments to inform decision-making

on whether to place brothers and sisters together are of better quality and provide a rich understanding of children's attachments. Unaccompanied minors' needs are well assessed, and these children are well supported when they arrive in the country.

20. The quality of health provision for children in care is poor, despite this being an area of focus since the last inspection. Serious shortfalls remain in the timeliness in which children's health needs are assessed when they first come into care. For example, of the children who started to be looked after during December 2018, only 13% had an initial health assessment completed on time. This means that children's health needs are not properly understood at the early stages of care planning. Strengths and difficulties questionnaires are now completed for children in care, but they are not routinely used to inform care planning. The child and adolescent mental health service for children in care is currently being recommissioned to deliver more timely mental health support for children, who currently have to wait several months for treatment.
21. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) are largely ineffective in challenging poor practice or addressing drift and delay. This is despite an increase in the number of IROs and some improvement in their oversight. Most children's circumstances are regularly considered through statutory reviews, but not all of these are timely or effective in ensuring that children's plans are progressed at the necessary pace. Shortfalls in practice identified by IROs through the dispute resolution process can go many months without being addressed. This is because managers at all levels are not rigorously overseeing social work practice to ensure that outstanding actions are swiftly completed.
22. Plans to reunify children with their families are seldom based on coherent assessments of risk and need. Placement-with-parents regulations are not properly understood by social workers and managers, and important parts of the process, such as critical checks, are not reliably completed. When children do return home to live with their families, they are not always offered the support they need to help them to make good progress and remain there.
23. Most social workers visit children regularly according to their needs. This includes those children placed out of the West Sussex area. Children's views are sought and captured through a range of activities, but this is often not well reflected in children's case records. Although some children are supported to understand their experiences through a range of direct work, others wait too long for important life-story work to take place to help them to make sense of their life histories.
24. Most children live with carers who meet their needs, support their aspirations and act as a champion for them. Although matching processes identify suitable placements for children, a shortfall in availability of carers means that choice is limited, resulting in unnecessary moves for some children. Opportunities to utilise foster-to-adopt placements are not considered for babies at the earliest

stages. Senior managers recognise that fostering-to-adopt practice is under-developed. Very recent work has been done to raise awareness and increase the number of children who can benefit from this route to permanence.

25. The virtual school is working to improve the number of personal education plans that are completed. While there has been some improvement in the completion rate, too many are still not produced within the expected timescales or to a sufficiently high standard. Consequently, the virtual school's knowledge about and impact on the academic outcomes of children in care are limited.
26. The number of children in care who are persistently absent from school remains high. Exclusions have risen over time. The local authority is tackling this issue strategically, working with schools and governors to develop their work around pupil exclusion as part of the promotion of a broader approach to safeguarding. This is supporting an emerging culture of inclusion.
27. Foster carers receive effective assessment and training. Carers value the support that they receive from supervising social workers. However, too many foster carers express concern and frustration about the impact on children of the high turnover and poor practice of some children's social workers. Allegations against foster carers and concerns about standards of care are not always rigorously investigated and understood. The local authority has begun to take action to respond to this, but it is too early to demonstrate impact.
28. The importance of permanence planning for children is not understood across the service and is not effective enough for too many children. Senior managers have started to improve the focus on early permanence across the service, but they recognise that there is much more work to do. Permanence decisions are made for most children before their second review. However, managers' tracking and oversight of the permanence process are not robust enough. The current local authority policy for children to remain in placement for 12 months before being eligible for a match with permanent carers prevents children from living in situations in which they feel confident they will stay for the remainder of their childhood.
29. A range of options, including special guardianship and adoption, enable children to experience permanence. Children are well matched with adopters who are able to meet their needs. Nevertheless, there has been a decline in the timeliness of matching and placing children with their adoptive families. Children's permanence reports are variable in quality, with some gaps and inconsistencies in important information. Some adopters are positive about their experiences, but others describe failures by children's social workers to visit in accordance with requirements, or to complete important tasks. This causes delays in achieving permanence for children and distress to adopters. Letters for later life vary in quality and are not always completed soon enough.



30. The local authority has made some progress in the support it provides to care leavers since the last inspection. A dedicated care leavers' service now ensures that young people are visited regularly and supported by personal advisers who know them well. This includes young people who are in custody and those who live out of the area. Many young people remain with their foster carers after their eighteenth birthday under staying put arrangements. Young people who spoke to inspectors were all happy with their accommodation and the support they receive. Additional support is available to care leavers from some district councils, but a consistent offer is not available across the county.
  
31. Young people are involved in their pathway planning. The quality of these plans varies, and some are more detailed than others. Plans are regularly updated, but actions arising from them are not always clear and timebound. Consideration is given to young people's day-to-day health needs. Although the local authority asserts that young people are provided with information about their health histories, this information is not held by the local authority. Should young people require access to this information in the future, it would not be easily available to them.
  
32. The local authority has taken action to raise young people's awareness of post-16 opportunities, such as apprenticeships, colleges and universities, using well-established local networks. As a result, the proportion of care leavers who are in education, employment or training has improved and is now broadly in line with national averages.

**The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families is inadequate**

33. Leaders and managers have not prevented service decline, resulting in widespread and serious failures in the experiences of children in West Sussex who need help, protection and care. Oversight, scrutiny and challenge from corporate leaders, including the children's select committee and the corporate parenting panel, have not been sufficiently rigorous. Consequently, chronic instability at all levels of the organisation, poor practice and a culture of non-compliance is evident. This leaves children at continued risk of significant harm and with their needs unmet.
  
34. Senior leaders have an accurate and realistic understanding of the quality of services. The actions that have been taken to tackle some of the deficits, such as the launch of the quality and development board, have not been focused or effective enough in addressing the widespread concerns. Many actions in the improvement plan have not been progressed despite continued attention. Partner agencies and the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) have not been included in this work. This has severely limited the extent to which the local authority has been able to effect the changes that are needed.

35. A quality assurance framework is in place and provides some scrutiny and oversight of practice. However, too few audits are undertaken and non-compliance by managers in conducting audits, combined with a lack of understanding of what good practice looks like, means that they are limited in their impact. Until very recently – January 2019 – there was no system in place to ensure that specific tasks arising from audits were consistently followed through, and this resulted in drift and delay for children. For example, the identification of poor practice through audits in October 2018 has yet to result in a clear action plan to drive improvement in the quality of service that children receive.
36. A deep-rooted culture of non-compliance with basic social work standards is a serious issue across the service. Recording is poor, with some important documents blank or missing. This is largely due to social workers and managers not updating records on the electronic recording system. Consequently, leaders cannot rely on performance information. Performance information in relation to return home interviews appears to demonstrate an improving picture. However, too often forms generated on the children's recording system contain only key dates and critical information is absent. The impact of this is that leaders cannot be confident about the quality of practice or the reliability of the performance information.
37. A clear, targeted sufficiency strategy provides a coherent analysis, effectively forecasting future placement need. The high number of children placed in the West Sussex area by other local authorities adversely impacts on the sufficiency of local placements, particularly for high-risk adolescents. Leaders have responded to this by monitoring the local market and seeking to engage more proactively with existing and emerging providers, but challenges in demand remain.
38. The corporate parenting panel is not sufficiently aspirational and has had limited impact on making a demonstrable difference to services or outcomes for children in care. The lead member attends, but the panel has limited membership, with no partner agencies, such as housing services, and no representation by foster carers or young people. Members of the panel have been aware of the significant concerns across the service, particularly longstanding weaknesses regarding the very poor timeliness of initial health assessments, but they have not been effective in making changes to this.
39. The local authority's reporting and governance arrangements do not provide a helpful framework to support the delivery of the largescale improvements that are needed across the service. The DCS does not directly report to the chief executive or attend the executive director board meetings. At the time of the inspection the DCS and the senior leadership team considered that this arrangement reduced the visibility of children's services within the corporate agenda. Changes in leadership at corporate and managerial levels, combined with service restructure in 2015, have resulted in significant staff turnover and

a workforce having to cover a broad range of work, without the skills and expertise that are needed. The creation of children looked after social work teams with responsibility for court work led to this work being prioritised above other casework, and resulted in a poor service for children in care.

40. A significant challenge facing the local authority is the instability in the children's care workforce. Senior managers have worked to improve the stability of the workforce, strengthening the recruitment and retention offer through a recent workforce strategy. Political leaders have provided significant financial investment to support an increase in capacity and service developments, but this has come too late to prevent turnover and instability and has negatively affected children's experiences.
41. Too many children have experienced too many changes of social worker, resulting in disruption and delayed intervention for many of them. Some children in foster care have lost confidence in social workers following these frequent changes, as well as when social workers leave, sometimes without saying goodbye. One child described the impact of such changes when they spoke about their frustration about 'having to say the same thing over and over again'.
42. Some children's cases are allocated in managers' names rather than to social workers due to increasing workloads and capacity issues. In these circumstances, a series of duty workers, who do not know or fully understand the children's histories or experiences, undertake statutory visits. This leads to delays in meeting the assessed needs of children and adversely impacts on the progress of their plans.
43. The constant turnover of social workers and managers, combined with a lack of clear, up-to-date procedures and practice standards has led to poor and inconsistent practice. Drift and delay are evident at every stage of the child's journey. This is particularly evident for children living in neglectful circumstances. For a very small minority of children, the prolonged experience of living in such conditions has had an adverse effect on their long-term health and well-being.
44. Management oversight at every level, including by IROs and child protection chairs, lacks rigour and does not tackle weaknesses or drive practice improvement. The variability in the skills and knowledge of first- and second-line managers undermines the much-needed improvements through inconsistent and often poor management oversight. Considerable gaps are evident in staff and case supervision. When it does take place, it is rarely detailed, focused or analytical enough.
45. The local authority has an established Children in Care Council that is supported by participation officers. The council champions the views of all children in care and care leavers. Children in care are listened to through this

forum and their voice has influenced the development of services, for example through the campaign 'treat us the same' where children expressed their concerns about being taken out of classes for statutory reviews and meetings.



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted).

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2019

This page is intentionally left blank

## **Corporate Parenting Panel**

### **Positioning statement**

Any child who comes into the care of the County Council until the child leaves care is the statutory responsibility of the County Council. Members of the County Council and staff members are Corporate Parents, and have a duty to ensure that during the child's time in care the voice and experience of the child is paramount. It is key that the child receives a consistently good experience and that the child's health and education needs are met allowing all children looked after the same life chances as any other child.

The Corporate Parenting Panel must work to national principles, including those provided by the Department for Education and as set out in the Appendix.

### **Constitution**

A multi-agency advisory panel to the County Council and to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People comprising six members of the County Council (appointed from among those best qualified to serve but including at least one minority group member and one from either the foster or adoption panel), as well as the multi-agency partners in West Sussex who are responsible for delivering good and effective corporate parenting for children and young people. This includes the Designated Nurse (NHS), a representative of Independent Reviewing Officers, a Foster Carer, Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the West Sussex Foster Carer Association, a member of the Children in Care Council and a Care Leaver.

At least two County Council members of the Panel will also be members of the Children and Young People's Services Select Committee. The quorum is three. The Chairman of the Panel will be the relevant Senior Advisor to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

### **Purpose**

The Corporate Parenting Panel aims to ensure that the County Council, alongside other agencies, undertakes its duties as Corporate Parents for all children looked after and care leavers for which it is responsible so that young people can achieve their full potential and a successful transition into adulthood. The Panel does this by ensuring that the voice and experience of the child/young person is central to all its work and that the services provided for children and young people looked after by the County Council are of good quality, consistent and meet their needs. It works with all elected members and officers within the Council, with colleagues from partner agencies and with children and young people who are looked after. The Panel's ambitions assist in the Council's overarching vision that "Children and Young People in West Sussex get the best start in life".

### **Terms of Reference**

Agenda Item 5  
Appendix 2

- (1) To rigorously monitor and challenge service improvement and the impact of social work practice in improving outcomes for children looked after.
- (2) To be aspirational and ambitious in driving better outcomes for children looked after.
- (3) To ensure that the voice and experience of the child is central to the work of the whole Council and to creatively consider ways in which the Corporate Parenting Panel will hear and respond to the views of children looked after, care leavers, their parents and carers.
- (4) To develop expertise in issues affecting children looked after and care leavers.
- (5) Ensure that ALL elected councillors are able to fulfil their role as corporate parenting champions and advocates for West Sussex children and young people who are looked after, and those leaving local authority care.
- (6) To provide the multi-agency strategic direction to achieve good outcomes for both children in local authority care and leaving care.
- (7) To contribute to the development of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Strategy and to challenge and hold to account for its delivery.
- (8) To take action continually, in conjunction with officers and partner agencies, to improve services and ensure it is responsive and meeting changing needs.
- (9) To deliver the County Council's 'Pledge' to children looked after and care leavers, and refresh this on an annual basis.
- (10) To monitor and challenge where necessary the effectiveness of the Virtual School in improving the educational attainment of children looked after and care leavers.
- (11) To raise members' awareness and understanding of children looked after and care leavers, their needs and experiences and consider how all members can contribute to improving outcomes, through ensuring they are the Council's first consideration when making any decisions that may affect them.
- (12) To monitor and challenge where necessary the health and wellbeing of children looked after and care leavers.
- (13) To include the voice of foster carers, adopters and Chairman of the Fostering and Adoption Panel, by invitation to panel meetings.
- (14) To report to the County Council on a regular basis, and at least twice a year.
- (15) In the event of serious concerns to accelerate these to the Cabinet member.



- (16) To consider what training is required by members to ensure that elected councillors are able to fulfil their role as corporate parenting champions and advocates for West Sussex children and young people.

## Notes

These terms of reference will be delivered by the Panel in the following ways:

- The Panel will liaise with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People on services for children looked after and care leavers, and with the Leader on the wider corporate parenting agenda across the County Council.
- Members of the Panel will have specific lead roles in order to give ownership to work the Panel undertakes.
- The Panel will liaise with the Children and Young People's Services Select Committee to seek to avoid duplication of work. Members of the Panel who are also on the Select Committee and its Business Planning Group will be responsible for sharing knowledge and issues of concern so that the Committee and the Panel can each fulfil their roles in the knowledge of the work undertaken by the other body.

## Appendix

A strong ethos of corporate parenting means that sense of vision and responsibility towards the children they look after and their care leavers is a priority for everyone. They recognise that children looked after have the same needs – to be loved, cared for and feel safe - as other children. But also that there are unique challenges that children looked after and care leavers face: 60% of children become looked after due to abuse or neglect and they have poorer educational and health outcomes than their peers. A strong corporate parenting ethos recognises that the care system is not just about keeping children safe, but also to promote recovery, resilience and wellbeing.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduces corporate parenting principles, which comprise of seven needs that local authorities in England must have regard to whenever they exercise a function in relation to children looked after or care leavers (collectively referred to as children looked after and young people). The corporate parenting principles are intended to secure a better approach to fulfilling existing functions in relation to children looked after and care leavers and for the local authority to facilitate as far as possible secure, nurturing, and positive experiences for children looked after and young people and enable positive outcomes for them.

The corporate parenting principles are about embedding a positive culture in the local authority towards children looked after and care leavers and their success will depend on the extent to which directors, councillors, heads of service and front line managers champion and promote understanding of them. The experiences of children looked after and care leavers, particularly in regards to

whether they feel cared for and listened to, will therefore be an important measure of how successfully local authorities embed the principles.

### **The principles**

In order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to children looked after and young people, as follows:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- To help those 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 those children and young people;
- For those 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.

The corporate parenting principles are not about applying a formulaic approach to how services are delivered in relation to children looked after and care leavers. Rather they describe the behaviours and attitudes expected of councils when they are acting as any good parent would do by supporting, encouraging and guiding their children to lead healthy, rounded and fulfilled lives. The principles intend to ensure that all councils have high ambitions for the children in their care. In doing so, the application of the principles must respond to the individual needs, vulnerabilities or disadvantages of children looked after and care leavers. This will assist in securing that such children and young people are not placed at significant disadvantage when compared with the support a non-looked after child or young person may receive from their family.