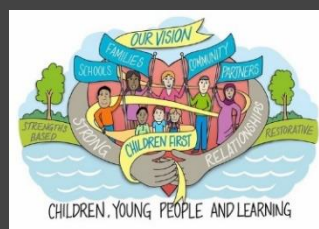




West Sussex Children, Young People & Learning Corporate Parenting Report for the Children we Care for June 2022



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Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the Corporate Parenting Annual Report, which details the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel and our services to the Children we Care for and our Care Leavers.

During the past 24 months the Corporate Parenting Panel has been mindful of the impact of Covid-19 pandemic and the impact this has had on all local authority services and activities nationally. The role of 'Corporate Parent' is a collective responsibility of the council that we all have a responsibility and duty to deliver. Many of our Children we Care for and Care Leavers have faced difficulties and trauma that will place them amongst the most vulnerable in our communities if we do not provide them with the nurture, love, care, stability, and support they need to help them achieve their ambitions. Contributions from our children through the work of our Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Advisory board and Voice and Participation Service form an integral part of panel meetings and have significantly influenced West Sussex County Council's improvement journey. Our Children we Care for and Care Leavers voices keep us focussed on our children's real and lived experiences and influence the development of the council's services positively.

As corporate parents we all want the best for our children. We are proud of their achievements and remain focussed on providing them with the opportunities that will enable them to reach their potential and together we celebrate their successes. As a corporate parent I am proud of all our children and young people and it has been my one of the greatest privileges to have worked and to continue to work alongside them.

As a council it's so important that we take the necessary actions to be the best corporate parents we can and provide for our family in the most effective way possible. I am completely committed to doing everything I can to support our children and young people so that they can benefit from the many opportunities our council and our communities have to offer. But we must all be united in this endeavour, from local business to the voluntary sector to families who can offer a foster home to our children who need one.

This annual report is a summary of the work presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel in 2020-2022 and is a celebration of the success and achievements of both our children and young people and staff. I would like to take this opportunity to thank panel members both past and present for their contributions to our continuing evolutionary journey.



Cllr. Jacquie Russell
Co-Chairman of Corporate Parenting Panel and Cabinet Member for
Children and Young People, West Sussex County Council

Directorate Summary

This report draws together the range of activities and impact of the Corporate Parenting Panel over the past year.

It has been an extraordinary period for all of us, particularly our children and young people. The challenges we have all faced because of the pandemic have provided a sharpened focus for us as we have adapted to the various national restrictions and the impact of these on how we deliver services to the Children we Care for and our Care Leavers. In doing so we have listened to our children and young people and are aware that there are some elements of the 'virtual world' they enjoy, we are keen to better understand how to use this effectively over the coming year.

Since joining the council some 18mths ago, the centrality and importance of listening, hearing, and acting on the voices of our children and young people with board members has been one of the areas that has shone through across this time. Board members have welcomed the opportunity to have both informal, formal, and themed discussions to support planned agendas as well as adhoc conversations as they occur in real time. We have ensured the pandemic has not prevented the improvement of services, and our leadership team remain committed to the promise made to our Children we Care for and our Care Leavers.

Daniel Ruaux

Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, West Sussex County Council

Our Vision & Principles



- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of our children and young people.
- To encourage our children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings and to challenge each other if their voices are not actively listened to and acted on.
- To listen, hear and do something when our children and young people tell us things.
- To make sure our children and young people know how to access, and make the best use of, services provided by us as a local authority and partners.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for our children and young people.
- For our children and young people to be safe, and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and to prepare our children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
- This will make sure that our children and young people are not placed at significant disadvantage when compared with the support any child or young person may receive from their family.

Our Promise

THE PROMISE 2020

The Promise 2020 is a partnership commitment to support young people in care and care leavers.

It has been written by young people in care, care leavers, professionals who work with them and the West Sussex Corporate Parenting Panel.

INVOLVING YOU WE PROMISE

- To ask your views, listen and act on what you tell us
- Tell you what you need to know
- To give you information you need at the right time, to help you make the right decisions
- To be a good friend

HEALTH AND HAPPINESS WE PROMISE

- That you will have somewhere safe to live
- To help you stay in touch with people who are important to you
- To support you to be happy and healthy

SUPPORT AND ADVICE WE PROMISE

- To avoid unnecessary changes
- To make sure you know who will support you and that important people keep in touch with each other to help you
- You will get the support and resources you need to help toward your goals
- You will have a social worker and have access to other professionals you might need

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND WORK WE PROMISE

- We will help you develop skills for life and work
- To celebrate your successes with you
- To champion your education
- To help you get the qualifications, interview skills, training and opportunities you want

LEAVING CARE WE PROMISE

- To put in place what you need when you leave care
- To help you make a clear plan for your life ahead after care

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Corporate Parenting Roles and Functions

The Lead Member of Children's Services has a statutory role that was established in the Children Act 2004. The role has political responsibility for the leadership, strategy, and effectiveness of Children's Services, and is responsible for ensuring that the needs of all our children and young people and their families and carers, are addressed.

The Lead Member is not involved or responsible for operational management of Children's Services and Education, however, the role provides strategic leadership, support, and challenge to both the Director of Children's Services and their Senior Management Team, as appropriate. It is a requirement for the Lead Member to provide an annual update to other elected members on how we are meeting our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

Corporate Parenting Panel

As of 2022 the council's Corporate Parenting Panel is chaired by not only our Lead Member for Children and Young People, but also by the chair of our Children in Care Council and chair of our Care Leavers Advisory Board. This refresh to the leadership and governance of the panel provides a 360-degree lens through co-production, ensuring robust assurance of the whole corporate parenting system, maintaining that children and young people in West Sussex receive outstanding corporate parenting; and that our Children we Care for and Care Leavers can achieve their potential.

Members of our Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Advisory Board sit on the panel as equal members and have a standing item on the agenda to report on their priorities, challenges, any activities, updates, or issues they would like to bring to the panel's attention. All reports submitted to the Corporate Parenting Panel have a children and young person friendly approach and methodology, which is considered by the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Advisory Board members prior to the panel meeting so that they can prepare questions and challenges in advance.

The voices, views, wishes and feelings of our Children we Care for and Care Leavers are central to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel. Over the last 12 months a review of our Corporate Parenting Panel has been undertaken to ensure it provides appropriate overview and scrutiny of the council's corporate parenting work and priorities. This has included:

- A refresh of the terms of reference
- A refresh of how our children in care council engage as equal members of the Panel and the design of child friendly reports to accompany full reports

- Review of membership to ensure appropriate seniority across the council and partnership involvement (Corporate Parenting Panel Membership is set out in Appendix 1)
- A refresh of the agenda format with standing items for our children in care council, data and highlight report.
- Development of a clear forward plan and action log for monitoring and understanding progress against agreed actions

The Panel champions and monitors the corporate parenting strategy and helps to drive its implementation. The panel of children, cross-party members, officers, foster carers, adopters, and senior managers meets at least four times a year, receiving reports, including performance reports, undertaking strategic and thematic enquiry into specific elements of the strategy, and seeking ways of resolving barriers to its success. Collectively and individually, Panel members engage regularly with children, young people, staff, and carers to help to further develop their understanding of issues affecting our Children we Care for and Care Leavers.

Since October 2020 the panel has met on 8 occasion considering reports on the following themes:

- Education progress and outcomes
- Children access and support to remain in educational employment and training (EET)
- Children Social care performance to improve care planning for our children
- Criminal Exploitation and Missing
- Care Leaver pathway planning and our local offer
- Progress and outcomes for Children we Care for and Children Seeking Asylum
- Permanency & Adoption
- Placement Sufficiency
- Primary and mental health need
- Placement Stability for Children we Care for
- Residential children homes development programme and quality assurance reporting
- Fostering service redesign and quality assurance reporting
- COVID-19 Impact, Arrangements and Recovery

Corporate Parenting Panel Subgroups

Over the past 12 months, we have launched our corporate parenting subgroups which sit below the main Panel and are responsible for driving the corporate parenting strategy, the subgroups focus on:

- Health and wellbeing
- Children we Care for and Children Seeking Asylum
- Education
- Journey to Independence (Care Leavers)
- Children we Care for with Disabilities

Although in their infancy, the subgroups are already co-chaired by our children and young people, as well as having a nominated special interest elected member and officers as part of the membership; thus, maintaining the 360-degree authenticity to co-production as modelled by the main panel. The subgroups have a key role in reporting on progress as well as identifying and addressing barriers to effective change, making recommendations on how issues can be resolved to improve the lived experiences of our Children we Care for and Care Leavers. There are a variety of tasks and finish groups that focus on the work identified within the strategy and their work reports into the respective subgroup.

An Induction to Corporate Parenting

We are keen to ensure that all elected members across the council exercise their responsibilities as corporate parents to our Children we Care for and our Care Leavers. A corporate parenting induction programme has been developed for all members which is mandatory being held twice yearly. The training has supported members in their respective roles on the panel, scrutiny committee and within the constituencies to keep the needs of Children we Care for and our Care Leavers as a priority to and to understand how to practically exercise their role as a corporate parent.

Position Statement for Corporate Parenting (October 2020/June 2022)

This position statement provides an update as of 01 June 2022, It summarises and evidences the impact and progress of our improvement activity over the past 24 months. The statement highlights practice, performance, and sustained improvements across all key performance indicators within the service:

- **Improved participation and engagement** including feedback and influence in practice from our children and young people
- **Stronger and more effective** Corporate Parenting Panel
- Feedback from staff engagement is that **culture is shifting**, and leaders and managers are working better together as one service
- **Action** to address difficult problems

- **Sustained improvement**; visiting, reviews, supervision, management oversight and case summaries
- **Improved performance in** Annual Health Assessments and Personal Education Plan's
- **Embedded** Quality Assurance Framework
- Compliance and consistency of audits is significantly **improved**
- Audit moderations show **improved practice** for children
- **Strengthening** the voices of our children within audit from summer 2022

Our monitoring and quality assurance activity evidence's significant improvement across the service, with compliance now being sustained, focus is now on quality and sustainability. As anticipated, there is some variability in practice for our children who recently have become cared for due to the inevitable staff disruption caused by the launch of the Family Safeguarding Model in February 2022.

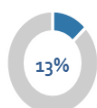
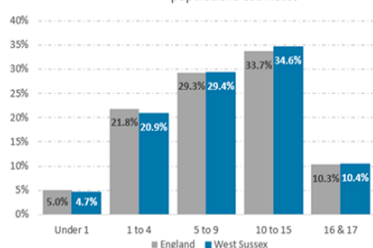
Background & Context

20% children and young people as a % of total population

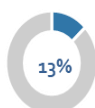


● 0 - 17 ● 18 and over

Children and Young People by age band - mid-2020 populations estimates

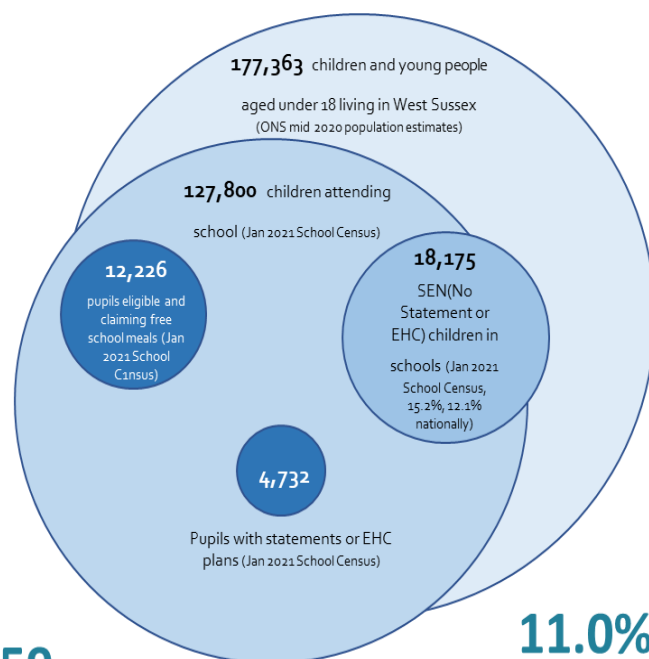


children under 18 who are BME



children living in relative poverty

5,288 families turned around and claimed for against national vulnerability criteria (Supporting Families Programme – Sep 21)

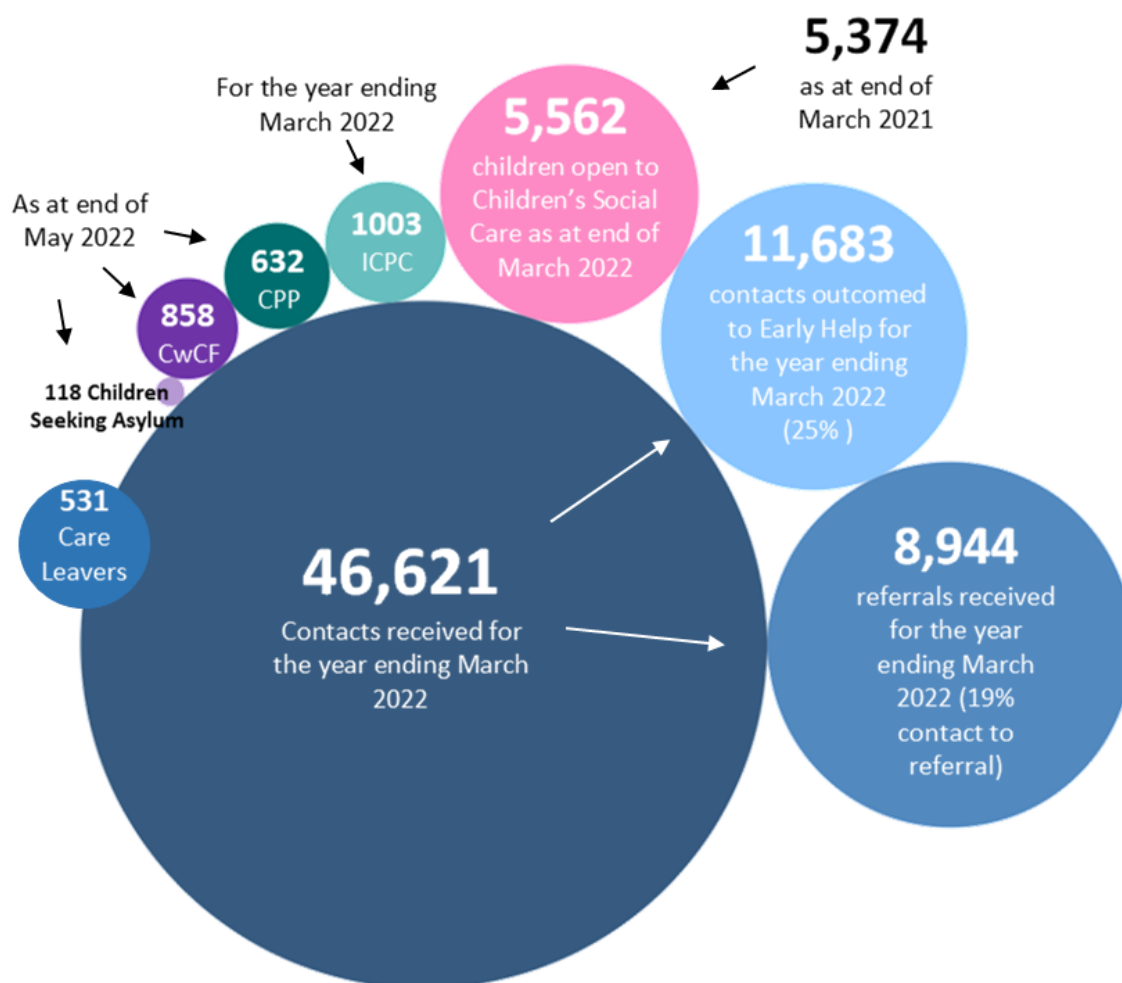


159 Care Leavers who are NEET (42%, Dec-21)

11.0% pupils classed as persistent absentees in 2020/21 autumn term (13.0% nationally)

West Sussex County Council is currently caring for 858 children. We have seen a slight decrease over the past five months. We did however see an increase in February 2022, and this is attributed to an increase in the number of children seeking asylum we are caring for which is in line with both the local and national picture. For our wider children looked after

population, we have seen this number stabilise in line with the continued focus on proportionate and consistent application of our safeguarding and entry to care thresholds.



Improvement activity & Service Development

In line with the Children and Young People's Business Plan for 2022/23 and with the Corporate Priorities, the service has a detailed service plan which details our key areas of improvement and our progression. We have worked comprehensively across all areas of our practice, in conjunction with relevant partners, to improve sustainable outcomes for children we care for as follows:

- Voice, Engagement & Participation
- Improving Care Planning
- Improving Health, Wellbeing & Partnership Working
- Management Oversight & Supervision
- Leadership and Governance
- Placement Sufficiency
- Quality Assurance & Audit

- Permanence Planning
- Transitions

Alongside this, we are undertaking work with Hertfordshire County Council to progress reunification work with children and their families using the Family Safeguarding Model and strengthening family approach.

Current Performance

The service has a range of key performance indicators which are closely monitored to ensure that children are having regular updated planning that reflects their needs and wishes and that they are seen regularly. Our current performance (as of 1 June 2022) indicates that our Children we Care for are seen regularly (recording of statutory visits 97%) and recording of care plans are up to date (98%). For the 10% of our children who experienced delayed visits, this was due to the ongoing prevalence of Covid-19, where virtual visits are then followed up as soon as possible by in person visits, accompanied by management oversight. Children with out of time visits for other reasons are tracked at performance meetings held by Team and Service Managers. These improvements have been maintained and any decreases are minimal, evidencing sustained improvement. These are monitored via regular performance meetings between the Heads of Service and operational teams. We also use our auditing process alongside management oversight on plans to monitor and oversee quality and effectiveness of planning. The evidence from our quality assurance audits is that plans are becoming more effective and improving in quality.

Voice, Engagement & Participation

For the first time in the history of our organisation we now have children co-chairing and informing service planning, delivery, and scrutiny. This has been achieved by the development of our Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Care Leavers advisory board (CLAB), for which there are now appointed chairs, vice chairs and ambassadors.

Our CiCC and CLAB continues to contribute to our service development. Alongside our Children First Vision, our CiCC and CLAB have developed and produced a Youth Charter, which clearly outlines our children's and young people's expectations of us as their Corporate Parents. This was launched in March 2022 and now forms part of our directorate's mandatory induction for all our staff.

The CiCC and CLAB have completed the 'new into care pack' which has been written from a young person's perspective to support children when they first enter care.

They also co-chair our Corporate Parenting Panel with the Lead Member for Children. As part of the Corporate Parenting panel subgroups, we also have children and young people involved

in both participating and co-chairing these groups, notably, the Children we Care for subgroup, the Journey to Independence subgroup and Children Seeking Asylum subgroup.

The Corporate Parenting Panel holds officers and members to account on key issues; the areas of focus to date have been changes of social worker for Children we Care for, family time and addressing wider areas of service provision required for children seeking asylum as this cohort of young people increases. Through these discussions specific challenges and reflection from our children and young people have influenced service delivery. This includes dentist provision; scrutinising the activity and impact of the chairman of the Council's Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on the access of dentistry for Children we Care for and Care Leavers, Adoption practice (Adopt South East); with regards to letterbox, as well as the refresh of our Care Leavers Pathway Plan and Local Offer.

We have various mechanisms to ensure the voices of our children in care are heard and their concerns are addressed appropriately. Findings from recent BrightSpots surveys regarding children in our care evidenced:

- 96% always felt safe where they lived
- 97% of all our children liked their bedrooms
- 95% of our 11–18-year-old said they trusted their social workers
- 81% of all our children surveyed said life was getting better
- On average more of our 11–18-year-old reported that they liked school compared to other cared for children in other local authorities (93% vs National avg. 78%)
- 98% of our 8–18-year-old reported the adults they lived with showed an interest in their education all or most of the time (this is higher than the general population)
- 97% of our 8-11 and 92% of 11-18 spent time outdoors in the last week (this is higher than the general population)

This survey will be undertaken again later this year (2022) and our children (CiCC and CLAB) we will be working with CoramVoice to be part of the BrightSpots national survey to gauge subjective wellbeing of young people in care. We have previously participated in this and used the findings to inform service development so it will be helpful to participate again and compare from previous findings and further contribution to service development.

We also plan to include children in our audits from October 2022 so this will contribute to strengthening our practice and learning.

Improving Care Planning

At the end of May 2022 98% of children had an up-to-date Care Plan in place, 100% within the Children we Care for Service. The impact of care and permanence planning is also manifested in the statistics around permanence referred to above.

The percentage of children participating in their reviews has increased since October 2020, to 96%. The child's voice remains a key part of the current improvement agenda for our Service. The expectation is that every child must have the right support and preparation in place to attend and participate meaningfully in their review meeting and that children (age appropriate), are supported and encouraged to chair their own reviews. It is also a clear expectation that a child's views will be represented in their review and that it will be child focused. Review reports are written as a letter to the child and work is planned to review and update the routes by which we can capture feedback from our children and families.

The timeliness of statutory reviews has also improved further over this year to 97%. Priority work is continuing to mitigate and resolve identified errors in the completion of performance data, or late notifications to the service, to ensure our service performance on children's reviews being held within timeframes is accurately reflected. The child's next review date is set at their previous review meeting and our Conference and Reviewing Officers are directed to undertake early preparation ahead of a child's subsequent review to ensure that all the right arrangements are in place. This also allows time to change a review within timeframe, for example if a key person in a child's network or the child or a family member cannot attend, and a change of date would benefit the child.

In terms of quality of planning, audit has evidenced that this is an area of improvement where they are now more consistently child focused and up to date, though we still need to drive through the consistency of SMART planning. To this end, we are undertaking a review of documentation to facilitate this within our processes, but importantly including a focus on plans being 'outcome-focused' to ensure congruence across the system. Additionally, we also want to become more multi-agency in our planning, we have started work to increase the development of our partnerships, to include more clarity around the expectations we have of our partners.

We have identified that an area of challenge within planning is around transitions to adulthood. We have run a series of joint service meetings to share information and challenges across Children we Care for and Care Leavers. We are currently finalising a new Assessment and Pathway Planning document which has been co-produced with our young people as members of the Care Leavers Advisory Board and will more explicitly focus on what is important to our young people. We also expect to see improvements in pathway planning in line with the increased resources being provided to the Care Leavers Service.

An Entry to Care Panel was initiated in January 2022. This Panel ensures there is Assistant Director oversight of the children who enter care as well as requests and reviews of placement changes, to ensure we are seeking and providing the right placements for our children to meet their needs from the earliest point. We have also reviewed our placement planning processes in response to audit and have now made it mandatory as of January 2022 that children's placement plans are reviewed and updated for every review so that changing needs are responded to.

Improving Health, Wellbeing & Partnership Working (internal & external)

This is an area we highlighted in our self-assessment to Ofsted at a recent monitoring visit in March 2022 (full report at Appendix 2) as requiring further improvement and we have targeted activity to achieve this. Performance in respect of Initial Health Assessment (IHA) is now an area of improvement. A problem-solving event recently held with health partners has led to a new IHA action plan, which we are now progressing to improve our initial health assessments. This has resulted in specific, measurable, realistic, and timely actions for both health and children's social care to progress improvements at pace. This is included as part of our service plan and will continue to be monitored to track progress. We hope to see tangible progress from this work over Q2/3. In respect of review health assessment (RHA) performance has generally been over 80%, with a small recent drop attributable to a change in recording process. The primary challenge in respect of RHA's is children placed out of county.

We have continued to offer a substance misuse intervention to children identified as requiring one at an increased rate in comparison to our statistical neighbours and nationally. Currently our conversion rate to engage our children is above the regional and national % figures. It is notable that fewer children in West Sussex, compared with previous years, have been identified as having substance misuse needs and that in this area we are moving back towards national averages. This indicates that either there is more effective identification, treatment and disruption of substance abuse networks, or better educational work with our children and young people.

A bi-monthly operation meeting is held between children's social care and health partners in respect of the health of our Children we Care for and Care Leavers; this has led to improvement in terms of creating new processes for the referral of Initial Health Assessments and Review Health assessments and supported access for a number of children to dentistry in a very challenging national context. This has been utilised to inform planning, stemming from the recent Somerset judgement in respect of children requiring legally compliant medical summaries. Our Care Leavers are now routinely provided with a health summary as they leave care.

Extra business support resource has been provided to the permanence team since February 2022. This support is primarily focused on ensuring we make improvements in the timely completion of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ), which we know is an area of challenge. Our children considered to have mental health needs are however, regularly identified and triaged through our Therapeutic Access Panel which is run jointly between Children's Social Care and the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAHMS) Permanency Service.

We work closely with our colleagues within our assessment and family safeguarding teams to support the timely transition of children to ensure they are in the right part of the service to avoid unnecessary changes of social worker. We now track the data for changes of social worker for Children we Care For so we can mitigate against changes of social worker if possible.

Further work is currently being undertaken to identify children who would benefit from an earlier move to the Children we Care for teams in line with their care planning. Further resources are being put into place in the Children we Care For teams to progress this.

We continue to have a monthly interface with our health colleagues for Children We Care For. The focus remains on improving health outcomes for our children. This includes health assessments, dental checks, SDQs and mental health support.

Education

In working together with education, monthly meetings are held between the Virtual School and Children's social care, with the Virtual School providing quality assurance of every Personal Education Plan (PEP). PEP compliance has now been over 90% for over two years and over 95% for the last year. There is also increased prioritisation of the education of children in care through the inclusion of the Virtual School at the Entry to Care panel held weekly.

Management Oversight & Supervision

This has been an area of significant improvement which is reflected within our data showing 91.4% of Children we Care For having had supervision recorded within last 8 weeks and 98.9% of Children we Care For having had management oversight in past 8 weeks. This is evidencing that almost all our children's case files have regular management oversight and that the rationale for decisions is clearer. Supervision is taking place to support care planning, and feedback from audits is that the quality is also improving. A focus on more outcome-based planning will continue moving forward across Q3/4 2022.

Leadership & Governance

All members and officers of the County Council hold a shared responsibility as corporate parents, and all our members now receive training for this role as a compulsory part of their induction or continued training.

There is a permanent, stable leadership team in place committed to driving the service forward and motivating the workforce to make this journey with the required communication and support mechanisms in place.

In early 2021, the service joined together as one becoming the Children we Care for and Care Leavers Service; with our updated service name informed and designed by our children and young people via our Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Advisory Board. This has supported our improvement work in transitions and service development.

Placement Sufficiency

The service has produced a Sufficiency Strategy which is due for review in 2022/23. There has been significant investment and development within our fostering, residential and support housing pathway which have been implemented to improve our overall placement sufficiency. Specific actions have been implemented and are already underway or are planned for the near future to improve this further and we have seen improvement in all key performance indicators as set out below:

Q4 comparison 2020 to 2021 - including statistical neighbour (SN) Regional (SE) and National Average (NA)

	West Sussex 2020	West Sussex 2021	Statistical Neighbour 2021	South East 2021	National Average 2021
Children placed at distance (out of county more than 20mls)	23%	20%	21%	22%	16%
Children who have 3 or more placements in 12 months	13%	10%	9%	11%	9%
Children in placement for 2 years or more	67%	72%	67%	65%	68%

As part of our service redesign a review of the fees and allowances for foster carers was carried out in April 2021(Phase 1), and a further light-touch review will be completed in Phase 2 (2022/23) as part of our wider fostering redesign. Evidence of impact of Phase 1 illustrates

that between April 2021 and February 2022; for recruited/mainstream (not including Children with Disabilities or Children Seeking Asylum) we have observed:

- 223 children placed with an Independent Foster Agency (IFA) – this is now 191 (net reduction of 32)
- 197 children placed in house (recruited/mainstream carers) – this is now 212 (net increase of 15)
- This gives a ratio of (IFA) 47%:53% (In house)
- Visitors to our fostering website have increased by 76%
- Fostering enquiries have increased by 36%
- Mainstream fostering placement approvals have increased by 33%
- Transfer requests (IFA & other LA's) have increased by 140%
- 26 new fostering assessments are underway - an increase of 47%

The service provides 44 placements for our children, delivered across 6 residential children's homes to ensure that we can provide appropriate residential care placement that can meet the needs of our children (including those who have more complex needs). These provisions are local (all within West Sussex), keeping them closer to their family, schools, and support networks. Early evidence of a positive impact in the residential service is summarised as follows:

- Recent full inspections (last 9mths) have graded 4 of the Council's homes as 'Outstanding'.
- The Council's 5th and 6th homes, are new homes, both of which are now Ofsted registered
- The 5th home has just been graded as 'Good' the highest grading possible at a first inspection
- The 6th home is awaiting its first inspection
- Following successful registration with Ofsted, 8 of our children have moved into the new placements which includes 6 returning to the county, who were previously placed at distance

Quality Assurance & Audit

Through increased oversight as evidenced in our data for management oversight and supervision, at all management levels our quality assurance has improved and our work moving forward is to increase the consistency across the service. To support this, we have been reviewing and updating our practice guidance for Children we Care For and this will

continue into Summer and Autumn 2022. Alongside this, quarterly service days and regular group supervision within teams and service areas sharing good practice examples to both celebrate and share the learning.

Audits continue to support our practice in identifying themes and areas for development. This has been key around our transitions work and resulting work included within our service plan. Moving forward, we will be including the voice of the child within audits and our team managers will become part of the auditing work which will be beneficial to the process and service improvements having first line managers directly involved in the auditing process.

Permanency Planning

This has remained a focus for the service with a monthly permanence oversight board with full cross service representation including legal contributing to joint permanence plans and improving the pace and consistency of permanence outcomes. A dedicated permanence team has been established, promoting, and monitoring all aspects of permanence service wide, including updating procedures and practice guidance which also includes life story work. A focus on an increase in the pace of adoption including early permanence with foster for adopt placements has led to an increase in the use of this option for early permanence.

Both our use of permanence planning meetings in tracking permanence and our permanency panel continues to be well utilised to secure permanence for our children. We have more than doubled the number of children in permanent arrangements and our panel is evidencing that permanence is being considered much earlier, and our practice is improved and embedded. 243 children were matched in permanent foster placements as of the end of May 2022.

Performance in respect of adoption is on a positive trajectory despite the delays and challenges caused by Covid-19 restrictions within the court system. In the 6 months period to January 2022, we saw reductions of 25 days in the timeliness of both entering care to moving with an adoptive family and from placement order to matching.

We continue to monitor any children who are residing in unregulated arrangements, understanding the rationale for this position, and acting as needed to rectify this position.

For the small group of children under 12yrs residing in residential placements, there are regular reviews with Head of Service oversight to ensure planning is robust and exit planning is kept under review to ensure it is in the child's best interest. Further work is being undertaken to determine and deliver timely exit planning and permanence for this group of children.

Specialist training for staff at all levels on achieving permanence is supported through Adoption South East and all agency decision makers and panel advisors will be accessing specialist training through CoramBAAF by Q2.

The above work and focus on permanence have been significantly scaffolded by the introduction of the Permanence Service in October 2021.

Transitions

Transitions for our children as they get older and move into adulthood is key. The move to make Children we Care for and Care Leavers one service has supported improvements in our work on transitions, as set out within our service plan. We have increased resources for our care leavers service to ensure going forward Personal Advisors come on board at 17yrs, and caseloads for personal advisors are reduced to support this area of work. We have embedded a process of joint supervision as children approach their 18th birthday.

We are currently revising our needs assessment and pathway planning. This is being informed by our young people to improve better assessment and pathway planning for our young people as they move into adulthood. Our new needs assessment tool is currently being developed by our Integrated Childrens System team in our IT department, and we are on track to complete this over Q2/3 2022/23.

Where we have identified an ongoing need for our young people, as they move into adulthood, we have a multi-agency transitions panel to consider this, and progress Care Act assessments as required.

Care Leavers in Employment or Training

The number of our care leavers in employment or training is improving. The Care Leavers service is recruiting more personal advisors who will soon be able to support Children We Care For at an earlier age and increase our support alongside social workers and the virtual school. The care leavers service is striving hard to build relationships with any providers, Department for Work and Pensions, in-house services, and educational establishments to provide greater levels of support for our care leavers, with the aim of creating and promoting a greater level of opportunities for our care leavers. Seven of our young people received funding this year to attend the Bridging the Gap Course with Chichester University. Two of these young people have successfully secured places on our 2023 Social Work apprenticeship programme and the University is keen to continue this work with our service and provide similar opportunities. We now have a guaranteed interview scheme for care leavers and a working group to increase wrap around support and opportunities for apprenticeships with us. We are exploring how we can use media platforms to notify our care leavers of opportunities that become available, including courses, apprenticeships, internships, and job fairs. The care leavers service is meeting with colleagues from our career service and we now have a Team Manager and personal advisor as specific points of contact whom are leading on improving educational opportunities. Guidance is being produced to ensure accommodation providers and personal advisors work together to review Pathway Planning with a focus on employment and education opportunities.

Care Leavers in Higher Education

There continues to be an increase in the number of our care leavers attending university and higher education. We have a rising number over the age of 21 years, currently 18 are between the ages of 22-24 years and 2 young people aged 18. Some of our older care leavers are doing their master's degree and returning for extended duties to support them with their education. Our Local Offer is providing additional financial support, if needed, for those completing their master's degree as well as those undertaking graduate courses. We have also ensured all of our eligible care leavers benefitted from the Department for Education and XMA project funded laptops and iPads via our virtual school.

Local Offer for our Care Leavers

Across 2021/22 we have been working with an organisation called the Care Leaders (national subject matter experts) whom have been supporting us to develop youth participation across the local authority and facilitate the process for the redevelopment and launch of our leaving care offer.

Through this partnership, the participation service has been successfully rebranded and restructured. This has included a full consultation with all those engaged in the service and our children and young people. This has proved a challenging and worthwhile exercise and has received valuable support from the Senior Leadership Team, which has enabled its success. We have been struck by the clear commitment that our children and young people's views are central to all that we do, and we have seen an increase children and young people attending forums, engaging in the work, and providing feedback that has shaped the project.

As part of the restructure, the participation service has produced a new Participation Strategy and developed a brand which enables the service to communicate with children and young people through a brand that relates to them directly.

Our care leavers service has been instrumental and supportive in developing the refreshed care leavers local offer, as we recognised that our previous offer contained gaps and was not communicated in a way that was easily understandable or accessible. Over the last 9 months we have worked extensively with the Care Leaders, service, leaving care workers, partners and our children and young people to rewrite the offer. We have identified and filled gaps in service provision and developed a plan to create a digital version of the offer. In the process of doing this we have seen considerable commitment and passion that has led the total rewrite of an offer that acts as a step-by-step guide for our children and young people to access services, for example applying for a NI number, accessing housing, writing a CV and more.

Since completing this work the Director of Children's Services has received notification from the Care Leaders noting that; from their knowledge West Sussex are the only local authority

who offer this type of guide to our Care Leavers and from their knowledge it is the most comprehensive.

We are now moving on the next phase of the project, which is to digitise this offer and make it accessible through web and mobile platforms. The progress of this is on track and due for completion across 2022/23.

Conclusion

We have worked hard to improve the **consistency** and **quality** of our practice for our children:

- In building positive relationships with children with better quality assessments and planning to achieve outcomes
- In our regularity and quality of visiting children, their reviews, supervision, management oversight and case summaries
- In the fostering service and significant investment in residential to improve choice and stability of placements for children
- Within the virtual school to consistently deliver high quality PEP's
- Permanence planning and foster for adoption
- Improved participation with children and their families, Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Care Leavers Advisory Board (CLAB) – including positive feedback from children
- Corporate Parenting Panel now includes children so that they can influence service developments and provide feedback
- Quality assurance framework is better embedded; compliance and consistency of audits is much improved and audit moderations show improved practice for children and the voice of the child to be piloted from April 2022 in audits
- Feedback from staff engagement is that culture is shifting, and leaders and managers are working better together as one service
- Action to address difficult problems such as initial health assessments, unregulated connected carers placements

Our Priorities

We know we need to continue to improve, and will focus on the following areas over the next 12 months:

- Embed participation, listening and capturing the wishes and feelings of children in all our work
- Consolidate child centred practice for children we care for
- Improve our placement choice and sufficiency for children

- Promote contact and family time and relationships and connections with family and friends
- Improve transition points for children
- Embed the Family Safeguarding Model to ensure quality of practice is enhanced and sustained when children first become care for.
- Correct the impact on performance due to the implementation of the Family Safeguarding Model
- Focus on staff recruitment and retention across the service; problem solving event planned

Closing Reflections

As set out within this position statement, there are many areas where we have seen significant improvements for Children we Care for, as a service we are proud of improving the outcomes for our children and retaining a stable workforce. This progress has been evidenced despite the recent Covid-19 pandemic which demonstrates the level of commitment and tenacity that the service must achieve and deliver higher aspirations for our children and young people.

Our Service Plan clearly sets out the areas which require improvement and the actions to deliver these at pace to ensure continuity and consistency for all our children which we care for irrelevant of where they sit in the service. The ownership and aspiration of our leaders, managers and staff will ensure we continue to drive forward the necessary actions and activity to further improve outcomes for the children we care for and care leavers.

Appendix 1 – Membership of Corporate Parenting Panel

The core membership of the Panel is set out below. The Panel can decide to invite representatives from across the Council and partner agencies as required, depending on the agenda items.

Current Core Membership:

Name	Role
Cllr Jacquie Russell	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Co-Chair of CPP)
Cllr Chris Oxlade	Vice Chairman of CPP
A	Chairman of Children in Care Council (Co-Chair of CPP)
C	Chairman of Care Leavers Advisory Board (Co-Chair of CPP)
Cllr Brenda Burgess	County Councillor
Cllr Alison Cooper	County Councillor
Cllr Nigel Jupp	County Councillor
Cllr Paul Linehan	County Councillor
Cllr Kirsty Lord	County Councillor
K	Children in Care Council Ambassador
L	Children in Care Council Ambassador
C	Care Leavers Advisory Board Ambassador
Lucy Butler	Director of Children, Young People and Learning, WSCC
Dan Ruaux	Assistant Director (Corporate Parenting), WSCC
Dawn Siddens	Designated Nurse – Children and Young People in Care, Sussex NHS Commissioners
Angela Putland	Named Nurse – Children and Young People in Care, Sussex NHS Commissioners
Natalie Brahma-Pearl	Chief Executive, Crawley Borough Council
Sue Hollowell	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children Foster Carer
Chris Day	Adopter
Toby Wilson	Team Manager- Voice and Participation Team, WSCC
Claire Tooke	Voice and Participation Team, WSCC
Adrian Dyka	Head of Service – Children We Care for and Care Leavers, WSCC

Sarah Clark	Head of Virtual School, WSCC
Laura Mallinson	Head of Service – Reviewing and Conferencing, WSCC
Kelly Wilkes	Head of Service – Children We Care For
Katherine De La Mora	Senior Advisor - Democratic Services
Ann Little	Assistant Democratic Services Officer (note taker)

Appendix 2: Ofsted Monitoring Visit Report March 2022

(see next page)

9 May 2022

Lucy Butler
West Sussex
County Hall
West Street
Chichester
PO19 1QT

Dear Ms Butler

Monitoring visit to West Sussex children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to West Sussex children's services on 30 March 2022. This was the fourth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in May 2019. Her Majesty's inspectors for this visit were Tracey Scott and Sarah Canto.

Areas covered by the visit

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- The quality and effectiveness of assessments, care planning and the support provided to children and young people in care.
- The quality, timeliness and impact of supervision, management oversight and decision-making, social work capacity and caseloads.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. This visit was carried out partly by remote means. Inspectors were on site but used video calls for discussions with some local authority staff.

Headline findings

Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of practice in West Sussex and have remained resolute in their approach to improving support for children. The quality of social work practice and the experiences of the children in the care of West Sussex children's services have significantly improved since the May 2019 inspection. Political and corporate support, including considerable financial investment, has assisted with a continued focus on practice improvement and has enabled more children to live in local, stable homes. A reconstituted and strengthened corporate parenting board readily hears and responds to children's voices. Comprehensive performance reporting and oversight have ensured that many important performance

measures, such as timeliness of visits to children and reviews of their arrangements, have significantly improved, and this improvement is being sustained. The timeliness of initial health assessments and completion of strengths and difficulties questionnaires remain an area of focus for improvement. Child-centred, impactful audits provide a largely accurate view of practice and reflective learning opportunities for practitioners. However, the impact of audit on the progression of children's plans remains inconsistent. A multi-faceted approach to recruitment and retention is beginning to increase permanence and stability within the workforce. There is a tangible shift in culture within the organisation.

Recent service redesign and the implementation of a new practice model have prompted some turbulence within the wider service. This has included changes in social worker and a small number of unallocated children awaiting an assessment when first referred to the service. Senior leaders are confident that this is short-term and are focused on the incremental implementation of the model to further strengthen practice in West Sussex. Despite significant endeavour, the number of children living with friends and family in unapproved arrangements has not reduced. A small number of children are living in unregulated arrangements where the support and care being provided is not sufficient to meet their needs.

Findings and evaluation of progress

Most children are living in arrangements that meet their needs and in settled, long-term homes. Their circumstances have improved, and many are doing well. A small number of vulnerable young people are living in unregulated arrangements that do not meet their current care and support needs. The local authority had recently reviewed these arrangements prior to inspectors being on site and had begun to take steps to strengthen the support and care children receive.

Some children continue to live in homes with family and friends' carers that fall below the expected standard for fostering regulations. Despite significant endeavour since the monitoring visit in May 2021, the number of children in such arrangements has remained similar to that of November 2021. This continues to be an area of real focus for the local authority.

Some children continue to experience too many changes of social worker, and this has an impact on the quality of relationships and on the progression of their plans. However, the frequency of this is reducing and increasingly the children the local authority cares for are able to develop meaningful relationships with their social worker.

Most children are seen regularly by their social workers. Thoughtful direct work and conversations with children enable them to express their wishes and feelings, and they create opportunities for children's experiences to be understood and for them to have a clear sense of the decisions that are made on their behalf and why, at a time that is right for them. For a few children, especially during times of change or

instability, the frequency of visits was not proportionate. Children told inspectors that they enjoy spending time with their social workers, and some said that they would like to see their social worker more often. Inspectors also saw a small number of visits being undertaken virtually, where the reason for this was not apparent.

Careful thought is given to the frequency of, and arrangements for, children to spend time with their family and others who are important to them. For some children, photographic story boards vividly capture time spent with family, to complement written records and inform future life story work.

The quality of records to and for children has improved. Records written to the child are reflective and show a real warmth and genuine care for the child.

Practitioners consider the progress of children and formulate plans to meet presenting needs effectively in timely reviews of children's looked after arrangements. The vast majority of reviews are taking place virtually and the return to face-to-face meetings has been too slow and not driven by children's needs. Some reviews would benefit from greater participation with partner agencies such as health or education. Most children are supported to attend and participate or are consulted prior to the meeting taking place. Sensitive letters are written to the child explaining what decisions have been made. These will help children understand their histories and the reason decisions were made for them. On occasion, language is too professional or jargonistic.

Initial health assessments are not taking place quickly enough. The local authority is aware of this and anticipates that a recent problem-solving event with health partners will lead to an improvement. Children's emotional well-being needs are being considered and addressed in key planning forums such as their children in care reviews and personal education plans. Children benefit from a range of emotional well-being support.

The virtual school is having an effective and positive impact on the support provided to children in relation to their education and well-being. The vast majority of children now benefit from having a personal education plan, the quality of which is improving and helping children reach their potential. School staff value the support and responsive communication provided by the virtual school.

Strengthened practice, increased awareness and management oversight of permanence planning has significantly enabled greater security and stability for many children. A small number continue to experience delay in this being achieved for them.

The allocation of personal advisers for children to support their transition to adulthood is not taking place early enough. The local authority is aware of this and has secured additional investment to increase capacity to meet the need.

Leaders have responded positively to the need to provide care for a greater number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children via the National Transfer Scheme. Interpreters are used to support assessments and visits, and access to education is swift. Children and young people benefit from the support of a specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health worker in addressing their emotional health needs. Practitioners are mindful of children's situations, and of their identities. They seek children's wishes and feelings, and focus strongly on ensuring that community networks are strengthened.

Most supervision is in line with the local authorities practice expectation but not always in keeping with the level of complexity and need. Most records of supervision provide an update for the child. However, although these records have improved, the extent of reflection and analysis, and of the impact that they have on progressing the child's plan remains inconsistent.

The implementation of a comprehensive participation strategy has ensured that children's voices are actively sought, heard and responded to. Children are involved in the training and recruitment of carers and staff, and their views inform service planning. A well-run children in care council is cohesive and productive. A range of events are organised, so children have opportunities to develop their skills, share experiences and, importantly, enjoy fun activities. Children's presence at corporate parenting meetings is meaningful and influential and has resulted in senior leaders positively receiving challenge to improve children's lives.

The independent reviewing officer's footprint is more evident on children's files. While stronger than previously, the timely impact of this for the child isn't always evident. The quality of the relationship between the independent reviewing officer and the child is also inconsistent, with some children benefiting from visits and communication between reviews and others being absent from the child's life between reviews.

Leaders actively responded to the challenge of placement sufficiency in West Sussex. Significant financial investment has supported an increase in local fostering capacity and high-quality residential provision, enabling more children to live closer to home, their communities and networks.

Comprehensive performance reporting and oversight provides an effective line of sight to practice. This has supported sustained compliance in a number of key areas.

The constitution, profile and effectiveness of the corporate parenting board has significantly improved. The chair of the board is highly committed to ensuring that children are empowered to participate and influence the work of the board. She continues to strive to raise the profile of corporate parenting and increase meaningful engagement across all members and leaders within the council.

Compliance with audit completion and a rigorous approach to moderation have been sustained. Increasingly, there is a shared understanding of what good practice looks like, and there is a significantly reduced number of children's experiences now considered by the local authority to be inadequate. The implementation of a new quality assurance framework and audit tool in November 2021 has supported an increasingly child-centred and impactful audit narrative and process to support a reflective learning approach. However, the impact on the progression of children's plans remains inconsistent. Leaders have recognised this and have plans to provide greater oversight of these children to ensure a timelier improvement to children's circumstances.

A comprehensive approach to recruitment and retention is beginning to reap positive results. While some parts of the service are more challenging to recruit to, the 'children we care for' workforce is almost all permanent staff, which creates greater stability and consistency for children.

Caseloads remain too high in some parts of the service, but the vast majority of practitioners report their workload to be manageable.

Inspectors observed a growing sense of optimism, enthusiasm and belief within the workforce. Leaders and managers are visible. Practitioners are excited and enthusiastic for the implementation of the new practice model.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Tracey Scott
Her Majesty's Inspector